

## A Brief Analysis of Peter Newmark's Communicative Translation Theory

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**Abstract:** Peter Newmark (1916-2011) was one of the representative figures in translation field of the English-speaking countries in the twentieth century. The paper mainly introduces Newmark's viewpoints on translation theory, especially his basic principles of the Communicative Translation Theory, that is, the principle of receptor-oriented strategies, the principle of equivalence-expected effect as well as the principle of information accuracy. It is based on text type and language function to translate, which makes the translation smoother and clearer to the target language readers. In that case, it can reduce the understanding obstacles of the foreigners.

### 1. Introduction

The Communicative Translation Theory is proposed by Peter Newmark, who first puts forward that texts should be divided into expressive, informative and vocative texts and distinguishes semantic translation and communicative translation based on this. The traditional semantic translation focuses on the source text, the formation of it and the intention of the source text producer. It often suits expressive text, authoritative documents, technical texts and those emphasizing the thoughts and emotion of the author without much consideration for the readers. While the communicative translation focuses on the reader and aims to produce the same effect. The emphasis of the Communicative Translation Theory is on the vocative texts such as advertisement, public signs, news and so on, thus it not only analyzes the words of the source text but also the readers of the target text so as to achieve the best translation.

### 2. Previous Studies on Newmark's Translation Theory

The emergence of Newmark's translation theory arouses great attention in translation academic field both in the west and in China. His two books, *Approaches to Translation* and *A Textbook on Translation* have significant effects on translation scholars and teachers and his *Communicative Translation Theory* has great practical significance for guiding the 'vocative' texts, like the public signs and advertisements.

#### 2.1 Previous Studies Abroad

Translation having attracted wide publicity can be traced back to the end of the 1960s when many scholars were at odds over literal translation or liberal translation. From the perspective of Peter Newmark, "the argument was theoretical: the purpose of the translation, the nature of the readership, the type of text, was not discussed."<sup>[5]</sup>, and there should not be one suitable method for all types of text analysis. Hence, He began to write some specialized essays and works on translation. On the basis of abundant translation practice and teaching experience, his translation theory began to take shape. In 1981, his first representative works, *Approaches to Translation* was published and immediately gained wide attention, in which *Semantic Translation* and *Communicative Translation*, as well as text typology was elaborated in detail. He pointed out: "semantic translation is for 'expressive' texts, communicative for 'vocative' texts" and the translator should take the translator's purpose, the nature of readership and text typology into account". What's more, Newmark took a unique perspective on the study of translation and his translation theory has its own distinctive characteristics. He always emphasized the close connection of

translation theory and practice. However, scholars and translators have different judgments on his translation theory. Translation researchers in the west made an overall evaluation of Newmark's translation approach:

Eugene A. Nida, the developer of the Dynamic-equivalence Bible-translation theory, stated in the foreword of *Approaches to Translation: Semantic and Communicative translating* is Newmark's major contribution to the translation field.

German professor, Wolfram Wilss, one of the representatives of translation field, he relegated Newmark's translation theory to the text-linguistic approach because he maintained that translator must use specific translation strategies to deal with specific text-type.

Roger T. Bell<sup>[7]</sup>, well known in the field of linguistics and translation studies for his book *Translation and Translating: Theory and Practice*, indicated that Newmark didn't use the concept "theory" appropriately and that what Newmark advocated was a summarization of superficial common sense of translation.

Jeremy Munday, a professor in Spanish and translation studies at the University of Leeds, criticized Newmark's strong prescriptivism and his language of evaluation deviated from his "prelinguistic era" of translation studies, but at the same time, he acknowledged that examples in Newmark's works provided ample guidance and advice for the trainee<sup>[2]</sup>.

Another famous interpreter scholar, Sergio Viaggio holds the opinion that Newmark's theory is a wrong and didactically dangerous one for the reason that Newmark refused to distinguish linguistic semantic meaning from extra-linguistic sense while Viaggio regards sense as the aim of translation.<sup>[8]</sup>

Hatim & Mason declares that the benefits of Newmark's Communicative and Semantic Translation Theory over Nida's Formal and Dynamic Equivalence Theory is that the former is not inclined to extremism so that the translator can choose in between but is not always inclined to be in one side.<sup>[1]</sup>

## 2.2 Previous Studies at Home

Newmark's translation theory arouses the interest of the professionals since it was introduced into China by Professor Wang Zongyan<sup>[9]</sup>. However, scholars have made different researches on the theory.

