Review

Systemic Functional Linguistics and Translation Studies
Edited by Mira Kim, Jeremy Munday, Zhenhua Wang, and Pin Wang

Reviewed by Daqun Zhang

Being geared to the study of language as communication, Systemic Functional Linguistics, with its focus on relating linguistic choices to various contextual factors, has been extensively employed in translation studies and has remained a powerful tool in analysing ideational, interpersonal, and textual equivalences between different types of source texts and their target texts (Baker, 1992; Hatim and Mason, 1990; House, 1997; Munday, 2012; Matthiessen, 2014; Munday and Zhang, 2017). Systemic Functional Linguistics and Translation Studies, published as part of the Bloomsbury Advances in Translation Series, brings forward the most recent developments in a myriad of contexts, offering both theoretical dialogue and practical collaboration between these two important academic arenas. The book grows out of two major international conferences on Translation and Discourse Analysis respectively held at the University of New South Wales in 2016 and at the Martin Centre for Applicable Linguistics of Shanghai Jiao Tong University in 2017. With their professional expertise in the intersection between SFL and translation studies, the four scholars bring a strong background to editing this book.

There are ten chapters in the book apart from an Introduction, in which the editors foreground the immense potential of conducting research in the
intersecting spheres of SFL and translation studies while acknowledging challenges of doing so, such as the technicality of SFL theory, the availability of the SFL modellings of other languages. Chapter 1, by J. R. Martin and Beatriz Quiroz, contrasts the English and Spanish TENSE systems through a detailed analysis of four short texts and their translations (two English source texts and two Spanish source texts). Following Matthiessen (2018), the authors argue that similarities and differences across languages can be usefully explained in terms of axis, delicacy, rank, and stratification in an SFL paradigm. Ascendancy along those dimensions corresponds to a cline from more different to more similar. For example, in the axial relation (system/structure), the same system of PRIMARY TENSE [future] is realised by the word syntagm \( \text{will} \uparrow \text{v} \) in English but the morpheme syntagm \( \text{v–ará} \) in Spanish. The implication of this functional language typology analysis is also illustrated in the SFL notion of instantiation which takes translation as a process of interlingual re-instantiation.

In Chapter 2, Erich Steiner explores how the notion of reading in an SFL context can offer particular insight for translation studies. Reading is considered the ultimate instance of a text or the end point of the scale of instantiation along which the system of meanings as a whole is progressively becoming less and less general through genre, register, text type, text, and reading. In different kinds of readings (compliant, resistant, tactical), the translator serves as a translational agent and makes constant choices which are essentially contextualised and shaped by the double bind between source texts and target texts. Based on six readings of a specific English text from the perspectives of lexical cohesion, cohesive reference, information distribution, and appraisal, the author emphasises a compliant reading in the typical process of translation and a tactical reading in the translator’s pre-translational text analysis.

Chapter 3, by Stella Neumann, elaborates on register and its relevance to translation. Compared with earlier functional theories of text type, the SFL-informed register architecture of field, tenor, and mode provides a much more solid foundation for capturing a multifunctional, multidimensional character of situational context in all its complexities and for a comprehensive analysis of contextual features in source texts and target texts. Theory-driven register analysis makes it necessary for translators to be aware of the differences between similar contexts of situation across languages and cultures. The empirical studies of the interaction between register and translation also suggest that translators deviate from conventions more in some registers than in others although there is a general trend to conform to register conventions.

The next chapter by Jeremy Munday examines translator intervention, or the active involvement of the translator, with SFL-based APPRAISAL system (Martin and White, 2005) which focuses on subjectivity and stance in
discourse. It should be noted that appraisal resource, as the central part of the interpersonal meaning of any text, is taken as ‘a means of identifying critical points of translation’ (p. 83). Munday specifically suggests appraisal shifts in the translation process tend to be realised more frequently in the area of graduation subsystem (indicating the intensity of appraisal) than the attitudinal categories themselves. At a more theoretical level, the analysis of evaluative deviation helps reveal translating intervention and is intimately intertwined with the translation theoretical concept of explicitation, especially when there are changes in the directness of attitudinal realisation in target texts.

Chapter 5, by Ekaterina Lapshinova-Koltunski, discusses how SFL theory interacts with Corpus-based Translation Studies in the two approaches of theory-driven and data-driven. On the one hand, SFL-inspired linguistic features can be used as a solid starting point for the analysis of translated texts. On the other hand, Corpus-based Translation Studies have been highly influential in addressing translation universals including normalisation, shining through, explicitation, simplification, etc. which all together constitute the uniqueness of translated texts and do not occur to the same extent in non-translated texts. In the analysis of an English-German translation corpus, both the theory-driven approach and the data-driven approach confirm that the register dimension seems to have more influence on translation variation than the dimension of translation method. However, it is worth noting that the synergy between the two approaches has generally been acknowledged since both quantifying SFL-informed linguistic features and SFL theoretical interpretation of corpus findings have become increasingly popular in translation studies.

