Trade-offs in translation effects. Illustrations and methodological concerns

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Abstract: Trade-offs are solutions to translation problems where two or more apparently incompatible values are sought at the same time. As such, they present an alternative to theories that see translation as operating between two polarities of the one value. Analysis of three illustrative examples suggests that receivers can activate trade-offs that are quite different from those envisaged by translators and that different readerships may seek different kinds of trade-offs. The resulting instability gives rise to problems concerning research methodology. It is proposed that the study of trade-offs is suited to a mixed-methods approach that starts from receiver-produced data, that allows for more than two values, and that recognizes that not all solutions are trade-offs. This approach can also identify situations where one kind of trade-off leads to another, creating chains of value transformation that are informed by translation history.

Keywords: translation theory, translation reception, trade-offs, semiosis, risk management

1. Introduction

We would like to offer a humble contribution to basic translation theory. Our concern is with particular kinds of *effects* translations can have in the space of reception. Within that space, we are interested in way receivers can activate *trade-offs*, understood as a rough weighing up of benefits and losses in such a way that two different kinds of value are sought at the same time. To take a simple example, the Chinese translation of the brandname Coca-Cola is 可口可乐樂, which both imitates the phonetics of the English (“kě kǒu kě lè”) and uses characters that can translate as “to permit the mouth to be able to rejoice”. If you were to make the phonetics even closer to the English, the semantics would suffer; and if you adjusted the semantics to make a catchier phrase, the phonetics would suffer. In this way, a successful trade-off is able to score highly on at least two different value scales at the same time. Les successful trade-offs would score better for one value than for the others.

The initial interest of trade-offs for translation theory lies in the way they break with binarisms such as foreignization vs. domestication, where all values are assumed to lie along the one line between two poles. Trade-offs say that there is no need to choose between just one option or the other: creative translations can activate two or more kinds of value simultaneously.

Here we will outline the general nature of trade-offs in translation, consider three illustrative examples, then explore how a few methodological and conceptual problems can be broached.

2. What is a trade off?

The logic of trade-offs is by no means specific to translation; examples can be found all around us. In the thick of COVID-19, for instance, public policy sought to save *both* lives and economies, imposing lockdowns at series of trade-off points that varied considerably from culture to culture. In language policy, Grin et al. (2014) and Pym (2018) evaluate options in terms of how well they maximize *both* social inclusion (for which one common language is fine) and individual mobility (for which people need several languages): better policies achieve both those apparently incompatible ends at the same time. Closer to literary concerns, Horace (c.19 BCE/1929: 478) famously advised the poet to "join the instructive with the agreeable" in order to "at once warn and delight the reader",[1] where the warning and the delighting can be seen as quite different values that are both in play in classical aesthetics. Or again, when machine translation is used, one aim is to increase productivity (maximizing automation) and another is to reduce the risk of error (requiring human checking). These two values are initially incompatible: the more productivity, the greater the risk of error; the more human checking, the less the productivity. So trade-off points are found in the various mixed workflows and modalities of post-editing. In all these cases, there are *at least two* potentially incompatible values involved.

Despite its classical origins, the idea of trade-offs has at best maintained a marginal presence in Western translation theory. As mentioned, the grand binary oppositions place "word for word" and "sense for sense" (or "foreignizing" and "domesticating") as two ends of a continuum, thus effectively reducing options to points on just one line. A possible exception might be when Joan Lluís Vives (1533) recognized the two polarities but then argued there was something else as well: "Tertium genus est, ubi & res & verba ponderantur" (1533, 168v) – "a third type is when the matter and the words are both weighed up". This weighing of two different things is the essence of a trade-off. The Chinese virtue-based theories with more than two terms, such as Yan Fu's "faithfulness, comprehensibility, and elegance" (信达雅) (1901/2004, 69), should also allow for such weighing-up. Closer to contemporary translation theory, awareness of trade-offs came in on the coattails of game theory. Jiři Levý (1967/2000) suggested applying von Neumann's "minimax" theorem to translation, positing that the translator's aim was to invest minimum effort to obtain maximum effect. Aleksandr Shveytser (1987) similarly described the translator as searching for "an optimal decision that fits with many variable functional criteria" (trans. Kazakova 2014, 3). And James S. Holmes approached poetry translation as a game with two opposed rules: 1) there must be enough invariance for the resulting text to be accepted as a translation, and 2) the translation "must be of such a nature that it will be considered a poem" (Holmes 1988, 50). This paints a picture where the more one is literal, then less poetic is the effect, and vice versa, which could be happening at points along the one line. Yet we must be careful here. To count as trade-offs, the moves in Holmes's game would require that the two kinds of value not be the same: "translationality" and "poeticity" cannot be placed at points along the one axis. The same reservation would apply if one were to see the norms model in Toury (1995/2012, p. 63ff.) as a trade-off. Although the model certainly has two axes, one of them is for "approval" and the other is for "behaviour", which implies there is only one kind of value being evaluated at any one time.

