

Paratext Translation Quality Assessment: *The Annals of Imperial Rome* as a Case Study

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Abstract

Genette (1987) describes a paratext as the threshold between a reader and a text, which presents the text to the readers, and influences how the text is received. Based on Genette's definition, this study makes further exploration of paratext translation and proposes that paratexts in translated works are constituted of the paratext in the original text and the additional parts from the translator and other participants. Mainly based on the translation assessment model proposed by Katharina Reiss, this essay suggests a three-principle model for the paratext translation quality assessment in historical text. Then mainly taking footnotes in *The Annals* as a case study, the essay explores the fundamental factors that influence the paratext translation quality in the historical text, and suggests taking the principles of completeness, preciseness, and conciseness into consideration.

Keywords: paratext translation, quality assessment, historical text, three-principle model

1. Introduction

The concept of paratext is defined by French scholar Gérard Genette in his book *Seuils (Thresholds)* in 1987. In this book, Genette offers a detailed description of the feature and function of each kind of paratext ranging from titles, epigraphs, prefaces, notes to the public and private epitext.

According to his definition, the paratext is what enables a text to become a book and to be offered as such to its readers and, more generally, to the public (Genette, 1999, p. 1). From the angle of spatial variables, Genette divides paratext into peritext and epitext. Peritexts are generally around the text or within the same volume, which primarily includes the prefaces, epigraphs, forewords, titles, notes, illustrations, index, postfaces, etc., while epitexts separate from the core text or locates outside the book, usually with the help of the media or private communications including interviews, conversations, letters, diaries, and others.

Surely, Genette also takes spatial, temporal, substantial, pragmatic, functional variables as well as the author's intention into consideration when he tries to classify paratexts. His concept of paratext with the criteria of spatial variables is accepted by most scholars. Furthermore, he regards translation as paratext of the original text, which raised heated discussions among scholars about the relationship between translation and paratext. Kathryn Batchelor makes deep analysis and discussion in *Translation and Paratexts*. She concludes that translated texts should be considered as a text in its own right, with its paratexts. Batchelor's viewpoints provide us a different way to look at translation and paratext, especially the paratext in the translated text. At the same time, when we strive to study the paratext in the translated text, there comes an essential question: what does paratext translation mean exactly? Does it contain only the paratext from the original text? Or it includes the paratext from the original text as well as those from translators, editors, and all of the additional paratexts added in the translated text?

This paper firstly approves Batchelor's claim that the translated text should be viewed as an independent with its paratext in the target language and culture. Based on this principle, paratext translation in my study covers the paratexts from the original text as well as paratexts added by translators, to be specific, it primarily focuses on the peritexts in the translated text.

Actually, according to Batchelor's statistics (2018, pp. 26–156), more than 100 English essays and several edited

volumes about paratext studies have been published after Genette's book. But most of them are mainly discussing the literary fiction. Some scholars turn their attention to the researches like audiovisual translation, music, comics, news, philosophy, political and religious text, while the amount of research into other domains is quite limited.

Different from other texts, historical text requires accurate historical information and factual background introduction to reveal the historical reality and the attitude of the historian. Generally speaking, to make the translation understandable and persuasive, the translated historical text usually has abundant peritexts. Some of these peritexts are from the original work, others mainly from translators. What is the distinct feature historical peritexts own? How do translators deal with these peritexts when they translate the historical text? What rules should be followed when translating historical peritext? How do we access the quality or value of historical peritext translation? In the following parts, taking peritext translation in *The Annals of Imperial Rome* as a case study, questions mentioned above will be explored in this paper.

2. Translation Quality Assessment Models Review

From the analysis and description above, one thing clear to us is that paratext translation is a part of translation. Therefore, before we start to discuss the paratext translation quality assessment, we need to take a general review of the existing translation quality assessment models and theories they adopted.

As we all know, people start to regard translation studies as a distinct discipline since James S. Holmes published his seminal paper *The Name and Nature of Translation Studies* in 1972. According to the map of translation studies (see Figure 1), which is described by Holmes and later presented by Gideon Toury (1995, p. 10), then filled by Jeremy Munday (2016, p. 20), translation quality assessment is a foundational part of translation criticism. Translation criticism goes with translating activities all the time, in the form of reviews or subjective remarks with intuitive or personal taste. Whereas Holmes believes that closer contact between translation scholars and translation critics could help to reduce the subjective elements in translation criticism (Venuti, 2004, pp. 180–192).