Starting from Chapter 6, the book moves onto more practical issues in SFL and translation studies. Xueying Li and Mira Kim first consider translation choices especially related to the logical meaning by comparing four different English translations of Chapter One in the classical Chinese novel Hong Lou Meng. The theoretical framework employed in the study is the discourse semantic system of CONNEXION which investigates the logical meaning in terms of explicitness (explicit or implicit realisation) and type (addition, comparison, time, consequence). The analysis of all the 180 connexions in the source text and their translations in the four target texts indicates translation shift occurs much more frequently in explicitness than in type. In addition, the translator team of a source language (Chinese) speaker and a target language (English) speaker may explain more logical shifts in one of the four target texts than the other three texts translated wholly by target language native speakers.
Translation shift is further illustrated in Chapter 7 by Komail Al Herz from an interpersonal dimension of modality. Halliday’s modality system of modalisation-modulation division and Simpson’s taxonomy of modality are used as the theoretical basis for the analysis of two Arabic translations of a literary text, *Waiting for the Barbarians*. The author categorises optional modality shifts into four types: (1) demodalisation shift where modalised utterances in the source text are transformed into purely polarity assertions or just omitted in the target text; (2) inserted modal shift in which unmodalised utterances are rendered as modalised ones through the insertion of modal expressions that are absent in the source text; (3) inter-modal shift which means a modal utterance is translated into another different modality system; (4) intra-modal shift which occurs within the same modality system, the modulation of modal intensity in particular. The results indicate a preponderance of demodalisation shift and inserted modal shift in the two translations and an overwhelming majority of modal shifts concerning probability. The effects of modality shift on altering narrative point of view in translation are also considered in this chapter.

In Chapter 8, Sami Jameel Althumali presents an empirical study to test the effectiveness of applying the SFL model in translator training and translation assessment. The experiment is conducted among Arab university students in their English – Arabic translation of fiction. It is persuasively argued that the performance of the experimental group armed with SFL knowledge improves significantly along four sub-competences: (1) the metafunction-based interpretation of the source text; (2) the SFL-based assessment of translation; (3) an SFL-oriented justification for choosing the most accurate metafunction-based translation; (4) the creation of a metafunction-based translation in the target language system.

Chapter 9 by Long Li draws attention to multimodal translation studies by investigating both verbal and visual elements in a descriptive study of six book covers of *Wild Swans* (three for English source text and three for Chinese target text). Two SFL-inspired frameworks, i.e., Kress and Van Leeuwen’s seminal work in visual grammar (2006) and O’Toole’s (1994) hierarchy of Work, Episode and Figure, are utilised in the ideational, interpersonal and textual analyses of translated book covers. It is found that, compared with the ideational and the interpersonal functions, the textual function shows the most significant visual shifts in translated book covers which remove foregrounding techniques mirroring the stardom of the book and the author. Potential reasons for diachronic changes across translated covers are also considered in the chapter.

The volume closes with a thought-provoking discussion by Giacomo Figueredo who looks at equivalence-related notions in translation studies.
from a Systemic Functional perspective and takes translation as a tool for multilingual studies in which language comparison and language relations can be effectively examined. The author starts from the central SFL tenet ‘all languages are meaning-making resources organized as a system’ (p. 213) and suggests the Saussurean concept of valeur for comparative studies of language. It is argued that the amount of valeur in any system can be measured and therefore constitutes a basis for multilingual studies. This is further instantiated in a case study of the interpersonal systems of mood, modality, polarity, and modal assessment in Brazilian Portuguese and English.

While the integration of analytical frameworks from other disciplines is not new in translation studies since its inception in the late 1970s, SFL has remained a valuable asset in investigating complexities and intricacies of translation. Furthermore, among a plethora of theories used in translation studies, SFL is one of the few frameworks which can offer both theoretical implications and practical significances for research in translation, thus covering both pure translation studies and applied translation studies (Holmes, 2000). This can be amply evidenced in the present edited book which encompasses a wide variety of theoretical topics and practical issues such as language typology, translational agency, universals of translation, translator intervention, translator training, etc. Considering the language pairs involved in translation, the volume not only describes English, German, Chinese, and Spanish with fully or partially available SFL models, but also takes challenge in touching upon Arabic and Portuguese which are largely under-researched in an SFL paradigm. It is worth noting that the book also pays attention to the generally neglected non-verbal resources in translation which form an equally fascinating area of research and directly echo multimodal discourse analysis, the latest development chiefly in SFL. In addition, the interpersonal dimension of meanings highlighted in this volume such as attitudinal realisation and modality categories apparently complements the ideational and the textual analyses in the traditional realm of translation studies.

References


About the Author

Daqun Zhang received his PhD in linguistics and translation from Shanghai Jiao Tong University and is currently a professor at the Foreign Languages School of Soochow University, China. He completed his postdoctoral research at Fudan University in June, 2015 and worked as a Fulbright Visiting Research Scholar at University of California, Santa Barbara from August, 2015 to September, 2016. His research interests include functional linguistics, discourse analysis and translation studies, and his publications have appeared in Text & Talk, Australian Journal of Linguistics, and Discourse & Communication.

Address for correspondence: School of Foreign Languages, Soochow University, 1 Shizi Street, Suzhou City, Jiangsu Province, 215006, P. R. China. Email: daqunzh@163.com