CHAPTER 7

One Problem Play, Two Measures: Translatability of Christian Ethics in Two Adaptations of Measure for Measure

Jenny Wong

Abstract

In this paper, I use Andrew Chesterman’s causal model of translation to discuss the adaptation of religious and moral material in two versions of Measure for Measure: a Chinese and a Taiwanese version. Traditionally, studies in adaptation draw on intralingual and intersemiotic versions but not interlingual issues. That is, they study versions of the same language rather than versions involving translations. Translation models were only occasionally used until the groundbreaking work of Lawrence Venuti, who in his article “Adaptation, Translation, Critique” criticises the lack of theoretical basis in adaptation studies, and John Milton, who draws attention to linguistic aspects in adaptation studies. This paper approaches adaptation using well-developed models from translation studies in order to fill this research gap.

The ethical viewpoints of translators and directors shape stage productions to a significant degree. This can be seen when ethical and religious values are apparent in a play, whereby agents may choose to highlight or filter out these values according to their ethical position. Shakespeare’s Measure for Measure is a case in point, a play that is embedded with Christian references and Elizabethan-era ethical standards. In this paper, I use Andrew Chesterman’s causal model of translation (“Causal Model”) to discuss the adaptation of religious and moral material in two versions of Measure for Measure: a Chinese and a Taiwanese version. Traditionally, studies in adaptation draw on intralingual and intersemiotic versions, but not on interlingual issues. That is, they study versions of the same language rather than versions involving translations. Translation models were only occasionally used until the groundbreaking work of Lawrence Venuti, who in “Adaptation, Translation, Critique” evaluates the lack of theoretical basis in adaptation studies, and John Milton (“Translation Studies”), who drew attention to linguistic aspects in adaptation studies.
This paper approaches adaptation using well-developed models from translation studies in order to fill this research gap.

Chesterman’s causal model is useful in explaining cause and effect in translation practice, and can be used in explaining the translatability of religious and ethical values in *Measure for Measure*, especially in accounting for the effects of “ideology” on a translation product. In this model, the levels of causation include cognitive (the translation act), situational (the translation event), and socio-cultural (the translation context). The model might be summarised as follows:

1. Socio-cultural conditions (norms, history, ideologies, languages)
2. Translation event (skopos, source text, computers, deadlines, pay)
3. Translation act (state of knowledge, mood, self-image)
4. Translation profile (linguistic features)
5. Cognitive effects (change of cognitive or emotional state)
6. Behavioural effects (individual actions, criticism)
7. Socio-cultural effects (on target language, consumer behaviour, discourse of translation, status of translators). (Chesterman 20)

However, this causal model has its limitations. By situating the translation in socio-cultural conditions, it tends to view the social as the overarching factor in shaping a translation, which is not so in some cases, especially where one’s religious values may be the topmost criterion in displacing material. Additionally, Elaine Tzu-yi Lee, in her thesis, has noted that the above causation model is linear. In reality, effects may not always be top-down, but may go in the other direction, i.e. effects of the productions may in turn influence the various conditions that shape the play. Socio-cultural conditions including the prevalent ideology of the times may directly affect the cognitive condition of the translator, as my previous research has shown (Lee, “Translators as Gatekeepers”). Or, conversely, individual ideologies can operate independently of the socio-cultural conditions at large, as my case studies in this chapter show. In Chesterman’s model, socio-cultural factors dictate cognitive conditions, i.e. individual ideologies; in my version, the socio-cultural factors interact with cognitive conditions.