

On Strategies of Non-equivalence in English-Chinese Translation

Ling Wang

School of Foreign Languages, Nanchang Normal University, Nanchang, China

Abstract—With the more and more deeper research in translation, non-equivalence has always been an important factor to influence the quality of passage. This paper will combine the existing translation theories to analyze the reasons causing the non-equivalence from the Chinese-English cultural levels. Then it lists five points of translation strategies with examples. At the end of thesis, the conclusion is drawn that there are absolute non-equivalence and relative equivalence. Only master the language styles and cultural background between English and Chinese and decline cultural differences, the translation will be done perfectly.

Index Terms—non-equivalence, translation strategies, culture, language

I. INTRODUCTION

Translation, as everyone knows, is a rather complicated course. Ever since people got into engaging in translation practice, the study on translation has been developed all along. As the research moves along, all sorts of contradiction appears. But in recent years, the controversy began to focus on the non-equivalence of translation. The essence of translation requires that there are equivalences between the target text and the source text. Therefore, equivalence and non-equivalence, as the two important factors for translation quality, become the meaningful topic to be discussed in this thesis.

A. *The Definition of Non-equivalence*

As is well-known, equivalence is the most important and useful translation standard in Chinese-English translation. But as a matter of fact, there always exists a large amount of non-equivalence phenomena. So what is non-equivalence and in what ways these non-equivalences display.

In Chinese-English translation, equivalence is a merely relative concept based on non-equivalence, there is no absolute equivalence and we cannot achieve the complete equivalence. Non-equivalence can mean that the target language has no direct equivalent for a word or a phrase that occurs in the source text (Baker, 1993)

As a means to communicate, language is a rather intricate system with all its elements intermingled. Because of different culture background, linguistic habit and ideology in English and Chinese nations, there is no absolute equivalence. (Lian, 2006).

B. *The Influence of Non-equivalence*

In English-Chinese translation, relative untranslatability may be caused by non-equivalence and how to translate perfectly and natively, is a big challenge to translators. For example, the idiom translation, some superficial content can be translated, but deep connotation cannot. Neither Chinese nor English, there are some part of idioms origin from their own language or allusion, which encompass specific, personal and geographic names. If we translate it in word-for-word, the reader can not catch on; if there are too many explanations for easily comprehending, the translation will be lack of conciseness. For instance, 东施效颦, the general translation is blind imitation with ludicrous affection, it is well-known that Dongshi is the name of Chinese ancient ugly, this kind of translation cannot convey the meaning of the source text. For this reason, translator should more focus on culture difference and acknowledge it.

II. THE CULTURE FACTOR CAUSING THE NON-EQUIVALENCE

The cultural factor is more important than the linguistic differences in translation. Culture is a big problem for foreign language learners on account of different cultural settings (Baker, 1993). Take the foreign joke for example; it is tough for us to get the laughing point, even though we understand its meaning, we still cannot appreciate it because of short of the same cultural setting. The non-equivalence in culture aspect displays in different historic culture, regional culture, custom and ways of thinking.

A. *Difference in Historic Culture*

Dragon is a kind of totem imagine in Chinese history. In the legends, it combined snake, bird, horse, deer, fish and eagle into one, which could govern rainfall as a miraculous animal. In the eyes of Chinese, the dragon is a symbol of good luck and be proud as 'descendants of the dragon'. Its valor and perseverance have been highly valued by Chinese nation. But in western countries, dragon is the symbol of wickedness and evil spirit with wings and scale. And it is

regarded as fierce monster, which need to perish. In the Bible, Satan, the evil, against God, was called the great dragon. In modern English, dragon is a derogatory term. If a woman is referred to as dragon, it means that she is fierce and disgusting.

B. *Difference in Regional Culture*

China and English countries belong to various civilization systems with different natural environment. Specific geographic position cultivate distinct cultures, thus make people hold different concepts to the same phenomenon (Liu.2012). Britain is maritime state with high development of navigation, while China settles in Asian continent relied on land. Hence 'water' is often used in English, nevertheless "山" is prior to employ.e.g. spend like water 挥霍无度, To be in hot water 陷入困境, As weak as water 身体虚弱, 意志薄弱, Draw water to one's own mill 谋取私利, 他山之石, 可以攻玉 stone carved can be tuned into jade, 东山再起 rise from the ashes. (Zhong, 2012)

In addition, specific environment breed particular living beings. A case study of '雨后春笋', Chinese is accustomed to translation to 'to spring up like bamboos', but English prefer the translation 'to spring up like mushrooms'. That is because there is lack of optimum environment for bamboos in Britain. And china is in continent, which has continental climate, so 'hot', 'tropical', 'heat' to describe the summer. However, Britain is located in northern Europe, which has a mild sea climate. So summer is related to 'kind', 'beautiful', 'soft'.