[1] "Omne tulit punctum qui miscuit utile dulci, / Lectorem delectando pariterque monendo." *Ars poetica*, v. 343-344. The Loeb translation reads: "He has won every vote who has blended profit and pleasure, at once delighting and instructing the reader" (Horace c.19 BCE/1929: 479). The translation makes the values sound quite compatible, as in a capitalist who finds pleasure in profit. Alternative translations nevertheless bring out the oppositions. Smart has "He who joins the *instructive* with the agreeable […] by delighting and at the same time *admonishing* the reader" (Horace. c.19 BCE/1827: 285, italics ours).

More recently, translational trade-offs have been explored empirically under several different names. Pym (2018) includes trade-offs within the more general concept of “risk mitigation”, seen as what happens when one kind of risk is played off against another: the standard example would be the fire sprinklers activated in offices because damage from water is less than damage from fire. In the present context, however, we insist more clearly that a trade-off is not about *replacing* one risk with another but instead concerns achieving *more than one positive value* at the same time. Bei Hu (2022) calls these trade-offs “compromises”, which she identifies in rich data on the way readers discuss and evaluate translations. The term “compromise” nevertheless suggests a focus on the sacrifices that are made, in keeping with classical concepts of translation as a necessary loss, rather than a plurality of *positive* values that can be played off against each other. Here we prefer “trade-off” in the hope that it evokes that more positive perspective, allowing win-win outcomes.

Previous research has focused on the decisions made by both translators and receivers, since elements of similar logics can be found in both places. Our attention here is more on trade-offs in *reception* because, despite the reception studies that have begun over the past decade, perhaps from Kruger (2012) to Cadera and Walsh (2022), reception is still the part of the translation process that we know least about. That said, we have no particular desire to separate reception studies from production studies. There is obviously much to be gained from comparing the two sides, and indeed from inviting all translators, especially learners, to think seriously about the effects their decisions might actually have on receivers.

3. Working from examples

The term “trade-offs” opens to a rich tradition of modelling in economics. It is tempting to take any one of those models and then seek correlatives in translation, working top-down (cf. Goldfajn 2020). A more productive approach, however, is to work in a more exploratory way, going bottom-up as much as possible, starting from illustrative examples where it is possible to trace at least some interactions between the various actors and interests. Here we work from three examples that focus on relatively simple translation problems: two concern the translation of names, where the options are limited and clearly different; the third then delves into a problem of semantics. We hope to show that the trade-off model can be applied in all cases.

Study 1: Names explained in footnotes

The much-studied eighteenth-century Chinese novel *Hong Lou Meng* includes some 732 named characters (Xu, 1982), nearly 40 of which are considered important. The names constitute a major challenge for any translator. The issue is complicated by the way the author Cao made purposeful wordplays on the names of many of the characters, indicating their destinies or personalities. For example, a woman of stunning beauty and great capability is named 熙凤 (Hsi-feng) which literally means “splendid phoenix”.

How can these names be translated into English? Should there be one solution for all? Or different solutions for different degrees of opacity? These are questions for which there is no wholly right answer, and perhaps no wholly wrong answer either. If you give the transliteration “Hsi-feng” (unique identifier naming a specific character within a specific cultural location), you lose the implicit content (narrative information controlled by the author), and the reverse loss would be incurred by a semantic translation as “Pheonix”. The more you win of one value, the less you have of the other, so a successful trade-off would be where parts of both values are somehow attained at the same time.

The translation of the novel as *A Dream of Red Mansions* by Xianyi and Gladys Yang (first volume in 1978) opted for a double solution: straight transcription in the text (for the "unique identifier" function) and then explanations of meanings in the notes (for the "narrative information" function). This strategy can be seen as a simple trade-off, seeking values on both fronts by expanding the text.

The exact nature of the values can nevertheless be difficult to pin down. So far we have invented our own variables, based on an abstract narrative analysis. But how might that actually work in a decision-making process? In this case, we have some evidence from Gladys Yang's commentary on the problem, where she not only justifies giving added information on the names – "to my mind Western readers need this assistance" (1980, p. 622) – but she also cites an argument against replacing the names with English versions: "Purists have pointed out that some of these are inaccurate and certain of the names defy translation; therefore, my Chinese colleagues out-voted me when I proposed doing the same [i.e. she proposed giving English names]" (1980, p. 622). That is, the two values were opposed not just as desirable ends in themselves, but as a difference in preference between the British-born translator Gladys Yang (saying "help the readers") and presumably the Foreign Languages Press in Beijing that had commissioned her and her husband to do the translation ("my Chinese colleagues", who were saying something different). For them, the purpose of the translation was likely be to show Chinese culture to the world, so "accuracy" would be more of a prime value: the names in the text should be in Chinese. As indeed they were. The trade-off can thus be seen not only as a balancing of values, but also as the result of a negotiation between at least one of the translators and the client.

