INTERSUBJECTIVITY AND A PRACTICAL INTERSUBJECTIVE ETHICS OF TRANSLATION
Tang Jun

I. Introduction

In the translational context, power relations can be viewed as a series of variants of the relation between the *self* and the *other*: the original vs. the translated version, the author vs. the translator, the initiator vs. the translator, the original vs. its readers and the translated version vs. its readers, etc. If the self is regarded as the subject (realistically or metaphorically) and the other as the object, the problem concerning the relation between the self and the other will be transformed into the problem of the relation between the subject and the object. What has to be called into question is: since the subject enjoys the sovereignty over the object, if a party is determined as the self, in other words, as the subject, it will definitely become synonymous with the *powerful* party. The task for a scholar is then to make a distinction between the subject and the object. Hence all the arguments turn out to be about which side or who is the subject. As a result, great division of ideas has come into being because of differences between decisions on picking out the proper subject from various points of view.

If we examine the situation from another perspective, drawing on the philosophical concept of *intersubjectivity* and taking the self and the other as different *subjects* (realistically or metaphorically), the problem about the relation between the self and the other will be transformed into the problem of the relations between different subjects. Such a transformation is surely more productive for explorations of translation practice. As the power status of a subject in reality is a variant that rises and falls together with the given condition, the aforementioned line of thought is helpful in analyzing problems within their respective contexts and in avoiding taking sides with an absolute, simplistic or static point of view. Balancing the attention to the objective and subjective factors in translation activities, one may come up with a

reconciliation of the polarity between the subject and the object within the context of translation studies from an intersubjective perspective.

II. Intersubjectivity in Translation

A closer look at the translation process with distinction of the following stages may be of help if the theoretical value of the concept of intersubjectivity in a translational context is to be considered.

1. Pre-stage of the Translation Process:

At this stage, two sub-processes are involved: first comes the precondition process. At this point, the author plays the role of the subject of creative writing. Right behind it follows the preparation process—the reading of the original by general readers as native speakers of the source language or readers with source-language background in addition to the initiation of the translation activity for particular personal or institutional purpose. In the case of an average reader, the reader may be regarded as the relatively passive subject of the reading of the original. In the case of a reader setting his or her mind to a given intention, the initiator of the translation activity or the potential translator is the subject as the selector of the material to be translated while a reader with practical intention is the active subject of the reading of the original.

2. Mid-stage:

At this stage, two sub-processes are involved: first comes the quasi- or pseudo-translation process, during which, the translator does his or her analytical reading of the original with the purpose of translating. At this point, the translator acts as the subject as a purposeful reader.

This is immediately followed by the operational process, that is, the process of translation proper. Under this condition, the translator plays the role of the subject as the selector and agent of certain strategies and techniques and the subject as the creator of the translated version.

3. Post-stage:

This stage may be labeled as the reaction process, which is the reading of the translated version by the target-language readers. At this point, the reader acts as either a passive or an active reading subject.

Since different stages of the translation activity have different subjects, it will be more advisable if the intersubjective relations between subjects characterized by the *intersubjectivity* are given priority when scholars consider

those arguments on literariness and substance, literal and free translation, form and content, proximity to form and to spirit, fidelity and infidelity to the original, the creative efforts of the translator, the style of the translator and the style of the author, and the reaction of the readers. Theoretically or ideally, some scholars tend to assume that the subjects involved at different stages of the translation activity coexist on equal terms. In this sense, the induced interrelations are of communicative dialogue, instead of those interrelations that are expected to exist between a subject and an object, such as between the one to recognize and the one being recognized, the one to practice and the practiced, the active and the passive. But actually, the power distribution among different subjects is asymmetrical, the fact of which determines a *practical* intersubjective dimension. This notion of intersubjectivity will be fruitful if translation scholars are ready to abandon the trouble-making dichotomy between the self and the other as the subject and the object.

III. A Practical Intersubjective Ethics of Translation

The intersubjective relations in a translational context outline the boundary of the intersubjective dimension of translation processes and studies. If a translation scholar notices the intersubjective dimension of the translation process, s/he may take to an ethical theory of intersubjectivity. With the concept of intersubjectivity in mind, people will definitely take the idea of dialogue and communication on equal terms between subjects suggested by the theory of dialogism to heart. But it must be noticed that it is too ideal a theoretical picture for us to draw with the color of reality because its premise has to be the combination of equality of status and a balance of power between rival subjects who constitute the two parties of a relation. More often than not, the efforts on desired dialogue and communication on equal terms between subjects achieve little more than well-meaning wishes because of the actual unequal status of and difference in power distribution among the subjects because of the influences of particular socio-historical factors. Technically speaking, the achievement of dialogue and communication between subjects involved in a translating process on equal terms may be labeled as *an ideal intersubjective ethics of translation*.

