An Ecological Approach
to the Interdisciplinary Construction of Translatology: Theoretical Discourse Systems Reconsidered[1]

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Translatology, striving for disciplinary autonomy, should establish itself on its own particular system of theoretical discourse, which can not only cover hierarchical research areas that define the discipline, but present its basis of the heterogeneous translation practice. A systematic interdisciplinary construction of theoretical discourse involves multidimensional considerations, such as the structure and functions of the theoretical system, the methodology of interdisciplinary theorization, the interdisciplinary reemployment of terminology, and the quality assessment of theoretical discourse. This paper, based on a critical review of some influential theoretical blueprints of the discipline of translatology and inspired by the ecological philosophy and wisdom introduced in the paper, makes an in-depth analysis of those meta-theoretical issues. Finally, based on its viewpoints on those meta-theoretical issues, this paper briefly reviews the theoretical discourse of the existing ecological approach to translatology instituted in China and offers suggestions on its further development. The meta-theoretical argument and viewpoints in the paper, demonstrating the guiding role of ecological wisdom in a systematic thinking about the construction of theoretical discourse in translatology, will contribute to the theoretical development of translatology in general and the existing ecological approach to translatology in particular.

Key words: translatology, interdisciplinary construction, ecological approach, theoretical discourse system

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1. Introduction

The rapid development of translatology has always been based on a variety of interdisciplinary approaches. On the other hand, for the purpose of developing into a separate (rather than affiliated) discipline, translatology must be built on its own particular system of theoretical discourse. This theoretical system should not only cover hierarchical research areas that characterize the nature of the discipline, but present its basis of the heterogeneous translation practice. The system of theoretical discourse should be established as an effective explanatory framework of different levels and aspects of translation activity. This is an inevitable step toward the theoretical maturity and integration of the discipline of translatology.

The build-up of the theoretical system, for the newly developed discipline, should be based on a holistic thinking about the interconnection and incorporation of existing interdisciplinary approaches. This holistic thinking could be furthered by drawing epistemological and methodological guidance from the ecological philosophy which puts emphasis on the multiple integration and multiple symbiosis of an ecosystem and the ecological wisdom which as an umbrella term can be defined in terms of three hierarchical senses: the philosophical wisdom, the wisdom of thinking mode and the wisdom of theoretical outlook. The three aspects of ecological wisdom have been discussed in detail in Zhu (2012a:61-63). Here for the sake of discussion about theoretical construction in translatology, we only list the main ideas of the ecological wisdom that could benefit the discussion.

The philosophical sense of ecological wisdom arises out of the ecological orientation of Chinese philosophy (represented by Confucianism, Daoism and Chinese Buddhism) towards the interplay between organic naturalism and intrinsic humanism. Epistemologically speaking, it regards empirical observation and experience as the direct way of acquiring knowledge, which will be rather beneficial to the thinking about the relationship between translation theory and practice; methodologically speaking, it can be boiled down into the three principles of wholeness, internality and organicity. The wholeness principle indicates that any individual thing must be understood in the whole context which forms its background, source, and network of interrelations; the internality principle requires thinkers to focus always on the movements and changes in the world as natural and spontaneous happenings due to the internal life-force of reality, not to seek explanations in an external

final cause; the organicity principle leads one to evaluate things and happenings by considering the negative and positive directions of change so that they may be seen to fit into a reality of balanced relationships. The three principles, characterizing an ecosystem, underlie the systemic thinking.

The ecological wisdom of thinking mode involves correlative thinking, dynamic process thinking, dialectical thinking and value-loaded thinking. The essence of correlative thinking is to classify and coordinate different types of things into correlative orders and patterns, and thus to consider explanations of individual happenings as relating to these orders and patterns (cf. Cheng 1999:101-107); dynamic process thinking puts emphasis on the process and context of producing meaning; dialectical thinking and the value-loaded thinking characterize the holistic-internalistic-organic feature of Chinese ecological philosophy, which is distinct from the atomistic-externalistic-mechanical feature of the Western traditional philosophy.

The ecological wisdom of theorization outlook, stemming from the horizon of the complexity science as the modern "ecological" methods of rationalization in the West, involves the systemic and hierarchical outlooks of theorization, which by their very nature of holism and interrelatedness, reveals theorists' major concerns of theorization about their research objects: wholeness, interaction, hierarchical structures, dynamic balance, and chronology.

