

Applying Systemic Functional Linguistics in Translation Studies: Instantiation, Individuation, and a Three-Dimensional Model

Yingchen Yu

School of Foreign Languages, Sun Yat-sen University, Guangzhou, China

Abstract—This study aims to provide a detailed investigation of applying Systemic Functional Linguistics (hereafter SFL) in translation studies from the perspective of instantiation and individuation. Revisiting instantiation and individuation along their history in SFL and introducing the recently developed concepts, the studies on the application of instantiation, individuation and a three-dimensional model are examined respectively. It is noted that instantiation and individuation complement the translation studies by treating the translation process as a linguistic process and interpreting many translation issues in terms of individuality and trajectories of allocation and affiliation, such as the differentiation of equivalence, translation strategies, and translator's choices. As a result, it enables the study of translation products, translation process, and people involved (i.e., the translator, writer, and reader) within a single architecture.

Index Terms—instantiation, individuation, translation, Systemic Functional Linguistics

I. INTRODUCTION

Systemic Functional Linguistics (hereafter SFL), as an applicable linguistics, provides a comprehensive and theoretically powerful model of language (Halliday, 2008), and has been applied in a wide range of areas, such as pedagogy, language typology, stylistics, forensic linguistics, computational linguistics, clinical linguistics and ecolinguistics. While the application of SFL in translation studies has been thriving since the 1950s (e.g., Halliday, 1956; Catford, 1965), the new century witnesses a renewed interest in the SFL-minded translation studies, marked by its flourishing theoretical and applicable development.

This study investigates the application of SFL in translation studies from the perspectives of instantiation and individuation. It begins with an overview of instantiation, individuation, and the recently developed concepts for the analysis of the two clines, serving as the theoretical foundation. Translation studies from the perspectives of instantiation and individuation are reviewed, including those adopting a three-dimensional model (i.e., realization, instantiation, and individuation). The study carries out a discussion of their application in translation studies, puts forward implications for further development and ends up with a conclusion based on former observations.

II. INSTANTIATION AND INDIVIDUATION

During the blooming development of systemic functional linguistics, the architecture of language is modelled as a system extending from the ordered typology of systems to the axial organization of a rank within a given stratum (Matthiessen, 2007), whereas the primary focus has been on two hierarchies – realization and rank, and two complementarities – metafunction and axis (Martin, 2008a, 2008b). Instantiation as a complementary dimension, which has received certain attention recently in presenting the process of semogenesis (e.g., Halliday & Matthiessen, 1999, pp. 382-387), remain less developed. Moreover, much less work has been concerned with individuation. This section introduces the concepts of instantiation and individuation, and their development as two hierarchies complementing that of realization.

A. *Instantiation, Coupling and Commitment*

While language is modelled as metaredundant strata, across which the relationship is realization, the exploration of instantiation offers an alternative perspective, which begins in Halliday's (1973) discussion about the relationship between potential and instance, i.e., general system and particular texts. According to Halliday (1973, pp. 25-37), meaning potential is what a language user can do with language, and an instance is of language use.

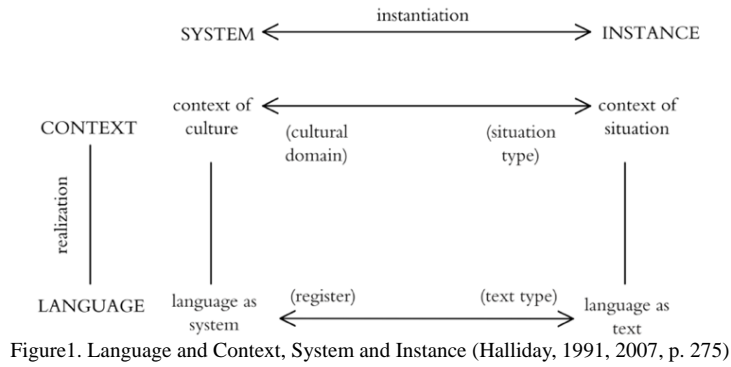


Figure 1. Language and Context, System and Instance (Halliday, 1991, 2007, p. 275)

Connected with realization, the dichotomy between the system of meaning potential and an instance of meaning has evolved to a cline of the relationship between context of culture and context of situation as well as the relationship between language as system and language as text (see Figure 1). Since realization, or stratification, and instantiation are interdependently variable dimensions, their intersection is constructed in the instantiation/ stratification matrix (see Table 1), demonstrating that each stratum instantiates from system through subsystem/ instance types to instance.

TABLE 1
INSTANTIATION/ STRATIFICATION MATRIX (HALLIDAY, 1995, 2005, P. 254)

		INSTANTIATION		
		system	subsystem/instance type	instance
STRATIFICATION	context	culture	institution situation type	situations
	semantics	semantic system	register text type	[text as] meaning
Lexicogrammar		grammatical system	register text type	[text as] wordings

Instantiation is thus theorized to a cline (see Figure 2), along which the two poles are defined by system of the overall potential of a language and text of a particular instance. Between the two poles are the intermediate patterns within language: registerial sub-potentials viewed from the system pole or instance types viewed from the instance pole (Halliday & Matthiessen, 2014, p. 29).