How well did this trade-off work? Some information on the actual reception can be gleaned from readers' comments on Goodreads and Amazon. When we read 484 online reviews of the Yangs' translation, we found 35 that discussed the names. Surprisingly, all 35 were negative in tone, suggesting that the trade-off was not exactly a resounding success. This finding is in line with Zheng and Fan (2022) who used an automatic sentiment analyser (Perkins, 2014) to compare the readers' comments of four English translations of *Hong Lou Meng*, including the Yangs' version, and found that all comments on the name translations were negative.

What sort of things were the readers complaining about? What were the values that were important to them? For some readers, the numerous transliterated names became unbearable and caused them to stop reading: "Obviously deserves its classic status, but *I do not think I will read the whole thing because of the sheer number and difficulty of the names*" (Bard on Goodreads, July 27, 2014; italics ours, here and throughout). Another reader also plans to give up because the effort is too great:

> […] the Chinese reader will see and relate to specific Chinese pictograms with their own syllabic meaning and graphical aesthetics, and he will be able to keep names separate in his mind, while the English reader with be stuck with a (meaningless) "Li-You" (which looks nearly identical to another, equally meaningless "Li-Yi" two paragraphs further down). […] For my part *I'll give Chinese classics a break*. (Thiry on Amazon, February 10, 2008)

A third reader confronts the same problem and seeks an ad hoc solution:

> Sometimes the characters' names are so close to each other that if you are not familiar with Chinese names it can get confusing. For example, there is Chia Cheng, Chia Chen, Chia Chiang, Chia Chian. At one point, I didn't know who was who. One way

of handling this is to make a family chart and include at least the important characters in that. (Vishy on Goodreads, November 20, 2020)

In all these cases, as more generally in the readers' comments, the problem is the sheer effort required to keep track of who is who. Gladys Yang was quite right: Western readers do need help. But these readers' account suggest that the values informing the reception process are not particularly the accuracy or the semantic content of the names – the information in the footnotes (only for the important characters) was not really addressing the readers' problems. The problematic value was something else: the *effort* required. And so the trade-off that seemed to work well enough between the translators and the client could then have floundered in the space of reception: the weight of the effort required for identification was too great to enter into any kind of balance with the readers' narrative interest.

Study 2: Names in many languages

The same novel *Hong Lou Meng* was translated into English by David Hawkes and John Minford as *The Story of the Stone* (first volume in 1973), published by Penguin for a wide readership. This is the translation that Gladys Yang was actually reviewing in her comments cited above, where she contrasted her own strategy for dealing with names with that of David Hawkes, the translator of the first volume of *The Story of the Stone*.

Hawkes' approach to name translation is very different. He recognizes that there are four different categories of names, each of which he deals with using a different strategy, indeed different languages.

First, the aristocrats' names are transliterated – they tend to be among the important characters and so readers might be expected to remember the Chinese names.

Second, the servants and housemaids in the Chinese original go by nicknames given by their masters or mistresses, often with reference to beautiful things or Chinese poetry. These nicknames are translated into English on the basis of semantic content. For example, the family name of the protagonist's chief maid is 花 (Hua, meaning "flower"), but her young master names her "袭人" (literally: assail people), in reference to a line of poetry "花气袭人" ("flowers' fragrance assails people"). Hawkes consequently names her "Aroma", whereas the Yangs transliterate her name as "Hsi-jen" and add a note indicating that it means "assail men".

The third group are the sing-song girls and prostitutes, who go by their stage names in the original. Hawkes translates these into French. For example, the sing-song girl "云儿", which literally means "cloud", is rendered as "Nuageuse", French for "cloud-like".

Fourth we have religious figures such as Daoist priests and Buddhist monks, whose names in the original usually refer to religious concepts. An example is "空空道人" (Empty-empty Daoist Priest), in which "空" (kong, "empty") is a philosophical concept usually rendered as "emptiness" or "vacuity". While the Yangs translate this name as "Reverend Void", Hawkes opts for the Latin "Vanitas" – and Latin is his general option for associations with classical language and religion.

Hawkes' approach thus involves a complex trade-off where, on the level of abstract narrative analysis, one value might be "geo-cultural location" (the aristocrats' names are visibly in China) and other could be something like "cultural association" (French and Latin are presumed to bring in different semantic associations). There is an obvious risk of misinformation here, since French and Latin were not operative in this way in eighteenth-century China. That risk might nevertheless be run to the extent that the main characters still have their names firmly located in the Chinese language, while the others might be appreciated as creations of a translator at play.

How did this strategy fare in the space of reception? Of the 422 online reviews we read of this translation, 32 mentioned the names. This time, not all are negative. Interestingly, this contradicts Zheng and Fan's (2022) finding that Hawkes' (and Minford's) name translation strategy received negative receptions in *all* readers' comments on Goodreads from 2011 to 2020. As mentioned, Zheng and Fan (2022) analyzed readers' comments on four English translations of *Hong Lou Meng* with an automatic sentiment analyzer. When a comment was fed into the analyzer, it was automatically tagged as being either positive or negative in sentiment. This fully automatic method thereby excluded the textual comments in which trade-offs could be expressed. However, by manually analyzing the readers' comments as texts, we found cases in which Hawkes' translations of the characters' names received some positive comments.