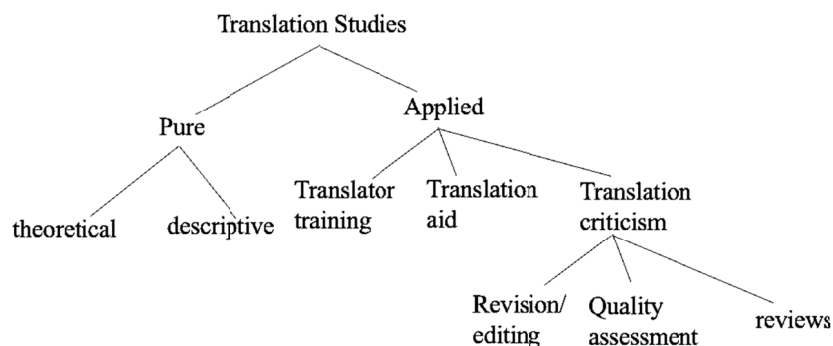


Figure 1. The map of translation studies (Toury, 1995, p. 10; Munday, 2016, p. 20)

From the discipline map Munday presented, we can see that branches of editing/revision, reviews, and translation quality assessment together constitute the translation criticism system. The editing/revision from publishers is usually viewed as initial steps, and reviews are regarded as something subjective or intuitive. Juliane House proposed the concept of translation quality assessment in her work *Translation Quality Assessment: A Model Revisited* (1997). Undoubtedly, employing systemic-functional linguistics and pragmatic theory and the notion of equivalence, House tries to establish a comparable objective criterion to evaluate the quality of translation. Nevertheless, her comprehensive model tries to cover all types of text, which provides neither criteria of equivalence nor feasible rules for different types of text. We can never establish a general model to guide all kinds of translation practice since translation is a comprehensive activity that involves different fields and text typologies.

With this point of view, another fundamental work worth mention is *Translation Criticism-The Potentials and Limitations: Categories and Criteria for Translation Quality Assessment from Katharina Reiss* (2000). Reiss (2000, pp. 16–25) believes that criticism begins with the type of text, which is significant for a valid translation.

She stresses that both linguistic and non-linguistic factors are essential for the translation process. Inspired by Karl Bühler’s three basic functions of language: represent (objectively), express (subjectively), and appeal (persuasively), Reiss divides texts into content-focused text, form-focused text, and appeal-focused text, which stand for the depictive, expressive, and persuasive function respectively.

According to the text typology of Reiss, historical text undoubtedly belongs to the content-focused type, which stresses content and information. The invariance of context and information could be considered as an important standard to assess the translation quality of the historical text. In other words, the precondition of translation is that we admit firstly the invariance in content-focused text, then the task of translation is to transfer the invariance from source language to target language. In fact, in the latest book *Translation Quality Assessment: Past and Present*, House (2015, p. 11) claims that equivalence is one of the core concepts in translation quality assessment. By combining the concept of text typology with the concept of invariance, this study tries to establish a model of the paratext translation quality assessment of the historical text.

3. The Annals of Imperial Rome as a Case Study

3.1 Features of *The Annals* as a Historical Text

The Annals of Imperial Rome is regarded as the greatest one among Tacitus’ five history works. It mainly records the stories of emperors in ancient Rome from Tiberius to Nero (A.D. 14–68). As a post-Augustan historian, Tacitus (1988, p. 16) incorporates some Roman traditional features of historical writing in *The Annals* to create emotional effects, aiming at pathetic stress and seeking to make events seem tragic.

By narrating stories of emperors, a lot of characters in this period of history are introduced. At the same time, the battle scenes are described with geographic details and accurate recording of the time and place. The original Latin work is translated into several English versions, among which two classical ones from John Jackson and Michael Grant are translated into Chinese. Just like I stated above, as a historical work of the post-Augustan period in Roman, *The Annals* owns distinguishing features, such as the hardly-distinguished Roman names, ancient geographic cities, tribes, rivers, and mountains, the specific and accurate time and place recordings. Considering all of these features and elements, the translation of paratext in the *Annals* undoubtedly requires accuracy and concision, which is also the initial intention of this study.

Kathryn Batchelor’s model is quite reasonable, but she still holds the idea of viewing the translated text as the paratext of the original text. Actually, from the perspective of paratext, the translated text could be regarded as another version of the original text with an expanded paratext in different languages and cultures. By using metaphors, the translated text could be seen as a sibling, a clone, a shadow, anything but a minor part of the original text. From Figure 2, we can see the relation and difference between the paratext of original work and translated work. It becomes clear that the paratext of the translated text includes the paratext from the original work and the added paratext from the translator. In addition, a part of the epitext of the original text could be taken in and become peritext of the translated work.

