Catford's Translation Shift Theory as Guidance in E-C Translation

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Abstract: *J.C. Catford is an influential British linguist and a translation theorist. Grounded on Firth and Halliday's linguistic models and Halliday's System Grammar, Catford proposed a Translation Shift Theory in his work A Linguistic Theory of Translation to explain a translation phenomenon. He divided the shifts into level shifts and category shifts which includes structure-shifts, class-shifts, unit-shifts and intra-system-shifts. By reviewing Catford's Translation Shift Theory, this paper mainly discusses the application of his theory to guide English to Chinese translation by case analysis to offer a new perspective on E-C translation practice.*

Keywords: *Catford's Translation Shift Theory; Translation Shifts; E-C translation*

1. INTRODUCTION

In the 1950s, the rise of the linguistic school of translation studies elevated translation to a higher level, and the translation shift theory became an important aspect of this research. Since then, a significant number of scholars who study translation shift theory have emerged. Among these is found perhaps the most influential and well-known representative figure of them all: J.C. Catford. In his book *A Linguistic Theory of Translation,* Catford stated that "Translation is an operation performed on language: a process of substituting a text in one language for a text in another. Clearly, then, any theory of translation must draw upon a theory of language - a general linguistic theory". (Catford, 1965:1). When introducing the translation shifts theory, many scholars cite Catford's research on this theory, including Jeremy Munday's *Introducing Translation Studies: Theories and Applications* (2008), Xie Tianzhen's *Introduction to Contemporary Foreign Translation Theories* (2008), Tan Zaixi's *A Brief History of Western Translation* (1991), etc., which shows its widespread acceptance in the field of translation.

2. CATFORD AND HIS WORK

Catford, an influential British linguist who studied both at the Royal High School of Edinburgh and the University of Edinburgh (1935-1939) specialized in French language and literature, and taught linguistics and applied linguistics in the School of Applied Languages at the University of Edinburgh. While there, he was involved in teaching and language research. Along with his fluency in French, he achieved a reasonable command of both the Russian and Modern Greek languages. He has also studied several other languages including German, Sanskrit, Latin, Arabic, Hebrew, Turkish and Indonesian.

Catford's masterpiece, *A Linguistic Theory of Translation* was published by the Oxford University Press in 1965, has been included in the Oxford Language and Language Learning Series, which is his only monograph on translation theory. Because of this work, he has become recognized and admired by translation learners everywhere. Nida refers to him as the most influential translation linguist in the world (Nida, 1993:161). According to Munday, *A Linguistic Theory of Translation* represents Catford's important attempt to systematically apply linguistic theory to translation. (Munday, 2001:61). Tan Zaixi commented in his book *A Brief History of Western Translation* that Catford's work has opened a new researching translation theory method that has caused great repercussions in both the western linguistic and translation theory fields (Tan Zaixi, 2000:249).

Catford describes his book as 'an essay in applied linguistics', and mentions in the preface that was compiled using lectures he delivered at the School of Applied Linguistics, University of Edinburgh.

Catford explains that "Since translation has to do with language, the analysis and description of translation-processes must make considerable use of categories set up for the description of languages. It must, in other words, draw upon a theory of language--a general linguistic theory." (Catford, 1965: vii). He also remarks that his book is not a discussion of particular issues, such as the faithfulness of translation, but rather focuses on an analysis of what translation is. "It proposes general categories to which we can assign our observations of particular instances of translation, and it shows how these categories relate to one another. In short, it sets up, though somewhat tentatively and incompletely, a theory of translation which may be drawn upon in any discussion of particular translation problems" (Catford, 1965: vii). The book *A Linguistic Theory of Translation* consists of fourteen chapters focusing on the Translation Shifts that are elaborated in Chapter Twelve.

3. CATFORD'S TRANSLATION SHIFT THEORY

Catford's Translation Shift Theory is influenced by the linguistic models proposed by J.R. Firth and M.A.K. Halliday. His theory is influenced by Halliday's Systematic Functional Grammar and incorporates a categorization of levels to elucidate the translational shifts phenomenon. In introducing this theory, the author draws primarily on grammar and lexis, the four categories including structure-shifts, class-shifts, unit -shifts and intra-system-shifts. In his book *A Linguistic Theory of Translation*, Catford proposed the concept of "translation shifts" which he defined as "Departures from formal correspondence in the process of going from the SL to TL" (Catford 1965: 73). He used the 'category' and 'level' concepts from Halliday's Scale and Category Grammar system to further classify 'translation shifts' into 'level shifts' and 'category shifts'.

