Changing Content of Translators' Prefaces: With Special Reference to China Yilin Press's Translated Publications*

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The current study aims at identifying the content configuration of translators' prefaces with special reference to China Yilin Press's English-Chinese (E-C) translated publications of American authors and finding the evolving tendency of the content of the translators' prefaces. One hundred and eight translators' prefaces are selected from the E-C translations published by the Press from 1988 to 2013 and classified on the basis of Genette's (1997) classification scheme. The Microsoft Excel as well as a human coder is used to analyze the evolving tendency and content of the translators' prefaces. Results indicate that translators' prefaces fall into 11 kinds in terms of their content, with the occurrence of three of them—genesis, the translator's conclusion and introduction to the translator—on the increase, whereas that of eight of them—introduction to the author, introduction to the original, genre indication, the translator's opinion or analysis, statements of intent, contextual information, commentary on the title and introduction to the translated version—on the decline. It can be concluded that translators' prefaces play important roles in that they provide more information concerning the original and the author, such as plots, characters in the story and narrative techniques, but also give explanations for translators' motivation of translation, translation strategies adopted. Focus of the content of translators' prefaces has shifted from the original and the authors to the translators and translation process that reflect translator's subjectivity. This study underlines that due attention should be paid to the evolving tendency of their content configuration in recent years so as to ensure the social status of translators, and circulation and acceptance of the translated publications.

Keywords: evolving tendency, translator's preface, China Yilin Press

Introduction

Looking back on the history of translation, many translation theories and principles were first put forward in translators' prefaces. Early in the Three Kingdoms Era (220-280) in China, ZHI Qian¹ advocated fluent translation in the Preface to Dhammapada, the first mention of translation standard in extant literature in China. Translators may comment on the authors and the original or throw light on the process of translation, which undoubtedly contribute to recognition and visibility of translators' status and wide acceptance of translation by readers and society at large. Therefore, in-depth researches on translators' prefaces are of utmost importance for all-round development of translatology.

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¹ ZHI Qian was one of the major Buddhist sutra translators in China. In the refined versus plain debate, he was an advocate of the so-called refined translation, adding literary polishing to the translation.

Since the publication of Gerard Genette's French book *Seuils* (1987) and its English version entitled *Paratexts: Thresholds of Interpretation* (1997), paratexts have become a hot research topic. Researches in China on translators' prefaces include analysis of one single translator's preface (LUO, 2010; NI, 2012; LIU, 2013) as well as comparative study of more than one translator's preface (ZHANG, 2005; WEN, 2011; LIANG, ZHANG, & ZHOU, 2012).

In the English community, articles on translators' prefaces fall into two categories. One kind of these researches chooses only one translator's preface or two translators' prefaces of the same translator as their research object (Crawford, 2013; Oktar, 2012). The other kind of researches on translators' prefaces chooses a large number of translators' prefaces as their data to find a tendency over a certain span of time (Zeptnek, 1993; Harbus, 2007; Dimitriu, 2009; Azar, 2012; Rodriguez-Alvarez & Rodriguez-Gil, 2013).

From the above, it can be found that only a few researches have been done from the perspective of content configuration and few have investigated the evolving tendency of development of translators' prefaces in recent years. In terms of research methodology, empirical researches are far from enough. Therefore, this paper aims at identifying the content configuration of translators' prefaces and finding the evolving tendency of them in China with special reference to China Yilin Press's translated publications.

Methodology

Choice of Data

Yilin Press is chosen for its particular place in China. Established in 1988, it specializes in publication of translated works on foreign language teaching, foreign literature, foreign classical works, linguistics and so on. Source languages of its translations cover a variety of languages, such as English, French, German, Russian, and Japanese. Its social influence and economic efficiency come out top of presses of its kind in China. To ensure an in-depth research, originals written by American authors are chosen, with special attention to the translators' prefaces to the Chinese versions. The author collects a total of 456 E-C translated publications of American authors, including the second editions. Second editions with the same prefaces are deleted. After this deletion, the number of works which can be used as the corpus of the research amounts to 388, of which 108 works have translators' prefaces that are taken as the data for this research, as shown below in Table 1.

Table 1

Translations With (w/) or Without (w/o) Translators' Prefaces (%)

Year	1988	1989	1990	1991	1992	1993	1994	1995	1996	1997	1998	1999	2000
W/	0	50	25	0	20	0	0	25	27.3	38.9	43.8	50	59.1
W/O	100	50	75	100	80	100	10	75	72.7	61.1	56.2	50	40.9
Year	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013
W/	28.6	33.3	37.5	100	60	0	0	52.9	30.4	10.5	17.9	14	12.7
W/O	71.4	66.7	62.5	0	40	0	100	47.1	69.6	89.5	82.1	86	87.3

Table 2

Works With (w/) or Without (w/o) Translators' Prefaces in Different Disciplines (%)

Discipline	B	C	D	E	F	G	H	I	J	K	N	P	R	T
W/	25	25	13.8	0	100	25	15	33.2	0	8.3	0	0	0	0
W/O	75	75	86.2	100	0	75	85	66.8	100	91.7	100	100	100	100

Note.: B-philosophy, C-social sciences, D-politics & law, E-military, F-finance, G-culture & science & education & sports, H-language, I-literature, J-art, K-history & geography, N-natural science, P-astronomy & geosciences, R-medicine & health, T-technology.