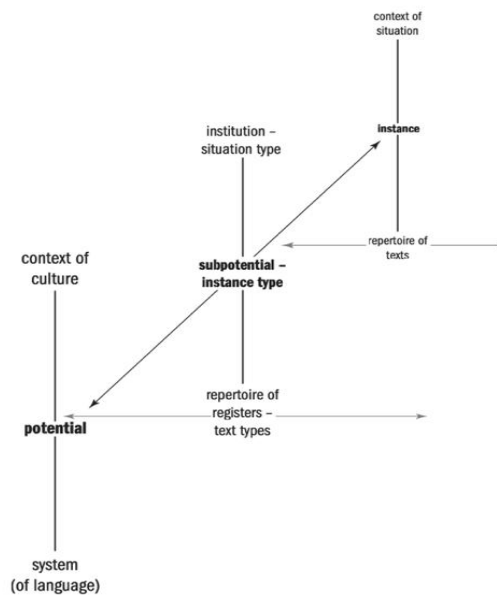


Figure 2. The Cline of Instantiation (Halliday & Matthiessen, 2014, p. 28)

Martin and White (2005) extend the cline of instantiation by adding the notion of reading, highlighting that text themselves are more than enough meaning potential to be read in different ways. Thus, the instance pole is extended to the meaning interpreted from the text according to a reader's subjectivity (see Figure 3).

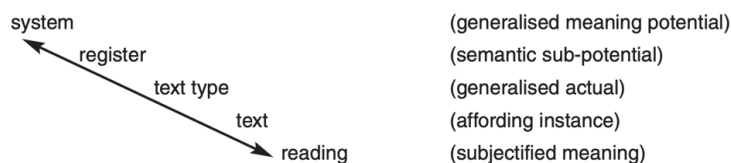


Figure 3. The Cline of Instantiation (Martin & White, 2005, p. 25)

Concerned with the process of instantiation, concepts of coupling, commitment and iconization are proposed for interpretation in a theorized way.

Coupling refers to the way in which meanings combine as coordinated choices from system networks (Martin, 2008a, p. 39), which can be within and across strata, metafunctions, ranks, and simultaneous systems, as well as across modalities. For example, “very brave” is a coupling of [Force: raise] and [Judgement: social esteem] in APPRAISAL system.

Commitment refers to “the amount of meaning potentials activated in a particular process of instantiation” (Martin, 2008a, p. 45), and “the degree of specificity of the meaning instantiated in a text” (Martin, 2010, p. 20). For example, he illustrates how the meaning of windfalls is realized in a set of coupling triplets with different commitments from most general to more specific.

Iconization refers to “the process of instantiation whereby ideational meaning is discharged and interpersonal charged”, which is easier to be found “in the context of images, artifacts and people” as well as in “the genesis of playful headlines, metaphors and idioms” (Martin, 2010, p. 21). Iconization is elaborated by Martin’s (2010) case study of a magazine column entitled “Modern Guru” for responding to readers’ questions about “21st-century ethics, etiquette and dilemmas”. He suggests that whereas the image of the third eye is less than an eye representationally in the sense that most people would not expect to meet a person with three eyes and the column writer is looking at them through the third eye, it is more than an eye symbolically because it symbolizes enlightenment, and thus the column writer is endowed with spiritually powered wisdom for giving advice.

B. Individuation, Affiliation, and Bonding

Whereas instantiation refers to the relationship between system of meaning potential and instance of use, individuation specializes the meaning potential according to language user, emphasizing “the development of persons as aggregates of personae emerging as they interact with people in different groups” (Matthiessen, et al., 2022, p. 171).

Martin and several scholars (e.g., Martin, 2006, 2008a, 2008b, 2009, 2010; Martin et al., 2013; Martin & Quiroz, 2021) develop individuation as a cline of between the reservoir of meanings in a culture and the repertoire that an individual can mobilize originates, based on Bernstein’s (2000) sociological work on coding orientation and Hasan’s (2005, 2009) researches on semantic variation.

