



English Literature and Language Review

ISSN(e): 2412-1703, ISSN(p): 2413-8827

Vol. 3, No. 1, pp: 1-11, 2017

URL: <http://arpgweb.com/?ic=journal&journal=9&info=aims>

Retranslation Theories: A Critical Perspective

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Abstract: The paper first introduces Goethe's three-stage theory of retranslating classics and Lu Xun's emphasis on the necessity of retranslating. Then, it summarizes the main achievements by contemporary scholars in retranslation studies, focusing on definitions of retranslation, retranslation hypotheses, reasons for retranslating and types of retranslation. There are three definitions for retranslation. Retranslations are divided into ordinary and great, active and passive ones. The retranslation hypotheses including those of increasing source focus, quality improvement, text-aging, and so on the reasons for retranslating are complex and closely related to the time of retranslating. Retranslation can be approached from different angles. Finally, the paper points out the problems with the current retranslation studies, proposes a definition of retranslation, outlines for retranslation research the theoretical system of its own and discusses the strengths of retranslation studies.

Keywords: Retranslation; Goethe; Lu Xun; Definition; Hypothesis; Theoretical system.

1. Introduction

In his well-known paper "On Translating Homer" (Robinson, 2006), Matthew Arnold commented on the translations of Homeric epic by George Chapman, Alexander Pope, William Cowper, William Sotheby, John Newman and Charles Wright. These translations follow a diachronic order and thus are retranslations of the same source texts. Arnold suggests that Homer was translated again and again because of different understandings of Homer and his works. This was one of the first retranslation hypotheses, but there have been others.

Research on retranslation was occasional and usually indirect before the 20th century. Only in the last two decades has retranslation, as a special phenomenon of translation, begun to attract more attention mainly from writers, translators and translation researchers. In the paragraphs that follow, the paper will first explore Goethe's and Lu Xun's ideas on retranslation. Then, it will make a sketch of contemporary retranslation research. Finally, it will discuss the problem with the retranslation hypotheses, propose the main fields of retranslation studies and explore the advantages of retranslation research.

2. Early Research on Retranslation

In the history of world literature, at least two authors have discussed retranslation extensively: Goethe (Berman, 1990; Brownlie, 2006) and Lu Xun (Wu, 1995). The former's discussion is somewhat indirect but thought-provoking, while the latter's is direct and forceful.

2.1. Johann Wolfgang von Goethe

Goethe was a great writer as well as a translator and a translation theorist. His fragmentary and aphoristic remarks on translation in his 133 volumes of collected works have helped make the German theoretical tradition one of the world's richest bodies of work in the field of Translation Studies (Robinson, 2006). In his *West-Östlicher Divan published in 1819*, Goethe divides translation into three kinds:

- (1) The first kind of translation familiarizes us with the foreign country on our own terms.
- (2) In the second kind of translation one seeks to project oneself into the circumstances of the foreign country, but in fact only appropriates the foreign meaning and then replaces it with one's own.
- (3) In the third kind of translation one seeks to make the translation identical with the original, so that the one would no longer be in the *stead* but in the *place* of the other. (ibid.: 222-223)

Goethe mixes the three concepts "kind", "approach" and "epoch" in his classification, although it seems that he lays more emphasis on "epoch" (*Epoche, Zeitalter*). In other words, the three kinds of translation are characterized by "temporal nature" and related to three "epochs". This is the very nature of retranslations, which appear one after another. And his words "the appearance among us of Germanized foreigners like Aristotle and Tasso, Shakespeare and Calderon, even twice and three times over" ensure that he is actually talking about retranslation.

The first kind of translation is developed out of Goethe's concept of "prose translation", a kind of simple, meaning-oriented translation (ibid.: 222). Adaptations are employed in it, as in Wieland's translation of Shakespeare, which turns poetry to prose and thus loses the original poetic properties. Stylistic contours in the source text may also be leveled down, as in Martin Luther's translation of the Bible, which, says Goethe, transforms the "stylistically most varied" source text into a more homogeneous target text (ibid.). This kind of translation is oriented toward "youth", "everyone", or "the masses". It may be extended to the concepts of "gist translation" (Gouadec, 2007) or "introduction" (Berman, 1995), although Wieland and Luther generally follow the originals line-by-line.

If we really want to draw a line of distinction between the first and second kinds of translation, their difference lies not in the expression, where both of them use target terms to express the original ideas, but in the understanding, where the first kind of translation understands the source text from the standpoint of the target culture while the second does the same thing from that of the source culture. The difference in the stance of understanding unavoidably means that there may be more intentional or unintentional misunderstandings and misinterpretations in the first kind of translation than in the second. This justifies the existence of retranslation and implies that later translations of the same text have fewer mistakes or errors.

Goethe's third kind of translation is more metaphysical and difficult to grasp. It can link to the famous words of Fu Lei, a great translator in modern China, who held that "an ideal translation seems to be the work by the original writer in Chinese" (Luo, 1984). Or we may think of "the transmigration of souls", a term used by George Savile and Ulrich von Wilamowitz-Moellendorff (Qian, 1997). "Transmigration" is a Buddhist term that involves belief in re-incarnation, that is, the rebirth of beings, which have a previous life, in this life and a posterior life. This same person lives in different temporal-spatial worlds with the same soul but different appearances. In some sense, translations and retranslations are the incarnation of the source text in target language-cultures, with the same soul (i.e. content and spirit) and different forms (i.e. languages). The first and second kinds of translation have merely taken over an incomplete soul of the source text and thus they are a derivative or at most a substitute of it. However, repeated translating of a text may result in the birth of a canonical translation that has achieved full understanding of the soul of the source text and can stand side by side with the latter, albeit in a different temporal-spatial world. This second possibility may lie in the idea that target readers who know little or nothing about the source language can access the target text and enjoy a thorough understanding of the source text as original readers with no need of resorting to the source text. The source text cannot replace the target text on such occasions, even if they coexist in the target culture. Perhaps Goethe wants to emphasize the perfect replacement of a canonical translation in appreciating great foreign classics. In our view, this may be the metaphorical sense of Goethe's "epoch".