Firstly, some books and theses made an introduction to and simple analysis of Newmark's views on translation theory, such as:

Lin Xiaoqin<sup>[4]</sup> published an article entitled *Newmark's Semantic Translation and Communicative Translation in Chinese Translators Journal*. The author first explained the characteristics of Semantic Translation Theory and Communicative Translation Theory and the differences between the two, as well as the text type proposed by Newmark before briefly discussing the application of the two divisions of the theory. However, few examples were used in this article.

Liu Shusen's paper in *Chinese Translators Journal* introduced Newmark's opinions of translation criticism based on his book *A Textbook of Translation*. He indicated that Newmark's views on translation criticism include five aspects: text analysis, the translator's purpose, comparing the translation with the original, an evaluation of the translation, an assessment of the translation in the target language or culture, based on these, two approaches to translation criticism, functional and analytical criticism methods, were put forwarded.

Cheng Mei published an article in *Shanghai Journal of Translators for Science and Technology*. The paper made a brief review of Newmark's translation theory from three aspects: 1) the nature and functions of translation theory and its evaluation on western translation theory; 2) the basic standards in the translation process; 3) the intentions and procedures of translation criticism.

Liao Qiyi<sup>[3]</sup> published a book called *Contemporary Translation Studies in the UK* by Hubei Education Press. The fourth chapter of the book introduced the major viewpoints of Newmark's translation theory: language function and language meaning, nature of translation, Semantic and Communicative Translation and so on.

Secondly, some scholars discussed the advantages and the disadvantages of the translation theory after comparing it with other theories.

After comparing it with Nida's Dynamic Equivalence Theory, Lin Kenan believed that Newmark's views of translation are worth wide application because Newmark divided texts into different types according to text functions and different texts demanded different translation methods.

Thirdly, a large number of researches adopt Newmark's theory to be a guidance to the translation practice.

Xu Cuimin and Liu Zequan<sup>[10]</sup> published an article named Culturally-loaded Words in Hong Lou Meng and Their Translations in Its Three English Versions. It analyzed translation strategies in the light of Peter Newmark's Semantic and Communicative Translation Theory and explored to what extent the three translators succeed in representing the cultural connotations of culturally-loaded words in the versions.

It can be seen from the analyses above, previous studies on Newmark's theory both at home and abroad focus on the introduction, appreciation and criticism of the theory. Two aspects can be generated: on the one hand, previous researches have acknowledged the reasonability of the theory, despite the fact that some shortcomings are pointed out. It should be emphasized that no theory is flawless but focus on one or some specific translation phenomena, thus the vigor of Newmark's theory can be seen from the previous researches. On the other hand, the application of Newmark's theory is not that well-developed, thus it is necessary to expand the scope of it.

### **3. Newmark's Viewpoints on Translation Theory**

As a remarkable translator and linguist, he had been a translator of European languages for many years and was also very influential in the Spanish-speaking world. He used to be the president of the Institute of Linguists and devoted all his life to interpreting teaching between English and German, English and French. He combined translation studies with language studies, and used linguistic theories to guide the translation practice. He pointed out that translation is not only a science but also an art as well as a skill, and the aim of his translation studies is to solve the real problems in the process of the translational action. Furthermore, he summarized the laws of translation practice. Therefore, his translation theory is guided and is to the point.

With a review of Peter Newmark's text typology and his translation theory, it is not exaggerated to state that his translation theory can be considered as his biggest achievement and the most influential part of his researches. Thus, Newmark's translation methods gain much attention from the academic and translation fields, and this is his best-known contribution to translation.