Translation activity constitutes a highly complex ecosystem of cross-cultural communication in general and a process of mediation and dialogue between two cultures and languages in particular. In addition, different approaches to translation studies, as different perspectives on the translation ecosystem, could be also incorporated into a broader theoretical ecosystem of the discipline. In light of the abovementioned ecological wisdom, an integrated theoretical system of the discipline of translatology could be seen as an organic ecosystem with its wholeness, internality and organicity. The ecological wisdom of thinking modes (as correlative thinking, dynamic process thinking and dialectical thinking) and theorization outlooks (as systemic and hierarchical outlooks) could be well beneficial to thinking how to integrate the various interdisciplinary approaches and research levels into an organic system of multiple integration and multiple symbiosis. Meanwhile, they will also offer effective guidance for a systematic thinking about the way of interdisciplinary reemployment of terminology in the theoretical system of the receptor discipline as well as the construction of quality assessment systems of functional and structural parameters for a comprehensive analysis of the quality of theoretical discourse on translation.

The discussion in following sections will unfold the guiding role that the ecological wisdom played in thinking about the abovementioned issues.

This paper at last takes an example of theoretical construction – the emerging ecological approach to translatology instituted in China, which is now not suggested as an ideal approach better than other previous approaches because it is just in its infancy and present certain problems in its theoretical system. On the basis of its viewpoints on the above-mentioned theoretical issues, this paper just intends to makes a critical review of the theoretical discourse of the ecological approach and offers suggestions for its further development. These meta-theoretical argument and viewpoints, demonstrating the guiding role of ecological wisdom in a systematic thinking about the construction of theoretical discourse in translatology, will be beneficial to the theoretical development of translatology in general and the existing ecological approach to translatology in particular.

2. The Theoretical Ecosystem of Translatology: Structure and Function

To build the theoretical system(s) for the discipline of translatology concerns many aspects of theoretical consideration. Two most fundamental aspects are the structure and function of the theoretical system. As mentioned above, ecological philosophy and wisdom contributes systemic and hierarchical approach, which gives rise to the methodology of systems theory (see Gharajedaghi 1999). According to the systems thinking, a system is a structural and functional whole composed of certain interrelated and interactional components in certain ways. Social systems, like all self-organizing ecosystems, create order out of chaos by means of certain codes. In the process of creating new structures and increasing complexity, one thing that a self-organizing system often generates is hierarchy (Meadows 2008: 82). This ecological (systemic) wisdom would be also effective in considering the structure and function of the theoretical ecosystem of translatology.

2.1. The structural hierarchy and internal coherence of the theoretical system

A new discipline, as proved by various developed disciplines, must be set up on the basis of its own research objectives, methodology and particular theoretical system. Translatology, which has long been affiliated to the field of applied linguistics and has also been striving for its autonomy since the 1980s, is no exception. The build-up of its own particular theoretical system, on the other hand, does not reject pluralistic research perspectives and research methods arising from multidisciplinary involvement. Instead, translatology especially need this open-minded thinking about different levels of translation research, involving both process-oriented and product-oriented approaches and concerning the textual, inter-textual and extra-textual horizons as different hierarchical levels of research. The systems thinking indicates that a systematic research should not merely be distinguishable on the hierarchical levels of research contents but also be coherent in the connective structure of them as a whole system.

The hierarchical structure and classification of the theoretical system of translatology depend on the nature and research objectives of the discipline, and must be centered on the fundamental elements of translation activity, such as the translator, text, process and product, and present organic (textual, inter-textual and extra-textual) layers and ranges of translatology, with multidisciplinary research approaches involved. The past decades has witnessed the publication of some blueprints on the theoretical systems of translatology.

Tan (2005: 23) points out that translatology should not be confined to the translation activity per se; it should involve all areas related to translation activity. He lists the basic areas as follows: (1) the nature of translation, (2) the principles and standards of translation, (3) the methods and strategies of translation, (4) the process and procedure of translating, and (5) the paradoxes of translation. Then he goes on to list the related areas of "comparative studies": (6) comparative semantics, (7) comparative syntax, (8) comparative rhetorics, (9) comparative social semiotics, (10) comparative cultural studies, (11) comparative ethnolingusitics, (12) comparative psychology, etc.

This formulation of translatology presents a general idea of theoretical hierarchy (such as the distinction between basic areas and related areas). But it seems inappropriate to incorporate those related areas of "comparative studies," which in fact are the assistance to translatology, into the theoretical system of the discipline. The interdisciplinarity of translatology does not mean that all the related areas could be fitted into its theoretical system, although it needs to draw theoretical ideas and approaches from them. Each related area presents its

170 Lin Zhu

An Ecological Approach to the Interdisciplinary Construction of Translatology: **171**
Theoretical Discourse Systems Reconsidered

particular research system. Suppose all the relevant areas or disciplines impose their own systems of theoretical discourse on translatology, the discourse system of translatology may become a theoretical "hotchpotch." In this sense, a systemic build-up of the theoretical discourse of translatology, first of all, concerns a problem of clarifying the fundamental elements of translatology and a hierarchical classification of the theoretical system of the discipline.