If we look at the three kinds of translation from the dichotomy of domesticating and foreignizing translation strategies, it seems that Goethe's classification indicates a general process for translating great works in his day. Domesticating approaches to both understanding and expression are employed in the first kind of translation, or initial translations of a text. Foreignizing approaches to understanding and domesticating approaches to expression are adopted in the second kind of translation, or subsequent translations of the same text. The foreignizing approaches to both understanding and expression are employed in the third kind of translation, or a canonical translation because "clinging so closely to his original the translator more or less relinquishes his own country's originality" (Robinson, 2006). In other words, Goethe perhaps presents a general model or tendency in (re)translating foreign masterpieces: first domestication, then a combination of domestication and foreignization, and finally foreignization.

2.2. Lu Xun

Lu Xun was one of the greatest writers in modern China. He was first of all a translator and then a writer, since he always translated more than he wrote as an original author (Sun, 2011). He offered many insights on translation, especially on the translation principle, the function of translation and the classification of target readers. He wrote three articles discussing retranslation: "On Retranslation" (1933), "A Few More Words on Retranslation" (1933) and "On the Absolute Necessity of Retranslation" (1935), emphasizing the necessity of retranslating (Wu, 1995). In "On Retranslation", he first formulates his concept of retranslation (i.e. indirect translation or relay translation) and its function as follows:

English is in the first place and Japanese in the second among the foreign languages Chinese people know. Without retranslation we could only read many literary works from England, America and Japan and there would be no way for Chinese people to read Ibsen and Ibáñez. They would even know nothing about the popular children's tales by Andersen and Cervantes' *Don Quixote*. (Wu, 1995)

A century ago, there were just a very small number of Chinese people who knew a foreign language, which was often English or Japanese. If people wanted to know works in other languages, such as Norwegian or Spanish, they had to read translations of them from the English or Japanese translations of these works. For example, Lu Xun translated Russian novels from their Japanese versions, as was the case with Gogol's *Dead Souls*. This is actually a kind of indirect translation ("间接译" in Lu Xun's words). It is viewed as retranslation by scholars such as Gambier (1994) and Shuttleworth and Cowie (1997), and in agreement with the description of "retranslation" in the Nairobi Recommendation (1976) which states that "as a general rule, a translation should be made from the original work,

recourse being had to retranslation only where absolutely necessary”.¹ In “On the Absolute Necessity of Retranslation”, however, Lu Xun develops a further concept of retranslation and offers suggestions on how it should be carried out:

Even if there is a good translation of a text, its retranslation is still necessary. It is self-evident that those works translated in classical Chinese should be retranslated in vernacular Chinese. Even if translations available are fairly good, they can be retranslated if later translators think that they can translate better. [...] A nearly complete finalized translation can be successfully produced through reference to the strengths of the previous translations and addition of the new insights of their own. However, due to the change of language with the times, new retranslations will occur in future. It is not surprising at all that a text can be translated seven or eight times. In fact, no work has so far been translated seven or eight times. If it should be the case, China’s New Literature and Art will not be so lifeless and stagnated. (Wu, 1995).

Here, Lu Xun develops his understanding of retranslation, moving from indirect translation to the concept that a text is translated seven or eight times.² He does not clarify whether the translation is via the source language or a third language. His advice on how to perform retranslation touches upon one of the purposes of retranslating. Retranslators should not be so arrogant as to ignore the merits of existing translations, such as unique understanding of the minute and subtle places in the source text or ingenious expression of original ideas, which they might not achieve easily in their work. Lu Xun proposes that retranslators should incorporate those merits into their own translation. Then, they should have their own idiosyncratically different understanding of something in the text that previous translators have not grasped. Finally, they combine all these in their linguistic operation and produce a “nearly complete finalized translation”.

3. Contemporary Retranslation Research

There has been discussion of retranslation by translators in the paratexts, such as forewords and afterwords, of their retranslations in Western languages, including English. Such comments can be seen as a kind of “occasional” and “personal” discourse on translation (Hermans, 2006). We will focus on the work of scholars in different fields, including Translation Studies.

The papers collected in *the 1990 Retraduire*, a special issue of *Palimpsestes*, especially those by Antoine Berman and Paul Bensimon might mark the beginning of a serious and scholarly study of retranslation (Susam-Sarajeva, 2006). From then on, more and more researchers have studied retranslations and remarkable achievements have been made with respect to issues such as the concept of retranslation, the “retranslation hypothesis”, the motivations and the causes for retranslation, the distinction between retranslating and revising, and approaches to retranslation.

3.1. Definitions of Retranslation

It is surprising that the forerunners did not clearly define the term “retranslation”. They might have thought that its meaning was self-evident. A relatively early definition of retranslation indicates that it is equivalent to indirect translation, namely translation from a mediating source language rather than the source language text (Shuttleworth and Cowie, 1997). Chesterman (2000), however, differs from this definition when he informally defines retranslation as “situations where there is more than one translation, in the same target language, of a given source text”. Both senses above are incorporated into the concept of retranslation in definitions by (Susam-Sarajeva, 2006) and (Gürçağlar, 2008). The second sense, the one offered by Chesterman, is preferred by later studies on retranslation because it is “more widely accepted” (Susam-Sarajeva, 2006) and “most commonly” used in translation discourse (Gürçağlar, 2008).

