



Translation Studies From Multiple Perspectives

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Supported by MTI Project of Guizhou Province [YJSCXJH (2018) 094]; The Guizhou Provincial Education office.

Received 18 July 2019; accepted 23 September 2019

Published online 26 October 2019

Abstract

This paper studies contemporary translation theories from multiple perspectives. It mainly focuses on the books such as *In Other Words: A Coursebook on Translation*, *The Theory and Practice of Translation*, *Translation and Empire*, *Discourse and the translator*, *Translation and relevance* and *the Pragmatics of Translation*. The first two books discuss translation from the perspective of linguistics and demonstrate many useful translation strategies. The third one, from the post-colonial perspective, views translation as a way of power distribution and a helper of empire's ruling, whereas the last three ones mainly concentrate on the relationship between pragmatics and translation and talk about the application of pragmatics to translation in detail.

Key words: Translation studies; Interdisciplinary approaches; Book review

Long, J. X. (2019). Translation Studies From Multiple Perspectives. *Studies in Literature and Language*, 19(2), 40-46. Available from: <http://www.cscanada.net/index.php/sll/article/view/11288>
 DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.3968/11288>

INTRODUCTION

Translation studies was regarded as a sub area of linguistics or a branch of comparative literature for a long time. It was not recognized as an independent discipline until the 1970s. As translation studies enjoys a comparatively high status nowadays, interdisciplinary

studies of translation attracts more and more scholars' attention. This paper focuses on the famous books about contemporary translation theories with aims to study translation from multiple perspectives.

1. TRANSLATION STUDIES FROM THE PERSPECTIVE OF LINGUISTICS

This part talks about the linguistic theory of translation from the two books: *In Other Words: A Coursebook on Translation* and *The Theory and Practice of Translation*.

The first book is written by Mona Baker. As it provides various kinds of practical translation strategies, including plenty of exercises, and appends a great number of translation materials, it can be served as a textbook for translation learners. Modern linguistic theories, especially M.A.K Halliday's systemic functional grammar, are applied to the study in many aspects. The book contains seven chapters which are introduction, equivalence at word level, equivalence above word level, grammatical equivalence, textual equivalence: thematic and information structures, textual equivalence: cohesion, and pragmatic equivalence. As can be seen from these subtitles, the notion of equivalence is paramount importance to the book.

In the first place, Baker elaborates equivalence at and above word level. To begin with discussing translation problems arises from lack of equivalence at word level, she points out that "there is no one-to-one correspondence between orthographic words and elements of meaning within or across languages" (Baker 1992/2000, p.11). In order to deal with the problem, she suggests the translators should pay close attention to two areas: the first one is to appreciate "the value that a word has in a given system", while the second is to develop "strategies for dealing with non-equivalence" (*op.cit.*, p.19). She also recommends eight attested strategies to translators such as "using a loan word" (*op.cit.*, p.34), translation by "a more

general word”, “a more neutral/less expressive word”, “cultural substitution”, “paraphrase”, “omission”, or “illustration” (*op.cit.*, pp.26-42). As to equivalence above word level, she shows her interests in lexical patterning and concentrates on collocation, idioms and fixed expressions. It is more difficult to handle the problem of non-equivalence in this level inasmuch as the variation of words and cultural differences. Even so, Baker still offers ways such as “paraphrase” and “omission” to solve the problems (*op.cit.*, pp.74 &76).

In the second place, Baker illustrates equivalence from the perspective of grammar. Besides lexical resources, grammatical system is another important factor which determines our ways of using words and expressing ideas. Grammar contains two dimensions: morphology and syntax. From Baker’s point of view, the biggest difference between grammatical choice and lexical choice lies in the fact that “grammatical choices are largely obligatory while lexical choices are largely optional” (*op.cit.*, p.84). This reminds me Saussure’s two relations of language. In his *Course in General Linguistics* (1983/2001), he points out that Syntagmatic Relation and Paradigmatic Relation are the two main relations for language. The former one deals with the relations from horizontal direction, whereas the latter one focuses on the relations from vertical direction. Therefore, in this sense, the study of translation should highlight not only lexical categories but also grammatical structures. Baker analyzes the influences of grammar rules to translation in terms of number, gender, person, tense, aspect, voice etc.

