UNIVERSALITY IN TRANSLATION: AN ANALYSIS OF TRANSLATION INTERFERENCE IN MULTIMODAL TEXTS

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ABSTRACT

Universality in translation has been a research focus in translation studies since the publication of Mona Baker's seminal paper in 1990s. The relevant studies mainly explore the various universality rules governing translation in written texts, however, little attention has been devoted to translation universality in translating multi-modal texts. This study, with Systemic Functional Grammar and Visual Grammar as theoretical framework, verifies the validity of Law of Interference, one of the universal translation rules, in multimodal texts. By statistically comparing transitivity, theme choice, thematic progression and information value of two magazine articles and their translations, the paper finds that most make-up of the source text is transferred into the target text or rendered into existing patterns, and that more negative transfers are observed in transitivity, split theme TP and information value when translating from a major language. The paper concludes that the Law of Interference is stronger in visual mode while weaker in verbal mode. The present study shows that the law of interference can be observed in translating multimodal texts. It also implies that the translation of multimodal texts makes more visible the power of English, and it helps to perpetuate the hegemony of English in the global world.

KEYWORDS

interference, transfer, multimodal texts translation, Systemic Functional Grammar, visual grammar

1. INTRODUCTION

Since Mona Baker (1993) introduced corpus methods in translation studies, translation universals have been explored or verified by using comparable corpora (Laviosa, 1998; Leviosa, 2002; Cheong, 2006; Liu and Tian, 2009; Xian and Dai, 2010; X. Hu, 2010; Wang and Qin, 2011) or parallel corpora (Øverås, 1998; Kenny, 2001; Williams, 2009). All these studies indicate that translations in the target language manifest certain regularities such as explication, implication, simplification and complexification. The common features of these studies are 1) statistical comparison of certain prominent characteristics among the source text, the target text and the untranslated text in the target language; 2) reliance on the features that can be counted by corpus tools while ignoring other constituents of the text; and 3) the explorations and verifications exclusive to verbal mode, namely, the written words.

The universal rules that exhibit in translating multi-modal texts, however, are seldomly researched. But, the society we are living in tends to be more multi-modal: the material we read, the TV and movies we watch, the advertisements we encounter, the social networking we use every day, to some extent, are expressed in multi-modal — words, pictures, audios, videos, and

even smells, as Serafini claimed that "language is one mode; images, actions, sounds, and physical manipulation are other modes" (2014: xi). Human has resorted multimodal resources to describe and understand the world, so multimodal texts is worthy of more attention. With globalization and localization increases, it is essential and urgent to study multimodal texts translation, which will shed light on understanding across nations (Starc et al, 2015), thus more and more studies on multimodal translation appear in the academic field (O'Hagan et al, 2002; Smith, 2008; Razieh et al, 2011; Rodney et all, 2015). These studies focus on equivalence, translation techniques, translation criticism, but they do not study the universals in multimodal text translations.

This paper aims to explore one of translation universals in multi-modal texts translation, namely, the translation interference. Translation interference is the transfer of the make-up of the source text into the target text, and it manifests in the forms of negative transfers and positive transfers. Negative transfers are "deviations from normal, codified practices of the target system", while positive transfers are "the greater likelihood of selecting features which do exist and are used in any case" (Toury, 1995:275).

Positive transfers make translations as natural as the untranslated texts in the target language, and negative transfers result in atypical patterns in the target system. Interference in translation is an important field in the study of translation universals (Mauranen et al, 2004).
In the last chapter of Descriptive Translation Studies and Beyond, Toury outlined the law of interference which reads:

Tolerance of interference—hence the endurance of its manifestations— tends to increase when translation is carried out from a "major" or highly prestigious language/culture, especially if the target language/culture is "minor", or "weak" in any other sense. (Toury, 1995: 278)

Although Toury claimed that translation interference includes both positive and negative transfers, his law of interference concerns exclusively on the negative one as he used "tolerance" and "endurance". It's understandable because positive transfers, which make the target text read naturally, is difficult to distinguish from the untranslated target text. Negative transfers can be found out by comparing the make-up of the source text with that of the target text, thus it is feasible to be studied.