Yang (1999: 92) puts forward eight fundamental elements involved in the research in translatology: the world (nature, society, and thinking), the author of the source text (ST), ST, the reader of the ST, the translator, translation process, the target text (TT), the reader of the TT. The eight interrelated elements constitute a whole system, involving both the subjects and the objects, and both the process and the product. With a wide coverage, they fan out from points to areas, outlining multiple layers of translation research. But this outline needs to be further elaborated in terms of theoretical hierarchy. Considering that, Yang (2002: 8), on the basis of his comparative study of previous theoretical outlines put forward by Wilss (2001), Holmes (1994), Huang (1988), Liu (1990), Tan (2005), and others, formulates those eight elements into a hierarchical and interconnected research system of translatology from the perspective of research approaches and theoretical functions, which is summarized and diagramed here as Figure1.

As illustrated in Figure1, the research in translatology falls into two categories: theoretical research and applied research. In each category, the

Figure 1. The research system in translatology (cf. Yang 2002)

principal research areas are defined. The interconnection of the adjacent research areas in the two categories, as indicated by the bidirectional arrows in the figure, organizes them into a research system of translatology.

In the category of theoretical research, the micro-level technological and technical investigation covers various technologies and techniques of translation, interpretation, and computer-assisted translation, including the newly developed IT and software engineering; the medium-level descriptive studies explain the whole process of translation, which, according to time sequence, can be classified into four layers of research – preparation process, transfer process, the translated text, and the impact of translation; the macro-level theoretical research should be guided by philosophy and explore the status of translation theory in the whole system of translatology, the relationship between translatology and other related disciplines, and the logical structure and historical evolution of translation theories, as well as the evaluation of translation theories (cf. Yang 2002).

Compared with previous outlines, Yang's outline presents broader coverage and classifies the research system of translatology according to the relationship between translation theories and practice or by the degrees of theoretical abstractness. The hierarchical layers of the system, as indicated by the bidirectional arrow connection in Figure 1, are interconnected between two adjacent research areas. However, this theoretical system as a whole cannot present a holistic perspective (structural coherence) that could link various textual, literary and cultural elements involved in the translation process. In addition, the medium-level of descriptive studies needs to be further elaborated because of its extensive coverage of multiple research areas.

Another systematic outline put forward by Gu (2007: 66-67) maintains that the theoretical system of translatology could be categorized into three layers including meta-theory (as theoretical guidance for translation theory), basic theory (of translation, translation techniques, and translation criticism), and related (non-basic) theory (from the intersection of translation and other disciplines, such as comparative literature and cultural studies). Although this categorization presents a hierarchical and pluralistic thinking, it is too general to be operable. More importantly, the division of basic theory and related theory may easily lead to a misleading idea that the interdisciplinary theory is basically the related (not basic) theory. This idea obviously is untenable because whether the theory is basic depends on its research content rather than its approach.

Hu (2009: 3-8) argues for an ecological approach to the integration of

172 Lin Zhu

An Ecological Approach to the Interdisciplinary Construction of Translatology: **173**
Theoretical Discourse Systems Reconsidered
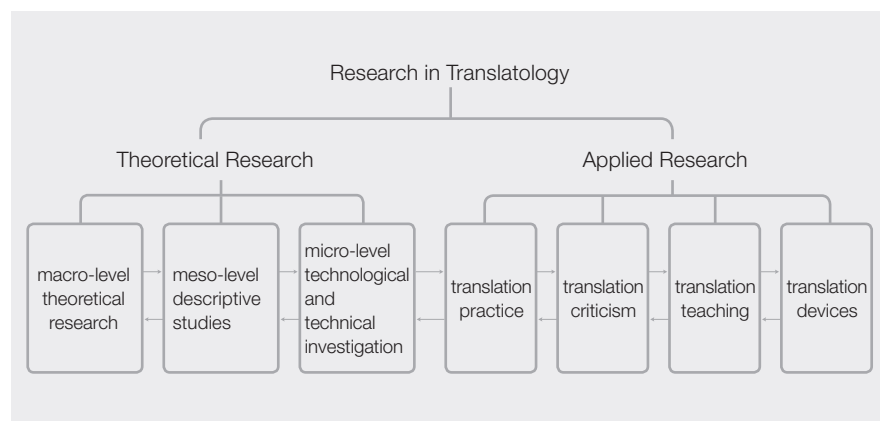
interdisciplinary translation studies. Hu's outline, in holistic and correlative perspectives of ecological philosophy, elaborates an integrated ecosystem of translatology, which centers on translation horizon and incorporates other research approaches (anthropological, linguistic, and cultural) as the interrelated subsystems involved in the general ecosystem. This conception reflects systemic, hierarchical and coherent thinking about the theoretical system, but it offers no idea about the specific ways of integration of those approaches.