Finally, Baker discusses textual and pragmatic equivalence. She defines text initially. According to Brown and Yule, text is “the verbal record of a communicative event, it is an instance of language in use rather than language as an abstract system of meanings and relations” (*op.cit.*, p.111). After that, she introduces two approaches to analyze text: one is Hallidayan approach from the perspective of systemic functional grammar, and another is Prague school’s approach from functional sentence perspective. Compared with latter one, she prefers the former one, even though she deems Hallidayan approach has some disadvantages. In this part, the author mainly concerns about the applications of Halliday’s thematic structure and information structure, text cohesion and coherence, and Grice’s cooperative principle to translation studies and discusses them in detail. She emphasizes the importance of coherence to translation studies, and also indicates that coherence is an “elusive notion” (*op.cit.*, p.253). Owing to the diversity of factors, linguistics, non-linguistics, context etc., absolute equivalence is impossible. Equivalence is a relative concept. What a translator needs to do, in so far as the principle of equivalence is concerned, is to translate as faithfully as possible.

In my opinion, the book makes two contributions to translation studies: the combination of linguistics and translation studies, and the understanding of equivalence.

First of all, it introduces linguistic theories to translation studies and studies translation from the perspective of pragmatics. As far as Fawcett is concerned, there are twofold relationships of linguistics to translation: “one can apply the findings of linguistics to the practice of translation, and one can have a linguistic theory of translation (Fawcett 1998; Baker 2000/2004, p.121).” Obviously, this book belongs to the first one. With the application of theories such as thematic and information structures, cohesion and coherence, cooperative principle to translation, new vigor has been added to translation studies. The introduction of Hallidayan approach brings functional view to translation studies. In systemic functional grammar, the primary function of language is communication. As Halliday maintains, “Language has evolved to satisfy human needs; and the way it is organized is functional with respect to these needs---it is not arbitrary (Halliday 1994/2000, p.39)”. Therefore, translation can be seen as a process of communication. Besides, the application of text analysis, to some extent, can be viewed as a complement to Catford’s translation theory. Its theme-rheme distinction, especially the proposition and attention of marked rheme will obviously provide new perspective for Catford’s theory. In addition, as Baker mentions, to conduct a comparative study on “Halliday’s notion of theme and the category of topics in Chinese and other topic-prominent languages” will be very interesting (Baker, 1992/2000, p.141).

Secondly, it states that equivalence is a relative concept. Retrospect to the history of translation, equivalence has been regarded as the central part of translation studies for a long time. A lot of theorists have proposed their ideas on it, among which Nida’s dynamic and functional equivalence won the greatest reputation. Unlike the previous ideas, Baker’s understanding of equivalence is quite similar to Nida’s for both of them viewing equivalence as a relative concept and agreeing absolute equivalence does not exist. Due to linguistic, cultural and contextual differences, it is common that the target language has no direct equivalent for the source language.

Despite of the contributions, the book also has limitations. Firstly, the view of translation is limited to linguistic level. This mostly dues to the theoretical foundation for it is only based on linguistic theory. However, besides language, there are also lots of aspects which should be taken into consideration such as ideology, poetics, economy etc. Secondly, though it views equivalence as a relative concept, it focuses on the role equivalence played in translation studies. As a matter of fact, over emphasizing on equivalence can only lead to binary opposition and hinder the development of translation studies at last.

The Theory and Practice of Translation written by Eugene A. Nida & Charles R. Taber, it is a classic of translation study. It mainly talks about Dynamic Equivalence. The most remarkable character of it is the

close combination between theory and practice. In order to assist readers to understand the essence of the theory as well as to gain certain practical skills and strategies, the authors take plenty of examples from the translations of bible. The book can be divided into two parts, with chapter one and chapter two as part one introducing the new concept of translating and with the last six chapters as part two talking about the system for translation.