Since a theory of intersubjectivity begins with concerns of the relation between the self and the other as different subjects, a *practical* ethical theory of

intersubjectivity centers on the praxis of translation, i.e. a translator must try to balance himself or herself among various forces and pressures in terms of his or her relations with other subjects. In this aspect, the current values, socio-cultural or socio-historical factors and the prevailing ideology of the target culture are determinants governing the translator's calculations or choices. Such an ethics of translation allows for certain room for a translator's consideration of personal interests yet insists upon his or her duties to all the parties involved in a translation process. Though it is impossible to please all, a translator must be reasonable or justifiable in making the choices and be responsible for the decisions.

Taking the intersubjectivity in translation activities into consideration, game theory widely applied in study fields of economy and sociology can be proved exceptionally helpful in analyzing and interpreting translational phenomena. An interpretation of the intersubjective relations connected with translation activities in a perspective of game theory may be categorized as *a practical intersubjective ethics of translation* because it can equip us with better explanations of the translator's calculations or considerations in his or her professional practice.

Game theory is insightful for translation studies because it concerns the interactions between rational agents (Sela and Vleugels 1997), who must deal with decision problems just as the translator, the source author, the target reader and other subjects involved in a translation process do. *Interactive* and *rational* are two fundamental concepts of game theory. According to literature on game theory (Shi 2000: 6; Winter 1999), "interactive" is employed to describe the intersubjective relations between the players as decision-making and action-taking subjects while "rational," the players' implementation of actions guaranteeing their optimal interests. Because of the interactive quality of a game, any "rational" decision must be made on the basis of one player's deduction of the actions of any other player.

Game theory will be helpful in viewing translation activities from a new vantage-point: (1) A translation activity is constituted of a variety of chronological processes with interactions between subjects, the fact of which coincides with the precondition of a game in game theory. (2) The decisions of the subjects engaged in translation activities are interdependent—the strategy of any subject is preceded by the consideration and deduction of possible moves

of any other subject, and the final result of the action of any subject is determined by the joint efforts of all the decisions of the subjects. I will offer a detailed account later in this section. The interdependent situation can be taken as analogous with the interactive situation of a game. (3) The study field of translation studies is one that cannot free itself from the concerns of interests (as the "most powerful of motivations" of "human ingenuity"—"the glorious trinity of jobs, remuneration and fame" propounded by André Lefevere [1985: 218]). Evidently the analytical method of game theory can safely be applied to the interpretation of the intersubjective relations in translation activities. In fact, translation activities fall under the category of non-cooperative games (Zhang 1999: 5) for there is no binding agreement between the parties concerned. Further, the favor is granted to the individual rationality or the optimum option for the person in question instead of the collective rationality.

A perspective of game theory will be useful in providing a different view of translation activities. Firstly, the subjects connected with translation activities are, in terms of game theory, *interactive*. It makes no sense to talk about the reader of the original if there is no author; a reading, which serves as the catalyst for the initiation of an act of translating, will be out of the question if no reader of the original makes any attempt at it; no translator will get involved without an initiator or the initiation of the translating act; no act of translating, no creation and reading of the translated text, no receiving audience and the acceptance of the translated version will ever occur or exist if the involvement of a translator is impossible. Adding to this, it can be noticed that the subjects connected with an act of translating take their moves in sequence. Therefore, the subject who acts later can observe the move taken by the one who acts earlier. In this respect, translation activities belong to the so-called dynamic games (Shi 2000: 9; W. Zhang 1999: 12). Of course, the relation between the source author and the translator is *interdependent* rather than interactive whether they are of simultaneous existence or not—if either of them is missing, the act of translation is out of the question though feedback is not necessary. Such a relation may be viewed as an *interaction* in the *symbolic*, *psychological* or *asymmetrical* but *not realistic* sense. It affects the translator to a greater extent than it does to the author. The effect is in inverse proportion to the status of the source culture, and in proportion to the fame of the translator as a professional.