Chesterman (2005: 27) developed a causal-concept-bridging model of integration in translation studies. He adopts a series of bridge concepts – re actions / responses / repercussions and norms / brief / strategies – that link the four hierarchical translation research spheres as textual, cognitive, sociological, and cultural. These bridge concepts mediate the causal conditions under which translations are done: the term "reactions" refers to the effects of the textual (i.e., translations themselves) on the cognitive (i.e., the mental and emotional reactions of readers); "responses" signifies the effects of translations on individual or group behavior, i.e. on the social level; and "repercussions" describes the effects of translations at the cultural level. Conversely, from the cultural sphere along to the textual sphere, the concepts of "norms," "brief" and "strategies" indicate another group of causal conditions under which translations are done. Chesterman's causal-concept-bridging model, in its very nature, should be a logical framework underlying the different approaches. The logical relations it suggests in fact are not new because they have been indicated in other theories preceding it. Perhaps, as an attempt at theoretical integration or connection, it offers us more confidence in the similar pursuit than specific ways to achieve it (see Zhu 2012a: 72).

The aforementioned outlines, despite the variety in theoretical classification and their respective deficiencies, all present a common idea that the research in translatology should be built as a hierarchical and pluralistic system involving not only the micro-level of technical and textual horizon but the macro-level of philosophical, social and cultural horizons (i.e., intertextual and extratextual levels). They all indicate that different layers of theoretical discourse should be properly and hierarchically located in the organic and holistic theoretical ecosystem of the discipline according to the nature and research objectives of the discipline. But they are all unable to demonstrate an effective way of connecting and integrating the different layers of research approaches or areas. In other words, there is still problem with the structural coherence of those theoretical systems mentioned above.

In this aspect, we suggest a translator-centered principle, which stresses the leading role of the translator as the performer of the translation process, and a translator's-integrated-cognitive-psychology-oriented way for organizing the hierarchical structure of theoretical system in the discipline. Theoretically, this systemic thinking is inspired by the embodied cognition paradigm of second generation of cognitive science. The embodied cognition paradigm argues for the embodied, situated and integrated (gestalt) model of cognition and reveals the fundamental role of the embodied experience in cognition. In a similar vein, the translation process at the same time is the process of the translator's embodied and situated cognitive psychology, which integrates various (textual, literary and cultural) aspects of experience involved in the translation process. Therefore, the translator's integrated cognitive psychology offers a fruitful perspective on a systemic thinking about the whole translation process which concerns multiple elements in the hierarchical (and meanwhile interconnected) textual, literary and cultural horizons. And hence it could be an effective logical link connecting different layers of interdisciplinary approaches to translation studies. This systemic thinking, as fully discussed in Zhu (2012b), can boil down to an integrated explanatory model of the translation process as a system of the translator's embodied cognition.

Although the above suggestion could not solve the problem of disciplinary integration of hierarchical research once and for all, it offers an effective model of thinking, which, conforming to the ecological wisdom in an holistic and coherent way of thinking about this problem, demonstrates that a systemic conception of the whole theoretical system should firstly consider how to make those layers or approaches of theoretical discourse coherent and be integrated into an organic framework of theoretical explanation of translation activity and the translation process. To this end, we still have a long way to go. Perhaps, first and foremost, the thinking about the relationship between interdisciplinary research and the disciplinary integration should be furthered, which inevitably involves the methodology in this aspect. The methodological issue will be discussed in Section 3.

2.2. Pluralistic functions of theoretical system

As a general rule, for a system, structure and function(s) are interconnected. Therefore, the structural hierarchy of the theoretical system of translatology, as

discussed above, has indicated the multiplicity of the theoretical function.