Consideration of the response of the receptor is one of the greatest contributions of the book. The fundamental difference between the traditional translating and the new concept of translating is due to their focuses. "The older focus in translating was the form of the message, and translators took particular delight in being able to reproduce stylistic specialties. The new focus, however, has shifted from the form of the message to the response of the receptor." (Nida & Taber 1969/2004, p.1) The receptor refers to the average reader. Here Nida puts forwards one of his respectable principle—Dynamic Equivalence, which can be stated as the readers of translated text may response the same as the original readers. Moreover, the authors recommend new attitudes with respect to receptor language and propose new attitudes concerning the source language. The authors believe that "each language has its own genius, and anything that can be said in one language can be said in another, unless the form is an essential element of the language." (Nida & Taber 1969/2004, p.4) Regardless of the difference between culture and language, one can translate the works through the process of finding equivalent words and recombining them in a new form. Then on discussing the nature of translating, the authors define translating as "the closest natural equivalent of the source-language message, first in terms of meaning and secondly in terms of style." (Nida & Taber 1969/2004, p.12) This is also a definition of Dynamic Equivalence, which contains three signification—the closest, natural and equivalence. From these points, the translators need to find the closest words and recombine them in a proper way opposing to translationese. The proposition of Dynamic Equivalence plays a great role in translation study and it is an improvement for the traditional translation. Unlike the traditional Free Translation, it demands the translation reproducing the meaning of the source text to the largest extent. In addition, aiming to perfect the equivalence, the authors propose a set of priorities, such as "the priority of contextual consistency over verbal consistency" (Nida & Taber 1969/2004, p.15), "the priority of dynamic equivalence over formal correspondence" (Nida & Taber 1969/2004, p.22), "the priority of the heard language over the written language" (Nida & Taber 1969/2004, p.28), "the priority of the needs of the audience over the forms of language" (Nida & Taber 1969/2004, p.31) and so on.

In the second part, the authors talk about the system for translation. There are two kinds of systems: one contains

only an intermediate stage, whereas another consists of a more elaborate procedure comprising three stages. The second one is better. The authors improve the second system and divide it into four stages which are analysis, transfer, restructuring and testing.

The processes of analysis involve both grammatical and semantic aspects of the text. On a grammatical level, the authors deal with "the analysis of the meaningful relationship between words" (Nida & Taber 1969/2004, p.34). Not only words have meanings, grammar also has meaning. "The grammatical differences of order provide quite different meanings." (Nida & Taber 1969/2004, p.35) In order to find the closet expression, the authors introduce the linguistic theory Transformation and Back Transformation into translation study. They regard the translations as surface structure, whereas the source texts are underlying kernels. For the sake of dynamic equivalence, translators may render the works into different forms and the styles according to their focuses in different environments. On the semantic level, the authors discuss about the referential meaning and the connotative meaning. In the process of semantic analysis, they distinguish four kinds of words: object, event, abstract and relative. Besides, three approaches—lineal analysis, hierarchical structure analysis and componential analysis are introduced. Then the authors talk about the essential part—transfer, through which "the results of the analysis are transferred from source language to the receptor language" (Nida & Taber 1969/2004, p.99). They present some specific problems which in most cases inevitably influence the quantity of translation. And they also give suggestions in the process of "semantic adjustments" (Nida & Taber 1969/2004, p.105) and "structural adjustments" (Nida & Taber 1969/2004, p.112) in term of the problems. In this part, they conceive translating as a process of communication and pay much attention to the cultural factors, which is the second greatest contribution of the book. Jin Di gives a great praise to it: "the great contribution Eugene Nida made was to shift the focus from the comparison of a pair of texts, the source-language and the target-language texts, to a comparison of the two communication process involved. As the message in a communication is carried by means of the text (written or oral), the new method of comparison does not disregard the important of the text, but the shift of focus implies the consideration of various linguistic and cultural complications that can affect the receptor's perception of the message carried by the text." (Jin 1997, p.231) And then in restructuring, translators have to put the styles of language into consideration. The final job is to test the translation and improve it. In general, the translation tends to be longer than the source text. For the need of understanding, the translation usually adds some words to explain the text and sometimes the using of marginal is indispensable.

From the analysis above, we come to the conclusions as follows: The book makes three contributions to translation study. First and also the most important one is the proposition of Dynamic Equivalence. It helps us to view translation from a new perspective. Secondly, the consideration of the receptors is a milestone in translation study. The response of the receptor is less taken into consideration until the publication of the book. From then on, translators shift their attention to the receptor's culture and get more freedom. Thirdly, it convinces the ideas anything that can be said in one language can be said in another and the cognitive ability of a particular nation is not restricted by its language structure. This is a beautiful response to the persons who stress meaning cannot be reproduced and view translation as a worthless job.