Several readers appreciate the transliterated names because they help with memorizing and distinguishing characters: "it certainly spares the reader headaches in remembering even more Chinese names, so you should all thank Hawkes for making your lives easier" (Exir Chen on Goodreads, September 15, 2020). Similarly: "This helps me keep track of everyone" (Martin A. Perea on Amazon, October 17, 2012). In effect, the translator is seen as offering the kind of assistance that, as we saw above, at least one reader of the Yangs' translation tried to develop for themselves.

That said, not everyone is so overjoyed. One reader says that translated names such as "Aroma" and "Tealeaf" still seem the same (Beth on Goodreads, January 20, 2008), so the identification problem is not entirely solved. Others indicate that the problematic value remains the cultural location of the text: "this translator seems to have written his own tale. And it is done more as an English Victorian tale in words and phrases rather than a Chinese fable" (Donald Buckley on Amazon, September 24, 2014). The complaint directly concerns the names:

> if this were a strict translation, the Buddhist nuns would not have Latin (I think—they look Latin, at any rate) names. Individuals would not have titles like "Marquis." The characters would not say "old chap," or "arsehole." What the translators have done here is almost "transplant" the story into Western Europe. (Colin on Goodreads, October 21, 2011)

So what Hawkes wins on the character-identification front is apparently lost with respect to clear cultural location. The trade-off is highly asymmetric. However, the same reader then goes on:

> While some might prefer to have the language as close to the original as is reasonable – accompanied by notes and dense introductions and appendices that serve to bring the world of 18th century Chinese aristocracy directly to you, steep learning curve and all – the translators have instead ingeniously discarded such editorial bustle by making the text as readable and as familiar as possible, while retaining its Chinese flavor.

Here the appreciation is in terms of a slightly different trade-off, this time between accuracy ("close to the original") and paratextual addition ("editorial bustle"), where the reduced accuracy is compensated for by the reduction in readerly effort.

Overall, the readers' reports on this translation are far more divided than is the case for the Yangs' translation: readers are either for or against the use of French and Latin in an English translation. This would seem to be the effect brought about by a high-risk strategy (the use of the languages for some names) within a trade-off where the Chinese cultural location is still maintained by the transliteration of other names. The trade-off works for some, but not for all.

Study 3: What is a "slumbering fire"?

Names are relatively easy to analyze because the options are limited. Here we apply trade-off analysis to a rather more complex problem encountered in the Agatha Christie novel *The Mysterious Affair at Styles* (1920). The narrator meets the aristocratic Mary Cavendish and remarks on "the vivid sense of slumbering fire that seemed to find expression in those wonderful tawny eyes of hers" (1920, p. 15). The problem is this "slumbering fire". The narrative suggestion seems clear enough: here is a woman who could become vivacious if that fire were lit up. But how are we to construe this "slumbering"?

The term is difficult enough for most English-language readers. The most probable reference is to the fires or stoves that, in cold climates, would not be allowed to die out: the air supply would be lowered so that the embers remained alight through the night, and the fire was thus "slumbering". How should that be rendered in Chinese?

Hu (2022) looked at the ways 123 Chinese readers reacted to three different translations of a passage that involves the above-mentioned phrase: raw machine translation (MT), a light post-edit of the machine translation (MTPE), and a published human translation (HT). The participants were told they were reading translations, and this awareness presumably activated their expectations of what a translation should be like. Our study is thus looking for ways in which those expectations form trade-offs. On the other hand, the participants were not told how the translations had been produced. They were randomly given one of the three translations and asked to annotate the target-text elements with Likes and Dislikes, although they were free to leave a passage without annotation. This gave the following results, where the percentages are of the total annotations and non-annotations (presumably neutral acceptance) made by 43 participants for the MT, 38 for the MTPE, and 43 for HT:

> MT (33% Likes; 51% Dislikes; 16% Neutral):
> 沉睡的火苗的生动的感觉 (the vivid feeling of *deeply sleeping* fire)
>
> MTPE (73% Likes; 5% Dislikes; 22% Neutral):
> 微燃的火焰般生动的气息 (the vivid aura of *mildly burning fire*)
>
> HT (64% Likes; 5% Dislikes; 31% Neutral):
> 欲露还藏的活泼表情 (showing yet *concealing lively expression*)

The scores show that the post-edited version was Liked more than the published human translation, possibly because the latter did away with the "slumber" metaphor altogether. They also indicate that the raw machine translation attracted very divided opinions: it was literalist but about a third of the readers still Liked it. What interests us more than the numbers are the reasons why readers gave these evaluations.