When English-Chinese language pair is concerned, English is a major language because it is widely used throughout the world despite the fact that the number of native Chinese speakers outnumbers that of native English speakers. If law of interference is true, we can expect that more English texts' make-up can be discerned in their Chinese translations, and that fewer Chinese texts' make-up can be found in their English translations.

2. CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

In order to explore how the target culture endures the transfers, it is essential to articulate the make-up a multi-modal text. According to Toury (ibid. :287), the make-up of a text consists of not only linguistic levels but also the textual model. The previous corpus studies (Kenny, 2001; Williams, 2009) concerned the transfer of recurrent linguistic patterns in translation, while paying less attention to transfer of overall textual features.

Thus, the present paper adopts systemic functional grammar (SFG) and visual grammar as its theoretical framework to investigate the make-up a text, and it postulates that the make-up of texts, either the source text or the target text consists of different variables which can be measured by SFG and visual grammar.

Halliday's systemic functional grammar (SFG) offers a framework to describe the linguistic and textual make-up of the verbal mode, whereas Kress's visual grammar, which is based on SFG, is suitable to depict the make-up of the other modes.

2.1. The Make-up of Verbal Mode

Halliday's SFG was adopted to describe the make-up of the verbal mode of the source and target texts. Different from structuralist approach, SFG attaches much attention to the text and its interaction with society, and concerns language in use. It holds that any text has three functions, namely ideational, interpersonal and textual functions. The three functions are connected to lexcio grammatical patterns in the text (Mubenga, 2009). Ideational function represents our experiences of the world, which is realized by transitivity; Textual function, concerning the overall organization of the text, is embodied in the thematic structure and cohesion devices; Interpersonal function uses mood system to indicate interactions between speaker, or writer and audience. Although the three functions are discussed separately, they are unified within the structure of the clause (Halliday, 2004: 168). Thus, by describing how three functions of a given text are achieved, the researcher can know the linguistic and textual models of the text. The present paper adopted the realization of three functions as the make-up of the source and target texts. For convenience, it only focused on ideational and textual functions in the chosen articles to investigate the transfer of text's make-up in two directions, and interpersonal function will be explored in further study. The specific methods are discussed in details in the following.

Transitivity construes the world into a set of processes, and Halliday (ibid. 170-171) distinguishes six types of processes: material, behavioral, mental, verbal, relational and existential, each of which has its own schemata to represent the world. The present paper adopted Halliday's classification of six processes to describe the transitivity of English texts, however, the transitivity of Chinese texts were analyzed by using the methods proposed by Li (2007) and Hu (1989). Specifically speaking, the present study counted the distribution of each process in both languages before comparing the process distribution in different texts. The study postulates that the process distribution is similar among articles chosen because they are of the similar topics and belong to the same writing genre.

When discussing textual function, the paper focused on theme distribution and thematic progression which shows how the articles are organized. Halliday distinguished themes into three categories: interpersonal, textual and topical themes as shown in table 2. Many thematic progression patterns are available (Danes, 1974; S. Xu, 1982; Huang, 1985), and the present paper adopted the patterns of McCabe (1999) which was developed from that of Danes. McCabe distinguished four types of patterns:

(1) Linear TP
   $T1 \rightarrow R1$
         $\downarrow$
         $T2(=R1) \rightarrow R2$
               $\downarrow$
               $T3(=R2) \rightarrow R3)$

(2) Constant TP
   $T1 \rightarrow R1$
         $\downarrow$
         $T2 \rightarrow R2$
               $\downarrow T3 \rightarrow R3$

(3) Split theme TP

[T] T1 → R1
  T2 → R2
  T3 → R3

(4) TP with a split rheme
  T1 → R1 (=R'2 + R"1)
      T'2 → R'2
        T"2 → R"2

Table 1. Classification of Themes (adapted from Halliday (2004:79))

Textual themes	continuative
	conjunction
	conjunctive adjunct
Interpersonal themes	modal or comment adjunct
	Vocative
	finite verbal operator
Topical themes	Participant
	Circumstance
	process (verb)

As for textual function, the present study conducted a statistical comparison of the theme and thematic progression distributions in chosen articles.

