# Translation as Rewriting

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## Abstract

*This paper tries to discover the significance of rewriting. As we all know, translation plays a significant role not only in the communication of different people from different nations, but also in the development of a nation's politics, culture and society. However, for a long time, the studies of translation was confined to the linguistic approach. In the past, scholars attached great importance to the source text, considering it as positive and authoritative. Translation, however, was regarded as derivative and servile. In the 1980s, the appearance of "cultural turn" was a satisfying change. It drew attention to the issues that are beyond equivalence and fidelity, namely history, culture, ideology and poetics and the like. Among all the introduced theories at that time, Lefevere's theory of rewritings was a prominent one. It focused more on the differences between source and target texts as well as issues such as culture and ideology. It helped translation researchers expand their horizons from the linguistic level to a wider social context. From the research, it can be concluded that rewriting is of great significance in translation and exerts powerful influence on translation. It believes that translation is productive for cultural studies, translation can improve translators' status and it can help promote the integration of translation theory and practice as well.*

**Key words:** translation; rewriting; ideology; patronage; impact

## *1.1 The "Cultural Turn" in Translation Studies*

The term "translation studies" was first put forward by James Holmes. In his "The Name and Nature of Translation Studies", Holmes made comparison among "translation studies", "science translation" and "translation theories", suggesting that translation studies seem to be the most appropriate. Holmes conceived of the approach as an empirical practice, one which looks at actual translated texts as they appear in a given culture (Gentzler, 2004, p. 93). Later on the term "translation studies" was frequently used by Lefevere and Bassnett. 1970s witnessed the "cultural turn" in translation studies in western countries. Polysystem theory, descriptive translation studies and manipulation school were the most influential at that time (Hermans, 2004, p. 13).

In 1976 in Leuven, Belgium, Lefevere argued that translation was not a branch of comparative literature or linguistics but an independent discipline. Susan Bassnett soon made response to this new perspective and had her *Translation Studies* published. In this book, Bassnett described the concepts and development of translation studies as an independent discipline, suggesting translation studies focus on the cultural background, thus starting the cultural turn of translation studies. Bassnett also expressed the main concerns of translation studies: focusing on the historical and cultural background of texts, trying to understand the complexity of manipulation of texts and factors that influenced translators' translating strategies etc, which offered new insights into translation studies (Bassnett, 2004, p. 32).

In 1980s translation studies was developed further. Lambert and Van Gorp called for not only a study of the relation between authors, texts, readers and norms in the two differing systems, but also for relations between authors' and the translators' intentions, between pragmatics and reception in source and target system, between the differing literary systems, and even between differing sociological aspects including publishing and distribution (qtd. from Gentzler, 2004, p. 132). Lefevere, Hermans and Van den Broeck were researching the translations into Dutch during a similar period as the French study. Still others focused intracultural relationships of the literatures within Belgium (ibid., p. 132). In recent years, the booming of cultural studies, feminism, postcolonialism and orientalism has also provided with translation studies new perspectives.

The achievements by the scholars have made clear that translation studies is far more than a linguistic matter. Every translator can not be separated from his cultural background. On the contrary, culture would be deeply engraved upon his mind. Therefore, during the process of translation, translators will be inevitably influenced by culture, politics and ideology, etc. Thus it is noteworthy that culture factors are an indispensable part in translation studies and the "cultural turn" in translation studies is of great significance.

## 1.2  Translation as Rewriting

Translations are not made in a vacuum and therefore can not be an isolated activity. As scholars of manipulation school argue, translation has always served a special purpose or many purposes at the same time, and each time it has been shaped by a certain force, power and so on. In its intellectual aspect, translation as a means of cultural enrichment, the choice of the works to be translated, and the guidelines and goals of the translation activity are set by certain forces. Therefore, translation takes the forms of rewriting, since it is performed under certain constraints and for certain purposes. The original text is chosen for a certain purpose and the guidelines of translation are defined to serve this purpose by the translator and/or by those who initiate translation activity. Therefore in order to fit that purpose, rewriting is bound to happen during the process of translation.