However, the importance of translation theory has not been well recognized, even in the circle of translation studies. As we know, the disdain for translation theory is a long-standing phenomenon, and the debate on the relationship between translation theory and practice has never ceased. In the year of 2003, the heated debates in China culminated in nine special short articles on this problem from translation studies scholars. They appeared in a special column named "Discussion about the Relationship between Translation Theory and Practice" in the *Shanghai Journal of Translators for Science and Technology*. Those scholars basically reached a consensus on the idea of practice-oriented theorization of translation but there were still disagreements on how far translation theory is useful to practice and how translation theory is connected with practice, although each scholar's opinion sounds reasonable in the context of his own argument.

In solving this problem, Chinese ecological philosophy, with its stress on human practice and experience as the direct way of acquiring knowledge, offers us epistemological inspiration. We should firstly establish a thinking of the translation-practice-oriented theorization. In fact, a principal reason for the abovementioned disagreements is that few scholars had made a detailed and comprehensive analysis of the heterogeneity of translation practice. If we regarded practice only as an ambiguous whole or mistook a certain part of translation activity for the whole of translation practice, we would not clarify the relationship between translation theory and practice. Since translation practice is undoubtedly the starting point of theorization, we should, first and foremost, make an in-depth analysis of the practice.

As we know, translation practice is obviously not homogeneous. From a macro-perspective, it should include the situation of the profession and various translation activities in different social and historical contexts; from a micro-perspective, it involves both the translation activities of the individual translators or certain translator groups and the translation process, which occurs in various forms and with varying content.

Since translation practice is heterogeneous, it is necessary for translation theory, as the generalization or characterization of certain aspect(s) of translation practice, to be multi-level and multi-functional. Translation theory on the whole may fulfill different functions for different practical purposes: explanatory, epistemic, critical, directive, predicative, and so on. Holmes (1994) classifies translation theory into three levels: theoretical, descriptive,

and applied. Each level of theories presents its special perspective(s) on some aspects of translation practice, and thus performs its particular functions. This point has also been demonstrated by the aforementioned hierarchical outline of research in translatology as a whole system developed by Yang (2008). As discussed above, each level of research areas present its special research content corresponding to specific aspect(s) of translation practice.

Theory could be both retrospective and prospective. Translation theory as a whole system should keep multiple relations with translation practice and perform pluralistic functions. Integrating the structural hierarchy and coherence with the pluralistic functions of the theoretical discourse system as mentioned above, an organic theoretical ecosystem of translatology could be promisingly built up. In addition, another significant aspect to be considered in theoretical construction should be the methodology of interdisciplinary theoretical construction.

3. Interdisciplinary Construction of Theoretical System(s): Methodology

In recent decades, interdisciplinarity has obviously become a dominating feature of modern academic research, not only because an interdisciplinary approach, by theoretical and methodological integration, is more possible to creatively and effectively solve complex research problems that can hardly be solved within a single discipline, but because more and more new research fields, such as cognitive science, artificial intelligence, environmental psychology, and translatology under discussion, are by nature interdisciplinary. On the other hand, the methodology of interdisciplinary research, such as the conditions and models of interdisciplinary transplantation as well as the interdisciplinary terminological adaptation in theoretical discourse, has not been well discussed and developed. For the interdisciplinary translation studies, we should pay more attention to such methodological problems and the approach to quality assessment of theoretical discourse.

3.1. The way of interdisciplinary transplantation[2]

The interdisciplinary research could occur not only between the natural

176 Lin Zhu

An Ecological Approach to the Interdisciplinary Construction of Translatology: **177**
Theoretical Discourse Systems Reconsidered

sciences or between the social sciences, but between a natural science and a social science. Especially the latter case, while potentially producing fruitful and even exciting achievements, may easily bring about methodological problems as well. Take memetics as an example. Memetics originates in the coinage of "meme" by the Oxford ethologist Richard Dawkins in his 1976 monograph *The Selfish Gene*, in which he not only popularized "the increasingly influential view that evolution is best understood in terms of the competition between genes" (Blackmore 1999: 4) but expanded Darwinism from gene-based biology to idea-based culture. The development of memetics got highly inspired by this analogical application of the Darwinian idea to cultural evolution.

As a matter of fact, this sort of direct theoretical analogy between the natural science and the social science has resulted in methodological misuse of concepts in interdisciplinary studies. Memetics is about imitation rather than innovation, but human psychology and cognition, as suggested by psychological and cognitive studies, are undoubtedly both imitative and creative processes. As Miller (2000: 435) points out, the meme machine argues against the current evolutionary psychology view that much of human culture promotes the genetic interests of particular individuals, and most memeplexes are products of individual human genius rather than abstract cultural evolution.