Despite of the contributions, the book also has limitations. Although the Dynamic Equivalence has lots of advantages, "the word dynamic is usually misunderstood, and for some people, it only refers to the thing having influences." (Liu 2003, p.160). The Dynamic Equivalence is replaced by the Functional Equivalence in later. Secondly, over focusing on intercommunication and understandability of the translation restrict its applied scope, e.g. it is not fit for literary translation. To put understandability to the first place can lead to the simplifying of words and make the literature works un-literature.

2. TRANSLATION STUDIES FROM POST-COLONIAL PERSPECTIVE

Translation studies, for a long time, has been restricted in the field of language transformation. Scholars always pay attention to the inner aspects of translation. *Translation and Empire*, inspired by the postcolonial studies, however, talks about translation from the outer aspects. Politics, economy, cultures, etc are the factors which attract Robinson's attention, and he shows great interests in how these factors influence translation. This book can be divided into three parts, with the first part giving a brief presentation of postcolonial studies in relation to translation, the second part discussing the understanding of translation by post-colonialism, and the last part dealing with the critiques on postcolonial approach.

The book begins with the explanation of the relationship between translation and empire. How do these two seemingly unrelated things, (translation studies language, whereas empire represents "a political system based on military and economic domination"), have something to do with each other (Robinson 1997, p. 8)? Considering the history of translation, it usually presents the will of empire. Taking the Spanish invasion of Mexico and the colonizing in Plymouth Plantation for example, Robinson shows us vivid pictures on how translation represents the will of the ruling class and is used as their

tool for controlling people in colony. On the one hand, translation enables the intercommunication between the colonists and the natives which in turn guarantees the governing. On the other hand, translation plays a role in civilizing or domesticating which consolidates the controlling. The colonists usually and used to compare the relationship between them and the natives to "adults" and "children" (op.cit., p. 21) and always acclaim that their controlling greatly helps the colony and its people. As Robinson mentions, the colonizers always explain their domination in the following ways: firstly, they point out that "the natives remain childish in comparison with the rulers". Then they present "a regimen of 'education' must be imposed on the natives to usher them from the childish state to a more European state of 'adulthood'" (op.cit., p. 22). Are these the facts? Definitely not, the explanation is just an excuse of the colonizers. And what's more? It reflects some prejudices. With little understanding and no respect to the natives' culture, the colonizers judge the natives from the European culture background. Whether being civilized or savage is just the evaluation from the western evaluation system. The natives, in fact, have no power of discourse.

In the second part, Robinson further talks about the role translation plays in the colony from the perspectives of politics and culture. Firstly, he talks about translating across power differentials and relates the power of translation to the power of politics. Then, he maintains that it is the sense for sense translation that makes the imposing of the ideology come true. Sense for sense translation, which is widely used in the colonial land, is actually a rewriting of the original. As most of the translators serve for the ruling class, their translations are indispensably immitted by the will of the ruling class. In addition, he presents the roles of translation from three postcolonial scholars' works: Eric Cheyfitz and the colonization of the New World, Niranjana and the British interpellation of India, and Rafael and the Spanish conversion of the Tagalogs. In Cheyfitz's opinion, translation is regarded as the process of helping the "naked native" to put on "clothes" (op.cit., p. 67) in the American colony. From the perspective of Niranjana, translation is used by the colonizers as a way to "imprint a new character" on the Indians (op.cit., p. 79). Similarly, Rafael describes the role translation performs as "moralizing" to the natives, not only from the language, but also from the religious.

The last part is the critique of the postcolonial approaches and mainly talks about the critiques on the above three scholars' works. Compared with Cheyfitz and Rafael, Niranjana's work attracts more attentions from mainstream theorists. This is probably due to its seemingly "less directed at specific postcolonial history" (op.cit., p. 104). Finally, Robinson puts forward four solutions by using of foreignizing or domesticating translations from the perspective of postcolonial studies.

After reading, I get a better understanding of translation from the perspective of post-colonial studies. From the governing in colony to the current clashes in the United States, translation reflects the purposes of the upper class which imposed on people. On the one hand, people in the developed countries in the west get used to receiving the translations which fit for their own culture, so they have little understanding on the true culture of the colony. On the other hand, people in the colony are forced to think in the way of the west or similar to the west in order to meet the requirements of the colonists.

