

## On The Subjectivity of the Translator from the Perspective of Culture

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**Abstract:** The translator, as the subject during the process of translation, is the most important and active factor in translation, whose subjectivity plays a key role in the translation practice. Not until the 1960s, did some researchers start to study the role of the translator in the process of the translation. Based on the previous studies on the subjectivity of the translator at home and abroad, this study mainly focuses on the subjectivity of the translator from cultural perspective. And it makes an analysis of the factors that influence translator's subjectivity from three aspects: translation standards, purpose of translator and personal experiences of the translator. The conclusion is of great importance and practical value to cultural communication and the teaching of foreign language.

**Keywords:** Cultural perspective; translator; subjectivity; influential factors.

**INTRODUCTION**

Translation is a kind of practice of cultural communication and the most direct and effective way to absorb foreign cultural achievements. The translator is the medium of culture; however, the role of the subjectivity of the translator in translation has not been paid enough attention for a long time. And the subjectivity of the translator should be in the case of reasonable translation activities. Only in this way can it promote the exchange of different cultures and the development of cultural globalization. This thesis aims to analyze the subjectivity of the translator from the perspective of culture in two aspects: cultural factors that influence the subjectivity of the translator and the influences of the above factors on the subjectivity of the translator.

**SUBJECTIVITY OF THE TRANSLATOR**

**Definition**

Scholars believed that subjectivity of the translator refers to that as the subject of translation, translator explores his/her subjective initiative for the realization of purpose of translation under the premise of respect the object of translation in translation activity. Its basic features are the consciousness of culture for translation subject, aesthetic creative consciousness, cultural character and culture. But as the subject of the translation, the translator and his/her practicality are not only constrained by the object, namely the influence and restriction of the original, but also by the objective environment.

From a cultural perspective, all translation practices base on the purposes of translation under the influence of some kind of culture to let the translators gradually transform their translation choices and strategies according to their own consciousness to the culture of target language in the translation practice. The subjectivity of the translator must be linked with

the cultural communication. With the development of the society, cultural environment and atmosphere, the translator in the process of translation of the age should make sure that the cultural context, ideology and literature concept conform to their grasped cultural information, identity and consistent attitude in order to adapt to the trend of the era and realize the echo of thinking and cultural context.

**Previous Studies on the Subjectivity of the Translator**

With the development of cultural trend study in translation field, translation theorists do research on translation theory from different cultural perspectives. In the light of "cultural turn", translation theorists can hold a completely different point of view on translator's subjectivity from that of traditional translation perspectives.

Andre Lefevere and Susan Bassnett are two outstanding examples among the scholars in the Manipulation school. Lefevere stated in his book

*Translation, Rewriting and the Manipulation of Literary Fame* that “Translation actually is a kind of rewriting about an original text. What’s more, the history of translation is the history of literary innovation and it is a shaping power of one culture upon another” [1]. In his opinion, the translator should treat the conditions and target readers as the vital part. From that, the translator chose the translation strategies according to his/her own understanding but the translator is confined by his/her ideology, patronage and poetics. All these factors are conducive for the translator to choose accurate way to translate which is the sufficient evidence of the translator’s subjectivity.

Besides, in Heidegger’s opinion, history plays a significant role in understanding. He believes that “when one thing is explained to another, the explanation is necessary for fore-sight, fore-conception and fore-having” [2].

Moreover, the subjectivity is also existed in the whole process of translation strategies selection, translator’s value and creativity. Susan Bassnett has illuminated the translator’s subjectivity clearly in her book *Translation Studies* “when interpreting the source text, the translator’s own creativity must be reflected in the inter-lingual translation” [3]. Obviously, she attaches great importance to the subjectivity of translator in whole process of translation. From that time, translator has been analyzed in loads of perspectives in the western world. The status of translator’s subjectivity has been payed significant attention to.

The above ideas of foreign scholars deepened the understanding of translator’s subjectivity to some degree; translator is regarded as the “center” of translation that plays a mediating role between the source language and the target language. Although western scholars have not directly stated translator’s subjectivity in their studies, their thoughts are of great favor to further researches.

Since the mid-1980s, the issue about translator’s subjectivity has become the focus of Chinese translation circles. With the “cultural turn” in translation study; there came the great development in the study of translator’s subjectivity which now becomes a subject of great interest. Since then, the key topic of translation study should shift from translation principle, translation strategies and translation standards to translator’s subjectivity. Translator thus gradually became the most important part in translation study field in China.

From the point of view of philosophy, human have subjective initiative naturally and are able to make judgment while handling objective issues, so do the translators in the translation work and this initiative is

characterized by the subjectivity of the translator. The translator can take various strategies with his subjective initiative to achieve the certain effect. How well the translator plays with his/her subjective initiative will directly affect the quality of translation.

According to Nida [4] translation studies in this period are “pre-scientific” with “enthusiasm for freedom in translating” (p.139). Scholars' attitude towards translation at this stage was more subjective rather than objective.

To sum up, with the “cultural turn” in translation study in the 1970s, the importance of translator’s subject status and translator’s subjectivity have been widely recognized in the translation field at home and abroad. The study on translator’s subjectivity mainly focuses on its definition, significance and connection with translation. The application scope of translator’s subjectivity mainly lies in literary work translation, legal translation, subtitle translation, tourist material, and publicity material translation. But the research on translator’s subjectivity was not built comprehensively, and translation researchers still need more comprehensive researches on translator’s subjectivity.

#### **CULTURAL FACTORS IN THE PROCESS OF THE SUBJECTIVITY OF THE TRANSLATOR**

Now that the subjectivity of the translator has a larger contact with cultural context, knowledge of cultural information, literature idea, thereby, the subjectivity of the translator must consider the specific cultural factors into consideration. The cultural factor is an important part of translators’ subjectivity, and there are also subtly rules and other aspects of performance, which restricts to the subjectivity of the translator.