Secondly, the decisions made by the subjects connected with a translation activity are, in terms of game theory, *rational*. In short, the goal for the options of a subject is to get the most desirable results. Specifically, the author, the translator or the initiator hankers after the establishment of personal image as a social critic or a creative writer, a maximum of readership, or the expected social benefits or economic returns as it depends; the reader of the original and the audience of the target text want to stick to their positions as the final judges for the text concerned to avoid unnecessary expenditure of money, time and energy in case they grant their recognition to or answer the wishes of the author, the translator or the initiator too rashly.

Thirdly, since any participant of a translation activity cannot have access to full and precise knowledge of the characteristics of other participants and their possible strategies, a translation activity can be categorized as a game of incomplete information (Shi 2000: 8; Zhang 1999: 12-13). In a word, translation activities belong to the most complicated type of games: dynamic games of incomplete information (Zhang 1999: 32).

Though a translation activity is a dynamic game of incomplete information, it will be inadvisable for us to try to interpret the strategies adopted and decisions made in translation practice according to the arithmetic model provided by the perfect Bayesian Nash equilibrium (Zhang 1999: 32-33) employed by game theory. There are two reasons. Firstly, the strategies adopted by any participant of a translation activity can hardly go that far as to reach the "optimal" goal designated by game theory. In a translation process, though a participant who acts later makes adjustments to his or her preliminary decisions on the basis of his or her observation of the options or actions of the ones who act earlier, his or her efforts on locating the optimal strategy will be no more than an ideal if a thought is given to the complexity and uncertainty of the socio-cultural phenomena and individual behavior. Secondly, a participant who acts later in a translation activity cannot forecast the probability as to what type of player another participant who acts earlier belongs to by any chance on the basis of his or her observation of the options or actions of the participant in question. Even if such a probability is predictable, the actual strategies adopted by other participants are difficult to detect on a complete scale and on shifting grounds of the instability and diversity of cultural behavior in reality. What makes the picture more intricate is that even if knowledge of possible strategies

adopted by a participant is accessible, available approaches to the strategies are inexhaustible and to what extent a strategy has been carried out is incalculable in quantity.

These qualities of a translation activity make it stand out as a dynamic game of multiple phases with more than one participant and unpredictable results. The intricate side of the problem urges us to resort to an interpretation of the types and behavioral inclinations of the participants in a translation activity drawing on a de-mathematical analytical method of game theory.

With regard to the close or loose collaboration between the author's intention of composition or way of thinking and the mainstream ideology of the socio-historical environment in which s/he exists, the author can be of three types: the morally didactic type (in close collaboration with the mainstream ideology), the self-expressive type (in collaboration with the mainstream ideology or otherwise as the case with a conventional or creative writer in the artistic or aesthetic respect), the socially critical type (at least partially uncooperative). Three corresponding strategies for the different type of authors: consistency in catering to the taste favored by the mainstream ideology, maintaining intellectual independence, or keeping balance between the two strategies. Three methods for realization of the strategies: a traditional or a creative way of writing, a balance between the two methods.

In consideration of the motivation of the translating act, the initiator of the translating act can be of two types: one type that looks to social benefits and the other, economic returns. A couple of possible strategies to be chosen: stress on the depth of thought or the practical value of the translational product. The single method for realization of the strategies: seeking a translator who can meet the requirements.

Keeping the purpose of the translator's involvement in the translating act and the corresponding position of the target culture in view, the translator can be of three types – the type that works for academic, professional or practical purpose, for introduction of new ways of thinking during the transforming period of the receiving culture in a relatively unfavorable position, or for consolidation of the existing value system during the stable period of the receiving culture in a relatively privileged position. Corresponding strategies for various translators: reader-oriented approaches to translation, an operating orientation of full-scale foreignization or of something between foreignization

and domestication (the actual doing depends on the national mentality of the people of the nation and the given political and historical situation), an operating orientation of full-scale domestication or of something between domestication and foreignization (the actual doing also depends on the national mentality of the people of the nation and the given political and historical situation). Available ways to fulfill the goal: optional skills for translating and useful linguistic devices.