Although post-colonial studies provides a new perspective for translation studies, I do not agree with its view of criticizing everything. Post-colonial studies, focusing on the influences of politics and culture, has close relationship with the studies on ideology. And ideology, according to Terry Eagleton in *Literary Theory: an Introduction* (1996), is defined as “what the ways in which what we say and believe connects with the power-structure and power-relations of the society we live in.” Everybody is a member of society, therefore, everyone is indispensably influenced by socio-ideology, and no one can escape the control of it. Lots of scholars of post-colonial studies, especially Niranjana, criticize ethnography for its non-objectivity, and moreover, ethnography is regarded as a helper for the domination of the colonist. However, can we confirm what we have done is totally objective? Obviously not. Although ethnography reflects the thoughts of the anthropologist in some cases, it is actually an objective note (By talking with the students majoring in anthropology, I know ethnography is a case report based on field study, and one of the crucial purposes of the field study is objectivity.). As to the degree of objectivity, it is determined by lots of factors which belong to the social ideology. Scholars of post-colonial studies always try to criticize insofar as they can and show little interest in the good aspects, which, in my opinion, hinders the development of the theory itself. Translation studies is a new discipline and its development depends on the developments of various subjects. In the process of learning from other subjects, we need to carefully avoid blindly praising and introducing their theories, or criticizing the theories and pushing them aside.

3. TRANSLATION STUDIES FROM THE PERSPECTIVE OF PRAGMATICS

This part focuses on the three books: *Translation and relevance*, *Discourse and the translator* and *the Pragmatics of Translation*. They mainly talk about translation from the perspective of pragmatics.

Translation and Relevance, as its name implies, presents the application of relevance theory to translation. Firstly, Gutt, the author, makes comments on the state of the art. He criticizes the previous theories and approaches,

especially equivalence and the descriptive-classificatory approach. In his point of view, “equivalence-based theories” only emphasize “systematic comparison” and “the notion of equivalence itself may not be truly evaluative in nature but merely comparative”, so it is “inadequate for evaluating translation” (Gutt 2000/2004, pp.13-14). As to descriptive-classificatory approach, he points out that it will cause “over-specification” and lead to “a loss of generalizing power” (op.cit., p. 20).

After the critical evaluation, the author introduces relevance theory found by Sperber and Wilson. It contains lots of basic concepts such as cognitive environment, explicatures, implicatures, contextual effects and interpretive resemblance and so on. According to the theory, the communication of human beings, is, in fact, interpretations of discourse. The success of communication is “determined by the desire for optimization of resources” and the crucial part of the “optimization is to keep the effort spent to a minimum.” (op.cit., p. 28) In addition, the theory also pays attention to the relationship between mind and thought. As the author mentions, “we do not necessarily say what we think, but more often than not what we say interpretively resembles what we intend to communicate.” (op.cit., p. 36)

Centering on these principles, the author examines various views of translation, and at the same time, illustrates how the relevance theory is applied. He defines the regions of translation at first. The texts such as tourist-brochures, advertisements, instructions of product and so on can be excluded in the definition of translation for their only aiming to attract the attention of readers and paying no attention to the original texts, whereas the translations of Bible, focusing on the original, on the contrary, are regarded as apotheosis of translation. He discusses how to transfer the thoughts of the writer to the receptor language readers. This is one of the central topics of the previous studies. By analyzing Nida’s dynamic equivalence and France’s idiomatic translation, he draws a conclusion: although resemblance is very important, it is impossible to translate all the information of the original to the target. Then, in what respects the intended interpretation of the translation should resemble the original? In the author’s opinion, it is the relevance theory that can solve the problem. Through a comparative analysis among relevance theory, Levy’s functional hierarchy, Beekman’s & Callow’s lexical equivalence across languages, Newmark’s equivalent frequency of usage and so on, he maintains that only relevance theory can handle various phenomena for its “resemblance in relevant respects”. Besides, the author discusses another central topic of translation studies—literal translation and free translation. In the view of relevance theory, the two approaches are not completely opposite. The choice is dependent on the “translator’s intentions” and the “audience’s expectations” (op.cit., p. 191). And sometimes, according

to the intentions or expectations, the translator can choose both approaches and apply them to different parts of the translation. That is to say, the two approaches can be unified in relevance theory.