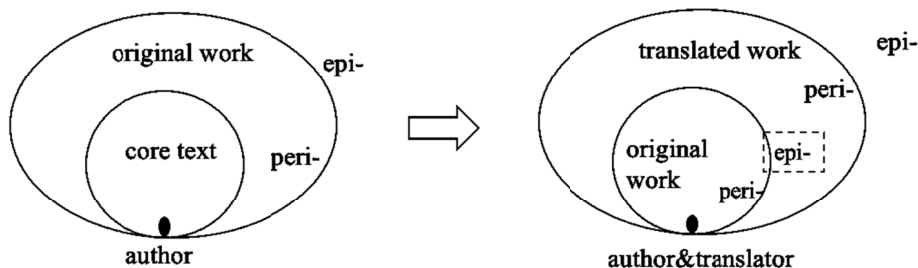


Figure 2. The paratext of the original work and translated work

3.2 Paratext TQA Model for Historical Text

Because of the distinguishing features of historical text, paratext plays a significant role to help readers to obtain some background information and the context like time, place, the historical character introduction, or essential historical event. In a sense, the paratext of translated work provides a space for translators to help and guide

readers to understand the original work easily and quickly. But low-quality paratext may mislead readers or even bring extra burden for their reading.

It's fortunate for me to take part in a translation program of western classics and be in charge of partial paratext translation work of the *Annals*. Based on reading experience and translation practice, this study advances a fundamental three-principle paratext TQA model, which requires the completeness, preciseness, and conciseness. The principle of completeness requires paratext in translated work covers the paratext of original work as well as the added part from the translator or editor for the translated version. In other words, it requires not only the prefaces, footnotes, illustrations, index, technical terms to be retained but also the added part from translated work, especially the part from the translator. Meanwhile, the principle of preciseness indicates all the information in the paratext should be correct and accurate, such as the footnotes about where or when, as well as other publishing information. But beyond that, high-quality paratext should be reader-friendly, to be specific, it should be relevant to the context and helpful for readers to understand, the expression needs to be condensed and clear, the logic must be explicit and coherent. In this way, the three principles of paratext TQA in a historical text, therefore, constitute a simple triangle model like Figure 3. If the model is considered as a hierarchy system, the principle of completeness should be the first and primary, then preciseness and lastly conciseness.

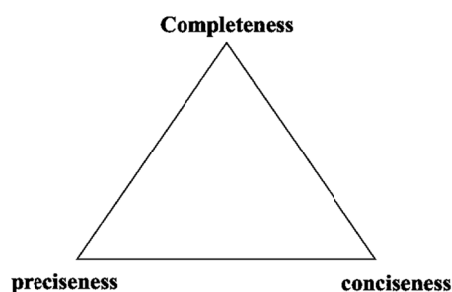


Figure 3. The paratext TQA model for historical text

3.3 Apply the TQA Model into Two Versions of *The Annals*

As Genette's division of paratext into peritext and epitext, those extra-text elements like the author's diaries, interviews, or reviews are considered as epitext. But when we talk of the paratext of a book, we generally indicate the peritext of a book instead of epitext. This study hence focuses on the peritext of translated work especially the footnotes as case studies.

First of all, according to the principle of completeness, by comparing the primary parts of the paratexts in two Chinese versions of the *Annals*, it's easy to find the statistics of Table 1 shows that Wang Yizhu's translation is better than He Yan & Gao Shuwen's version.

Table 1. The rough statistics of the paratext in two Chinese versions of the *Annals*

Two versions/peritexts	prefaces	footnotes	index	illustration	postface	Terminological terms
Wang's Yizhu's translation	✓	✓	✓	✓	X	X
He Yan & Gao Shuwen's translation	X	✓	X	X	✓	X

Whereas the principle of completeness doesn't mean translators can't do any change or deletion in paratext translation, because the three-principle model should be applied to the paratext of the original text before translation, in this way, translators could add the necessary information for the target language readers when the paratext of the original text can't provide. In the same way, translators could also do corrections, revisions, or deletions when the original paratext contains incorrect or unnecessary information. Furthermore, to be reader-friendly, translators should adopt a pithy expression even when the original paratext does not. Therefore, the principle of completeness doesn't mean unchangeableness, and in practice, the situation is usually more complicated. In addition, target readers should be considered as an important parameter. In other words, the three-principle model should be applied to the original paratext altogether, which can help to achieve real completeness in the target language.

Then, when we compare the two versions, it's not difficult to find that there are more obvious errors about the

time and name in He's version. As we all know, time and names are critical information for historical text, as the errors of time and names in the footnotes can mislead or even confuse readers. One typical example could be shown in the following part:

Another death was that of Junia Tertulia, ... a full sixty-three years after Philippi³.