3.1. Level Shifts

A level shift refers to "a SL item at one linguistic level has a TL translation equivalent at a different level." (Catford 1965: 73). Using Halliday's theory, Catford classified language into four levels: lexis, grammar, phonology, and graphology. Obviously, in the translation process, translation between the levels of phonology and graphology is impossible. And translation between either of these two levels and the levels of grammar and lexis doesn't seem possible, either. So, level shifts are only possible from grammar to lexis or from lexis to grammar, and translation shifts between these two levels are very common. Catford illustrates this point in the book using examples of level shifts involving the verbal aspects between Russian and English. At the same time, Catford points out that when translating between other languages, examples of incomplete level shifts from the grammatical level to the lexical level are often encountered. As an example, he mentions the shifts between English and French (Catford 1965: 75). And the author supports his theory further by using two examples of level shifts between English and Chinese.

Example1.

Level shift between English and French:	Shift from English grammar to French lexis:
SL: ***This*** *text is intended for…*	***This:*** a deictic word / a grammatical item
TL: ***Le present*** *Manuel s'adresse a…*	***Le present***：an article + a lexical adjective / a lexical translation

Example2.

Level shift between English and French:	Shift from English grammar to French lexis:
SL: ***Thi****s may reach you before I arrive.*	***This:*** a deictic word / a grammatical item
TL: *Fr. Il se peut* ***ce mot*** *vous pavienne avant mon arrive.*	***ce mot***：a demonstrative pronoun+ a noun / a lexical translation

Example3.

Level shift between English and Chinese:	Shift from English grammar to Chinese lexis:
SL: *Roxy is* ***showing*** *her presentation.*	***showing:*** present continuous/ a grammatical item
TL: *洛克希**正在**做展示。*	***正在**：adverb / a lexical translation

Example4.

Level shift between Chinese and English:	Shift from Chinese lexis to English grammar:
SL: *过去**四十年**，中国发生了翻天覆地的变化。*	*年：a noun / a lexical item
TL: *The past* ***forty years*** *has witnessed the great changes in China.*	***years:*** plural form of noun/ a grammatical translation

By comparing the features of Chinese and English grammatical structures, it is not difficult to understand that English grammatical features are explicit/overt as reflected by the obvious fact that word class can be easily identified by word forms and the grammatical functions of words. By contrast, Chinese grammatical features are implicit/covert because word class is independent of the word forms, the grammatical functions of words are not easily identifiable, and the tenses are often hidden in the sentences. In example 3, the English grammatical form (the present continuous tense *be doing*) can be shifted into the Chinese word "正在", and in example 4, the Chinese lexical item "年" can be shifted into the English grammatical form (plural form of noun *years*), which reflects the level shifts between English and Chinese.

3.2. Category Shifts

When discussing translation shifts, Catford focuses on the analysis of category shifts. He mentioned rank-bound translation and unbounded translation in the second chapter of his book *A Linguistic Theory of Translation*. If equivalent components choices in the target language are intentionally restricted to units below the sentence we refer to this as 'rank-bound translation'. Catford maintains that rank-bound translation is often considered a 'bad translation' because the translated text is neither a normal form in the target language (it uses linguistic equivalents that do not correspond to their place in the translated text), nor is it relevant to the contextual substance as the source text (Catford, 1965: 76).

An example of this is machine translation, which usually is used to translate the word or morpheme rank. This system sets up a word-to-word or morpheme-to-morpheme equivalence, but not at the higher ranks of phrases, clauses, or sentences. By contrast, unbounded translation is the normal and complete translation of text where the equivalence relation can be freely shifted up or down within the ranks (Catford, 1965: 25). In Catford's view, unbounded translation is the standard or 'free' translation in which equivalence between the source and target language can be established at any suitable rank. In a standard unbounded translation, equivalence can occur between sentences, clauses, phrases, words, and morphemes, although rarely in the last case.