The concept "translation as rewriting" was put forward by Lefevere. According to Theo Hermans (2004, p. 126), Lefevere developed his idea about systems and the place of "rewriting" in them over a period of about fifteen years and lots of his essays were collected in *Translation, Rewriting, and the Manipulation of Literary Fame*. In 1981Lefevere introduced the concept of the "refracted text". By "refracted text" he means "texts that have been processed for a certain audience (children, for example)", or adapted to a certain poetics or a certain ideology (qtd. from Gentzler, 2004, p. 137). In 1982 Lefevere took the term "refraction" to mean "the adaptation of a work of literature to a different audience, with the intention of influencing the way in which that audience reads the work." (qtd. from Hermans, 2004, p. 127). In 1984, Lefevere defined and added the concept of "patronage" to his model in order to better investigate ideological pressures (Gentzler, 2004, p. 137). In 1985 "Refraction" gave way to "rewriting". By "rewriting", Lefevere referred to any text produced on the basis of another with the intention of adapting that other text to a certain ideology or to a certain poetics and, usually, to both (Hermans, 2004, p. 127).

In *Translation, Rewriting and the Manipulation of Literary Fame*, Bassnett and Lefevere (2004a, p. vii) formally present their theory "translation is a rewriting of an original text". According to them,

> All rewritings, whatever their intention, reflect a certain ideology and a poetics and as such manipulate literature to function in a given society in a given way. Rewriting is manipulation, undertaken in the service of power, and in its positive aspect can help in the evolution of a literature and a society. Rewriting can introduce new concepts, new genres, new devices and the history of translation is the history also of literary innovation, of the shaping power of one culture upon another. But rewriting can also repress innovation, distort and contain, and in an age of ever increasing manipulation of all kinds, the study of the manipulation processes of literature are exemplified by translation can help us towards a greater awareness of the world in which we live." (ibid., p. vii)

Therefore it is clear that translation is not a pure, simple and transparent linguistic matter but involves factors such as power, ideology, poetics and patronage, etc.

Theo Hermans (2004, p. 127) states that rewriting includes translation, criticism, reviewing, summary, adaptation for children, anthologizing, making into a comic strip or TV film, and so on. And translation is regarded by Lefevere as "the most obviously recognizable type of rewriting, and potentially the most influential because it is able to project the image of an author and/or a (series of) work (s) in another culture, lifting that author and/or those works beyond the boundaries of their culture of origin" (Lefevere, 2004a, p. 9).

## 1.3 Factors That Give Rise to Rewriting

In the early 1980s, Lefevere's theoretical interests made him receptive to Even-Zhoar's polysystem theory, but he soon moved on to other propositions, taking in General System Theory. Later he even criticized polysystem theory for several reasons. As a consequence, Lefevere differentiated his own systems concept from Even-Zohar's, and devised his own categories and terms. The most important of these are patronage, ideology, poetics and "universe of discourse" (Hermans, 2004, p. 125).

In *Translation/History/Culture: A Sourcebook*, Lefevere claims that translation aims at influencing the development of a culture and the development of a literature, and this aim is reflected on the level of each of the four constraints under which translators operate. According to Lefevere, translation is closely linked with authority, legitimacy and power. Therefore, translation needs to be studied in connection with power and patronage, ideology and poetics, with emphasis on the various attempts to shore up or undermine an existing ideology or an existing poetics. It also needs to be studied in connection with attempts to integrate different universe of discourse.

### 1.3.1 Ideology

The expression "ideology" was invented by Destutt de Tracy and his friends in 1790s in France, who assigned to it as an object (the genetic theory) of ideas. Ideology was first favored and later dismissed by Napoleon. After his conspiracy of establishing a monarchy was opposed by ideology theorists, Napoleon considered "ideology" negative and derogatory . When Marx took up the term, he gave it a quite different meaning, even in his early works. According to Marx, ideology is the system of the ideas and representations which dominate the mind of a man or a social group. Later on French philosopher Louis Althusser used "ideology" to refer to a representation of the imaginary relationship of individuals to their real conditions of existence. From the above definitions, it is clear that ideology is closely related to politics, power and history, etc. The "ideology" concerning translation studies will be based on such definitions.