A third sense has been given to retranslation in the past few years. It involves translation revising. Paloposki and Koskinen (2010) argue that some so-called revisions are actually retranslations because there are so many substantial revisions that the first translator’s voice gets lost in the new revised translation. Pym (2011) views revision as a kind of retranslation. He says that “[t]he retranslation may return to the ST [source text] and start from scratch, or modify existing translations but with significant reference to the ST”. However, he also claims that “a retranslation is not just a modified or corrected edition of a previous translation”. Problems arise here: what does “significant reference” mean? What is the distinction between retranslation and revision? Is there any quantitative or qualitative boundary between them? Vanderschelden (2000) argues that revision “can embrace a wide variety of alterations ranging from simple copy-editing to extensive rewriting”. She thinks that revision normally takes place if the existing version contains a limited number of problems or errors and thus “it is still worth ‘recycling’”. However, revision is no longer a revision but a retranslation if the overall structure or the tone of the former version is changed. Paloposki and Koskinen (2010) do not agree with Vanderschelden’s ideas on revision and retranslation. They think that it is very difficult to draw a clear-cut line between them and suggest that they may be put into a continuum which

¹See Part V of the Recommendation on http://www.catti.net.cn/2007-09/06/content_75240_2.htm.

²Lu Xun used *chong yi* (重译) in 1933 that literally means retranslation but is an equivalent to indirect translation in meaning. Then he used *fu yi* (复译) in 1935 that literally also means retranslation. In Chinese, “重” and “复” are synonyms, meaning “again”.

contains all kinds of revisions and retranslations and where few orthographic improvements stand at one end and an entirely reworked text at the other.

Their discussion, in fact, implies the difference between what retranslators/revisers actually do and the way their work is presented in the paratext. It is assumed that scholarship should consider the second level as well. In other words, scholars in Translation Studies have to face commercial reality and the times.

3.2. Types of retranslations

The discourse on retranslations indicates or implies different classifications of retranslation. The remarks by Berman (1990/1995) see Susam-Sarajeva (2006); Brownlie (2006) suggest ordinary and great (re)translations. The definitions of retranslation by Shuttleworth and Cowie (1997), Gürçağlar (2008), Pym (2011) and other scholars contain three kinds of retranslation, namely indirect translation, translation revision and complete retranslation that is done neither from a third intermediate language nor based on a previous translation. Pym (1998) adds to the study of retranslation an active category. He argues that retranslations “with little active rivalry” might be called “passive retranslations”. Otherwise, they are “active retranslations”.

3.3. The Retranslation Hypotheses

Theoretical pronouncements on retranslation made in the 1990s by scholars such as Paul Bensimon, Antoine Berman, and Yves Gambier refer to retranslation hypotheses (Brownlie, 2006; Chesterman, 2000; Deane, 2011; Desmidt, 2009; Koskinen and Polaposki, 2003; O’Driscoll, 2011; Plaposki and Koskinen, 2004). These pronouncements aim to uncover some tendencies or universals in retranslating. Bensimon (1990) claims:

Since the initial translation already introduced the foreign text to target readers, the retranslator no longer seeks to close the distance between the two cultures. S/he does not refuse the cultural displacement, but rather strives to create it. After a reasonably long period following the initial translation, the reader is finally able to receive and perceive the work in the irreducible foreignness and exoticism. Compared to the introduction-translation or the acclimatising translation, retranslation is usually more attentive to the letter of the source text, its linguistic and stylistic profile, and its singularity. (Susam-Sarajeva, 2006)

Gambier (1994) expresses a similar idea from the dichotomy of domesticating and foreignizing translation strategies, by saying:

[...] a first translation always tends to be more assimilating, tends to reduce the otherness in the name of cultural or editorial requirements [...]. The retranslation, in this perspective, would mark a *return* to the source-text. (Plaposki and Koskinen, 2004)

(Berman, 1995; Brownlie, 2006) believes the cycle of retranslating follows a linear progress in translation quality and will finally be interrupted by the appearance of a canonical translation, which may be labeled the “hypothesis of retranslation cycle”. He says:

First there is a courageous “introduction” without literary pretension (usually for those studying the work); then comes the time of the first translations with literary ambition – they are generally not complete translations, and as is well-known, full of flaws; then come the (many) retranslations [...]. Eventually a canonical translation may be produced which will stop the cycle of retranslations for a long time. (Brownlie, 2006)

Based on the assumptions above, a few hypotheses have been formulated. They can be diachronically presented as follows:

- Only retranslations can become great translations; later translations tend to be closer to the original than earlier ones; later translators take a critical stance to the earlier translations, seek to improve on them; the existence of the earlier translation in the target culture affects the potential reception of the new one, and the translator knows this. (Chesterman, 2000).
- Later translations tend to be closer to their originals than first translations. (Williams and Chesterman, 2004)
- Retranslations mark a return to the source text, after an alleged assimilation carried out by first translations. (Koskinen and Polaposki, 2003)
- First translations are more domesticating than retranslations. (Plaposki and Koskinen, 2004)
- First translations are target-oriented and less accurate, and later retranslations are source-oriented and more accurate. (Brownlie, 2006)
- Retranslations tend to be more source-culture oriented than first translations. (Desmidt, 2009)
- Retranslations lead to improvement in translation quality diachronically. (Stewart, 2009)³
- The first translations’ inherent assimilating qualities create a need for source-oriented translations. (Palaposki and Koskinen, 2010).

The above hypotheses attempt to approach the nature of retranslation from two angles: cultural orientation and translation quality. They can be summarized as two points: first translations tend to be target-culture-biased (i.e.