Individual follow-up interviews were carried out with one or two participants at a time via Zoom and in Chinese. A total of 15 participants volunteered for these interviews and all of them were interviewed. They were presented with the three translations on the one screen. On the translation that they had annotated prior to the interview, they could also see with own Like and Dislike annotations. Without knowing how each translation was produced, the participants were asked to comment on their annotations and compare the annotated version with the other translations. The interview data this obtained indicate that

MT version “deeply sleeping fire” was mainly Disliked because it was seen as an unusual collocation. For some, this exceptional quality was not automatically negative: the expression was seen as “belonging uniquely to literature” and “gives a beautiful description of the expressions in the character’s eyes” (our translation from Chinese, here and throughout). For others, the rendition was “awkwardly worded” and it was “hard to get what it wants to say”. The values at stake thus seem to be “literariness” (for the unusual and striking wording) and “comprehensibility” (for the sense that one does not understand). For the positive reception position, the expression was “hard to understand but literary”; for the negative reception, it was perhaps “literary but hard to understand”. The trade-off could be tipped either way, as neatly expressed by the asymmetry of the English conjunction “but”.

These values also generally hold for the way the other translations were received. The post-edited version spells out the “slumbering fire” as “微燃的火焰” (“mildly burning fire”), thus avoiding possible confusion about why fire is sleeping. The interview data suggest that this greatly improved the comprehensibility. Many readers indicated that the post-edited rendition had a clear meaning and gave them a vivid picture of the expressions in the character’s eyes. One reader noted it enabled him to imagine “a close-up shot of the [character’s] face”, in which he could see “fire-like glows in her eyes”. Another commented that it “creates an image that the girl has vivid expressions in her eyes”. At the same time, the figurative rendition was generally considered literary and aesthetically enjoyable: “it is a pity that [the human translation] does not have this line saying that there are fires in the girl’s eyes”. The trade-off thus scores well on both comprehensibility and literariness, possibly with a slight weighting in favor of comprehensibility: it is “literary but comprehensible”.

In contrast, the professional human translator used his own interpretation to explicitate “slumbering fire” as a non-figurative expression meaning “showing yet concealing lively expression”. This received the lowest percentage of Dislikes, so it was not unsuccessful, but did not win as many Likes as the more figurative post-edited version. One reader argued that “微燃的火焰” (mildly burning fire) in the post-edited version was “easier for me to understand what it means”, whereas “欲露还藏” (literally: want [to] show yet conceal) in the professional version was “too blurry”. Points seem to have been lost in both legers.

The human translator nevertheless attempted to compensate for any loss of literariness by creating a pseudo-idiom. The phrase “欲露还藏” (want [to] show yet conceal) is a four-character neologism that imitates an established literary idiom “欲说还休” (want [to] say yet refrain), which is from a classical *Ci* poem. In Chinese literature, four-character idioms (*chengyu*) have long marked literariness, in both translations and non-translations. This means that most readers found the published human translation to be the most literary because of its exquisite word choices. On the downside, some readers said that the word choices were “contrived” (做作) and “a little over the top” (有点过头) because this rendition “simply puts together some seemingly fancy words, but in comparison with [the post-edited version], you would find that its meaning is not very clear”. So the literary values here take two steps forward and one step back. Based on the interviewees’ receptions, the professional translation could be a complex trade-off: for the positive reception, it is literary but comprehensible, while a more negative reception sees it as comprehensible but literary, albeit with a loss of perceived authenticity.

4. Questions of method

What do these few examples tell us about trade-offs? From the naming strategy in A *Dream of Red Mansions*, we find that *the values in a trade-off depend on who is negotiating*. Between the translators and the clients, the pertinent values were reportedly *accuracy* and *narrative information*, and a trade-off was enacted that enabled both to be achieved. The English-language readers, however, seemed more concerned with the *workload of character identification*, so a different kind of trade-off was required to keep them reading. When David Hawkes in *The Story of the Stone* offered a multilingual naming strategy that seemed to help with the character identification, yet another value entered the trade-off: the *cultural location* of the languages and names. Some readers were prepared to accept the misleading presence of French and Latin in eighteenth-century China as a tool for easier identification, others were not. The resulting division of opinions is indicative of the risk-taking nature of Hawkes' strategy. When we move to the "slumbering fire" example, yet another kind of value enters into play: *perceived literariness*. Some readers are prepared to accept reduced comprehensibility if it accompanies some kind of aesthetic pleasure. The various trade-offs then concern the different ways in which that literariness is perceived and evaluated, along with the varying degrees of comprehensibility that some readers felt they required. For some readers, the four-character literary marker in Chinese lacked *authenticity*, making that yet another value entering the logic of trade-offs.

Drawing on these examples, we now consider on some basic methodological problems that should be addressed if trade-offs are to be an object of research.

4.1 Why look at data on reception?

Our examples suggest that the options verbalized by a translator need not always correspond to the values that most concern receivers, even when translators (and many translation theorists) make facile assumptions about what receivers want or need. A focus on reception need not replace any of the other negotiation processes from which trade-offs result (translators with translators, with publishers, with clients, with institutions) but it could help explain the historical success or failure of certain trade-offs.