On the basis of summarizing and absorbing other theorists' research results, Newmark divides language functions into the expressive function, the informative function, the vocative function, the phatic function, the aesthetic function and the metalingual function, according to the content and writing style of the text. Among these six functions of language, Newmark presents that the expressive, the informative and the vocative are the three chief functions of language use. Therefore, based on the three main functions of language use, Newmark put forward his text-categories: the expressive type, and informative type and the vocative type, and correspondingly, each type correspond to different translation methods. In his view, "only Semantic and Communicative Translation fulfill the two main aims of translation, which are first, accuracy, and second, economy, and Semantic Translation is used for 'expressive' texts, Communicative Translation for 'informative' and 'vocative' texts."<sup>[5]</sup>

### **4. The Basic Principles of the Communicative Translation Theory**

In Peter Newmark's famous book *Approaches to Translation*, two translation theories are introduced: Semantic Translation and Communicative Translation. He claimed that "Communicative Translation attempts to produce on its readers an effect as close as possible to that obtained on the readers of the original"<sup>[5]</sup>. It can be inferred from the definition that Communicative

Translation emphasize the “force” rather than the content of the message, which attempts to render the exact contextual meaning of the original. In such way, both content and language are readily acceptable and comprehensible to the readership. As the definition mentioned above, three basic principles of the Communicative Translation Theory should be highlighted.

#### **4.1 Principle of the Receptor-Oriented Strategies**

Newmark points out that Communicative Translation is subject to the target language culture and gives priority to the reader. The main purpose of these texts is to communicate, to make readers addressed. In other words, in the process of translation, it lays emphasis on the readers’ comprehension and response. Therefore, the principle of the receptor-oriented ranks first.

Take the translation of cosmetic advertisement as example, this kind of translation is not for native people but for foreign customers. The purpose of the translation is to improve the foreign consumers’ recognition and acceptance of the brand. For such kind of text, just like Newmark said, we should lay stress on the reader’s culture and language; put emphasis on the reader’s response but not on the form. Only in this way can we achieve the desired effects of translation. We must admit that different countries have different cultures and languages, and different people have different ways to operate his language. All these differences will produce barriers in translation. If Communicative Translation is adopted, the grammatical structure of source language text should be modified according to the receptors’ language and culture.

Newmark advocates that the vocative text require Communicative Translation Theory rather than Semantic Translation Theory. Under the guidance of the Communicative Translation Theory, translation is not bound to the structure and language environment of the source text. Translators should focus more on the receptor and the environment of acceptors rather than the original work. That is to say, Communicative Translation Theory is capable of explaining and describing the original information more freely. In a word, the translator can reorganize the syntax under the guidance of Communicative Translation method, not to follow the standard of the original language form, and translate the phrases and words according to the target language and culture. In this way, the translation can be lucid and easy to be understood by the receptors.

#### **4.2 Principle of Equivalence-Expected Effect**

In Newmark’s words, the Communicative Translation Theory attempts to produce on its readers an effect as close as possible to that received on the readers of the source language. Equivalence-expected effect should be realized from the angle of the receptor. He thinks that in the translation of vocative texts, the equivalent effect is not only desirable but also essential.

In his famous works, *Approaches to Translation*, he holds that Communicative Translation addresses itself solely to the second language reader, who does not anticipate difficulties and obscurities, and would expect a generous transfer of foreign elements into his own culture as well as his language where necessary. For this reason, the translator should use his own language to produce a better version of high quality. It can be inferred that the Communicative Translation is more likely to create equivalent effect than the Semantic Translation.

#### **4.3 Principle of Information Accuracy**

According to Newmark’s Communicative Translation Theory, accuracy information is important in communicative translation, thus, the third principle of the Communicative Translation Theory is accuracy. Taking the translation purpose into consideration, we should ensure that the messages and information of the original text is true and correct.

In Communicative Translation, the accuracy of the message is also important. Although we can change the form of the original text and pay great attention to the readership, the translation should express the message of the original in the first place. If a translator fails to be faithful to the original text and maintain the accuracy of the message, what he does is not translating, but rewriting. Newmark holds that the main purpose of language is to communicate. As a kind of communication, the primary purpose of translation is nothing but to convey the accurate information between the sender and the receiver. Therefore, it is obvious that the main task of the translator is to transmit the

accurate message of the writer to the reader without much consideration of the author's personal style.

In short, the translator can adjust the structure of the original sentences, change the modes of expression and add supplementary information to the version under the Communicative Translation Theory. However, this does not mean that the translator can be disrespectful to the original content. On the contrary, the translator should transmit the original information as precise as possible.

## 5. Conclusion

Newmark, as an influential translator in the field of translation, has a profound influence and positive enlightenment on translation. With the help of his Communicative Translation Theory, the vocative texts like advertisement, public signs and news can be analyzed via a novel angle. In addition, three main principles of the Communicative Translation Theory are regarded as the guiding principles in the translation.

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