

On Integrated Translation Approach of English Idioms

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Abstract—Idioms are the gems of a language. Translating idioms is not an easy task because not all English idioms have equivalents in Chinese idioms due to linguistic, especially cultural differences. Research indicates that there are six translation tactics in translating English idioms into Chinese: literal translation, free translation, compensatory translation, explanatory translation, borrowing, integrated approach. This paper aims to propose the integrated translation approach, one indispensable and important tactic to Chinese translation of English idioms based on Nida's dynamic equivalence. Obviously, a reasonable choice and the quality of translation are decided by the translator's cultural awareness and creativity.

Index Terms—English idioms, Chinese translation, dynamic equivalence, integrated translation approach

I. INTRODUCTION

According to Oxford Advanced Learners Dictionary of Current English (1974), "idiom" refers to "phrase or sentence whose meaning is not obvious through knowledge of the individual meanings of the constituent words but must be learnt as a whole, e. g. give away, in order to, be hard put to it, and so on." English and Chinese both abound with idioms. Idioms best mirror the national characteristics embodied in a language and are thus always rich in cultural connotation and national flavor. Lots of cultural information is embedded in idioms. In some senses, idioms are the reflection of the environment, life, historical culture, etc. of the native speakers and are closely associated with their innermost spirit and feelings. "Idioms usually carry more impact than non-idiomatic expressions because of their close identification with a particular language and culture." (Nida, E.A., 2001: 28) For one thing, most idioms, though composed of few words, contain an extremely profound and rich meaning, for another most idioms carry a vivid image.

The main cultural differences between Chinese and English idioms lie not only in the language expression and ways of vocabulary, grammar and rhetoric devices, but also in their different cultural backgrounds, because Chinese and English idioms originate from different cultures. Thus, in translation of idioms, much attention should be paid to the dissimilarities of cultures as well as languages themselves. Translation involves not only different languages but also different cultures. The ultimate goal of translation is to help and ensure communication between people whose mother tongues and cultural backgrounds are different from each other. Idioms are linguistic symbols which most vividly reflect the culture of a nation and its people. Therefore, the Chinese translation of English idioms should be based on the careful consideration of all the relevant theoretical points about language, culture, and communication.

In idiom translation, the implicated meanings in English idioms are hard to render because of different cultural backgrounds of English and Chinese cultures. In translating the SL (Source Language) into the TL (Target Language), to be faithful to the original text is to render the implicated meaning in the SL text faithfully with the style and images of the SL text retained in the translated text. But not all English idioms have equivalents in Chinese idioms because of linguistic, especially cultural differences. That is to say, not all English idioms have the same literal meaning, figurative meaning and implicated meaning with those of Chinese idioms. Nida once states: "No two words in any two languages are completely identical in meaning. This means that to some extent there is always some loss or skewing of meaning in interlingual communication. One purpose of translating is to keep such disparities at a minimum." (Nida, E.A., 2001: 40) To achieve that, this paper makes a research on integrated translation approach of English idiom with the application of Nida's Dynamic Equivalence with cultural considerations.

II. NIDA'S DYNAMIC EQUIVALENCE

Eugene A. Nida (1914-), a distinguished American translation theorist as well as linguist, is regarded as the most influential one among all contemporary translation theorists (Newmark, 1993: 133). Many Chinese translation scholars are familiar with Nida's theory, Nida's major contributions to modern translation studies are "the scientific study of translating" and "the principle of dynamic equivalence".

The definition of dynamic equivalence is firstly given by Eugene A. Nida in his book *Toward a Science of Translating* (Nida, E.A., 1964: 161). It is defined as a translation principle which requires the translator to render the meaning of the original in such a way that the target text wording will trigger the same impact on the target reader as the original wording does upon the original reader. Dynamic equivalence is based on the principle of equivalent effect. In

such a translation one is not so concerned with matching the receptor-language message with the source-language message, but with the dynamic relationship, that the relationship between receptor and message that should be substantially the same as that which existed between the original receptor and the message. A translation of dynamic equivalence aims at complete naturalness of expression, and tries to relate the receptor to modes of behavior relevant within the context of his own culture. It does not insist that he understand the cultural patterns of the source-language context in order to comprehend the message. In dynamic translation, the translator seeks to provide a more accurate translation by paying attention to such things as idiom and slang. The translator translates not word for word, but thought for thought. Dynamic equivalence tries to correct the shortcomings of word for word translating by translating not precisely what the original author wrote, but what the most likely meant.