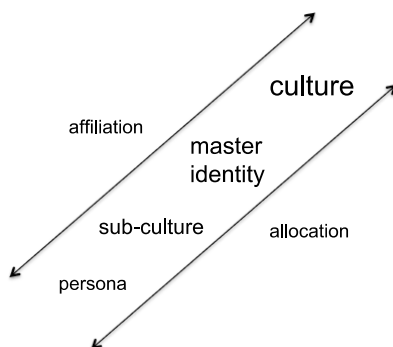


Figure 4. The Cline of Individuation (Martin et al., 2013, p. 490)

The cline of individuation is illustrated along two opposing trajectories (see Figure 4): from reservoir to repertoire, individuation is interpreted as allocation “whereby semiotic resources are differentially distributed among users”; from repertoire to reservoir, it is interpreted as affiliation related to “how personae mobilize social semeiotic resources to affiliate with one another” (Martin et al., 2013, p. 489), or more specifically, how personae “align themselves into sub-cultures, configuring master identities, and constituting a culture” (Martin, 2010, p. 24).

Affiliation and alignment, notions from psychology and sociology, offer a complementary perspective on individuation (Matthiessen et al., 2022, p. 171). For further exploration of the process of individuation, the concepts of bond and bonding are proposed.

Bonding is a process of creating a bond, a technical term for the social relation generated as interlocutors negotiate a particular shared coupling of experience with evaluation in language (Martin et al., 2013, p. 470). During the process of affiliation, i.e., the communal identification of participants into communities of bonds (Knight, 2010, p. 35), bonds form the basic building blocks of the individuation hierarchy which then cluster into the subcultures and master identities to which community members subscribe (Martin, 2010, p. 26).

Combined with iconization, bonds become bonding icons, or bondicons for short, referring to the stronger and less-negotiable bonds – the symbols around which members establish their membership, such as allusions as verbal bondicons, one of the “membership devices” (e.g., Caple, 2010, p. 117; c.f. Chang, 2004, p. 1).

C. A Model of Three Complementary Hierarchies – Realization, Instantiation and Individuation

Thus far, the progress of modelling language system, language of use and language users reaches a model of three complementary hierarchies (see Figure 5): the hierarchy of realization construes the resources which vary at various strata; the hierarchy of instantiation actualizes each stratum from system to instance; the hierarchy of individuation performs the personae through which communities align.

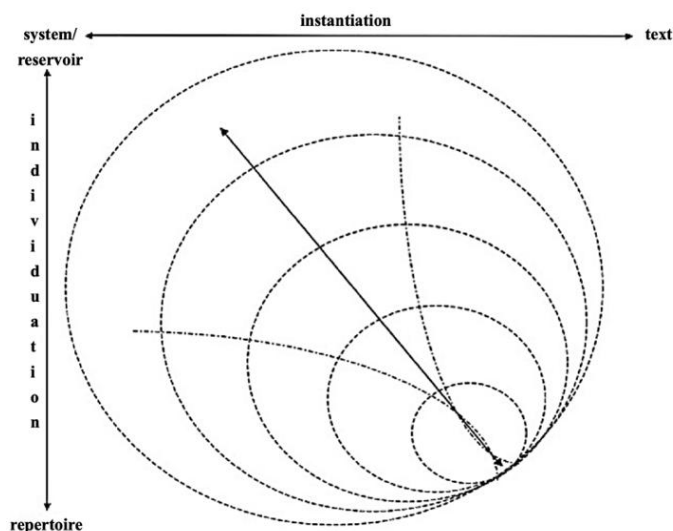


Figure 5. Complementary Hierarchies of Realization, Instantiation and Individuation (Martin et al., 2013, p. 491)

III. APPLYING INSTANTIATION AND INDIVIDUATION IN TRANSLATION STUDIES

Compared with the history and flourishing outcome of applying realization hierarchy in the field of translation studies (e.g., Huang, 2006; Li, 2022), studies concerned with instantiation and individuation are developing recently in terms of theorization and application.

A. Instantiation and Translation Studies

Since the earliest research of translation studies from the perspective of instantiation by Matthiessen (2001) and Steiner (2001), the development of applying instantiation is twofold: one refers to locating translation at the instance pole of instantiation included in the range of multilingual studies; the other refers to modelling translation as a process of (re-)instantiation.

(a). Locating Translation at the Cline of Instantiation From a Multilingual Perspective

Matthiessen (2001) investigates the contextualization of translation from the four ordered systems (biological, physical, social and semiotic), positioning translation along the six dimensions that organize language in context – stratification, instantiation, rank, metafunction, delicacy and axis. Based on this contextualization, Matthiessen locates translation at the instance pole of instantiation, emphasizing the importance of the overall linguistic system they instantiate, as “translation of the instance always takes place in the wider environment of potential that lies behind the instance” (Matthiessen, 2001, p. 87). Adapting Halliday’s (1995, 2005) stratification-instantiation matrix, Matthiessen proposes a complex of stratification-instantiation matrix to interpret their relationship in translation (Figure 6). It is suggested whereas translation can be located at one end of the cline of instantiation, it takes place throughout the hierarchy of stratification (Matthiessen, 2001, pp. 89-92).

