

Study on the English Translation of *Someone to Talk To* from the Perspective of Toury's Translation Norms

Xiaoqing Chen

School of Foreign Languages, Henan University of Technology, Henan Zhengzhou 450001

Abstract: *Someone to Talk To* is a local novel written by Liu Zhenyun, a writer from Henan Province. This novel won the Mao Dun Literature Prize in 2011. The English version of the novel was translated and published by the famous American sinologist Howard Goldblatt and his wife. Based on Toury's translation norms theory, this paper analyzes the factors that influence the formation of the English version of the book and the translator's choice and implementation of translation strategies from three aspects: preparatory norms, initial norms and operational norms, and finally draws a conclusion. This study attempts to help Chinese culture "go global" and let the world hear the voice of China better through the theory of translation norms.

Keywords: Translation norms; *Someone to Talk To*; Toury

1. Introduction

In 2009, Liu Zhenyun's *Someone to Talk To* was published, causing a stir and receiving critical acclaim, winning the People's Literature Award in 2009 and the Mao Dun Literature Award in 2011. Due to its description of Chinese-style loneliness, it is also known as the Chinese version of *One Hundred Years of Solitude*. In 2018, renowned sinologist Howard Goldblatt and his wife Lin Lijun co-translated the English version of *Someone to Talk To*, which was published by Duke University Press, contributing to the "going abroad" of Chinese culture.

At present, although there are a certain number of research results on this book in domestic academic circles, they are mainly on the literary level, such as "narratology", "rhetoric", "thematic analysis" and so on. However, there are few textual analyses that apply translation theory. Only two papers have analyzed the English translation of Howard Goldblatt and his wife from the perspective of translation theory, one using a bilingual corpus to analyze the English translation of the verb "say", and one applying the theory of translator behavior criticism to study the degree of translator behavior in the vernacular language in *Someone to Talk To*. Under the background of "One Belt, One Road", the state emphasizes the excellent Chinese traditional culture to go out. As a part of the excellent Chinese traditional culture, Zhongyuan culture should also follow the trend of the times and seize the opportunity. Based on this, this paper analyzes and discusses the English translation of the Chinese cultural work *Someone to Talk To* from the perspective of Toury's translation standard theory, and describes the translation process.

2. Theoretical Foundation

According to Toury, translation is influenced by many factors that go beyond the sphere of the source text, the systematic differences between languages, the textual traditions involved in translation, and even the cognitive abilities of the translator, and are at the level of society and culture. The social constraint that lies between rules and characteristics is the norm^[2]. In the translation process, the translator must not only take into account the cultural connotations contained in the reproduction of the source language, but also be influenced by the target language's linguistic habits and its cultural environment. Translation studies should not be limited to whether the translation is completely correct to the original English or whether it meets aesthetic standards, but should also look at macro factors in the translation process, such as political context, cultural environment, social system, economic situation, etc. Toury believes that translation norms influence and determine translation choices and translation results, and further divides translation norms into three major categories: preparatory norms, initial norms, and operational norms.

3. *Someone to Talk To* from Toury's Translation Norms

3.1 Preliminary Norm in *Someone to Talk To*

There are many factors involved in the Preliminary Norm, such as the attitude of the publisher, the expectations of the target readers, the personal preferences of the translator and the differences in translation policies.

First is the support from Chinese policy. Since the reform and opening up, government propaganda agencies have hosted literary translation projects and exported Chinese literature and culture abroad through the Panda Series. Liu Zhenyun's novels first went abroad through the Panda Series, which provided an opportunity for Liu's novels to be translated and disseminated in the English-speaking world. Although *Someone to Talk To* did not go to the sea through the Panda Series, Liu's previous works also laid the foundation for subsequent translations and dissemination.

Second, the translators' personal favorites are high. The translation of Liu Zhenyun's novel into the English-speaking world was made possible by Howard Goldblatt and Lin Lijun, who appreciated Liu Zhenyun's novel. As early as 2011, Howard Goldblatt had translated Liu's novel *Cell Phone: A Novel* into the English-speaking world, and in an interview with Beijing Youth Daily in 2013, Howard Goldblatt commented, "These little people are abominable and cute, and Liu Zhenyun looks at the thoughts and behaviors of these little citizens very thoroughly." Ge's translation of Liu Zhenyun's novels has a strong continuity and a short publication cycle, which helps to ensure the stability of the readership and the number of readers and arouses the expectations of the target readers^[4].

Once again, the translation and publication of the work would not have been possible without the support of the publisher. *Someone to Talk To* was published by Duke University Press in 2018. The Ge couple mentions on the title page that the publication of the English translation of *Someone to Talk To* would not have been possible without the support of Beijing Changjiang New Century Culture and Media Company and Duke University Press. Before translating *Someone to Talk To*, Mr. and Mrs. Ge had already translated several novels by Liu Zhenyun, and Chinese government agencies, translation and literary circles, and the publishing industry had always been supportive, and *Someone to Talk To* was also included in the Sinotheory series by American sinologists Zhou Chengyin and Luo Peng. *Someone to Talk To* has also been included in the Sinotheory series by American sinologists Zhou Chengyin and Luo Peng.