Dynamic equivalence provides us with a new research perspective, which bypasses the meaningless controversy about providing a satisfactory answer to the controversial literal translation vs. liberal translation, content vs. form etc. Literal translation emphasizes faithfulness, which results in formal equivalence and negligence of the actual effect, while liberal translation emphasizes elegance, which results in over-emphasizing the actual effect regardless of the form. Dynamic equivalence, focusing itself on the equivalence of the two, has solved the contradiction above.

In a word, dynamic equivalence is a progress of achieving the closest natural equivalence by choosing the most appropriate translation method. Such choice is based on the consideration of the whole factors in functional identity and is able to take the same effect on the target receptors as the original text does upon the original reader.

III. INTEGRATED TRANSLATION APPROACH

According to Nida's dynamic equivalence, a reasonable tactic should be employed in the process of translating so as to keep the meaning and the flavor of the original English idioms.

Literal translation is usually employed in the complete representation of the original when the original almost accords with the target language in the form of vocabulary, grammatical structure and rhetorical device, which means literal translation is a way by which the rhetoric, national and regional characteristics are kept in the target language.

Free translation, or liberal translation, as opposed to literal translation which keeps to original text's content as well as original form, only remains the same content as the original.

It is obvious that literal translation and liberal translation are basic and common translation methods which deserve first consideration when the translator undertakes the Chinese translation of English idioms. However, sometimes, stiff or rigid literal translation will violate the readability of the translation, leading to the monotony of reading as well as the ineffective cultural transfer; liberal translation beyond limit will often destroy the faithfulness of English idioms. To overcome this problem, an integrated approach combining the literal and free translation may be employed as the former could retain the original coloring and image while the latter could serve as a supplement avoiding the possibility of misunderstanding and misleadingness of the translated version. It is an indispensable and important tactic to Chinese translation of English idioms based on Nida's dynamic equivalence proposed in this paper, this tactic should be reasonably employed in the process of translating to keep the flavor of the original English idioms as well as to cater for the Chinese readers. For example: "Until all is over, ambition never dies" is translated into "不到黄河心不死" in Chinese. "心不死" is literal translation, whereas "不到黄河" is liberally translated. Another example: "Be in the same boat" is translated into "同舟共济", here "同舟" is literal translation, whereas "共济" is liberally translated. And "An eagle does not catch flies" can be translated into "老鹰不会去捉苍蝇, 大人物不会去做小事". Both literal and free translations are employed here to retain its literal meaning and reveal its implicated meaning.

Self-explanatorily, the integrated approach will not only reproduce the literal meaning or figurative meaning so as to retain the style of the original text but also convey the implicated meaning as well. Cultural dissimilarities are a great barrier to idiom translation. Because of this, when the literal meaning or figurative meaning of some English idioms are the same with those in Chinese, they may have different implicated meaning. Only after a fully comprehension of the cultural differences of both English and Chinese idioms can we make proper translation. Literal translation and free translation respectively have their advantages and disadvantages. When cultural similarities adjust positively, literal translation is used without violating the language rule and destroying expressive effect of idioms. The literal meaning, figurative meaning and implicated meaning will be revealed all at the same time in the translated text. Such as "to be wild with joy" is literally translated into "欣喜若狂" and "to show one's card" into "摊牌". When there exist cultural dissimilarities between the SL and the TL, free translation is usually used in translating idioms, especially when vocabulary having weak cultural meaning in translating implicated meaning. For example, "to live a dog's life" is liberally translated into "过牛马生活". By way of this method, the content or message of the original text remains, but its form, its style, its image or its rhetoric color may be lost in the translation. Throughout Chinese translation history, translation theorists and practitioners have been frowning about the issue: how to achieve "faithfulness" and "smoothness" at the same time in the translated texts. Although the disputes over literal translation and free translation still exist, literal translation and free translation do not always contradict each other, they are not absolute, but relative. No absolute boundaries lie between them.