Instruments

The main instrument used in this research is Microsoft Excel. Microsoft Excel is endowed with a lot of subsidiary functions, such as picturing tendency chart, making summation, averaging, etc. Transforming those data into the chart form by means of Microsoft Excel reveals the evolving tendency. The evolving tendency is shown finally in forms of figures and charts. To ensure validity, the content is classified based on Genette's (1997) classification of content of the original preface in his book on paratexts and each of them is analyzed by the author one by one under another human coder's supervision. There are mainly eleven parts of content, which are ranked from largest to smallest (See in Table 3).

Content of Translators' Prefaces

Classification of Content

As the name suggests, translators' prefaces contain two parts of content, one of which may be similar to the content of original prefaces, and the other of which is closely related to translation or translators. After analyzing and categorizing all the translators' prefaces collected in the corpus, two parts of content are found as shown in Table 3. The former seven (a-g) is about authors or the original and the latter four (h-k) is about translators or translation, where *a* stands for the translator's opinion or analysis, *b* statements of intent, *c* brief introduction to the original, *d* brief introduction to the author, *e* genesis, *f* genre indication, *g* contextual information, *h* actual process of translation, *i* commentary on the title, *j* introduction to the translated version, *k* introduction to the translator.

Table 3

Content Configuration of Translators' Prefaces

Content	<i>a</i>	<i>b</i>	<i>c</i>	<i>d</i>	<i>e</i>	<i>f</i>	<i>g</i>	<i>h</i>	<i>i</i>	<i>j</i>	<i>k</i>
Percentage	98.1	91.7	76.9	74.1	54.6	36.1	2.8	43.5	24.1	21.3	17.6

Content about the author or the original. The most frequent content in the translator's preface, as Table 3 shows, is the translator's opinion or analysis of the plots, characters, or the author's writing purpose, which occurs in 98.1% of the prefaces. Although it is given by translators, this content mainly contains information about the original work or the writer. Translators leave their marks on the translators' prefaces they made, which can explain why most of translators' prefaces contain translators' opinion or analysis. Translators' opinion or analysis aims at introducing significance of the original or providing readers with some comments on the author or characters in the work. Also, in this part, translators are not invisible. Every word or sentence they comment on the original or author embodies translator's subjectivity. They speak for themselves in this content, no matter supporting the author's opinion or exposing the theme of the whole work to readers who may feel puzzled when reading.

Statements of intent occur in 91.7% of all the translators' prefaces. Statements of intent here refer to not only summary of the novel or story, but also settings the story takes place, theme of the novel, the moral of the story, or the significance of the work. Every book has its own intent. However, books of various disciplines have different kinds of intent. For example, the intent of literary works usually contains story line, setting of the story, information about characters, etc., while that of economic or political works only covers summary of the translated work. As such, although most translators' prefaces have statements of intent, this content differs very much among various kinds of disciplines.

Brief introduction to the original work or the writer appears in 76.9% and 74.1% of the prefaces in question respectively. The two is very close and covers a large amount, indicating that they are important and conventional content of translators' prefaces. Introduction to the original involves award-winning experience, influence of the work, weakness or strength of the work, existing controversy of the work, framework or narrative skills of the work, etc. Introduction to the author includes summary of author's life, award-winning experience, and social status of the author, as well as brief information about other well-known works of the author. The two types of content mentioned comprise main parts of the original prefaces according to present studies. Other scholars have made similar findings, such as Dimitriu (2009).

According to Genette, "The original preface may inform the reader about the origin of the work, the circumstances in which it was written, the stages of its creation" (1997, p. 210). He names this content as genesis. Based on this understanding, translators' prefaces are examined in terms of whether they have such information. The result is that 54.6% of all the 108 translators' prefaces introduce genesis of the work. More than half of the translators are willing to inform readers how the original work they translate is created or what makes the idea of creating this work hitting the head of the author.

Some translators define genre of the work in translators' prefaces and others introduce the origin or development of the genre in details, which comprise the content named as genre indication. After analyzing the entire corpus once and once again, it is found that 36.1% of all the translators' prefaces have information about genre. This number is not a very small one, but less than half, which can be a sign of insufficient attention to this part. Having a comprehensive understanding of the work's genre before reading is necessary for readers to get rid of puzzles and confusions, which they may come across when they don't know the features of the genre.

Contextual information is the least appeared content in translators' prefaces studied. Here, contextual information refers to related information about a serial of works. There are two possible reasons explaining the smallest percentage of this content. For one, a lot of works do not have related texts, preceding or following them. Those works can be seen as an individual with no contextual information to be shown. For another, some translators feel not necessary to introduce contextual information, as there is no obvious relevance between the related texts and the work to translate.