In his *Translation/History/Culture: A Sourcebook*, Lefevere argues that translations are not made in a vacuum for they are undertaken in the service of power. Lefevere earlier defined ideology as "world view". Later on he refers approvingly to Fredric Jameson's concept of ideology as "that grillwork of form, convention and belief which orders our action" (qtd. from Hermans, 2004, p. 126). In one of his latest essays Lefevere described ideology as "the conceptual grid that consists of opinions and attitudes deemed acceptable in a certain society at a certain time, and through which readers and translators approach text" (qtd. from Hermans, 2004, p. 127). According to Gentzler, Lefevere understands "ideology" as a set of discourses which wrestle over interests which are in some way relevant to the maintenance or interrogation of power structures central to a whole form of social and historical life (Gentzler, 2004, p. 136).

It is noteworthy that the "ideology" concerning translation studies is also closely linked with power and politics as Lefevere understands ideology as the dominant concept of what society should be or can be allowed to be. In *Translation/History/Culture: A Sourcebook*, Lefevere (2004b, pp. 14-18) also claims that ideology is often enforced by the patrons, the people or institutions who commission or publish translations. This has made clear that translation and patronage can not be separated. According to Lefevere, ideology dictates the basic strategy the translator is going to use and therefore also dictates solution to problems concerning the process of translation.

### 1.3.2 Patronage

According to Lefevere (2004a, p. 15), Patronage refers to "something like the powers (persons, institutions) that can further or hinder the reading, writing, and rewriting of literature". Patronage is usually more interested in the ideology of literature than in its poetics. Power, Lefevere reminds us, is to be understood in the pervasive Foucaultian sense.

Patronage can be exerted by individuals, groups, institutions, a social class, a political party, publishers, the media, both newspapers and magazines and larger television corporations. Patronage sees to it that the literary system does not fall out of step with the rest of society. Patrons try to regulate the relationship between the literary system and the other system, which, together, make up a society, a culture. Patrons often count on professional to bring the literary system in line with their ideology.

Patronage consists of three components, namely ideological component, economic component and status component (Hermans, 2004, p. 126). In Lefevere's views, ideological component acts as a constraint on the choice and development of both form and subject matter. By economic component, he means patrons see to it that writers and rewriters are able to make a living, by giving them a pension or appointing them to some office. The status component means that the patron can confer prestige and recognition. Patronage can be differentiated or undifferentiated, or rather, literary systems can be controlled by a type of patronage that is either differentiated or undifferentiated in nature. Patronage is undifferentiated when all three components are concentrated on one hand or institution, as under totalitarian regimes.

Patronage is differentiated, on the other hand, when economic success is relatively independent of ideological factors, and does not necessarily bring status with it. In system with undifferentiated patronage, readers' expectations are more restricted in scope and the "right" interpretation of various works tends to be emphasized by means of various types of rewriting. While in system with differentiated patronage, the result is the increasing fragmentation of the reading public into a relative profusion of subgroups.

### 1.3.3 Poetics

According to Lefevere (2004a, p. 14), poetics can be defined as what literature should (be allowed to) be. A poetics consists of two components: one is an inventory of literary devices, genres, motifs, prototypical characters and situations, and symbols; the other a concept of what the role of literature is, or should be, in the social system as a whole. The latter is influential in the selection of themes that must be relevant to the social system if the work of literature is to be noticed at all (ibid., p. 26). In its formative phase a poetics reflects both the devices and the "functional view" of the literary production dominant in a literary system when its poetics was first codified (ibid., p. 26).

The functional component of a poetics is "obviously closely tied to ideological influences from outside the sphere of the poetics as such, and generated by ideological forces in the environment of the literary system" (ibid., p. 27). The inventory component of the poetics of a literary system is not immediately subject to direct influence from the environment once the formative stage of the system is past (ibid., p. 34). The functional component of a poetics exerts an innovative influence on the literary system as a whole, while the inventory component of the poetics tends to be more conservative. And the conservative influence by the inventory component is attested by the fact that genres seem to be able to lead a shadowy existence as "theoretical possibilities" when not actively practiced and that they can be revived sooner or later (ibid., pp. 34-35).

A poetics, any poetics, is not absolute but always changing. In a literary system, the poetics dominant today is quite different from that at the beginning of the system. Its functional component is likely to have changed, so is inventory component. However, every poetics tends to present itself as absolute. Obviously each dominant poetics controls the dynamic of the system.