4.2 How can different values be measured?

Perhaps the most obvious methodological problem concerns quantities. If a trade-off seeks so much of value A and so much of value B, how can we actually measure the quantities involved? In some cases, we can generate quantitative data that address the problem, as in the Likes and Dislikes used for the "slumbering fire" or indeed in the counts of positive or negatives values in the online reviews. Data science is helping us move in that direction. Yet those numbers do not directly tell us anything about the *reasons* for the judgements; they do not indicate what kind of values are entering into the trade-offs. To discover those things, we have to interpret *qualitative* data, what people say about their likes and dislikes, or the terms in which the reviews are actually expressed. The recourse to qualitative data should then mean that, when value A and value B are being compared and weighed up, that is *first done by the actors themselves* in the scene of translation, in these cases by the receivers. We then try to make sense of the judgements they verbalize. That is, values are first measured by the people making judgements, in effect by the people who propose, accept, or refuse trade-offs. If we, as observers, also choose to do this on the level of what we have called "abstract narrative analysis", as a kind of starting hypothesis, then that is something that we do as just another set of receivers – we are not outside the scene of translation. Other receivers obviously have no reason to concur with our individual expectations.

4.3 How many values are involved?

In our examples, we have generally reduced the trade-offs to just two values. Is there any reason why there should be just two? All the values we have mentioned (accuracy, narrative value, identification, geo-cultural location, aesthetic quality, comprehensibility, authenticity) are at least potentially concerned to some degree in all cases; none of them simply disappears. In theory, there is no limit to the list of possible values, and no limit to the ways that values can be combined in trade-offs. However, when we gather data from actual translation events, the trade-offs seem to be responding to one value that is in some way problematic or under threat in that particular situation, and then another value that is brought in to offset the first. If there are too many names, then "character identification" is a value; if the effort of identification is reduced by using footnotes, then "effort" becomes the other value; if that effort is reduced by bringing in French and Latin, then "cultural location" becomes the other value; if a metaphor is hard to understand, then "literariness" becomes a problematic value, and if a literary marker then seems forced, then "authenticity" is in question. In principle, there is no reason why there should just be two values in play.

On the level of the individual translation event, where we are looking at the success or failure of a particular translation for a particular reception group, the weighing up of just two values nevertheless seems to be strong. The limitation to two might could be a feature of the way sentences are used in the qualitative data, and then the kinds of arguments that are based on sentences (for example, the positional asymmetries of the conjunction "but"). Yet the Chinese sentence can accept more than one predication, and still the trade-offs expressed in that language seem limited to two opposed values. Even when there do seem to be three values at the same time, in the case of the literary translator who removed the slumbering fire and put a four-character literary idiom in its place, the three apparent values (comprehensibility, literariness, authenticity) could be reduced to two by seeing the last pair as different aspects of literariness.

4.4 Can all values be reduced to one?

A more interesting question is whether the values balanced in a trade-off can be reduced to just one value. For all the examples we have given here, such a reduction can be attempted. Beyond translation, when public-health strategies seek to save both human lives and economies, a cold-hearted analysts can calculate the value of each year of each human life and then argue that the elderly should be left to die while economies and schools remain open (Foster and Frijters, 2022): the common denominator is the worth of a year of human life at a certain age. Similarly, for the problem of balancing speed and accuracy when machine translation is used, the value "accuracy" can be measured in terms of the *time* needed to correct errors, thus making time the common denominator for both values. Or again, when readers seek a trade-off between character identification and cultural location, an experiment could be set up where complete information is available in different places in a text in accordance with different translation strategies, then measure the effort needed to resolve problems of identification and location; that is, *effort* could become the common denominator. It can be done.

Does this mean that everything is really in the one dimension and the trade-offs are somehow illusory? Could we happily return to the linear models of just two polarities and a scale of value between them: low vs. high effort, or perhaps low vs. high foreignization, and the like?

The remarkable thing is that, just as public pandemic policies did *not* calculate the worth of each person's remaining life, the qualitative data gathered from readers' reviews and focus groups rarely reduce complex assessments to purely one-dimensional preferences. Even when some receivers compare different strategies in terms of effort, for example, one doubts they would opt for a zero-effort solution if it were available. No one turns to eighteenth-century Chinese literature for an easy read. Cultural and literary values are also in play, necessarily, and those values are rarely one-dimensional.

This suggests that although the abstract reductions to one-dimensional comparison can work for statisticians and the like, they lack socio-psychological reality.

4.5 What is the status of self-report data?

This brings us to the question of how far one should believe what people say about their reception processes. The psychology of actual reception can be very complex, very personal, with far more than two variables involved. For the purposes of our research here, that inner space of reception remains a black box: we do not know about it. What we are analyzing is clearly externalized discourse, the things that people say when interacting with other people, the stuff that builds up and confirms shared beliefs and expectations – the things that Bourdieu (1980a) termed “doxa”. For us, the trade-offs ultimately exist in the way social groups *discuss* translations.