Readers of the original and the translated version can be classified in a similar way. Taking their reading intention (aiming to do a casual or purposeful reading) and receiving attitudes into consideration, readers can be of four types: the type showing readiness to accept, tolerable readiness to accept, little readiness to accept, readiness to reject. Corresponding strategies to be adopted by the four types of readers: total acceptance of the ideologies and linguistic features of the cultural product; a considerable degree of acceptance; a considerable degree of rejection; total rejection. The strategies mentioned are influenced by the joint efforts of the social, cultural, historical, and ideological forces of the socio-historical environment to which the readers belong. Above is a de-mathematical analysis for classification of the subjects and available strategies of the process of translation in the perspective of game theory.

With remarkable insight, Thomas points out that a game is a "theoretical model" in description of "conflicts of interests" (1984: 15). In the translational context, the subjects' reactions to *conflicts of interests* as the major components for a practical ethical theory of translation may be interpreted as follows:

1. As to the relation between the author and the reader of the source text or the one between the translator and the reader of the target text, the author and the translator both endeavor to strike a balance between the realization of the preliminary intention and the achievement of the expected effect so as to preserve the distinctive qualities of a cultural product's content and form as well as attend to the acceptability of the cultural product while the reader acts as the judge of the value of a cultural product and the beneficiary of the valuable or useful elements contained in the particular product simultaneously. It must be noted that the author and the reader of the source text may be of simultaneous (i.e. the period of the creation of the original by the author is contemporary with the period of reading by the reader) or non-simultaneous existence (i.e. the period of the creation of the original by the author precedes

the period of reading by the reader). It also holds true for the case of the translator and the reader of the target text.

If the author and the reader of the source text are of simultaneous existence, they must make adjustments to bring about reconciliation. It is the case because more often than not, neither the cultural production of the author as the creator of a cultural product or the consumption of the cultural product by the reader is a one-off act. Yet it all depends as to the adaptations and adjustments made on their parts respectively. If the author and the reader of the source text are of non-simultaneous existence, the adaptations and adjustments are made solely on the part of the reader.

The following points must be emphasized: If the reading of a source text occurs during the stable period of the receiving culture in a relatively privileged position, whether the judgments of an author or a text are left closed or open, an average reader will spare no efforts in adjusting his or her individual reading strategy in keeping with the prevailing value system of the society; if in addition, the author and the reader of the source text belong to the same historical period, the author will definitely change his or her later strategy of writing to comply with his or her inference or observation of the reading strategy or reactions of the reader if s/he is a conformist, or stick to the former strategy if s/he is of the critical or creative type.

If the reading of a source text occurs at the middle or later stage of a transforming period of the receiving culture in a relatively unfavorable position, with little pressure from the fetters of the dominant value system of the society on individual reading strategies, the reader often embraces an open-minded rather than a conservative way of thinking, the result of which is the diversity of reading strategies and reactions of the reader; if in addition, the author and the reader belong to the same historical period, the author meets little pressure on changing his or her earlier strategy of writing and has more freedom of creative writing.

But at the early stage of a transforming period of the target culture in a relatively unfavorable position, there is a considerable discrepancy between the self-location decided by the culture itself and its actual status, that is to say, the culture itself has not come to realize its degraded status as a weak force, and its national mentality still indulges in an imagination of the former strength of the nation. Under this condition, the behavioral inclinations of the author and the

reader are similar to that of the stable period of the target culture in a relatively privileged position. The behavioral inclinations of the translator and the reader of the target text can be inferred analogously.

2.   Keeping the relation between the author and the translator in view, if the author and the translator are of simultaneous existence, it is the author's natural desire for greater publicity of his or her cultural product by the publication of the translation without deformation or distortion of the original on the translator's part; whether the translator and the author are of simultaneous or non-simultaneous existence, the translator does not often translate as the author wishes or may wish because his or her translating act, in most cases, is strongly purposeful and his or her selections of strategies maintain close ties with the purpose of the translation practice. To put it in another way: If the author and the translator belong to the same historical period and the author gives the translator or the individual or institution as the initiator his or her permission to translate, the author simply takes the translated version as a reproduction of the original and hopes to see his or her creation truthfully presented in another form while the translator views the original as a preliminary product to be recreated or reconstructed and seeks a transformation of the original on the basis of calculations or considerations made against both the source culture background and the target culture one. On the whole, it is safe to say that, under circumstances of simultaneous existence, adjustments are often made and such efforts are usually rendered on the part of the translator. Of course, the real cases vary according to conditions.