Language, a part of culture, reflects culture, in turn. Cultural discrepancies can be found in Chinese and English idioms, which are possible causes for dilemmas for translators in turning the SL into the TL. But some other idioms,

when translated literally or figuratively, arouse no cultural conflicts in the translated texts. Nevertheless, the readers in the TL are unable to understand the implicated meaning. That is to say, sometimes the reader can understand the literal meaning or figurative meaning in the SL text without cultural conflicts aroused, but it is hard for them to figure out the implicated meaning of idioms because it is lost in translation. To solve this problem, a translator should employ the translation method involving both literal translation and free translation. It will not only reproduce the literal meaning or figurative meaning so as to retain the style of the original text but also convey the implicated meaning as well. For instance, "Every bird likes its own nest" is translated into "鸟爱其巢, 人爱其家". The first part "鸟爱其巢" is a literal translation, which expresses its literal meaning and could be easily understood, whereas "人爱其家" is a free translation which is used to render its implicated meaning. Another example: "All asses wag their ears" is translated into "驴子爱摆耳朵, 傻瓜爱装聪明". The first part is its literal translation. The second part is the rendering of its implicated meaning. And the idiom: "A cat may look at a king" is translated into "猫也有权看皇帝, 老百姓也该有点权利", in which the literal meaning is retained by: "猫也有权看皇帝", and its implicated meaning is conveyed by its liberal translation: "老百姓也该有点权利". It is a fact that a term in one language may not always have a counterpart in another language. The main cultural differences between Chinese and English idioms lie not only in the language expression and ways of vocabulary, grammar and rhetoric devices, but also in their different cultural backgrounds. Through combination of literal and free translation, the image or style of the SL is retained and the message is rendered as well.

The following are some more similar examples which will demonstrate the employment of the integrated strategy to make the implicated meaning revealed with the literal meaning and figurative meaning retained without destroying the faithfulness of English idioms in the translated text.

She shed crocodile tears when she dismissed him from his job.

她把他解雇时, 流出了鳄鱼的眼泪, 假慈悲 (假装难过)

A little pot is soon hot.

小壶易热, 人小火气大

A leopard can't change its spots.

豹子改不了身上的斑点, 本性难移

A good dog deserves a good bone.

好狗应该得到好骨头, 有功者应该受奖

A bargain is a bargain.

契约终究是契约, 成交不可妄毁

The above examples not only show that literal translation can be used to maintain the source language images, such as, "crocodile tears" (鳄鱼的眼泪), "A little pot is soon hot" (小壶易热), "A leopard can't change its spots" (豹子改不了身上的斑点), "A good dog deserves a good bone" (好狗应该得到好骨头) and "A bargain is a bargain" (契约终究是契约), but also show that the structure of the idioms may be reorganized to suit the idiomatic expression of the TL by free translation. "假慈悲", "人小火气大", "本性难移", "有功者应该受奖" and "成交不可妄毁" are translated liberally into Chinese idioms so as to make the implicated meaning of English idioms intelligible to Chinese readers. If the meanings of the above idioms are rendered into Chinese only by literal translation, the confusion must be aroused. It is hard for the readers to figure out the implicated meaning only by the literal translation, though they can understand the literal meaning or figurative meaning in the SL text without cultural conflicts being aroused. However, in order to make the implicated meaning revealed with the literal and figurative meaning retained in the translated text, the combination of literal and free translation is to be employed in translating these English idioms.

It is known that some idioms which contain certain historical events or literary allusions, are of rich cultural connotations of a nation and are hard for the TL readers to understand if they are rendered into another language only by literal translation. To solve this problem, the integrated approach: a combination of literal and free translation is to be employed. It will guarantee the comprehension of the idioms on the one hand, and on the other hand, it contributes to the retention of the original cultural terms in the idioms.

IV. CONCLUSION

In conclusion, the integrated translation approach of English idioms should be employed properly, for literal translation and free translation are relative concepts, there is no obvious distinction between literal translation and liberal translation, nor is it necessary to distinguish one from the other. The key point for a translator is to comprehend the original thoroughly, and then put it into idiomatic TL. This paper only makes a research on the integrated translation approach, one of the idiom translation tactics with the application of Nida's Dynamic Equivalence theory with cultural considerations. It is hoped that through introducing the integrated translation approach, people may know more about English idioms and the mentioned Chinese translating method in order to reach a better intercultural communicative purpose and a better fulfillment of translators' duty as a medium of cultural exchange.

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