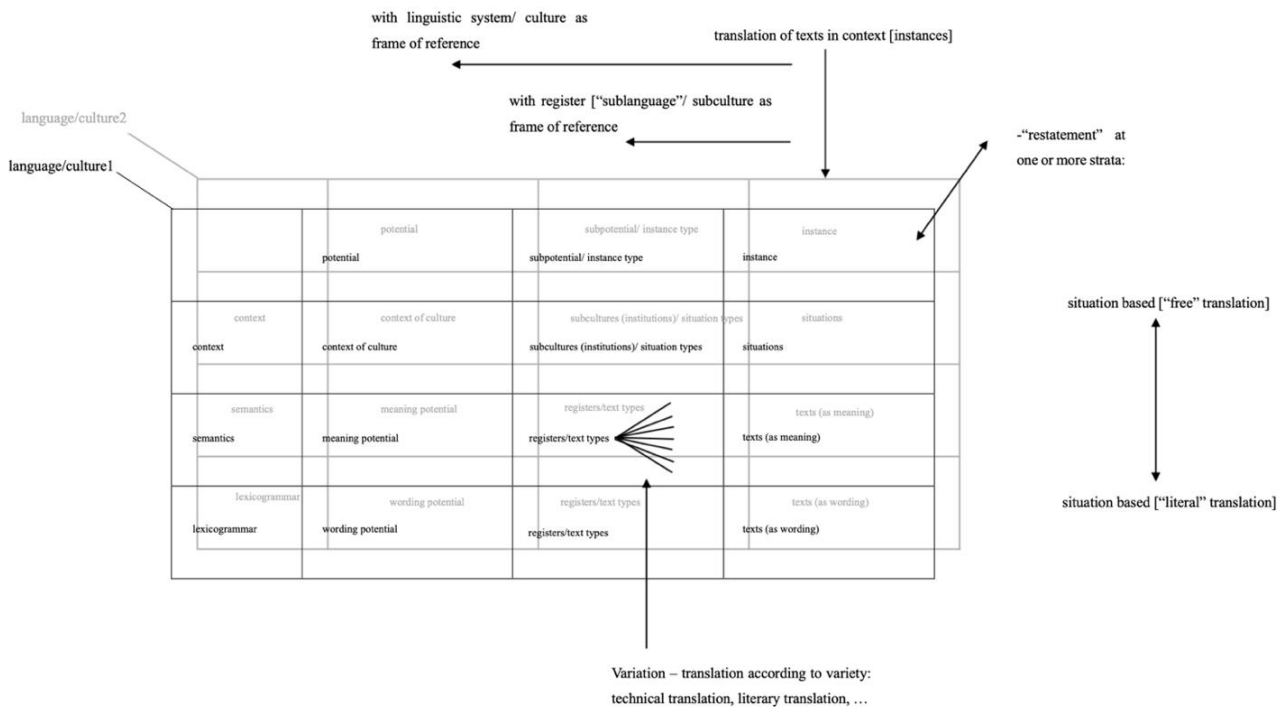


Figure 6. Instantiation in Relation to Translation (Matthiessen, 2001, p. 92)

Drawing attention to the relationship between translation and multilingual generation, Steiner (2001) refers translation as a relationship between instantiations (texts), i.e., the text generation under the constraints of a source text, rather than a relationship between language systems. Likewise, Matthiessen and a number of scholars (e.g., Matthiessen, 2021; Matthiessen, Teruya & Wu, 2008; Matthiessen et al., 2022) regard instantiation as one of the global semiotic dimensions to explore translation as a semiotic process within the field of multilingual studies (see Figure 7).