2.2. The Make-up of Visual Mode

Inspired by Halliday's SFG, Kress and van Leeuwen (2006) outlined visual grammar to describe the visual mode. Visual grammar holds that images, like clauses, have meta-functions: representational, interactive and compositional. The representational function is realized by narrative and conceptual representations, the interactive function by contact, social distance and attitude, and the compositional function by information, salience and framing. The three functions of the visual mode correspond to ideational, interpersonal and textual functions of SFG.

3. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study focused on the translation of magazine articles in two directions (C-E and E-C) because magazine articles, with many illustrations and visual design, are multimodal in nature. Another reason for the choice of magazine articles is that it has fewer modes compared with videos and websites and thus it is easy to be handled in this study.

3.1. Research Sample

The present study explored two magazines and their translations. One is *National Geographic* issued in USA and its translated version in China run by Yunnan Academy of Social Sciences, and the other is *China Today* in Chinese and English versions. What the two magazines are in common is that only some articles in the source are translated and that their translated versions also contain original articles created in the mother tongue.

Given it is a pilot study, four articles were randomly chosen from four magazines respectively. The topics of the chosen articles are similar, and they all describe people. The detailed information of the selected articles is showed in the Table 1.

Table 2. General Information about Selected Articles

	Title	Words	Source
STC	杨广文：用超级计算机为科研提供助力	5635	《今日中国》，2016.10：pp14-16
TTE	Yang Guangwen: Builder of the Most Powerful Computer	3630	*China Today*, 2016.10, pp22-24
STE	Dunhuang: Mogao Caves	3575	National Geographic, 2016.09, pp63-78
TTC	世界最大的艺术殿堂—敦煌石窟	5432	《华夏地理》，2017.02, pp61-76

N.B.: STC=Chinese source text; TTE=English target text; STE=English source text; TTC=Chinese target text.

3.2. Anatomy of Multimodal Texts

In analyzing the verbal mode, STE-TTE pair chose the introduction part and first three paragraphs under each headline; STE-TTC pair chose the first three paragraphs under each headline. The total chosen words for the former pair is 985 Chinese characters and 1060 characters for the latter pair. In analyzing the visual mode, the four articles were considered as a whole.

Specifically speaking, the present study adopted the choice of process, theme distribution and TP pattern distribution to investigate the make-up of the source text and the target text statistically, which was followed by quantitative comparisons to reveal the transfer of the text's make-up in different translation directions. The following is an example to illustrate how a text is investigated statistically.

E.g. 1

ST: 2016 年 6 月 20 日，在德国法拉克福 2016 国际超级计算机大会上，国际 TPO500 组织发布了最新的全球超级计算机排名榜单，中国的"神威-太湖之光"荣登全球最快的超级计算机排行榜 TOP500 榜首。

TT: At the International Super-computing Conference held in Frankfurt, Germany on June 20, 2016, the TOP 500.org published the latest supercomputer rankings. China's Sunway TaihuLight took pole position.

The source text has two verbs ("发布" and "荣登"), and both of them belong to material process. The target text also has two material process which can be realized with two verbs ("published" and "took").

All the three themes ("2016 年 6 月 20 日", "国际 TPO500 组织" and "中国的'神威-太湖之光'") in the source text are topical themes. Similarly, the three themes in the target text are also topical themes.

Both the source text and target text used two constant TPs, which is showed in the following diagram. The first clause doesn't fall into any progression pattern because it is the first sentence of the passage. In each paragraph, the progression pattern is determined based on its relationships with the previous paragraph.

```
T1 → R1
     ↓
   T2 → R2
        ↓
      T3 → R3
```
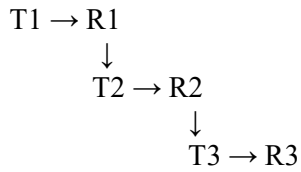
As for non-verbal mode, compositional function was discussed in this study, while the other two functions will be touched in the subsequent studies. The compositional function is realized by information value, salience and framing. Information value concerns the placement of the elements as left-right, top-bottom and center-margin; Salience is realized by placement in foreground or background, relative size, contrasts in tonal value, differences in sharpness, etc; framing concerns about whether there are dividing lines (Kress &. Van Leeuwen, 2006: 177). Painter et al. (2013) used layout to replace information in the compositional function. Given the size of this paper, information value was adopted as a variable to measure the make-up of visual mode. Specifically speaking, the layout of the article, the position and size of the picture and the organization of articles was compared in two translation directions.