This means that, in the public discussion of trade-offs, there are no lies that can be discounted simply because we think they are lies – at least beyond trivial cases like respondents who give the same answer to all questions in a survey. It is possible, for example, that a patriotic Chinese reader is completely bamboozled by the naming strategy in the Yangs’ translation and yet praises that strategy because the translation is the official Chinese version. Such public praise must be part of the data from which trade-offs operate: there might be a mismatch between the actual reading process and what is said about it, but the public preference can still be part of the trade-off. As Baudrillard (1981) showed, simulacra are socially operative; or as Bourdieu (1980b, p. 32) put it, “illusions are not in themselves illusory”.

4.6 Why use mixed methods?

In the wider study from which we have taken the “slumbering fire” example, Hu (2022) applied a classical mixed-methods approach. As noted, this included a quantitative questionnaire survey of 123 readers that was followed up by qualitative interviews with 15 selected readers. The *quantitative* data most importantly gave the numbers that enabled us to identify groups within the readership; interpretation of the *qualitative* data from the interviews then identified the main variables involved in the trade-offs and the logics by which they were related.

That kind of mixed-method approach has become fairly standard in empirical translation studies, with many possible variants (see the review in Meister 2017). We have invented nothing new in that respect. Here we merely pause to note that a mixed-method approach can be seen as a trade-off in itself.

If our study were weighted very heavily on the quantitative side, it would have a hard time saying *why* some variables were important to receivers – the analysis might ultimately only be of the values that we include in our questions. For example, it is interesting to consider why trade-offs seem not to appear significantly in highly quantitative studies like Kotze et al. (2021) and Zheng and Fan (2022), which set out to identify the values readers use to describe literary translations in Goodreads. The quantitative procedures used for keyword and sentiment analysis typically attach one value to each item, even when allowing for the uncertainty expressed in hedges. As noted above, this precludes trade-offs from surfacing easily. However, if slightly different research questions are asked, one could search for markers of asymmetric value distribution (“but”, “however”, “although”, “despite”, “even when”, etc.), extract comments that are likely to express trade-offs, and then analyze those texts qualitatively in relation to whatever context variables are available.

The use of bottom-up analysis and quantitative methods is sometimes confused with a positivist belief that truth springs directly from data. We make no such assumption: the methods come from the initial research questions, which always have a bias. One can nevertheless muster enough heterogeneous external data so that the researchers' initial expectations might be shown to be wrong (as actually happened in our case with the percentages of Likes and Dislikes – we thought the MT version was more successful than it turned out to be), just as data on receivers' trade-offs can show translators' assumptions to be over-hopeful (cf. Hu 2020, 2022, not to mention the expectations of Gladys Yang and David Hawkes above). Used in this way, the research process can move us beyond our initial positions, producing knowledge.

4.7 Trade-offs and loss avoidance

The asymmetry of the values in a trade-off can be understood in several ways. Sometimes it is easy to assume that two positive values are being sought at the same time (for example, character identification and narrative information). A more common kind of trade-off nevertheless seems to involve a baseline avoidance of one negative value (for example, excessive effort in the case of the Chinese names) and the seeking of one or more positive values (perhaps cultural location and character identification). This second kind of trade-off can be found in Freud (1930), where the avoidance of unhappiness is weighed against an open-ended list of different ways of seeking happiness, including intense sexual pleasure, drugs, narcissism, and asceticism, each of which must be limited if life is to proceed. Something similar appears in the "negative utilitarian principle" attributed to Popper (1945), where the avoidance of suffering is regarded as the prime ethical criterion. This holds a certain attraction in cross-cultural studies, since the desire to avoid suffering is likely to be more common to humanity than are the many different ways in which different cultures seek happiness. Andrew Chesterman (1997, 2001) has usefully incorporated this principle into his translator ethics, where the first principle is "avoid communicative suffering", after which there is a list of positive values that can be sought at the same time (truth, trustworthiness, etc.). A similar mode of thought might be also read into in the economist Kanneman's principle of "loss aversion", where human choices are seen as being motivated more by the avoidance of loss than the attainment of rationally calculated gains – a principle applied to literary translation in Goldfajn (2020), who uses it to explain all the inferiority tropes used by translators in their prefaces down through the ages.

The point we want to retain here is that, in all these cases, one baseline value is the avoidance of negative effects, upon which a plurality of trade-offs can be built in accordance with the positive values that are sought. Translators might be characterized as opting for the first kind only, as when Goldfajn (2020) suggests that they are guided by loss-aversion, Simeoni (1998) assumes that a prime element in their habitus is subservience, or Pym (2021) laments that translators tend to be risk-averse, which means that they tend to play it safe, making texts clear and boring. The theory of trade-offs forces us to consider the other end of business as well: the range of *positive* values that can be sought in order to achieve communicative success. In this, the theory may underlie an interventionist kind of criticism, seeking to challenge excessive risk aversion. In identifying the range of positive values that can be sought, this approach should encourage translators to take more risks.