3.2 Initial Norm in *Someone to Talk To*

A study of the English translation of *Someone to Talk To* reveals that the translator tries to balance both norms.

On the one hand, the translator follows the principle of "adequacy" by directly translating the names of people and places phonetically, while presenting the true meaning of the folk saying "catch a thief with the loot and catch the adulterers in cahoots" through the strategy of Foreignization. The translation rhymes with "oot" and the original rhymes with "ang", and the sentence-by-sentence translation does not make significant changes or add notes, reflecting the respect for the cultural norms of the source language. At the same time, the principle of "acceptability" is followed, and the translation is made as close as possible to the target language readers to make it easy to understand and enhance the readability of the translation.

3.3 Operational Norm in *Someone to Talk To*

Compared with the original text, the translator has not made any omission, addition or repositioning changes in the paragraphs under the principle of "adequacy" and "acceptability", and the structure is standardized so that readers can feel the original taste and appreciate the charm of the original text.

In terms of language, first of all, the translator chooses phonetic translations for things that are unique to Chinese culture, such as names of places, people and terms of address, and translates them as much as possible in the context of the original culture, so that readers can feel the original Chinese culture. There are a lot of different names of places and people in the book, such as "Yanjin", "Linfen", "Wenjiazhuang" and "Yang Baishun", "Yanjin", "Linfen", "Wenjiazhuang," and "Yang Baishun," "Lao Ma," and "Lao Zeng," which the translator translates as "Yanjin," "Linfen," and "Wen Village," respectively, "Wen Village", "Yang Baishun", "Old Ma", " Old Zeng". The same is true for the translation of honorific words, for example, in Chinese there is a special name for the wife of an elder brother - "sister-in-law", which can also refer to a married woman in general. In English, the term "sister-in-law" has no equivalent in English, so it is difficult to translate it into English. When translating the word "sister-in-law", the translator transliterated it as "Saozi".

Secondly, for the translation of vulgar words and dialects, the translator adopts a naturalization strategy and tries to use language that is close to the everyday language of Western readers, which fully demonstrates the "acceptability" of the translation. For example, the vulgar word "fuck" is very common, but the translator does not translate it as "Tamade", but as "damn you". "goddamned". The same is true for dialect translation. In Henan dialect, "spraying air" means chatting, but the translator did not translate it as "chat", but translated it

as "shooting the breeze" according to the culture of the incoming language. The translator did not directly translate it as "chat", but translated it as "shooting the breeze" according to the culture of the language, which is a very authentic and close-to-life expression, and matches the style of the text very well. Some folk words that are difficult to translate, such as "dancing the fire", are translated as "perform", which avoids the difficulty of expressing the original meaning and makes it easier for readers to understand. Such a translation process also reflects that the Ge's have taken into account the language habits and cultural background of the target language in the translation process.

4. Conclusion

Based on the Translation Norms theory proposed by Gideon Toury, this paper analyzes and discusses the English translation of *Someone to Talk To*, which mainly involves three levels, namely, preparatory norm, initial norm and operational norm. It is found that while conveying the meaning and spirit of the original work, the English translation of *Someone to Talk To* takes into account the expression habits and cultural background of the target language, reduces the traces of translation, strives to create emotional resonance with foreign readers, and draws readers closer to the work. In translation practice, translators take into account the cultural paradigms of both the source language and the target language, showing respect for the original work and the culture of the source language, while also trying to enhance readability, better disseminate outstanding Chinese literary works and expand the influence of Chinese culture. In the process of translation, the three major norms simultaneously influence the translation process and interact with each other. The author believes that in the future development process of "going abroad" of Chinese traditional culture and literary works, translators should seriously consider the constraints of a series of social norms on translation activities, tell the Chinese story in a practical way, and at the same time make the translation close to the readers of the target language and take care of the needs of the readers of the incoming language. In this way, they can better spread Chinese traditional culture and let the world hear Chinese voices.

References

- [1] Goldblatt, Howard; Li-Chun Lin, Sylvia. *Someone to Talk To* [M]. Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2018.
- [2] Toury, Gideon. *In Search of a Theory of Translation* [M]. Jerusalem: Israel Academic Press, 1980.
- [3] Qingliu Li, Guozhi Liu. Dissemination of the English-language Panda Series in the United States[J]. *World Chinese Literature Forum*, 2017, (04): 29-37.
- [4] Lu Shao, Wei Li. Translation and Reception of Liu Zhenyun's Novels in the English-speaking World [J]. *Southern Literary Forum*, 2020, (06): 98-105.
- [5] Sui Tang. An Overview of the Study of Translation Norms in Toury [J]. *China Market*, 2016, (05): 203-204.
- [6] Meng Wang. News Translation in the Context of Toury Translation Specification Theory[J]. *Journalist's Cradle*, 2020, (11): 39-40.
- [7] Shuzhen Zhang, Ning Zhao. Toury and the Theory of Translation Norms [J]. *Journal of Chongqing Institute of Science and Technology (Social Science Edition)*, 2009, (06): 136-137.