3.3. Research Questions

The present study on translation interference in multimodal texts can be divided into the following three questions:

(1). What variables of source text have interference on the target text in E-C translation?
(2). What variables of source text have interference on the target text in C-E translation?
(3). Does interference in E-C translation differ significantly from that in C-E translation?).

4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

4.1. Transitivity Transfer

The selected articles are of same genre, which is expected to exhibit similar transitivity pattern. The three major processes of STC, TTE, STE and TTC are invariably material, relational and verbal, and their percentages are similar. However, significant differences can be found from Table 3.

The total number of the processes counted in STC, TTE, STE and TTC are 56, 45, 60 and 73 respectively. It indicates that Chinese texts, original and translated, have more processes, which conform to the finding that Chinese has more short sentences while English has more complicated long sentence (Lian, 1993). The decrease rate in C-E and the increase rate in E-C are 20% and 21% respectively, which means no significant difference is found about the complexity of the sentence in two translation directions.

Table 3. Process Distribution

	Material		Mental		Relational		Behavioral		Verbal		Existential	
	RN	%	RN	%	RN	%	RN	%	RN	%	RN	%
STC	38	68%	0	0%	9	16%	0	0%	9	16%	0	0%
TTE	27	61%	0	0%	11	24%	0	0%	6	13%	1	2%
STE	40	67%	3	5%	11	18%	2	3%	4	7%	0	0%
TTC	53	73%	3	4%	10	14%	2	3%	5	6%	0	0%

N.B.: STC=Chinese source text; TTE=English target text; STE=English source text; TTC=Chinese target text; RN=raw number; %=percentage in the row.

The relational process tends to increase in C-E translation (from 16% to 24%) and decrease in E-C translation (from 18% to 14%). English has more relational processes because it has more relational verbs compared with Chinese. In C-E translation, some material processes are rendered into relational processes.

E.g.2

ST: 跟美国和日本等发达国家比较，我们的研制水平已经进入世界先进行列。
TT: We are now one of forerunners in this field, rather than runner-up to developed countries such as the US and Japan.

The process in the source is material ("进入" literally means "enter into"), but the translator used a relational process to render it. Such practices were adopted by the translator, which can be supported by 7% decrease in material processes in C-E translation.

In E-C translation, an opposite approach was adopted as shown in example 3. The translator changed the relational process in the source text into a material process.

E.g. 3

ST: …, another man's funeral is in full swing at the other end of town.
TT: ……，小镇的另一边某个男子的葬礼正办得如火如荼。

The two opposite approaches in different translation directions reveal that translators tried to make the translated language sound idiomatically in the process of translating. But slight difference can be observed: the percentage increased (8%) outweighs the percentage decreased (4%), which means more negative transfers exist in E-C translation with regard to relational process.

The third difference lies in verbal process. In C-E translation, verbal process reduce by 3%. English doesn't favor repetition (ibid.), and it uses other words to replace Chinese verb "说" (it means "say".) as shown in example 4. Thus a reduction in the verbal process is observed.

E.g. 4

ST:付昊恒说，"神威的整个系统由 4 万块芯片构成，每个芯片有 260 个核。"
TT: "The entire system is composed of 40, 000 chips, with 260 cores on each chip," Fu explained.

However, in E-C translation, no increase is found in verbal process, instead, the verbal process reduce by 1%. The translator didn't add more verbal processes to make the translation idiomatically, rather, he just retained the process features of the source text as in example 5.

E.g. 5

ST: As we back silently out of the room, Elisabeth says softly, "Wake up, Papa. It's time for your dinner." I turn back for a moment as eldest son, Yokke explains: "She's taking your picture, Papa."

TT: 我们安静地退出房间时，伊丽莎白轻声<u>说</u>：“他爸，醒醒。该吃饭了。”大儿子约科<u>解释了</u>我的来意：“他来给你拍照，爸爸。”

Unlike example 4, the translator didn't translate "explains" into "说", rather he retained the literal meaning in the source text.