Finally, a changeable and changing poetics, established mainly by means of rewritings, will also dictate which original works of literature and which rewritings are acceptable in a given system, or, rather, such a poetics will be the touchstone used by teachers, critics, and others to decide what is in and what is out. Moreover, different poetics dominant at different stages in the evolution of a literary system will judge both writings and rewritings in different ways (ibid., p. 36).

### 1.3.4 Universe of Discourse

According to Lefevere, Universe of Discourse is defined as certain objects, customs, and beliefs thought unacceptable in their own culture (ibid., p. 87). Because of the uniqueness of each nation's cultures, customs and beliefs, most of what is to be found here is said in jest and contains jokes that are different in all languages, a regular translation, say word-for-word translation is impossible to conduct. In this case, translation involves a complex network of decisions to be made by translators on the level of ideology, poetics, and Universe of Discourse.

In most cases, translators have to strike a balance between the Universe of Discourse (i.e. the whole complex of concepts, ideologies, persons, and objects belonging to a particular culture) as acceptable to the author of the original, and that other Universe of Discourse which is acceptable and familiar to the translator and his or her audience (Lefevere, 2004b, p. 35). Translators usually do not reject outright, but decide to rewrite on the level of both content and style.

During rewriting, translators' attitudes toward the Universe of Discourse is heavily influenced by the status of the original, the self-image of the culture that text is translated into, the types of texts deemed acceptable in that culture, the levels of diction deemed acceptable in it, the intended audience, and the "cultural scripts" that audience is used to or willing to accept (Lefevere, 2004a, p. 87). The status of the source text can run the whole gamut from central to peripheral in either the source or the target culture. A text that is central in its own culture may not occupy the same status in another culture. The self-image of the target culture is always changing. And a culture with a low self-image will welcome translation from a culture or cultures it considers superior to itself. Different attitudes towards Homer of French at different times are a case in point.

In total there are four constraints listed above. However, Lefevere emphasizes that constraints are conditioning factors, not absolute. Translators definitely do not operate in a mechanistic universe in which they have no choice. Rather, they can choose to go with or against them, say, stay within the perimeters marked by the constraints, or to challenge those constraints by trying to move beyond them.

### 1.4 Significance of André Lefevere's Rewriting Theory

Significance of rewriting theory first lies in its new perspective in study on translation. Traditional study on translation had considered the original texts as creative and authoritative while translations as derivative and servile. Standards such as "faithful vs. free", "word vs. sense" and "source-oriented vs. target-oriented" had long been the main concerns of translators. While Lefevere firmly declares translation is a rewriting of an original text for all rewritings would reflect a certain ideology and a poetics in a given society in a given way and therefore would inevitably be undertaken in the service of power (Lefevere, 2004a, p. vii). Since translations are made under a number of constraints, language matter is the least important. Therefore Lefevere claims that translation should no longer be regarded as static but dynamic. Different from traditional views, Lefevere believes that translation is productive for cultural studies and deserves to occupy a more central position in cultural history than the one to which it is currently relegated.

Secondly, considering translation as rewriting has improved translators' status both socially and economically. Traditionally people thought translation was mainly a linguistic matter, thus demanding a high degree of skill. Therefore translators had been considered slaves of the original just as Dryden once claimed that "slaves we are, and labor in another man's plantation; we dress the vineyard, but the wine is the owner's" (Lefevere, 2004b, p. 24). Instead of accusing translators of ignorance or unfaithfulness, Lefevere argues that deliberate distortions, incompetence on the part of the translator and linguistic incompatibility between the two languages can be accepted. Although Lefevere lists four constraints that translators should take into account, he declares that they have the freedom to choose to go with or against them.

Thirdly, rewriting theory can promote the integration of translation theory and practice. Translation theory has long been divorced from practice. The theory and practice issue has gone through heated debates. Theorists may criticize translators for their ignorance of translation theories, while translators may consider theories useless. Rewriting theory, however, can offer a platform for such discussion for "rewriting" not only involves linguistic exchange in traditional sense but also "manipulation" of texts. Here translation acquires its metaphorical function. In this case, translation theory is combined with practice.

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