Catford specifically states that "Not infrequently, however, one cannot set up simple equal rank equivalence between SL and TL text. As SL *group* may have a TL *clause* as its translation equivalence, and so on." (Catford, 1965: 76). Of course, what occurs in translation is not only a change of rank (unit shifts), but also structural changes in the system, thus the *class* changes, the *term* changes, and so on. Of these, structural changes are even more common than rank changes. These are the several types covered by category shifts. Catford's article shows that the concept of category shifts is important when discussing translation. However, unless we assume that there is some kind of formal correspondence between the source language and the translated language, it is meaningless to discuss category shifts alone. "Category-shifts are departures from formal correspondence in translation" (Catford, 1965: 76), which includes structure-shifts, class-shifts, unit-shifts and intra-system-shifts.

3.2.1. Structure-Shifts

Structure-shifts are the most frequent category shifts in the translation process, and can occur at all levels.

Example5.

Structure-shifts between English and Gaelic:	Sentence structure
SL: *John loves Mary.*	**SPC**
TL: *tha gradh aig lain air Mairi.*	**PSCA**

(Catford, 1965: 77)

We can treat the above example as a structural shift only if we assume that there is a formal correspondence between the English and Gaelic languages. We must assume that the English sentence structure S,P,C,A has a formal counterpart in Gaelic, namely S,P,C,A. This assumption is justified, and explains why the Gaelic PSCA structure is considered to have translation equivalence with the English SPC. As the shift contains different elements, it can be said that a structural shift has occurred. But there is another question. Not only does Gaelic contain different elements, but it also switches the positions of two of its elements, S and P. If *SP* were the only possible word order in

English, just as *PS* is the only possible order in Gaelic, then we can ignore the order and look directly at its two particular elements, *S* and *P*. From this perspective, English and Gaelic share the same structure. However, the English language concerns word order, so we must consider it to be a feature of English structure, which means the above example also suggests a structural shift.

Similarly, structure shifts occur in English-Chinese translation. Chinese and English people have different thinking patterns, so when they describe one thing, the English syntactic structure usually follows *subject + predicate + object + adverb* while the Chinese syntactic structure is *subject + adverb + predicate + object*. So, the English language puts long attributes or adverbs of time, place, and manner at the end while the Chinese language does the opposite. For example,

Example6.

Structure-shifts between English and Chinese:	Sentence structure
SL: *I saw you **yesterday**.*	S+P+O+A
TL: 我**昨天**看到你了. (*I yesterday saw you.*)	S+A+P+O

The English sentence "I saw you yesterday" is equivalent to the Chinese "I yesterday saw you", which shows the English *S+P+O+A* structure must be converted into the Chinese *S+A+P+O* structure. In most cases, therefore, it is necessary to analyze the original text sentence structure carefully, and adjust it according to the target language's expression habits to achieve a proper understanding of the original text rather than simply copying the original text structure directly. The structure-shifts between English and Chinese mainly include affirmative and negative shifts, active and passive shifts, and so on.

Example7.

Structure-shifts between English and Chinese:	Shift of English postpositive attribute
SL: *A question **of great importance***	Noun + postpositive attribute
TL: **十分重要的**一个问题	Attribute +noun

Example8.

Structure-shifts between English and Chinese:	Shift between passive and active voice
SL: *Printing **was introduced** into Europe from China.*	passive voice
TL: 印刷术**是**从中国传入欧洲的。	active voice

Example9.

Structure-shifts between English and Chinese:	Shift between animate subject and inanimate subject
SL: ***His name** has slipped from my memory.*	inanimate subject
TL: **我**完全记不起他的名字。	animate subject

3.2.2. Class-Shifts

Class-shifts "occurs when the translation equivalent of a SL item is a member of a different class from the original item" (Catford, 1965: 78) as in the example below:

Example10.

Class-shifts between English and French:	Shift from a modifier to a qualifier
SL: *a **white** house*	*White* - modifier *adjective*
TL: *une masion **blanche***	*Blanche*- qualifier *adjective*

(Catford, 1965: 79)

The French translation equivalent of the English adjective 'white' is 'blanche'. On the surface, both are adjectives but no class-shift has occurred. However, a deeper look reveals that the English adjective 'white' is used as a modifier (M), while the French adjective 'blanche' is a qualifier (Q). In this way, the shift from M to Q is a class-shift. Let's look at more examples drawn from English to Chinese translation.

Example11.