³ See Philip Stewart’s online article “The Persian Letters in seven English translations” at <http://www.umass.edu/french/people/profiles/documents/Persian.pdf>.

domesticating) and later translations tend to be source-culture-biased (i.e. foreignizing), which may be seen as the “hypothesis of increasing source focus”; first translations are less accurate and full of mistakes or errors, while later translations are more accurate and closer to “great” or “canonical” translations, which may be viewed as the “hypothesis of quality improvement”. However, some empirical studies over the past decade have challenged these hypotheses.

The teamwork by (Koskinen and Polapowski (2003); Plapowski and Koskinen, 2004; Polapowski and Koskinen, 2010) has produced remarkable fruits in this respect. Their research on the Finnish translations and retranslations of *Alice in Wonderland* by Lewis Carroll and *The Vicar of Wakefield* by Oliver Goldsmith indicates that there is not a regular linear progression from target culture-orientedness or domestication in earlier translations to source culture-orientedness or foreignization in later translations. In the overall time span of the translations, the research data supports the retranslation hypotheses presented above, but within a certain specific period of time the case may be just the opposite or present a different picture. For example, the 1995 version of *Alice in Wonderland* is quite source-oriented but its 2000 version is rather target-oriented; the 1859 version of *The Vicar of Wakefield* is a word-for-word literal rendering, while its 1905 version is very smooth and close to an adaptation of the source text. The researchers suggest that “RH [retranslation hypothesis] may apply during an initial stage in the development of a literature but not to all first individual translations: domesticating first translations may be the feature of a phase in a literature, not of translation in general” (2004: 30).

Polapowski and Koskinen have also questioned the measuring concepts in the retranslation hypotheses such as closeness, accuracy, domestication and improvement. It is singularly difficult to measure them because “they may work on different levels of the text simultaneously” (2004: 32) and “may also be dependent on the observer’s viewpoint” (2010: 30). Brownlie (2006) combines narrative theory and retranslation theory to study the English versions of *Nana* by Emile Zola. She finds that no canonical translation is produced among the translations and their quality does not improve in any way.

Desmidt (2009) has conducted a case study of 52 German and 18 Dutch versions of the children’s classic book *Nils Holgerssons underbara resa genom Sverige (Nils Holgersson’s Wonderful Journey through Sweden)* by Selma Lagerlöf. She argues that although some more recent versions show respect for the original, their closeness to the source text is not due to the translators’ allegiance to the original, but to a clash of literary, pedagogical and economic norms. Her findings suggest that in peripheral forms of literature, like children’s literature, as well as within classical literature, less prototypical (re)writing has proven to be more than the exception and target norms continue to clash with fidelity to the original. Thus, she concludes that the retranslation hypothesis does not have general validity but it may be valid to some extent if it is not formulated in absolute terms (ibid).

O’Driscoll (2011) combines Pym’s model of translation causes and Toury’s model of translation norms to examine six English translations of *Around the World in Eighty Days* by Jules Verne. His findings indicate that over a time span of more than 130 years the translations do not follow a linear progression from target-oriented and less accurate, to source-oriented and more accurate renderings. Therefore, he argues that the retranslation hypothesis of increasing source focus may be “excessively simplistic, in failing to reflect the intricacy of the multiple causes which generate translated texts”, even though it has “some broad, general validity in indicating sweeping trends over long time periods” (ibid.: 251-252). Research by Deane (2011) on British retranslations of Flaubert’s *Madame Bovary* and Sand’s *La Mare au Diable* shows that the same retranslation hypothesis is “untenable when confronted with the polymorphous behaviour of retranslation, both within and without the text” (Deane, 2011).

3.4. Retranslation: When and Why

Research on the reasons or motivations for retranslation has attracted the attention of many researchers, such as Pym (1998), Vanderschelden (2000) and Mathijssen (2007). For example, Vanderschelden (2000) presents five reasons to justify retranslation, as follows: (1) the existing translation is unsatisfactory and cannot be revised effectively, (2) a new edition of the source text is published and becomes the standard reference, (3) the existing target text is considered outdated from a stylistic point of view, (4) the retranslation has a special function to fill in the target language, and (5) a different interpretation of the source text justifies a new translation.

Gürçağlar (2008) summarizes the major findings concerning the motivation for retranslation. She thinks that some findings are not very insightful, such as the retranslator’s ignorance of the existence of an earlier translation of the same source text, the lack of coordination and communication between publishers, the need to update the language of the existing translation (i.e. the “hypothesis of text-aging”), the re-edition or expansion of the source text, the need to correct the mistakes/errors of the initial translation, and so on. It is thought that there is complementarity between different versions of the same source text so as to satisfy the needs of different readers or to fill a gap in the target culture (Koskinen and Polapowski, 2003; Toury, 1999). For example, Homer’s *Odyssey* was rendered into Latin in the third century BC and the Roman poet Ennius (239–169 BC) effectively established dactylic hexameter as the dominant Latin medium of epic in the second century BC, then someone rewrote Livius’ translation into hexameters (Armstrong, 2008). Some in-depth studies indicate that the changing social environment and the evolution of translation norms are the main causes for retranslating some texts. Du-Nour (1995) findings show that changes in linguistic and stylistic norms require retranslating. Kujamäki (2001) studies German translations of the Finnish novel *Seitsemän veljestä* by Aleksis Kivi in terms of the historical dynamics of literary translation and concludes that retranslations are remarkably subject to “the context of time-bound normative conditions, particularly to shifts in the context of text reception and the changing image of Finland in Germany”

(2001: 65). Ideological and political factors are often the motives for retranslating literary classics. For example, different versions of *Tom Sawyer* and *Huckleberry Finn* by communist and pro-American publishers were sold in post-war France (Jenn, 2006). Sometimes less canonical texts have been retranslated in a new ideological context and thus are re-positioned in the receiving culture. Retranslations are published so as to reaffirm the authority of some social institutions, including academic and religious establishments (Gürçağlar, 2008).