Discourse and the translator mainly talks about the application of systemic functional linguistics to translation studies. In the foreword, Hatim & Mason clearly put forward translation as a part of “applied linguistics” to which they hope they can “make a contribution”. Viewing translation not only as a process of language transference, but also a process of communication under the social situation is the central argument of this book. Centering on this argument, the authors discuss the implication of linguistics on translation.

The book can be divided into three parts. Chapter one is the first part. It briefly reviews the hot research issues of translation such as process and product, objectivity and subjectivity, literal and free translation, formal and dynamic equivalence, the translation of style, meaning potential, translator’s motivation, laws of translation, etc. The second part is chapter two. The main purpose of this part is to explore the implication of functional linguistics on translation studies. “Traditional structural linguistics sought to describe language as system of interdependent elements and to characterize the behavior of individual items and categories on the basis of their distribution. Its main areas, morphology and syntax exclude the intractable problem of meaning.” (Hatim & Mason 1990/2001, p. 25) However, meaning is an essential part of translation. Then, the introduction of functional linguistics solves the problem. Functional linguistics focuses on the languages in real communications and pays great attention to the transfer of meaning. Its theory on register, context and so on provides the theoretical basis for studying from meaning to translation. Chapter three to ten belong to the third part. From all aspects of linguistics such as register, pragmatics, semiotics, intertextuality, text type and so on, it illustrates the influence of the linguistic theory on translation studies. The final part is the last chapter. In this part, the authors mainly focus on the requirements of the translator. In their opinion, “translator stands at the centre of the dynamic process of communication” and plays the role of “mediator” (op.cit., p. 223). Therefore, it is quite necessary for a translator to own extensive knowledge. S/he not only has a bilingual ability but also a bi-cultural vision.

The pragmatics of translation, edited by Hickey, is a volume of papers written by thirteen scholars with the aim of addressing the pragmatic level of translation. Pragmatics is a sub branch of linguistics which studies the ways in which context contributes to meaning. For it studies the language in communication, it is, in fact, a study of how the meaning of a sentence changes depending on how and where it is expressed. Thus, the application of pragmatics plays a great role in translation

studies. As Hickey mentions that the approach “attempts to explain translation—procedure, process and product—from the point of view of what is done by the original author in or by the text, what is done in the translation as a response to the original, how and why it is done in that way in that context” (Hickey 1998/2001, p. 4).

The thirteen essays present the application respectively from speech act theory, cooperative principle, relevance theory, politeness and so on. Among them, Gutt’s paper *Pragmatic Aspects of Translation: Some Relevance-Theory Observations* and Hatim’s paper *Text Politeness: a Semiotic Regime for a More Interactive Pragmatics* attract me more.

From the perspective of relevance theory, Gutt’s paper mainly deals with two important aspects of translation: “the notion of translation” and “the significance of changes in context often involved in translation work” (op.cit., p. 41). Translation, in Gutt’s opinion, is an “interpretive use of language” (op.cit., p. 46). That is to say, translation interprets what someone else said or wrote in another language. Context is the crucial factor that relevance theory emphasized. Translation is the rendering not only of language, but also of context. Therefore, in order to translate well, the problems which may occur in communication situations should be taken into consideration by the translator.

In Hatim’s paper, the focus is on the study of politeness within socio-textual practice. Politeness theory was first formulated by Brown and Levinson as the redressing of the affronts to face posed by face-threatening acts to addressees. Through the process of inheritance and development, region from “speech act to text act” (op. cit., p. 73) and with the complement of the cooperative principle” (op.cit., p. 77), it has extended to cover politeness of texts which focuses on the socio-cultural factors and rhetoric. In Hatim’s opinion, the translator’s prejudice may show in his or her works and produce undue domestication of a text rather than respecting its foreignness.

The introduction of pragmatics provides a new perspective for translation studies. Both literal translation and free translation, from then on, have theoretical basis. Untranslatability is never an insurmountable divide for translators. And moreover, the study of translation is not restricted in the area of linguistics; more and more people begin to study translation from the perspectives of semiotics, sociology, anthropology, psychology and so on, which have far-reaching significance.

CONCLUSION

The paper focuses on the famous books about contemporary translation theories and studies translation from the perspectives of linguistics, post-colonialism and pragmatics. It shows that the development of

translation studies depends on the developments of various disciplines. With the introduction of interdisciplinary studies, the study of translation ushers one turn after another. Open out translation studies to innovative thoughts, new perspectives will improve our understanding on translation.

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