#### **Translation Standards of the Translator**

From the perspective of translation standards, the translator plays a role first and then the standard of translation appeared. Traditional translation standards are “faithfulness”, “faithfulness, expressiveness and elegance”, “equivalent”, and making readers “accept” etc. This standard is the summary of experience and in turn forms a specification on the translator’s subjectivity performance again. The principles mentioned above, in turn, guide the translator to adjust the style and the use of words in the translation activities in order to ensure the acceptability of the translation. It is not only helps the formation of the role of the translator in translation standards, which in turn forms the standard of translation and restricts the subjectivity of the translator. At the beginning of the traditional criteria of translation, many criteria for translation are related and attract attention to the translators and their role later. This suggests that translator’s subjectivity with the change and improvement of translation criteria has changed, and

this is also the mutual influence among the translator, translation standard and translation.

The translation criterion provides a yardstick for measuring the quality of the target text, which promotes the performance of the translation function and the improvement of the quality of the translation. The standard of translation is a summary of translator in translation practice. Researchers cannot empty and abstractly talk about “translation is namely translation criteria” and “faithfulness, expressiveness and elegance”, but they should realize mutual influence and interaction between the factors of the translator’s subjectivity and translation standards.

### **Purpose of Translation of the Translator**

In the process of reading the translation and interpretation, the translators are the aesthetic subject of the original, and his or her translations are the reader’s aesthetic object. As the original aesthetic subject, the translators must put themselves into the text and perceive the original beauty according to the author’s aesthetic taste in the reproduction of translated text. Besides, translators need to reproduce the aesthetic standard and taste of the author, such as the author’s knowledge structure and aesthetic emotion. The translation purpose of the translator has already existed and determined in translation during this process.

In translation activities, the target readers cannot be ignored. Communication between the readers of the translated text and the target text could only be equivalent after the end of the translation. On the contrary, the translator must take the exchange and dialogue into consideration during the process of the translation activities. For example:

ST: 正懒在床上胡想, 鲍小姐外面弹舱壁, 骂他“懒虫”, 叫他快起来, 同上岸去玩。  
(excerpted from *Fortress Besieged*)

TT: Just as he was loafing in bed thinking of that nonsense, Miss Pao tapped on the outside of his cabin, called him “Lazybones,” and told him to hurry and get up so they could go ashore and have fun [5].

The word “懒虫” in Chinese means lazy people in particular, if translated as “lazy worm”, was completely hardly to understand by the target language readers, because in English, there is no relation between worm and lazy. Therefore, the two translators cleverly replaced the word of “lazy worm” with “lazybone”, which is a masterstroke.

In expression of translation stage, the reader’s awareness of the translator affected the expression of the final translation in a large extent. Actually, before the translators began to write the translation, they have

established their own readers. The translator’s understanding and grasp to the reader’s level of education, cultural background, literary ability and the level of aesthetics will directly affect the creation of the translator.

### **Personal Experience of the Translator**

Translation behavior is a process of practice and the translator will be manipulated by his/her ideology in the translation behavior. Under this influence, the translator will inevitably intentionally or unintentionally put their own value judgment and understanding into his translation ideas and principles, and then into his own translation behavior.

For the translator, firstly, he must understand what is conveyed in the translation of cultural phenomenon. Secondly, he should choose translation techniques and skills. As for the translation of words, the translator tend to act as follows, making the original words given tone of strengthening in the target language to achieve more challenge to read. In addition, the translators take desalination or shadowing means so as to make the translation works easy to understand. Therefore, the translator chooses the words and sentences with his/her subjectivity, and the translator is also bound to examine his/her translation practice based on different cultures.

Nida once said that “for truly successful translating, biculturalism is even more important than bilingualism, since words only have meanings in terms of the cultures in which they function” [4]. Translators should take cultural difference into account, fully understand the cultural meaning of the culture-loaded words, make every effort to restore the cultural comiotation and finally improve the communication of the two cultures.

### **INFLUENCES OF THE ABOVE FACTORS ON THE SUBJECTIVITY OF THR TRANSLATOR**

Through the above analysis, the performance of translator’s subjectivity must be constraints of a certain culture, and in the process of translation, different cultural influences on the translator’s translation have direct significance. And next, the ways and results cultural factors influences on the subjectivity of the translator will be discussed.

In the process of translating, source text adopted by the translator also reflects the understanding of the translator for a specified period of culture and the result of the translation of the source text has a direct relationship with the translator’s own knowledge structure, character and temperament, the life experience and knowledge level, etc. Under these influences, the translator will inevitably intentionally or unintentionally puts his/her own value judgment and understanding into the ideas and principles of

translation, and then into his/her own translation activities. And this is the performance that personal experience of the translator influences on the choice of the source text.

Translation is a process of different cultural communication, which corrects the understanding of cultural differences and cultural marginalization. The translator skillfully uses the strategies arousing the resonance of the readers, so as to reduce the block of foreign culture understanding and make it conform to the target language culture system of cultural forms. Thus, the translator chooses proper translation strategies under the cultural perspective is also an expression of the subjectivity.

### **CONCLUSION**

The understanding of the translator's subjectivity from the perspective of culture can be more profound in specific process to understand the translation. And base on cultural background, the translator makes the translation works more easily accepted by readers, and through which is more conducive to the realization of communication between different cultures. To conclude, it is important for people to know about the subjectivity of the translator from cultural perspective and have a clear understanding on how to make the translator's subjectivity play an active role in translation works in the future.

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