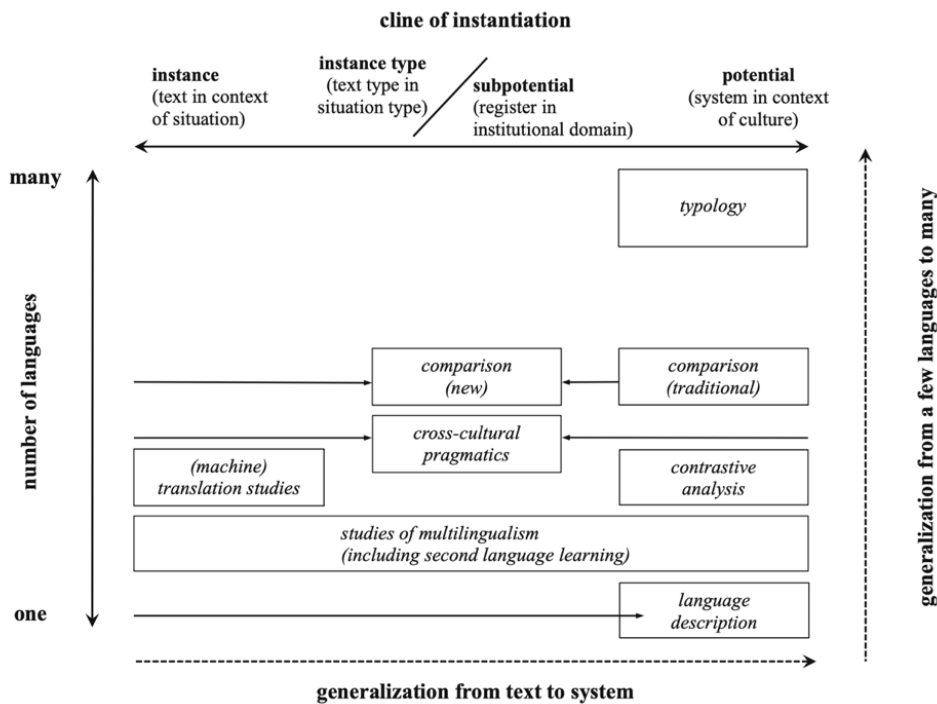


Figure 7. Phenomenal Realm Explored in Multilingual Studies (Matthiessen, Teruya & Wu, 2008, p. 149)

(b). Modelling Translation as a Process of Re-Instantiation

Assisted by computational tools, translation, as a semiotic process, or specifically as a linguistic process in the first instance (Matthiessen et al., 2022, p. 238), is illuminated by the computational models of the process of instantiation

(e.g., Matthiessen, 2001, p. 92; Teich, 2003, p. 60; Martin & White, 2005, p. 25; Halliday & Matthiessen, 2014, p. 50). According to these models, translation starts with the instance pole of the cline of instantiation, i.e., the source text in its context of situation, move towards the system pole, “recreating the meanings in the source language and in the target language”, and then moves down the cline of instantiation again and ends with the instance pole of the cline of instantiation, i.e., the translated text in its context of situation (Matthiessen et al., 2022, p. 241). As a complex and phased process unfolding through time, the model of instantiation is adopted in a series of translation studies in relation to different registers.

In exploring translation from a three-complementary perspective, de Souza (2010, 2013) focuses the study on the dimension of instantiation. Translation is defined as a reconstruction of source text’s meaning potential in target texts, comprising semantic relations between a source text which maintains an instantial relation to the source language system, and a target text which maintains an instantial relation to the target language system. Adopting Martin’s (2008a, p. 50) term of distantiation (moving up the cline to recover meaning potential), de Souza (2010) addresses translation as a process of re-instantiation and outlines the possible path (see Figure 8): starting at the ST, a single move goes up the SL cline to the relevant potential, then reaches a straight connection to a corresponding subpotential in the TL line, and finally goes down the TL cline to the TT. This model is adopted by Martin and Quiroz (2021) in discussing the systems of tense in Chilean Spanish and English.

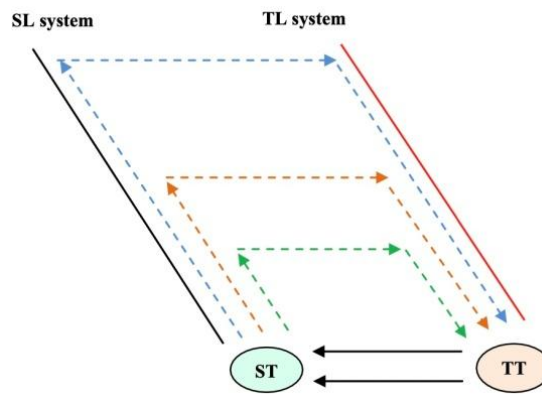


Figure 8. The Model of Interlingual Re-Instantiation (de Souza, 2010, p. 169)

In re-examining the concept of translation equivalence, Yang (2015, 2017) proposes a process model to reveal translation process as interlingual re-instantiation, categorizing the sources and information processed by the translator as encoded information (indicated by solid lines) provided by source text as discourse meaning and subliminal information (by dotted lines) contributing to the success of translation (See Figure 9). The complexity of interlingual re-instantiation reflected in this model requires the translator’s subjectivity in making inferences in comprehending source text and rhetorical maneuvering when constructing target text, which is illustrated by a case study of sinology classics *Tao and Teh (Dao De Jing)* and its two English translations.

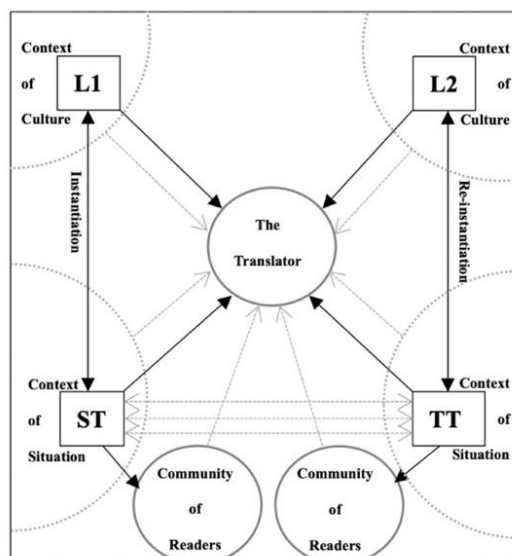


Figure 9. A Process Model of Translation as Re-Instantiation (Yang, 2015, p. 23)

Concerned with the social subjectivity of readers, Chang (2018) investigates how the source text has been differently re-instantiated in the target texts by a case study of Jane Austen's novel *Pride and Prejudice* and its translated versions, focusing on different degrees of commitment in the process of instantiation. It is noted that the target texts are differently committed both ideationally and interpersonally, and among the target texts themselves there are significant differences in the amount of meaning potential activated.