[3] 菲利披之役发生在罗马建城 712 年, 即公元前 61 年。(Tacitus, 2007, p. 414)

According to the context here, the year of Junia's death is 22 A.D., a full sixty-three years after Philippi, which indicates that the war of Philippi may happen in 41 B.C. instead of 61 B.C. offered in the footnote. Undoubtedly, mistakes like that could only make readers confusing, which is obviously against the principle of preciseness, and not reader-friendly.

Lastly, when we apply the principle of conciseness to analyze these two versions, we can find that Wang's version is full of irrelevant or incoherent information in the footnotes. In the following parts, two typical cases will be exhibited and analyzed.

Another death was that of Junia Tertulla, niece of Cato, wife of Gaius Cassius, sister of Brutus...

还有一个人去世了, 她就是优尼娅·特尔图拉, 她是加图的外甥女、盖乌斯·卡西乌斯的妻子, 马尔库斯·布鲁图斯的妹妹².....

[2] 加图的姊妹谢尔维里娅起初嫁给了马尔库斯·尤尼乌斯·布鲁图斯, 后来又嫁给戴奇姆斯·尤尼乌斯·西拉努斯。她第一次结婚时生下了暗杀过凯撒的布鲁图斯, 第二次结婚后生下了卡西乌斯的妻子特尔图拉。(Tacitus, 1997, p. 194)

From the context of the original text, about Junia Tertulla, we have already known that she is the niece of Cato, wife of Gaius Cassius, sister of Brutus. The original text provides readers an adequate introduction about her to help readers to understand the context. And there are no footnotes in the English version, but Wang chooses to offer a quite long footnote here to explain the two marriages of Junia's mother. If readers stop to read this footnote about Junia's mother, they may find it's not helpful for them to understand the death of Julia. The question is therefore that the function of the footnotes in translated works is not to tell readers everything translators know, but depending on if it is helpful to understand the context and make the reading easier, quicker, and more convenient. If translators can't follow this rule, the footnotes they added may cause obstacles or confusion instead of providing guidance and help.

If relevance is the first thing that the principle of conciseness requires, clearness and coherence are undoubtedly secondarily essential elements that need to be stressed. We can believe that high-quality paratexts are just reader-friendly, and they help readers tackle queries with efficient and clear methods instead of causing more puzzles. In quite a lot of situations, however, paratexts are merely overdone.

This year being the eight-hundredths since Rome's foundation, Secular Games were celebrated, sixty-four years after those of Augustus.

这一年, 罗马建城 800 年的时候, 罗马举行了一次百年祭², 这一次是在奥古斯都前一次举办百年祭的 64 年之后

[2] 百年祭大约是公元前 249 年制定的, 每百年举行一次。第二次是在公元前 146 年, 比规定晚了三年, 但在公元前 46 年却没有举办。奥古斯都利用西比拉预言书中所说的 110 年的世纪和十五祭司团的传统, 设法在公元前 17 年举行了百年祭。克劳狄乌斯又恢复了百年的世纪。多米提安采用了奥古斯都的办法, 但是他提前六年举行了祭礼 (Tacitus, 2007, p. 669)。

From the perspective of readers, when reading the original text, about Secular Games, we may notice its relations between Roman's foundation and Augustus. But when we read, do we need to know how many times or in which year it was celebrated? Maybe the only information readers need is about why Secular Games are celebrated, or the reason not being celebrated regularly in Roman history. But the footnote is trying to provide background with all detailed information about the Secular Games and failed to make the information clear and coherent, let alone help readers to understand.

4. Conclusion

Although Genette gives a persuasive definition of paratext, he doesn't take too much effort to explore the issue of paratext translation. By providing necessary background information like time, place, introduction to some relevant historical characters, paratext is an essential part of historical text. Paratext translation plays an important role in the quality of historical text translation, but problems in paratext translation have been ignored for a long time. This essay focuses on exploring the elements that influence the quality of paratext translation in

a historical text and put forward a simplified but manipulable model to help assessing the quality of historical paratext translation.

Furthermore, this essay tries to define the paratext translation and points out the significance of paratext translation in historical work by analyzing its distinguished features. To make further exploration, the author takes the paratext translation of *The Annals* as a case study and suggests considering the completeness, preciseness, and conciseness as the three-principle paratext TQA model for historical text.

In short, after reviewing the previous TQA models, we can know that it's too difficult to establish a TQA model for all types of texts. This study, therefore, contributes to build a paratext quality assessment model for historical text in hope of improving reader-friendly paratext translation.

In this way, this paper aims to provide a new angel to think about the quality of paratext translation in the historical text. At the same time, historical text could be considered as one of the most important academic texts. Therefore, the three-principle model established in this paper may bring inspirations for the academic texts in other disciplines, such as philosophy, economics, politics, etc.

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