Most of the studies are restricted to the reason for retranslating and little attention is given to the *time* of retranslating. However, one of the sessions of the 2009 American Modern Language Association Annual Convention focused on when and why to retranslate.⁴ The panelists include Candler Hayes, Philip R. Stewart, Gabriel Moyal, Barbara Godard and Douglas Robinson. They looked at the practice of retranslation in order to consider the aesthetic, linguistic, ideological, and commercial factors that motivate the production of new translations.

In the written papers of this session, Moyal (2009) explores the theme of retranslating by examining literary history and intertextuality with *L'Auberge rouge* by Balzac as the object of study. The June 1834 issue of the *Dublin University Magazine* published a novel entitled *The Red Inn at Andernach*, giving neither the author's name nor the text's identity as a translation. Actually it was an English version of *L'Auberge rouge*, even though it contained some additions and omissions. Coincidentally, *L'Écho Britannique*, a French magazine, took *The Red Inn at Andernach* for an original work and translated it back into French, modifying the original name as *L'Auberge rouge d'Andernach* and changing the original tragic ending into a comic one. This literary anecdote implies that some first translations are back-translations and the translator is not aware of it. The case of *The Red Inn at Andernach* indicates that some original works in world literary history are indeed translations. In other words, some writers are translators instead of creative authors. Their creation may be labeled a kind of "pseudo-original" (cf. Pym 1998), which would be the opposite of Toury (1995) "pseudo-translation", which goes to the other extreme, namely an original literary creation that is presented as a translation. In our view, all literature, in some sense, is a kind of intertextual writing. If the writing is interlingual, then it is translation. Given the great complexity of interlingual intertextuality in literary texts, literary writing is more probably of retranslating. Therefore, retranslation also falls within the scope of literary studies.

Stewart (2009) research focuses mainly on the mistranslations caused by difficult words and sentences in seven English versions of the *Persian Letters* by Montesquieu. The preface to the 1762 version indicates that the reason for retranslating is that the language of the first translation in 1722 is bad, with inaccuracies, additions and misplacing of some of the letters. In other words, whatever the specific reason, the time for retranslating classics will come when there is dissatisfaction with existing translations (Ricoeur, 2006). Stewart points out that new translations enjoy advantages that old ones do not have: retranslations after first translations will more or less receive benefits from old translations. This is what Brownlie (2006) calls the "haunting" of old translations, from which new ones cannot break away. Stewart argues that it is reasonable for retranslators to consult earlier translations but the key is "to redo it" rather than "merely to improve upon a predecessor's work". This implies that retranslators are not supposed to use something like taking a previous translation as a referent as a pretext for plagiarism. Stewart's view on retranslation can well serve as a basis for us to examine the upsurge in the retranslating of foreign classics in China in the 1990s.

Robinson (2009) refers to the theories by Pierre Bourdieu, Frank Kermode, Nancy Armstrong and Raymond Williams to formulate his own hypothesis of "ideosomatic drift" to explain the reason for retranslation. He uses the term "ideosomatics" to mean the social regulation of meaning, rightness, identity, reality, and other things through the circulation of shared evaluative affect. In the case of a "discovery" or a widespread agreement that a given text needs to be retranslated, it signals the grounding of "widespread agreement" not just in propositional concurrence but in collectivized feeling, in the somatics of group norms. "Drift" is a kinesthetic turn, denoting the felt/perceived slippage between the original and the old translation(s), the movement away from each other of those two (or more) texts. As a whole, the concept "ideosomatic drift" is a kind of group kinesthetic affective-becoming-cognitive dissonance - a feeling, circulated through "society", that the old translation keeps "moving" further and further from the original, and has entered into a zone of drift that has become ideosomatically intolerable. This hypothesis is a tentative explanation with regard to when and why retranslation is done, even though its theory is abstruse.

3.5. Approaches to Retranslation Studies

Venuti (2004) believes that retranslation is the creation of value. He has formulated three approaches to retranslation, including research on translators' agency, intertextual studies and historical studies. According to Sandra Poupaud (2008: 39) "agency" can be split into ability, performance and discourse. Ability refers to the capacity to deal with all potential resources in translation practice; performance means to deal with the effect produced by a particular phenomenon or action; discourse involves how agents conceive and represent their own agency and that of others and how agency is expressed through discourse and the values put forward in these discourses.

(Venuti, 2004) claims that compared with the translators of first translations, retranslators have a stronger awareness of all kinds of conditions and effects involved in translating. Retranslation strengthens the translator's intentionality because the purpose of retranslation is to produce a text that is different from the existing translation so as to create a new and different reception situation in the receiving culture. The inscription of different

⁴See <http://www.umass.edu/french/people/profiles/Retranslationwhenandwhy.htm>.

interpretations requires the translator's agency and performance. In other words, the translator has to utilize all possible resources to reach their goal. Besides the translator's ability, retranslation is subject to transindividual factors, such as translation commissioners, publishers and patrons. The whole process from the decision to retranslate a text to the entry of the retranslation into the consumption market is the effect of discourse interactions between the translator and other subjects and objects. The editing, printing, advertisement and sale of the retranslation and even the selection of the text to be retranslated may be beyond the translator's control. Transindividual factors also include the cultural macro-context. For instance, the campaign to use Quebecois French to translate the world's classical drama was intimately related to the construction of the national identity in Quebec in 1968 (ibid.). Retranslation research is supposed to give attention to the phenomenology of the translator, other subjects and objects in translating and their interrelationships. It might be more productive to approach them from a non-causality angle.