From the perspective of re-instantiation, Chen and Huang (2019) explore the "thick translation" (c.f. Appiah, 2012, pp. 221-224) of an ethnographic classic, focusing on its multimodal annotations within the context of situation. The study demonstrates what distinguishes the annotations of ethnographic translation in the aspects of translation activity, translator's identity, and the way of translation. In terms of field, translation as a social semiotic activity turns from "recreation" to "interpretation"; in terms of tenor, the identity of the translator turns from a cultural communicator to an ethnographer, and in terms of mode the annotations adopt a multimodal way instead of a mono one. Meanwhile, it is found that each modality contributes to the professional interpretation of original texts cooperatively, forming a process of professional knowledge construction through translation.

Through a detailed analysis of title translation in Xi's *The Governance of China*, Zhao (2020) explores how meaning of the target text is reconstructed during the process of re-instantiation. Translation strategies and techniques employed by translators are revealed, including regulating commitment, adjusting appraisal meanings, omitting rhetorical devices, and shifting coupling patterns. Meanwhile, it is found that translators' choices of lexical and grammatical expressions are accommodated to the norms of the target language, contributing to the acceptance of translation in target readers.

B. Individuation and Translation Studies

A few studies have focused on translation studies from the perspective of individuation. Wang and Yang (2015) propose a new approach to translation studies based on the cline of instantiation, regarding translation activities as a series of processes including de-individuation, re-individuation, and affiliation (see Figure 10).

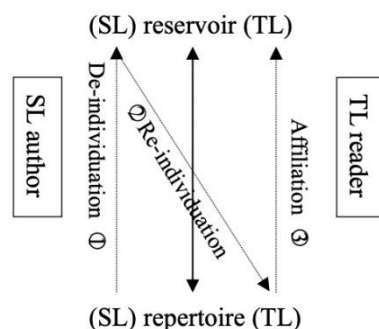


Figure 10. Translation Process of Individuation (Adapted From Wang & Yang, 2015)

According to this model, a translator first aligns him/herself with the SL author to regress SL repertoire (i.e., ST) into SL reservoir through de-individuation, examining the intersection between SL reservoir and TL reservoir, then re-individuates it into TL repertoire (i.e., TT), and aligns with the TL reader through affiliation.

Furthering the exploration of translation in terms of individuation, Wang (2015, 2017) highlights the gender of the translator as the most significant individual factor in a case study of the English translations of the *Tao Te Ching* (*Dao De Jing*). Through investigation of lexical density and grammatical intricacy, it is found that female and male translators differentiate themselves in choices of words, syntactic patterns, and mood, which result in different translation styles collaboratively.

C. Realization, Instantiation and Individuation: A Three-Dimensional Model and Translation Studies

The hierarchies of instantiation and individuation are adopted into SFL-minded translation studies as complementary dimensions. Based on the interpretation of instantiation (e.g., Martin & White, 2005) and the complementary relationship between the hierarchies of realization, instantiation and individuation (e.g., Martin, 2006, 2008a, 2008b, 2009, 2010; Martin et al. 2013), de Souza (2010, 2013) establishes a three-dimensional model of translation as interlingual re-instantiation, taking into account the abstract language systems involved (source language and target language), the concrete use of such language systems (in forms of source texts and target texts), and the users of such systems (especially translators as readers and writers), in relation to the hierarchies of realization, instantiation and individuation respectively (see Figure 11). By focusing on how target texts are semantically related to source texts, de Souza (2013) interprets the process of re-instantiation as language users negotiating source texts' meanings according to their repertoires.