Class-shifts between English and Chinese:	Shift from prepositions to verbs
SL: *...and that government **of** the people, **by** the people, **for** the people...*	of, by, for - English prepositions
TL: 民**有**、民**治**、民**享**的政府	有、治、享- Chinese verbs

In this example, the English prepositions 'of', 'by', and 'for' are converted into the Chinese verb '有 (to have) 治(to rule) 享(to enjoy)', respectively. Although the English and Chinese word classes sometimes overlap, there are relatively few sentence components that can be served by a certain word class in English. For example, in English, only pronouns, nouns or noun-equivalent gerunds and verb infinitives can be used as subjects, and most of the predicates are verbs. But in the Chinese language, nouns, verbs, and adjectives can be used as subjects, predicates, objects, and in the predicative, respectively. Here are more examples:

Example12.

Class-shifts between English and Chinese:	Shift from noun to verb
SL: ***Mastery*** *of a language is not easy.*	Mastery – noun
TL: ***掌握****一门语言不容易。*	掌握 - verb

Example13.

Class-shifts between English and Chinese:	Shift from noun to adjective
SL: *Independent thinking is an absolute **necessity** in study.*	necessity– noun
TL: 在学习中，独立思考是绝对***必需的***。	必需的 - adjective

Example14.

Class-shifts between English and Chinese:	Shift from adverb to noun
SL: *It was **officially** announced that China is invited to the meeting.*	officially– adverb
TL: **官方**宣布，巴黎应邀出席会议。	官方- noun

3.2.3. Unit-Shifts

Unit-shifts are "changes of rank-that is, departures from formal correspondences in which the translation equivalent of a unit at one rank in the SL is a unit at a different rank in the TL" (Catford 1965: 79). Catford (1965) points out that this kind of shift might be more appropriately called 'rank-shift', but since this term has already appeared in Halliday's grammatical theory to express a different professional meaning, he could not use it for his book. But the book did contain five units concerning unit-shifts, including sentences, clauses, phrases, words, and morphemes.

Example15.

Unit-shifts between English and French:	Shift from a word to a phrase
SL: *a **medical** student*	***medical***– a word
TL: *un étudiant **en médecine***	***en médecine***–an adverbial phrase

From the examples above, the translation equivalent of the English adjective *medical* become the adverbial phrase *en médecine* in French, so the shift from a word to a clause represents a unit shift. Here are more examples of these used in E-C translation:

Example16.

Unit-shifts between English and Chinese:	Shift from a word to a phrase
SL: ***Surprisingly***, *such temporary tunnels don't contradict the laws of physics.*	***Surprisingly***– an adverb
TL: ***令人惊讶的是，***这种临时隧道并不违背物理定律。	***令 人 惊 讶 的 是*** –an adverbial phrase

Example17.

Unit-shifts between English and Chinese:	Shift from a word to a clause
SL: The **inside** of each room depended on the personality of its occupants.	**inside**– a word
TL: ***每个房间内部怎样布置***，这要视各个住户的性格而定。	***每个房间内部怎样布置***–a clause

3.2.4. Intra-System-Shifts

According to Catford (1965 :80),"We use the term *intra-system shift* for those cases where the shift occurs internally, within a system; that is, for those cases where SL and TL possess systems which approximately correspond formally as to their constitution, but when translation involves selection of a non-corresponding term in the TL system." Catford further illustrates this point by using English

and French as examples. The numeral systems of English and French are generally considered to be formal equivalents where both systems are used in noun phrases, and characterized by the correspondence of the subject and predicate in clauses. In addition, both languages have singular and plural numerals, which are also formally equivalent. But the expression of these two terms has a different distribution in each of the two languages. An intra-system-shifts is only possible when the source language and the target language operate under approximately the same system. Similarly, in the case of E-C translation, for example, the noun phrases *three decades* in the English system can be translated into 三十年 instead of 三个十年 in the Chinese system，as the former translation sounds more idiomatic in Chinese. In E-C translation practice, we must consider the different cultural backgrounds between Chinese and English, and make corresponding adjustments within the system to optimize the translation quality. More examples of this point appear in the following:

Example18.

Intra-system-shifts between English and Chinese:	*mushrooms* in English shifted into *bamboo shoots* in Chinese
SL: *…have sprung up like **mushrooms***	*mushrooms*
TL: 如雨后**春笋**般涌现	**春笋** *instead of* 蘑菇

Example19.

Intra-system-shifts between English and Chinese:	*water* in English shifted into *soil* in Chinese
SL: *to spend money like **water***	**water**
TL: 挥金如**土**	**土** *instead of* 水

Example20.