If the translating act occurs during the stable period of a privileged target culture, which means that the translation practice aims to turn a cultural product of a subordinate source culture into a correspondent one of a privileged target culture, the selections of translational strategies made by the translator (regardless of his or her native language background) in a privileged position as the representative of the privileged target culture are highly restricted by the value system, ethics and moral principles of the target culture because of the strength of that culture and the unfavorable status held by the author of the other culture. Of course, the personal attitude of the translator must not be ignored. If the translator remains critical to the prevalent ideology of the dominating culture, s/he will try to resist the pressures from the

conventions or values of the privileged target culture, be they linguistic, cultural, ethical, social, or ideological.

If the translating act occurs at the middle or later stages of a transforming period of a subordinate target culture, which means that the translational operation aims to turn a cultural product of a dominating source culture into a correspondent one of a subordinate target culture, the selections of translational strategies made by the translator in an inferior position as the representative of the subordinate source culture are highly restricted by the value system, ethics and moral principles of the source culture or by the intention or status of the author because of the strength of the source culture and the superior status held by the author of that culture. Also, if the translator sticks to a critical way of thinking, s/he will not yield to the pressures from the dominating source culture completely while remaining alert in finding a chance for the subordinate target culture and language to play their due parts.

If the translating act occurs at the earlier stage of a transforming period of a subordinate target culture, keeping the considerable discrepancy between the self-location decided by the culture itself and its actual status in mind, it is the same story as the case with the stable period of a privileged target culture. Besides, the relation between the original and the translation can be reviewed in a similar way as the materialized variant of the relation between the author and the translator.

3. As for the relation between the initiator of the translating act and the translator, the initiator bents on the accomplishment of the expectations. Whether the translator can live up to the expectations depends on the initiator's knowledge of the background and capability of the translator and the translator's operating competence and working state in reality. The initiator chooses a suitable translator for the performance of translating while the translator adapts to the requirements of the initiator.

Since the production and reading of a cultural product are processes, it is natural to detect deviations, inconsistencies, changes and adjustments in making decisions on translation strategies. It must be pointed out that the above-mentioned theorization does not exclude exceptions because of the individuality and diversity of human behavior.

IV. Conclusion

A translation activity is a decision-making process, the result of which is not the product produced by a single decision based on a simple reason but complicated calculations of an array of social, historical, cultural or linguistic considerations. In this sense, "In game theory as applied to verbal communication there are only partial winners and never a perfect game" (Nida 1998:178) is a reasonable remark.

With an emphasis on the interactions between the phenomena and the subjects, game theory can provide better help if its analytical methods are stripped of their mathematic elements, which are unnecessarily burdensome and daunting under the present condition. In this sense, the practical intersubjective ethics of translation can provide a better explanation of whatever happens in translation activities.

BIBLIOGRAFIA

BERMAN, Antoine. Venuti, Lawrence. tr. "Translation and the Trials of the Foreign." *The Translation Studies Reader*. Ed. Venuti, L. London & New York: Routledge, 2000. 284-297.

CHESTERMAN, Andrew. "Ethics of Translation." *Translation as Intercultural Communication*. Snell-Hornby, M. et Al. Amsterdam & Philadelphia: John Benjamins Publishing Company, 1997. 147-160.

LEFEVERE, André. "Why Waste Our Time on Rewrites? The Trouble with Interpretation and the Role of Rewriting in an Alternative Paradigm." *The Manipulation of Literature*. Hermans, Theo. New York: St. Martin's Press, 1985. 215-243.

NIDA, Eugene A. *Language, Culture, and Translating*. Huhehaote: Inner Mongolia University Press, 1998.

SELA, Aner and Jan Vleugels "Game Theory." 1 Dce. 1997. 20 Aug. 2002< http://www.sfb504.uni-mannheim.de/glossary/game.htm >.

SHI, Xiquan. *Game Theory*. Shanghai : Press of Shanghai University of Finance and Economics, 2000.

THOMAS, L. C. *Games, Theory and Applications*. Chichester: Ellis Horwood Limited, 1984.

WINTER, Joachim. "Rational Behavior." 17 Jun. 1999. 20 Aug. 2002< http://www.sfb504.uni-mannheim.de/glossary/rational.htm >.

ZHANG, Weiying. *Game Theory and Information Economics*. Shanghai: Shanghai Sanlian Press & Shanghai People's Press, 1999.