The above analysis indicates that the development of memetics depends not on the biological genetic mechanism, but on whether it can develop its own explanatory framework (mechanism) of cultural evolution. What it requires should be more effective and detailed concepts signifying certain inner structures, functions and processes of the dynamic mechanism per se. In this aspect, the methodology of molecular ecology can provide inspirational idea. In addition to the basic concept of gene, molecular ecology has established its own scientific framework of coherent explanation, which is constituted by a series of concepts (such as nucleic acid, protein, DNA, RNA, Polypeptide Chain, enzyme, hormone, and chromosome) signifying certain structures and functions as well as the dynamic process involved. So in the process of interdisciplinary transplantation from natural science to social science, what a social science needs to learn most from natural science should be its detail-

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² Please see Zhu (2012a: 68-70) for more detailed discussion about the methodology of interdisciplinary research. Section 3.1 here borrows some parts of discussion there for the sake of the completeness of the question under discussion in Section 3.

oriented scientific approach to theorization.

The methodological misuse of memetics has mirrored the problems of interdisciplinary research between natural science and social science. We suggest that interdisciplinary researchers should firstly consider the following aspects of interdisciplinary transplantation: the conditions (necessity and possibility), layers (philosophical, mechanismic, and methodological), goals (knowledge enrichment, methodological improvement, and disciplinary integration), modalities (theoretical substitution, theoretical inspiration, and theoretical integration), and results or values (the extent of merging and the prospect of sustainability) (see Zhu 2012: 64).

In addition, in view of the discrepancy between natural science and social science, we suggest that the major layers of theoretical transplantation between them could be mainly epistemological and methodological inspiration rather than a mechanical analogy. By inspiration, we mean an arousal of the mind to special creativity in terms of mechanism and method while by mechanical analogy we mean indiscriminate theoretical substitution or application. What we need most before interdisciplinary studies is a careful study of the donor theory. As Gabora (1999) points out, as one's understanding of biological concepts increases, the danger of misapplying them decreases.

From the above analysis, the ecological approach to translatology should learn a lesson for its further development. As Chesterman (2005: 21) warns,

> *A more serious problem is the risk that, in borrowing theoretical concepts and methods from more established disciplines, we actually do no more than transfer labels. Our applications remain superficial, not supported by an adequate understanding of the original context in which these concepts were developed. We may lack appropriate methodological training in fields other than the one where we feel most at home.*

Therefore, what really matters in the interdisciplinary research is not the substitution of new terminology borrowed from other disciplines for the old concepts in translation research, but establishing new coherent theories to explain the relations and mechanisms that can really deepen our understanding of the translation process and broaden our research horizon in translation studies.

On the other hand, interdisciplinary research can hardly avoid drawing terminology from related disciplines. But a term, in general, could not be

directly employed in the receptor discipline. It needs to be redefined and redeployed according to the new context of the theoretical discourse of the receptor discipline. In other words, one should consider how to put it into a new theoretical discourse system of a different discipline. Only when it is coherent with other terms in the new discourse system can it be well alive in and beneficial to the system.

3.2. A systemic thinking about terminological adaptation

Interdisciplinary research more often than not requires a careful consideration of terminological adaptation and redeployment. Terminology, as specialized terms in a certain field, may be words or phrases in form. It is "the formal reflection of the conceptual organization of a special subject and a necessary medium of expression and professional communication" (Cabré 1999:11).

The basic features of terminology are professional, precise, monosemous, and systemic. Each term in a field or discipline can be only defined in the whole conceptual system of this field. The discourse system of a discipline functions in a particular context of situation and profession. Thus, a term out of its original (professional) context system in a field should be adapted when it is reemployed in another field (system) even though the two fields are closely related to each other; otherwise, it would bring about a certain incoherence of theoretical discourse and even the failure of the theoretical formulation. In this sense, terminological adaptation and redeployment becomes highly important for interdisciplinary research. For translation research, terms from related disciplines should be redefined and adapted to the theoretical discourse system of the discipline of translatology. Terminological adaptation and redeployment are beneficial to the coherence of conceptual organization in the theoretical discourse.

Hu (2004a; 2004b; 2008; 2013) in his ground-breaking research on eco-translatology has conducted instructive exploration of terminological adaptation (see the following Section 4 for more discussion). Drawn from ecology and Darwin's evolution theory, some important terms, such as translational ecosystem, translation chain, translation as eco-balance, multiple symbiosis, adaptive selection and transformation, and eco-transplant, have been adapted to the context of translation activity and fit in with the theoretical discourse on translation. These ecological terms have been redefined and redeployed in translation discourse and thus avoid the mimetic way of theoretical analogy and terminological misuse.