Intertextuality is another problem that merits attention in retranslation studies. Intertextuality in retranslating contains several hierarchies. The narrowest intertextual relation is between source and target texts and it is the most basic relation of intertextual mapping. The translator will use bilingual dictionaries and refer to the translations in them. Or we may argue that the translations in these dictionaries have already been inscribed in the translator's mind, even though meanings are, in most cases, acquired through experience in situation and indeed through translating. Thus, the dictionaries have a relation with the translation, which forms an intertextual relation. The translator may mention existing translations of the same source text or claim that he or she borrows or criticizes something in them in the preface, afterword or notes of the retranslation. As a result, a link has been created between the new translation and the old translation(s). Intertextuality can also be regarded as a kind of specific or abstract relation between the translation and the texts in the receiving culture. Translation is the transformation from the chain of signifiers that constitute the source text to the signifying chain in the target language on the basis of a semantic similarity that relies on current definitions for source-language lexical items. This kind of transformation will inevitably bring about semantic gain or loss because the relation between signs of different systems and their associations are different. For example, Feng Huazhan, a Chinese translator-scholar, uses “农夫荷锄犁” (*nong fu he chu li*, the farmer carries his hoe and plough) to translate the first part of “the plowman homeward plods his weary way” in “Elegy Written in a Country Churchyard” by Thomas Gray. The translation reminds target readers of “戴月荷锄归” (*dai yue he chu gui*, the farmer carries his hoe home under the moonlight).⁵ This association cannot be avoided unless the translator excludes the use of classical Chinese (Tian, 2008). Therefore, the translation produces an intertextual relation between texts in the target language. This is a specific or fixed relation. The abstract or global relation can be illustrated by the above-mentioned relevance between the retranslating language of the world's classical drama and Quebecois French in the works by lexicographers, playwrights and poets in Quebec (Venuti, 2004). Venuti holds that the more dense and complex these intertextual relations, the more a retranslation risks effacing the linguistic and cultural differences of the source text to serve a domestic cultural politics. Intertextuality may refer to the relation of the source text to other texts, such as works that make new comments on the source text in the source culture. For example, the greater source-text orientedness of the retranslation of Dostoevsky's *The Brothers Karamazov* by Richard Pevear and Larissa Volokhonsky that is quite different from the fluency of the old translation is clearly influenced by the interpretation by Mikhail Bakhtin, who regarded Dostoevsky's novels as “dialogic” or “polyphonic”, characterized by a heterogeneous multivocal style (Venuti, 2004).

Historical temporality is an important part of retranslation studies. All existing translations came into being at a certain point of time in history. The translation process, from text selection to determination of discursive strategies and to text production, is a diachronic process. The historicity of discursive strategies, first of all, lies in the fact that the dialect, textual style and translation methods chosen by the translator are closely related to the era in which the translation activity is undertaken. A case in point is the translation style of “豪杰译” (*hao jie yi*, excessively free translation, something like John Dryden's “imitation”) that was prevalent during the late Qing dynasty and the early period of the Republic of China. It is quite similar to the pillaged translation (i.e. adaptation) extensively practiced in the ancient Roman Empire. The language preferred by the translator may be associated with a specific historical period. For instance, the Jacobean English in Benjamin Jowett's Plato typifies the strain of poetic archaism in Victorian translation. The interpretations inscribed in the translated text by the translator are the manifestations or modifications of the mainstream values of the day, such as Lin Shu's preference of classical Chinese instead of the vernacular to introduce Western novels and inscriptions of Confucian moral values in his translation to strengthen imperial culture (Venuti, 2004). The historicity of retranslation also manifests itself in the difference between new and old translations in terms of discursive strategies and interpretations. Retranslations construct the effect of defamiliarization through the closer and more complex relation with the source text in textual form and translation tradition (ibid.). The historical temporality of retranslations is also contained in the changes in narrative styles, values and cultural systems along a temporal vein.

⁵ It is a verse line from *Return to Nature* (《归园田居》) by Tao Yuanming, a household poet of the Western Jin dynasty. For the whole poem and its comments, see <http://baike.baidu.com/view/162513.htm#sub4998396>.

4. Discussion and Implications

The history of retranslating is long, while that of retranslation research is short. Only in the past few centuries have several authors offered their ideas on retranslation directly or indirectly. It is not until the recent two decades that more and more writers in Translation Studies have begun to look at the phenomenon of retranslating. In fact, retranslation has become a hot and popular topic in recent years. Some important findings on retranslation have been made in such respects as the definition of retranslation, the laws or hypotheses on retranslation, the reasons or motives for retranslating, types of retranslation, approaches to retranslation, and so on. Retranslation studies have been conducted by authors, translators and scholars within and beyond Translation Studies from a variety of perspectives. These studies can help gain a better understanding of retranslation as an important and necessary intercultural communication activity.

The achievements made in research on retranslation have some weaknesses with regard to the retranslation hypotheses and definition of retranslation. However, compared with non-retranslation studies, namely single-translation studies, retranslation research has its own strengths. Therefore, a theoretical system of retranslation studies is called for.