Content about the translator or translation. The content of brief introduction to the translated version and the translator is found in 21.3% and 17.6% of all the translators' prefaces respectively. Introduction to the translated version refers to motivation of translation, features of the translated version, revision made by the translator, etc. Introduction to the translator contains self-experience, award-winning experience, relationship with the original or the author and other translated works of the translator. From this perspective, the content corresponds with the above-mentioned two—brief introduction to the original or the author. However, the percentage of the four types of content has a wide gap. Only a few translators cover information about themselves or their works while most of them focus on introducing the author and the original. That is a great gap remaining to fill for the future translators, also a good opportunity to make translators visible in academic field and translation profession.

The translator's conclusion about the actual process of translation is the main content about translation of the entire content configuration. It contains so many details, such as difficulties and inadequacies of the translation, problems and strategies of translation, experience of reading or translating the work, brief introduction to the co-translator, the translator's expectation, reasons of writing or rewriting the translator's preface, etc. Translators' prefaces that have the content of the translator's conclusion account for 43.5%, which

is the most frequent one of the four parts of content related to translation. That is to say, some translators try to let readers know something about translation, such as translation strategies, translation norms, or translation principles. This may contribute to the enhancement of translators' social position in academic field and drawing attention from readers who only focus on stories or characters when reading. However, the percentage is still less than half, indicating that this content remains to be valorized by all the translators in the process of writing a translator's preface if they want to be recognized by society and scholars in other fields.

The title of a work, like the face of a person, can make people know and remember it quickly for it summarizes the content of the whole work or reveals the theme of the work. Translators explain, in translators' prefaces, their understanding on the work they translated or their reason for translating the titles in that way. This content can be classified as commentary on the title. In fact, this content creates a new function of translators' prefaces, that is, a precaution against the misleading of the title and also a defense against criticism undergone or anticipated. According to Genette, "Commentary on the title may also serve to explain why a title was changed from what was advertised or from what it had been in serial publication" (1997, p. 214), which can also be applied to the content of translators' prefaces.

Deficiency or Enhancement of Content of Translators' Prefaces

In order to find out the deficiency and enhancement of content of translators' prefaces, proportion of each part of content in different years is calculated and then typed into the Microsoft Excel, finally to be shown as follows.

Figure 1. Evolving tendency: brief introduction to the author & contextual information.

Figure 2. Evolving tendency: brief introduction to the original & statements of intent.

Figure 3. Evolving tendency: genre indication & the translator's opinion or analysis.

Figure 4. Evolving tendency: comments on the title & introduction to the translated version.

Figure 5. Evolving tendency: genesis & introduction to the translator & his conclusion.

From the above five figures, it is not difficult to summarize the deficiency and enhancement of the content of translators' prefaces from its evolving tendency. According to the linear of each figure, it is clear that the evolving tendency of eight content configurations in the former four figures tends to be decreasing in these years, including brief introduction to the writer, brief introduction to the original work, genre indication, the translator's opinion or analysis, statements of intent, contextual information, commentary on the title, and brief introduction to the translated version. And the rest three in the last figure, genesis, the translator's conclusion, and brief introduction to the translator, are in a rising trend. These tendencies expose that only one part of the content concerned with the writer or the original work appears to be rising while the rest is decreasing among these years. However, more and more attention has been given to providing brief introduction to the translator

and the translator's conclusion on translation process with readers in translators' prefaces. That is to say, scholars or translators are transferring their attention from content about the writer or the original work to content about the translator or translation. Therefore, the decreasing of evolving tendency of content about the writer and the original work comprises the deficiency of content of translators' prefaces, and the increasing tendency of content about the translator and translation comprises the enhancement of content of translators' prefaces.

In summary, main focus of the content of translators' prefaces nowadays has shifted from the original and the authors to the translators and translation process that reflect translator's subjectivity, due to two reasons. One is the awareness of the importance of translator's visibility. Since the publication of Venuti's (1995) *The Translator's Invisibility: A History of Translation*, translator's social status has been revalued. As a new and hot research subject, translators' subjectivity arouses translator's interest. They use their own way, being visible in translators' prefaces, to enhance their status and boost development of translatology. In addition, there has been an increasing demand from readers for information about translators and translations. With the focus shifting from the translation process itself to cultural considerations, translators' explanations and introductions are more needed to clarify readers' confusions. As Lefevere (1992) theorized translation is rewriting. This kind of rewriting is done by translators and must be left with marks of translators, or even of target cultures. Only translators can give a clear hint to readers about how they deal with culture, language problems in translation. Translators' prefaces thus offer a platform for them to do so. Therefore, reader's demand for details on the translated texts or translators inspires changes of content configuration of translators' prefaces.

Conclusion

Translators' prefaces now occupy an important position. As a kind of paratext, translators' prefaces have got rid of being a shadow of text and begin to form their own framework and display functions. From this study, it can be seen that more attention has been paid to translators rather than prefaces only. The content of translators' prefaces mainly contains eleven categories, which are introduction to the author, introduction to the original, genre indication, the translator's opinion or analysis, statements of intent, contextual information, commentary on the title, introduction to the translated version, genesis, the translator's conclusion, and introduction to the translator. Making all of these clear helps to improve the quality of translators' prefaces and make translators recognized by society better. The data for current study, however, are selected from one influential press in China, which calls for further research based on data from more presses and more countries.

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