To conclude, in both C-E and E-C, the general distribution of six processes is similar, which shows the translators try their best to transfer the transitivity patterns of the source texts. But the sheer number changes in material, verbal and relational processes indicate that translators do not completely copy the transitivity pattern of the source text, and that they adopt existing patterns in the target language to make translation read naturally. In other words, the very small portion of the transitivity patterns follows those of the target texts when the Chinese-English language pair is concerned. In addition, more negative transfers in transitivity are found in E-C translation.

4.2. Theme Transfer

In two different translation directions, topical themes amount for more than half of the total themes, while interpersonal themes are least chosen in both the source texts and the target texts. Textual themes, however, fluctuate in two directions. In C-E translation, 2% of increase is observed because English is hypotactic but Chinese is paratactic (Lian, 1993).

Table 4. Theme Choice Distribution

	Textual themes		Interpersonal themes		Topical themes	
	RN	%	RN	%	RN	%
STC	18	39%	4	9%	24	52%
TTE	17	41%	3	7%	22	52%
STE	17	28%	4	7%	40	65%
TTC	18	26%	5	7%	47	67%

N.B.: STC=Chinese source text; TTE=English target text; STE=English source text; TTC=Chinese target text; RN=raw number; %=percentage in the row.

E.g. 6

ST: 作为第一台完全使用国产处理器的超级计算机，“神威.太湖之光”展现了中国在设计和制造高性能计算机领域取得的成就。

TT: Sunway TaihuLight is the first supercomputer with a processor independently developed by China, <u>and </u>showcases our level in designing and manufacturing high-performance computers.

E.g. 7

ST: Everyone likes funerals, especially for the chance to meet faraway relatives, she says, <u>as</u> three younger cousins romp nearby, including around their grandfather's coin.

TT: 她说，每个人都喜欢参加葬礼，尤其是有机会看到远方的亲戚，更让人高兴。三个比她更小的表亲正在附近玩耍，毫不避忌身旁的祖父棺材。

The change in the choice of textual themes as in examples 6 and 7, is caused by the language difference: a hypotactic language uses more connectives than a paratactic language, which is further supported in the E-C translation (2% decrease is found).

As far as themes are concerned, the make-up of the source texts is exactly transferred into the target texts except for the textual themes. The difference between Chinese and English can account for the partial change of the source text's make-up. No negative transfer is found in theme choice.

4.3. Transfer of Thematic Progression Patterns

What the four texts have in common is that progression patterns mostly adopted are constant TP and Split theme TP, and that no TP with split rhemes is found. From Table 5, no difference is found with regard to linear TP and constant TP. However, more split theme TPs are used in E-C translation, but the trend goes in an opposite direction in C-E translation. It can be also explained by the fact that Chinese has more short sentences and English has more complicated structure. The point is illustrated in example 8 and example 9.

Table 5. The Distribution of Thematic Progression Patterns

	Linear TP		Constant TP		Split theme TP		TP with split rhemes	
	RN	%	RN	%	RN	%	RN	%
STC	2	5%	24	56%	17	39%	0	0%
TTE	2	6%	26	72%	8	22%	0	0%
STE	1	2%	43	75%	13	23%	0	0%
TTC	2	3%	38	62%	21	35%	0	0%

N.B.: STC=Chinese source text; TTE=English target text; STE=English source text; TTC=Chinese target text; RN=raw number; %=percentage in the row.

E.g. 8

ST: 记者穿上印有"神威"和国家超级计算机无锡中心字样的工作服，对这套世界上运算能力最强的超级计算机系统有了一个直观的认识。

TT: Our reporter was instructed to wear the white coat bearing the Sunway logo and the name of the center—a reminder that we were approaching the world's most powerful computing system.

The source text progression pattern is a split theme TP, and the two parts share a same theme. However, the target text didn't follow this pattern, and it started a new theme ("a reminder"). Thus, the pattern of the target text is constant TP.

E.g. 9

ST: Sleek, fat water buffalo are everywhere, lounging under trees, standing alongside the road, or being walked in circles by young men who tend them as affectionately as they would pets.