Intra-system-shifts between English and Chinese:	*Ice* in English shifted into *silence* in Chinese
SL: *To break the **ice**…*	*ice*
TL: 为了打破**沉默**…	**沉默** *instead of* 冰

4. THE SIGNIFICANCE AND LIMITATIONS OF CATFORD'S TRANSLATION THEORY

Catford expounds the rationality of equivalence and shifts based on the theoretical Systemic Functional Grammar Model theory which has been favourably received in the academic field for bridging the gap between traditional and modern translation studies. Specifically, there are the following aspects:

Firstly, Catford uses linguistic theories to describe the phenomenon of translation shifts in detail. Hersman notes that, when studying linguistics, translation studies that are derived from Halliday's Functional Gammar are enlightened. These ideas enable researchers to discover that the language used in translation is characterised by social ideology (Xing and Fang, 2008). And, translation itself refers to the conversion of one language into another, so the translation shifts theory has its rationality. Without conversion, how can there be translation?

Moreover, Catford divided shifts into level shifts and category shifts, which clarify the theoretical basis for the shifting phenomenon, which in turn provides an important basis for machine translation. Mechanical translation requires a series of rules or procedures in order to operate, so the Translation Shift Theory proposal is very helpful in machine translation development.

More importantly, Translation Shift theory plays a guiding role in instructing translation practice and in teaching because it enables translation research to reach a more microscopic level, and can classify and describe in detail all kinds of conversions in the translation process by using the General Linguistics theory. It also focuses on the relationship between the original and target texts, and has a detailed description of the transformation process occurring at all levels. This is an important guiding method for translation practice.

But Calford's translation shift theory also has its limitations. First, Catford views translation theory as a branch of applied linguistics, which is a one-sided standpoint. We cannot deny that translation study is closely related to language study, but translation theory is not confined to the study of language. Both the paradigms of philological studies, linguistic studies, literary studies and cultural studies explain one aspect of the nature of translation. Translation involves language conversion which has an impact on the target language literature and cultural construction (Liu Fang and Xing Jie, 2010). The language issue is only one aspect of translation studies, and we cannot use one aspect to negate the other.

Second, Catford's translation theory mainly analyses and describes the translation process and translation conversion, but does not comment on the standard of translation at all, nor does it explain why it is necessary for readers to adopt the hierarchical conversion and category conversion methods in order to translate properly. Translation standard is an important aspect of translation theory research, but without this standard, it would be impossible to judge whether a translation is superior or inferior.

Third, the examples given by Catford in his description mostly concern translations between Germanic and Slavic languages, or within their respective language families, which suggests the theory lacks universal significance. For example, when doing English-Chinese or Chinese-English translation, it is difficult to find practical guidance from his examples or illustrations. As Munday(2001:61) comments, "the examples used by Catford are basically idealized and the sentences that are out of context are made up by himself rather than sentences in actual translation."

5. CONCLUSION

By applying the discipline of linguistics to translation theory study, Catford has identified a scientific path forward in the development of traditional translation study. It also has a certain inspirational significance to the research method suggested for use in traditional Chinese translation theory. When it comes to the study of translation by means of traditional linguistics, scholars will naturally think of Catford and his translation theory. Tan Zaixi（1985）once pointed out that in terms of this trend, linguistic translation theories now occupy a dominant position in the study of modern translation theory. However, for current translation research development, the status of discipline no longer remains the main problem, and what researchers should be concerned about is how to promote translation research to go deeper (Xing Jie and Liu Fang, 2008).

In recent years, with the development, enrichment and improvement of different disciplines, translation theory study has entered a multi-level and multi-angle phase in its research methods and discussion. Translation theory development must proceed hand in hand with scientific development and societal development. Through an in-depth study of Catford's translation theory, the author has gained a clear understanding of his translation shift theory. This paper not only recognizes the contributions and shortcomings of Catford's translation theory, but also recognizes the linguistic theory of translation as one of the important aspects for further research in translation study.

Studying western translation theories helps us reconsider the development of Chinese translation theory. To push forward the development of Chinese translation theory, we must make greater efforts to improve the development of various disciplines and to call on more scholars to engage in translation theory research. Learning from the western translation theories can not only help develop a Chinese translation theory with its own distinctive features, but also to guide our E-C translation practice. Also, an in-depth understanding of Catford's translation shift theory will provide a theoretical basis for both E-C and C-E translation teaching.

6. FUNDING

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