The outcome of terminological adaptation in interdisciplinary research should be to make newly developed theoretical discourse coherent and effective in terms of explanatory power, and thus strengthen the quality of the theoretical discourse of a discipline. In addition to terminological adaptation, coinage sometimes is necessary for the construction of theoretical discourse in a newly developed discipline. Terms created in a field, of course, must also possess the general features of terminology as mentioned above. In addition, they would better be brief, transparent (i.e., easily understood), derivative (i.e., strong power of word formation), and stable (i.e., frequently and widely used), not to mention according with linguistic convention and style of a given field. Effective terminological system would contribute substantially to the high quality of theoretical discourse.

3.3 The quality assessment systems of the theoretical discourse on translation

We have argued in last part for terminological adaptation and coinage in relation to the quality of theoretical discourse. In addition to terminology, the quality of a theoretical discourse also depends on the characteristics of its discoursal performance (realization) at the textual level. The quality assessment of theoretical discourse should be based on a holistic thinking about the multiple aspects of the structure and functions of the discourse, as inspired by the systems theory and methodology mentioned above.

It is well known that language performs ideational, interpersonal, and textual functions, as systematically theorized by Halliday (1970/2005). As a general description, this theory will apply to any type of oral or written texts. The theoretical discourse, as a specific type of language performance in discussing ideas or concepts of a certain topic, should be no exception. Therefore, based on Halliday's idea and the characteristics of theoretical discourse, the quality of theoretical discourse on translation could be accordingly analyzed in terms of the following three redefined functional aspects as a system of functional parameters.

• **Ideational function:** theoretical discourse on translation should clearly

180 Lin Zhu

An Ecological Approach to the Interdisciplinary Construction of Translatology: **181**
Theoretical Discourse Systems Reconsidered

describe and explain certain layer(s) or aspect(s) of translation with brief and transparent language, and meanwhile present the researcher's attention to the translator's real experience and inner world (as the psychological process and features).

• **Interpersonal function:** theoretical discourse on translation should fulfill an interpersonal function of translation knowledge presentation and methodological inspiration with good receptive effect of its readers.

• **Textual function:** theoretical discourse on translation should be self-contained, that is, it functions as a coherent text with sound logic and a down-to-earth approach to translation activities.

In addition, theoretical discourse in some sense could be regarded as a conversation between the theorist and the intended theoretical readers. Therefore, we can also value the quality of theoretical discourse in light of the cooperative principle of conversation and its maxims (Grice 1975) in order to make the analysis more operable. Those maxims, as a system of more specific structural parameters, could be adapted in the context of translatology as follows.

• **Quantity Maxim:** theoretical discourse, for intended readers, should be informative enough to clearly describe its research contents, avoiding both hasty conclusion and unnecessary interpretation.

• **Quality Maxim:** theoretical discourse should be based on actual translation materials and corpus and be well-grounded in sound evidence and argument.

• **Relation Maxim:** theoretical discourse (including diction) should be centered on the translation tasks in question, avoiding rambling and digression. (This should be in particular instructive for interdisciplinary theoretical discourse because of the extensive connections of translation with other fields).

• **Manner Maxim:** theoretical discourse should be brief, pertinent, well-organized, and logically sound, avoiding obscurity and verbosity (especially the tendency of complicating simple problems).

The above-mentioned systems of functional and structural parameters of theoretical discourse are not intended to be regarded as prescriptive rules, but as descriptive items helpful to the quality improvement of theoretical discourse.

The key point here is to indicate that the construction of theoretical discourse in translatology, as a systematic enterprise, entails systematic thinking. A translation studies researcher needs to follow some basic rules of both the theoretical discourse and the translation activity, to pay close attention to new developments of translation practice and related fields, and to concentrate on fundamental issues of translatology in order to develop productive research methods and high quality of theoretical discourse.

4. Review on the Existing Ecological Approach to Translatology

The above meta-theoretical argument on the build-up of the system of theoretical discourse in translatology can contribute directly to our analysis of the emerging ecological approach to translatology instituted in China and thereby be beneficial to its further development.

The ecological approach has been developed into two sub-approaches: eco-translatology (Hu 2004; 2013) and translation ecology (Xu 2009). Although they both approach translation and its contexts from an ecological perspective, the two ecological sub-approaches still vary markedly in research orientation, theoretical basis, and interdisciplinary approach. Briefly speaking, eco-translatology, with an eco-holistic perspective and developed out of Darwin's evolutionary idea of natural selection, puts emphasis on the translator's leading role in the process of translation as adaptation and selection, and thus it is translator-centered. In contrast, translation ecology focuses on the investigation into the ecological operation of translation community and hence is "(ecological) mechanism-centered." The translator in the translation ecology approach is mainly regarded as a node in the ecological chain of translation ecosystem, without being specially treated. In view of the topic of the paper, we do not intend to introduce the specific theoretical content in detail, which has been discussed in another paper (Zhu 2012). Here we just make a critical review of the theoretical discourse system of the two sub-approaches in the hope of facilitating the improvement of their theoretical construction.