TT: 到处都是皮毛油亮的肥硕水牛，有的卧在树下，有的站在路边，有的由年轻的男子领着兜圈儿，受到宠物般的悉心照料。

A constant TP in the source text was rendered into a split theme TP. The general theme was followed by three split themes which was indicated by three Chinese expressions "有的".

In E-C translation, complicated sentences are translated into short ones, which may give rise to more split theme TPs. In C-E translation, short sentences become complicated ones, reducing the number of split theme TPs. Although most thematic progression patterns in the source text are transferred into the target text, some deviations still exist: small portion of the TPs in the source text is replaced by those in the untranslated text in the target language. However, more negative transfers are found in E-C translation as shown in the fact that the percentage of split theme TP increases only 12% compared with a 17% increase in C-E translation. It means that small portion of English source text's make-up can be found in the Chinese target text as showed in example 10.

E.g.10

ST: This week, for the ceremony of ma'nene', he was hauled out along with a dozen or so much longer dead relatives, his companions in the crypt.

TT: 为了这个礼拜的马聂聂仪式，他与十几位入土年头比他长得多的亲戚——在墓室中和他作伴的人——被一起抬了出来。

In this example, the interference of the source text can be discerned in the target text which is far more complicated and difficult to read compared with untranslated text in Chinese.

4.4. Transfer of Non-verbal modal

Based on the visual grammar, the position of pictures, the layout of the articles and the article organizations were compared in two translation directions in this section.

In C-E translation, the source text used three pictures. The topics of the three pictures are "Yang explains the applications of the Sunway TaihuLight", "a staff member attended the prize awarding ceremony at Frankfurt" and "a staff member delivered a keynote speech at Frankfurt" respectively. The first picture takes up half of the first page, while the other two pictures are of similar size, about a quarter of the first picture. In translated version, there are also three pictures, but only the first picture is the same with the source text. The other two are replaced with two new pictures, whose topics are "team members at a conference in Frankfurt" and "the center's office building in Wuxi" respectively. With regard to the size, the first picture is narrowed into half of the source text. The other two pictures are enlarged, which are of similar size with the first picture in the target text. In the E-C translation, however, the target text doesn't make any change to the pictures of the source text, and even the positions of the picture's captions are exactly same. As for layout of the passage, two translation directions show a significant difference. In the C-E translation, deviations of layout were observed. First, the introduction part of the translation is represented in blue with the rest in black, but all parts of the source texts are invariably in black. Second, the first letter of the first word *A* is capitalized in the target text, which is the practice of English text layout. Third, the position of the lead-in part is changed in the target text. However, in E-C translation, the target text strictly follows the layout of the source text: First, the translator doesn't make any alteration to the position and the size of the pictures. Second, the first character of the first paragraph is even enlarged, which is a writing tradition in English.

The article organization also differs in two directions. When English is translated into Chinese,

the number of paragraphs is identical in the target and source texts. However, 22 Chinese paragraphs are rendered into 33 paragraphs in English in C-E translation.

To sum up, when compositional function of visual mode is concerned, more negative transfers are found in E-C translation, which result in a style not familiar to native Chinese. In C-E translation, no negative transfer is found, and the translators tried to adapt to the style of the target text.

5. CONCLUSIONS

Generally speaking, the make-up of the source text tends to transfer into the target text. When the transfer makes translations read unnaturally, the translators, translating either from English to Chinese, or from Chinese to English, choose the patterns already existing in the target language rather than retain the make-up of the source text, which becomes more frequent if greater differences between two languages exist. However, some small portion of constitutes tend to be retained in target text, and they make atypical the language of the translations. Specifically speaking, in transitivity (especially relational process), split them TP and information value of the visual mode, more negative transfers are found in English to Chinese translation rather than in Chinese to English translation, especially in the visual mode.

Considering the language status of Chinese and English, we can conclude from this case that tolerance of interference tends to increase when translation is carried out from English. The conclusion is weaker in the verbal mode because only a very small portion of transfers are found, but it is stronger in the visual mode.

The present study shows that the law of interference can be observed in translating multimodal texts. It also implies that the translation of multimodal texts makes more visible the power of English, and translation helps to perpetuate the hegemony of English in the global world. Translators should try their best to reduce the influence of translation interference so as to resist English hegemony across the world.

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