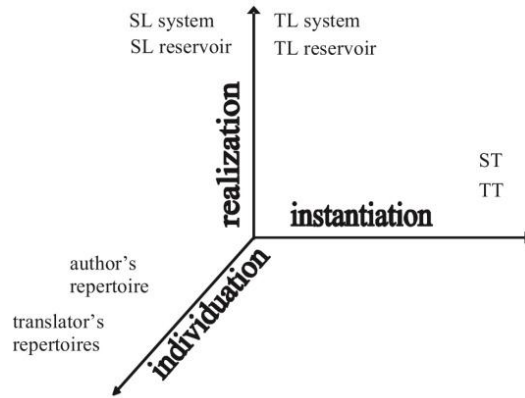


Figure 11. A Three-Dimensional Model of Interlingual Re-Instantiation (de Souza, 2013)

Wang (2016, 2018) specifies the three-dimensional model of complementary hierarchies in terms of language system, language use and language user, regarding translation as a process of inter-lingual re-instantiation where realization and individuation are two indispensable factors (see Figure 12). In this process, meaning is negotiated between language users (i.e., author, translator, and reader) via specific language use (i.e., source text and target text) of two language systems (i.e., source language and target language). This process is illuminated by a case study of English translations of *Tao Te Ching (Dao De Jing)*, offering a comprehensive perspective of translation within an overall architecture.

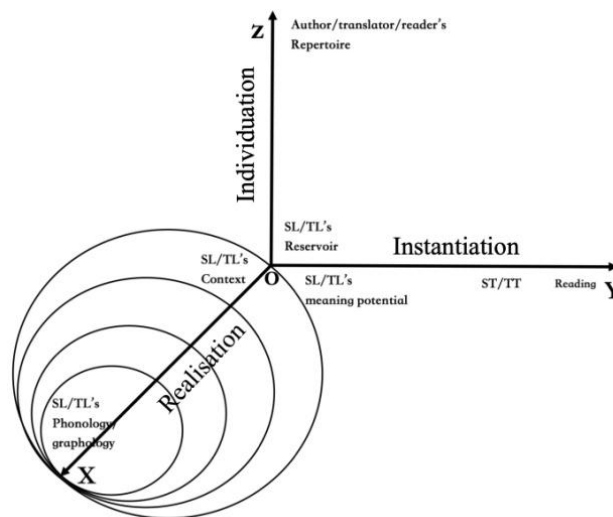


Figure 12. Translation as Interlingual Realization, Instantiation, and Individuation (Adapted From Wang, 2018)

In the investigation of Buddhist scripture translation, Wang (2021) applies the hierarchies of individuation and instantiation as two complementary perspectives to explain the equivalence and differences found in the cross-comparison of the Sanskrit source text and English and Chinese target texts of the *Heart Sutra*. In terms of instantiation, it is demonstrated the translators go along different re-instantiation routes in finding corresponding potentials between the source text and their respective target texts (see Figure 13), due to lacking equivalent potentials at the cline of instantiation. In terms of individuation, the study shows the English and Chinese translators' personal and social identity – the English translator as a Buddhism scholar and the Chinese translator as a Buddhist master – has an immediate influence on their respective reproductions of the text (see Figure 14).

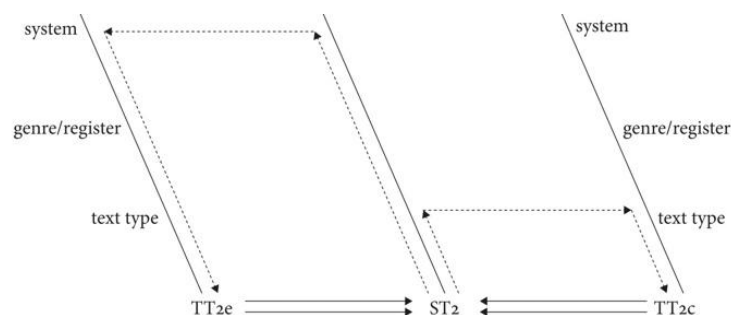


Figure 13. Distantiation and Re-Instantiation Routes for the Two Translations (Wang, 2021)

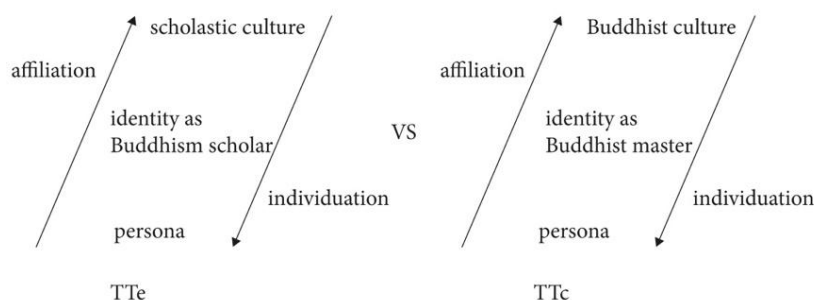


Figure 14. Individuation and Affiliation Path for the Two Translations (Wang, 2021)

IV. DISCUSSION

SFL offers an applicable model informing translation studies. Based on the review of translation studies in terms of instantiation, individuation, and a three-dimensional model above, this section makes a discussion about applying the two complementary hierarchies in translation studies and offers implications for further development.