4.8 Are all translation solutions trade-offs?

There is no shortage of business manuals and self-help books that claim that "everything is a trade-off", such that prudence is a necessary virtue across the board. In translation pedagogy, Gideon Toury (1992) used something like that mode of thought when he argued that students should be led to discover that every translation solution has its downside: "everything has its price". Just as abstract analysis can theoretically reduce all decisions to a one-dimensional sliding scale, so clever theorists can in principle find trade-offs everywhere. With respect to translation solutions, it is enough to assume that effort and understanding are minimally pertinent values in all cases.

Such a view may not hold in all cases of reception processes, however. To take the example of names, a solution like straight transcription should allow maximum accuracy with minimum effort, such that there is no effective trade-off at all. In a case where there are few characters in a novel and no narrative values in play, there is no reason why transcription should not be the obvious way to translate names. The same might be said for the use of authorized or obligatory solutions (where the risk is transferred to the authority) or other cases where one avoids complications by adopting only literalism or the surest of semantic values (adopting a risk-adverse strategy). There is no overriding reason to find trade-offs everywhere.

The American conservative economist Thomas Sowell is often cited as saying that there are no solutions, only trade-offs. He used this as a critique of left-wing positions that would impose one grand ethical principle across the board as a universal solution to all problems of governance, just as we might use trade-offs to criticize those who say that all translations should be foreignizing or domesticating. Sowell claimed that prudence is necessary in each case. In *A Conflict of Visions* (1987), he nevertheless recognizes that his claims depend on a certain vision of human nature as being imperfect or at least open to doubt, such that constraints must apply to every decision of governance. If, however, you are absolutely sure of the ultimate goodness of humans, just as a translator might assume to know exactly what all receivers like or require, then an "unconstrained vision" becomes possible: you make decisions without second thoughts about possible negative consequences, as might a Nietzschean *Übermensch* or perhaps the translator David Hawkes when opting for French and Latin, apparently sure all readers will follow his every move. Such would be risk-taking, which might also be seen as an extremely asymmetric trade-off.

Are all decisions trade-offs? It seems more useful to recognize that decisions can also be informed by risk aversion, risk transfer, and risk-taking, at least. Those forms might be seen as extremely asymmetric trade-offs, as in the case of Hawkes' use of French and Latin, where the value "geo-cultural location" is close to zero and the translator thus runs risks in search of high aesthetic rewards. In terms of Holmes's particular game theory, Hawkes' text loses as a recognizable translation but gains, but only for some, in literary entertainment.

5. Closing remark: Trade-offs in translation history

The trade-off model questions any simple call for all translations to apply one kind of solution or another ("all names should be accurate to the Chinese"); it problematizes any simple categorization of translations ("the Yangs domesticate; Hawkes foreignizes"); it can help explain the concomitant failure of empirical attempts to find clear significant differences in translation reception in such terms: if you ask readers ten different questions about different kinds of foreignness in a translation, you tend to get ten different answers (cf. the empirical surveys in Zhong and Lin 2007, Wang, Chen and Zhong 2009, Zhong 2014). Why? Because "foreignness" is not just one thing. It is a series of possible values that enter into trade-offs with other values.

The trade-off model is nevertheless like most of the grand theories in that it is static, synchronous, vainly universalist, without a properly historical dimension. Is this necessarily so?

We have seen that trade-offs can form chains: a particular solution ("footnotes") makes one value problematic ("effort"), the reduction of which is achieved by another value ("multilingual translation"), which problematizes a further value ("cultural location"), and so on. Something similar happened with the slumbering fire example, which moved from comprehension to literariness to authenticity. This kind of movement recalls the semiosis that Peirce (1931/1958) claimed to be general to the interpretative nature of meaning and that was applied to translation by Jakobson (1959/2021: 156). Each trade-off would involve relative instability because, first, different actors bring different value preferences to the one translation event, and second, there are degrees of asymmetry between the values themselves. That inherent instability then explains how further, alternative trade-offs can be sought, each time leading to a type of solution that is only temporary. In translation history, we propose, there may be no permanent solutions to the fundamental translation problems. Values that are highly pertinent and problematic in one historical moment can enter into a trade-off relation for a while and then become less pertinent as intercultural relations change and different modes of trust inform the status of translators (Rizzi et al. 2016). In a historiographical project that compared Hispanic translation events at intervals of a century or so (Pym 2014), values and principles that were strongly opposed to each other in one century could still be present in the next, but lower down on the agendas of public debate, at levels were the disagreements had moved to the background. This may help explain why most trade-offs seem limited to just two kinds of values: although there are, in principle, always *many* values in play, each particular negotiation seems to focus on just one frontline issue to be resolved.

This does not mean that trade-offs are motors of historical change. They are more like temporary, unstable resolutions of ongoing discussions about how cultures should relate to each other. When we come to identify trade-offs and follow their evolutions, we are scratching a surface beneath which deeper historical dialectics churn.

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