As mentioned in Section 3.3, eco-translatology adapts some ecological terms to the context of translation ecosystem. The interdisciplinary approach draws epistemological and methodological inspiration from ecology; its objective is for methodological improvement and interdisciplinary integration of translation

182 Lin Zhu

An Ecological Approach to the Interdisciplinary Construction of Translatology: **183**
Theoretical Discourse Systems Reconsidered

studies. Eco-translatology presents its own theoretical system (see Hu 2004a, 2004b, 2008, 2013) that is aimed at a systemic explanatory framework of the translational eco-environments, textual ecologies and translation community ecologies. The build-up of theoretical system has got remarkable achievements as well represented by Hu's recent monograph *Eco-Translatology: Construction & Interpretation* (2013), which reflects a systemic and hierarchical way of thinking about translation theory. In terms of research orientation, it is translator-centered and translation-process-oriented, with its focus on the fundamental issues of translation studies, such as the mechanism of translation ecosystem, translation assessment, translation process, and translation standard. In terms of theoretical construction, what we can learn from eco-translatology is its eco-holistic and translator-centered perspectives on the translation ecosystem, its effective way of interdisciplinary terminological adaptation, and its systemic mode of thinking in theorization.

Eco-translatology, on the other hand, still needs to be further developed in the build-up of its theoretical discourse system. In light of the above-mentioned systems of quality parameters, one may detect possible aspects of its improvement: (1) the layers of the theoretical system of eco-translatology need to be further classified in light of the complexity and variety of translation activities; (2) the internal coherence of theoretical discourse of the translation ecosystem needs to be strengthened, and the integrated conception of translation studies should be further elaborated with more detailed ways of coherence (interconnection) between different approaches involved; (3) the translator-centered research could be furthered in terms of an in-depth investigation into the translator's experience and psychology in the translation process.

Another ecological sub-approach to translatology is translation ecology (Xu 2009), which, as the name suggests, should be a study of the ecology of translation. According to Xu (2009: 3), the purpose of translation ecology, in applying ecological research achievements to translation research, is to explore the relationship between translation and its eco-environments as well as the mechanism(s) involved. In this light, translation ecology should be an ecological study of translation community, with the ecological mechanism (i.e., various principles and laws of ecological community) being its theoretical framework. In this sense, it is "mechanism-centered," which is obviously different from the translator-centered perspective of eco-translatology in respect of research orientation.

Since translation is a social practice (see Wolf & Kukari 2007), translation ecology, theoretically, should belong to the broader category of social ecology. In this sense, translation ecology seems to be part of "translation sociology" (see Holmes 1994), with ecology as a vantage point. As a sociological study, the interdisciplinary approach of translation ecology, in term of methodology, needs to be careful about the similar problem in the development of memetics mentioned above, for social ecosystem of translation is distinct from the biological ecosystem. We suggest a focus on the connection between the translation ecology and the sociology of translation in order to develop more effective research methods and produce fruitful research findings in this ecological sub-approach.

5. Conclusion

The interdisciplinary construction of theoretical discourse in translatology is currently in a booming stage, when the methodology of interdisciplinary research is particularly important for the healthy development of translatology as both an interdiscipline and a separate (not affiliated) discipline. To build a hierarchical and coherent system of theoretical discourse with high quality is a systemic and complex enterprise involving multiple considerations. The ecological philosophy (wisdom) offers us systemic and hierarchical methodology to consider the structure and function(s) of theoretical discourse system of the discipline. The guiding role of ecological wisdom has been also demonstrated in the paper by a systemic thinking about both the reemployment of terminology in a new system of theoretical discourse and the establishment of quality assessment system(s) of the functional and structural parameters for our evaluation of the quality of theoretical discourse on translation. Therefore, these meta-theoretical argument and viewpoints in the paper could be instructive for the development of translatology in general and the ecological approach to translatology in particular.

184 Lin Zhu

An Ecological Approach to the Interdisciplinary Construction of Translatology: **185**
Theoretical Discourse Systems Reconsidered

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186 Lin Zhu

An Ecological Approach to the Interdisciplinary Construction of Translatology: **187**
Theoretical Discourse Systems Reconsidered