4.1. The Problem with the Retranslation Hypotheses

As far as Western research on retranslation is concerned, it seems that the main hypotheses are predicated on the *ceteris paribus* assumption, namely that *all else being equal*, relation X holds. The assumption, of course, is of necessity to scientific inquiry in order to focus on the unique effects of a given factor in a complex causal situation through control of all independent variables other than the one under study. However, retranslation researchers tend to make a diachronic study of (re)translations of literary texts, focusing on norms and taking it for granted that all other social variables remain the same. This kind of research paradigm ignores the complexity of retranslation research, which necessarily involves a great variety of variables, since long periods of history are involved. On the one hand, synchronic studies of retranslations are possible because several retranslations of the same source text may be produced in roughly the same time-period. More importantly, major events in a culture or nation-state that seem to have nothing to do with translating may strongly affect the production of retranslations. Historical factors do not stand still; they are dynamic. More attention needs to be paid to changes in social variables such as government policy. For example, the Communist Party of China shifted the focus of government policy from the class struggle in the planned-economy period to the economic construction, reform and opening-up in the market-economy period. This shift brought about great changes in the field of translation and retranslation with respect to selection of source texts, translation strategy, language and the relation of the publishers to the relevant government departments, translators, readers and book distributors.

4.2. A Tentative Definition of Retranslation

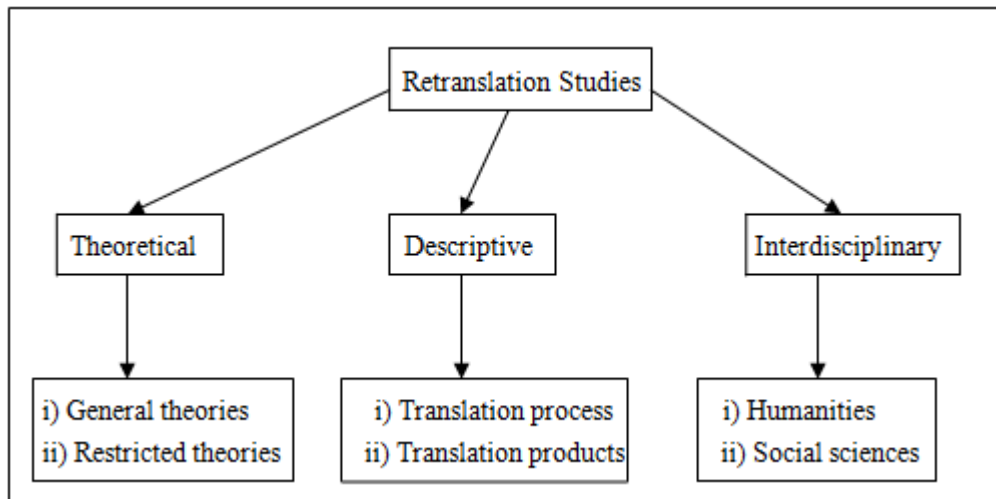
One problem in retranslation studies is the concept of retranslation. Scholars have not yet reached consensus in defining retranslation. The definitions of retranslation have so far presented three heterogeneous referents. Retranslation first refers to the new translation of a source text that has previously been translated into a given language. Second, it designates a translation that is done not from the source language but from an intermediate language. Third, it refers to a revision done by the translator for his or her own translation. If retranslation research aims to develop into an independent research domain, it is quite necessary to fix the definition of retranslation.

In the Descriptive Translation Studies paradigm, translation is defined as what is regarded or offered as a translation in a culture (Toury, 1995). Following the same way, we may formulate a descriptive, objectivist definition of retranslation that retranslation is what is perceived or regarded as a retranslation in a culture. This definition embraces all forms of retranslations in different cultural traditions of different time-periods, allowing for the largest possible space for retranslation research. For example, ancient Chinese literatures had always used retranslation (重译, *chong yi*) to refer to indirect translation, which seems a terminological tradition in past Chinese discourse on translation. Ancient Chinese writers did not adopt the correct term “*jian jie yi*” (间接译, indirect translation or relay translation). In fact, the translations of early Buddhist Scriptures and Chinese imperial culture mainly adopted the form of indirect translation. It is argued that the traditional Chinese mainstream culture did not care about the mode of translating and the efficiency of translation and there was no trouble with linguistic expression because that difficulty was for foreign translators to deal with, and the greater the difficulty, the further the translators were from China and the greater national prowess China enjoyed (Kong, 2005). The definition also allows us to make a comparison between the views held by different cultures on retranslating, which may help grasp the nature of retranslation. On the contrary, if we choose the first sense to define retranslation, we will ignore the other retranslation phenomena once acknowledged in cultural history, thus greatly weakening the depth and width of retranslation studies in exploring the sociocultural context where retranslations or non-retranslations are done under the very name of “retranslation”.

4.3. The “Map” of Retranslation Studies

Different from Translation Studies, retranslation studies have a much narrower area. It is restricted to written translation of classics, especially those in literature, religion, philosophy and sciences. It is assumed that research on translation should have its autonomous research domain. Translation Studies have established its research fields with

the efforts of such scholars as Holmes (1972/1986) and Toury (1995). Retranslation studies have much in common with Translation Studies. Therefore, like Toury's map of Translation Studies, a similar map of retranslation studies may be drawn as follows:



Retranslation studies can be broken down into three fields: theoretical, descriptive and interdisciplinary retranslation studies. The theoretical retranslation studies deal with general and restricted theories. The general theories can deal with such basic issues as the notion and nature of retranslation, types of retranslation and the scope of retranslation. The restricted theories may include research on the translator's agency, the object of retranslation with special focus on changes in the identity of source and target texts in source and target cultures respectively, universally accepted culture-specific views on retranslating as perceived in retranslation paratexts and other kinds of retranslation practice patterns in different languages and cultures. This research may lead to some universals with regard to retranslating across cultures.