A. Instantiation and Translation Studies

Locating translation at the instance pole provides a magnifying perspective on viewing translation as from a linguistic phenomenon within the architecture of language in context, to a semiotic phenomenon in semiotic systems which offer multilingual meaning potentials as the meaning-making resources of two or more languages, connecting translation with other systems in an ordered typology (e.g., Matthiessen, 2001, 2007).

As the development from the dichotomy of the relationship between system and instance to a cline of a continuum, instantiation offers great explanatory power to exploring the nature of translation, a guided meaning-creating activity, as a phased process of re-instantiation.

The initial and final phases of translation as instantiation, i.e., translation products including both source texts and target texts, have been investigated in a large scale of studies by text analysis (Matthiessen, 2021, p. 531), and can be further explored with an approach of “SFL informed corpus-assisted discourse analysis” (Chang, 2020, p. 255), which enables the powerful theoretical orientation of SFL combined with the quantitative methodology by a number of computational tools facilitating automatic or semi-automatic analysis of large volumes of texts. See SysAm (Wu, 2000), SysConc (Wu, 2009; Li & Wu, 2019), SysFan (Yu & Wu, 2017), UAM CorpusTool (O’Donnell, 2008), and the Multimodal Analysis Image Software (O’Halloran et al., 2016).

Concerned with the intermediate phases of the process, the cline of instantiation offers theorized scales such as registerial subpotentials and text types, contributing to explain how far up the cline towards the potential pole a translator moves during the process of (distantiation and) re-instantiation (e.g., de Souza, 2013; Chang, 2018). The investigation of translation as a process of re-instantiation complements the studies of translation process “from below” as a material process (e.g., by keystroke logging and eye-movement tracking), as translation is a linguistic process in its first instance (c.f., Matthiessen et al., 2022).

B. Individuation and Translation Studies

In the context of translation, individuation is concerned with the relationship between the reservoir of meaning resources in a culture that the translator belongs to and the repertoire of meanings that the translator can mobilize to align both the original author and the target reader. As instantiation contributes to explaining how different degrees of equivalence (Matthiessen, 2001, p. 115) occur during the process of translation, individuation provides a perspective to explore why different degrees of equivalence is found in target texts by taking language users into consideration.

Along the affiliation trajectory of the cline, the translator’s personae and identity (e.g., gender, ethics, social class) play a crucial role in logogenesis process and products of translation, as the target texts are endowed with their own personae and their rendering is dependent on their identities, serving to explore translator’s subjectivity and intervention.

Meanwhile, moving along the affiliation trajectory facilitates illumination of the process in which the translator aligns other language users into communities of various kinds, such as aligning the original author in a writership and aligning the target reader in a target readership. This process can be investigated by the concept of bond, serving as the basis of the relationships for the formation of communities, and created by couplings of experience with evaluation (Martin, 2010, p. 26). As the original text is written for and belongs to a community, what kind of the community that a translator is targeting at motivates the translator’s linguistic choices and translation strategies.

In addition, along the allocation trajectory of the cline, a translator’s repertoire distributed from the culture reservoir determines the translator’s whole affordance of meaning resources in the process and results of (re-)instantiating the source text into the target one, serving as an essential factor for translation quality. As Martin (2010) discussed the educational implications of individuation in terms of ontogenesis, questions about how to expand the translator’s

repertoire are pedagogically meaningful in translator training. For example, besides raising translators' typological understanding of the languages involved in translation, trainers can develop their repertoire by increasing the input of translator's knowledge along the hierarchy of individuation, ranging from the original author's culture, identity and persona to the target readers'.

V. CONCLUSION

SFL, as an applicable linguistics, offers a powerful toolkit for translation studies, as its theoretical dimensions of stratification, rank, metafunction, delicacy and axis, instantiation and individuation enable detailed language descriptions and comparisons, analysis and interpretations of the issues in translation studies.

Based on tracing the development of instantiation and individuation in SFL, this study offers a detailed review of applying instantiation, individuation and a three-dimensional model in the field of translation studies. It is shown that the recent development of instantiation and individuation expand the spectrum of perspectives for SFL-minded translation studies: modeling translation as re-instantiation extends the studies of translation process as a linguistic process; the exploration of the cline of individuation affords to interpret the differentiation of equivalence, translator's choice and translation strategies in terms of individuality and trajectories of allocation and affiliation; the development of the three-dimensional model enables the study of translation, translation process and individual (and community) involved (translator, writer and reader) within one comprehensive architecture.

It's also noted that during the history of SFL-minded translation studies, although abundant studies have focused on the realization or stratification hierarchy, the hierarchies of instantiation and individuation are less developed, needing more investigation into their theorization and adaptation in the context of translation.

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Yingchen Yu is a Ph.D. candidate in English Language and Literature at Sun Yat-sen University, China. She received her M.A. degree in English Language and Literature from Jiangxi Normal University, China. Her research interests include general linguistics, systemic functional linguistics, discourse analysis and translation studies. She previously published her work on *Journal of World Languages*.