

# *Early Theory - The cultural translation theory of Susan Bassnett*

## 巴斯内特的文化翻译观

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### 1. Introduction

Throughout the history of translation studies in the world, before the 1950s, most of the translation studies focused on the text itself, that is, how to make the target text faithful to the original text. Since the 1950s, cultural studies have emerged in the UK, which soon involved various fields, and the translation studies have gradually paid attention to the cultural influence on translation. In the 1970s, the poly-system theory proposed by Zohar and other theories appeared, which admitted that the target text could not be completely faithful to the original text, so they focused their studies on its cause, process and result. In 1980, Susan Bassnett published *Translation Studies*, which provides a carefully contextualized introduction to the key debates of translation theory. Exploring translation as a semiotic and cultural act, rather than a strictly linguistic process, she alerts her readers to the problems of "equivalence" which are inevitably raised when the translator decodes and recodes a language. In 1990, Susan Bassnett and Lefevere put forward the concept of "Cultural Turn" in their book *Translation, History and Culture*, which is regarded as a turning point in the study of Western translation theories. So we're going to talk about Susan Bassnett's cultural translation theory.

### 2. Susan Bassnett

While many regard a high profile managerial position in contemporary UK higher education as the end of a research career (Bassnett has been Pro-Vice-Chancellor at the University of Warwick twice and is currently Special Adviser in Translation Studies), Professor Susan Bassnett continues to be a prolific researcher with more than 20 books to her name. Translator, theorist, literary critic, poet and journalist, Bassnett is a versatile scholar and public intellectual with interests ranging from Shakespeare to Sylvia Plath, renaissance Italy to post-colonial India. Her *Translation Studies*, which first appeared in 1980, has remained in print ever since and has become an important international textbook in this field. Her *Translation, History and Culture*, co-edited with Lefevere has also become internationally renowned and has been translated into several languages.

### 3. Cultural translation

Cultural translation is the practice of translation while respecting and showing cultural differences. This kind of translation solves some issues linked to culture, such as dialects, food or architecture.

The main issues that cultural translation must solve consist in translating a text as showing cultural differences of this text and respecting the source culture.

Cultural translation is studied through cultural anthropology, a field of anthropology focused on cultural issues among humans. This discipline questions translation through cultural differences. Indeed, translation studies are not only based on language issues, but also on cultural contexts between peoples.

### 4. Susan Bassnett's cultural translation theory

Bassnett emphasizes the importance of culture to translation and the significance of translation to culture. She makes a reflection on the needs of contemporary society and the overall situation of translation, and put forward the concept of cultural translation, which does matter a lot for the study of translation.

Firstly, the unit of translation was no longer a word or a sentence or a paragraph or a page or even a text, but indeed the whole language and culture in which that text was constituted. Susan Bassnett and Lefevere put forward the concept of "Cultural Turn" in their book *Translation, History and Culture*. Culture turn means the process that cultural approach substitutes for linguistic approach and cultural factors was valued by translation. Different from traditional linguistic approach by which the word, phrase, sentence, and text are the translational units, in cultural approach culture becomes the main translational unit. It emphasizes the important role that culture played in translation, and treats translation as micrographic cultural shift with the studying focus shifting from the source text to translated text, from the author to the translator and the source culture to the receptor culture.

Secondly, translation is not just the transfer of texts from one language into another, but a cultural exchange in essence. It includes both intra-cultural and inter-cultural exchanges. She considers translation acts as a transaction between texts and cultures.

Thirdly, equivalence in translation is the equivalence realization of the cultural function in two languages. Exploring translation as a semiotic and cultural act, rather than a strictly linguistic process, she alerts her readers to the problems of "equivalence" which are inevitably raised when the translator decodes and recodes a language. For example, she notes that a simple word like "butter" in English, or

"burro" in Italian, might describe the same foodstuff, but mean quite different things within their broader social and cultural contexts. And there is usually a distinction between the function and value of objects in their cultural context.

Lastly, the principles and norms of translation are also constantly changing. The purpose of translation is to meet different needs.

In conclusion, according to the cultural translation theory of Susan Bassnett, translation focuses on cultural exchange, this is, the first priority of translation is cultural exchange and then transmission of information. Susan Bassnett's cultural translation theory requires that the cultural differences of the source language should be retained as much as possible. Because it can reflect different cultures and let the reader understand the culture of source language.

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## Futher Reading

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