The descriptive branch of retranslation studies deals with the retranslating process, actual retranslations and the function of retranslation. The retranslating process handles such problems as whether the retranslator starts from scratch without reference to his or her own or others' earlier translations of the same source text, whether the retranslator retranslates some parts of the source text, whether the retranslator just corrects the flaws in or polish the language of the earlier translations or whether the retranslation is nothing but a "collage translation" (Mossop, 2006) produced by plagiarizing others' translations of the same source text. As for actual retranslations, diachronic and synchronic analyses can be used to make a comparison between different translations of the same source texts in order to collect the textual-linguistic facts and translational features in the retranslations and to discern the change in translation strategy. The methods for comparison are introduced in Toury (1995) masterpiece *Descriptive Translation Studies and Beyond*. He introduces three types of comparison: comparison of parallel translations into one language, comparison of different phases of the emergence of a single translation and comparison of several translations into different languages (ibid.: 73-74). The first two comparisons can be used in retranslation research. There are parallel translations of the same source text that are produced in the same time-period, which enables us to make a synchronic study of the retranslations. Retranslations also emerge at different phases in the target culture, which enables the possibility of a diachronic study of them. Quantitative and qualitative analyses are also possible with respect to examining changes in the degrees of the formal and semantic accuracies of retranslations along the historical progression. As far as the function of retranslations is concerned, it may be approached from linguistic, ideological, hermeneutic and aesthetic perspectives.

If the first two branches of retranslation studies are of phenomenological nature, the third branch, namely the interdisciplinary branch is of explanatory nature. The interdisciplinary research helps explain many retranslation phenomena. History, literature, sociology, politics, economics, hermeneutics, linguistics, and so on, are the main disciplines from which researchers can find theoretical tools or even answers for retranslation research. The recovery of historical events may shed light on reasons for retranslating; literature, or literary studies may provide knowledge for intertextuality, as in making a distinction between pseudotranslations and retranslations; sociology, politics and economics can facilitate a sociocultural analysis of retranslation production; hermeneutics helps explain why and how retranslators inscribe their interpretations in new translations; linguistics, of course, can offer influencing language factors involved in retranslating. For example, according to the Chinese language habit, Chinese translators used to put the operator before the reported utterance in rendering an English direct-speech sentence in which the operator is usually put after the utterance. Due to the effects of the intercultural communication between English and Chinese, the unique English direct-speech sentence structure has now been assimilated and established in Chinese. Present-day (re)translators tend to keep this structure in translating. This language change can help identify the translation strategies: domestication was employed by past translators and literal translation by today's translators. Another example is the retranslation boom of world classics in the 1990s mainland China. The underlying reasons for the boom may be sought from political and economic angles: the adjustment of the Party's ideological focus and the turn of government policy to the reform, opening-up and economic construction.

4.4. Advantages of Studying Retranslations

The first strength of studies of retranslations as compared with studies on a single translation is the significance of the results for translation history research. One major aim of research like this is to uncover the sociocultural conditions in which the translation activity was undertaken. When dealing with only one translated work, the researcher can only focus on a certain point or a single period of history, while studies on retranslations can perform both diachronic and synchronic analysis, as retranslations are produced in different historical periods. Diachronic study can compare the sociocultural situations over different periods as well as the differences in literature, language, translation view and norm, disclosing the different attitudes, expectations and interpretations of the receiving culture toward the same author and his or her work. Synchronic study is of much help to our understanding of the similar or dissimilar interactions between translation subjects and objects, such as translator and translation norm.

The second strength of studies on retranslations is that, in some sense, it offers researchers a wider field of study. As far as intertextuality is concerned, single-translation studies mainly deal with the relation between source and target texts, while studies on retranslations explore the relation between the source and several target texts. Moreover, it can compare the target texts and identify their intertextual relation and the degree of the relation. Research on intersubjectivity is similar to that on intertextuality. The study of retranslation involves more complex relations between different translation subjects. Some foreign works have been translated into the receiving culture just once, but others can have two, three, or more chances. To use [Susam-Sarajeva \(2003\)](#) words, some texts have obtained a multiple-entry visa into the receiving culture. Why does the receiving culture give them such a visa? This is another question that single-translation studies cannot answer.

The third strength of studies on retranslations lies in the significance of cultural studies and translation studies. Some cultural dimensions with which translation is concerned can only be reproduced and ascertained by studies on retranslations. In some sense, studies on retranslations are a kind of dynamic research, investigating the development and change in sociocultural evolution and translation activity.

From the perspective of intersubjectivity, retranslation is a kind of polyphonic resonance, including author's voice, voice of old and new translators, voice of old and new readers and voice of scholars.⁶ Retranslation may be viewed as a symphony of multiple voices of different subjects and social contexts. Listening to different voices and their dialogues in translations and retranslations may open a wider door for studies on retranslations and even for Translation Studies as a whole.

5. Conclusion

Interpretability is the inherent property and magic of a text and it is an important precondition for retranslating. Just as the famous writer [Zhang \(2012\)](#) points out, "Words cannot prescribe everything for readers. Interpretation of a text depends on the restoration of words in the process of reading." The more classical a text, the greater space of interpretation it has. Although retranslation studies have so far not yet constructed a theoretical system of its own, its research value is self-evident in the fields of history, culture, society and economy. Compared with non-retranslation studies, retranslation studies have its own strengths. As for future retranslation research, we may first seek solutions to existing problems in the field, then conduct a cross-lingual and cross-cultural confirmation of the relevant research hypotheses or conclusions available and finally explore new methods, new paradigms and new directions for retranslation studies.

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⁶ See <http://www.hf.uio.no/ilos/english/research/groups/Voice-in-Translation/events/CfpViR.pdf>.

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Biography

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