C. *Difference in Custom*

Both English and Chinese nations keep a dog, whereas they hold different attitudes to dog. In English nation, their aim to keep a dog is not only to look after the house, but to company. Even it can be the child for who have none. The dog has quite a number of privilege and preferential treatment. Therefore, it is easy to understand why there are a large amount of commendatory phrases and sentences with 'dog', such as 'love me, love my dog' 爱屋及乌; 'a lucky dog' 幸运的家伙; 'help a lame dog over a stile' 雪中送炭, and so on. Chinese people seem to more focus on dog's slavery than the westerners. The main purpose is to keep the door. So comparing to the dog in English nation, the dog in china holds a lower position. In many cases, in the eyes of Chinese, the dog is nasty. And the words relate to 'dog' hold derogatory sense. For instance, 狗仗人势; 狗腿子; 狗嘴里吐不出象牙.

D. *Difference in Ways of Thinking*

Ways of thinking are influenced by culture. The Chinese thinking is rather inclined to concrete, subject, straightforward thinking than abstract, object, reverse thinking of westerner's, which cause the non-equivalence between the source language and the target language (Zhou, 2005). Here, various attitude toward color and number, are listed to declare.

The words of color are one of the important parts of words in language. And, referring to specific color, it also carries cultural connotation. Hence, there is non-equivalence between the target language and the source language to comprehend with difficulty. In traditional Chinese culture, black is solemn color with the symbol of justice and integrity. Such as 'black face; Bao qingtian', the facial makeup of 'zhang fei' and 'li kui' in Beijing opera. However, in Bible, black is embodiment of evil. Such as 'black Friday'. Red is kind of propitious color in china, newlyweds will wear red clothes when holding wedding, and children will get a red packet. However, in western countries, red is viewed as unlucky and bloody.

Another color having distinct difference is 'white'. In western, white represents purity, niceness and happiness. In wedding day, new couples will wear white wedding dress in white scene. But white symbolizes at opposite poles in china, white color associates with death.

In the eyes of westerners, number 7 is a lucky number which equal to number 8 in china. In western, many brands named with 7, such as '7-up' 七喜. While in china, number 7 is usual number with no special meaning.

In western, number 13 is regarded as ominous number and synonymous with betray since Jesus was betrayed by his thirteenth adherent Judas for 30 dollars. And there are 13 people participating in the Last Supper; even the date of that day was 13. But, in china, number 13 do not have such a meaning. Chinese view number 6 as the most auspicious number. In ancient, there were '六经' '六艺' '六亲' '身怀六甲', and so on. Nonetheless, 'six' is an unpopular number. People were created in sixth days with lots of shortcomings which needed stay with god to wash away the sins. Take the following idioms for example, six of one and half a dozen of the other (半斤八两), hit/knock sb for six (给人以毁灭性的打击).

III. STRATEGIES ABOUT NON-EQUIVALENCE IN ENGLISH-CHINESE TRANSLATION

Translation is a rough and tremendous task for translators. Translation is not word to word or phrase to phrase. As a form of communication, translation is as a matter of fact a cultural and linguistic fusion. (Zhong, 2012) An excellent translator need to be familiar with the source language and the target language, because lack of the knowledge of cultural background (Peter. 2001), it is fairly difficult. Here the author just lists five primary strategies and try to achieve the maximum equivalence. The following will introduce these five strategies one after another.

A. Conversion

Conversion has been the favored means of translating. When we are in the learning of English, teachers implant constantly the concept of ‘part of speech’, so part of speech like noun, verb, preposition, conjunction, pronoun, adjective, and adverb and so on, are fixed in our mind and make out with ease (Liu, 2012). What was supposed to be favorable, it may be obstacle for translator. For as much as the concept of ‘part of speech’ is based on the surface structures of individual languages, while Chinese and English have big differences. In English, a concept expressed by noun or by verb in Chinese; a adverb in Chinese translated into English may convert to adjective. This kind of example can be found everywhere.

1) Noun to verb/verb to noun

In English, a noun derived from verb or having behavioral meanings can be translated into corresponding verb in Chinese, vice versa.

(1) The improbably smile was a big encouragement for the man.

(她竟然会笑, 对这个男人来说是极大的鼓励。) (Noun to verb)

(2) Qinghai is the ideal place for traveling, because there is no shortage of sea.

(青海是旅游的理想之处, 因为那里根本不缺乏海。) (verb to noun)

(3) The camel is characterized by the ability to go for long periods without water.

骆驼的特点是能够长期行走而不用喝水。 (verb to noun)

(4) He impressed me as a man of great ability. 他给我的印象是他相当有能力

2) Proposition to verb/verb to proposition

There are large amount of proposition in English, it enriches the English expressions. While in Chinese verb is more used than proposition. They can also convert each other.

(1) He does not like to be interrupted when he is about an important piece of work. (他在做一件重要工作时, 从不喜欢有人打扰。) (Proposition to verb)

(2) Though plane tickets are expensive, there are still thousands upon thousands of people who travel by air. (尽管机票昂贵, 但还是有成千上万的人们乘坐飞机旅行。) (Proposition to verb)

3) Adjective to adverb/adverb to adjective

In English-Chinese translation, if a noun in English converts into adjective or verb in Chinese, then adjective in the source text, which describes noun, will correspondingly translate into adverb in Chinese. For example:

The detective is making a comprehensive investigation of this case. (侦探在全面地调查这件案子。) (Adjective to adverb)

The judge require companies to treat all employees reasonably equally. (法官要求公司所有雇员既合理又平等的待遇。) (adverb to adjective)

4) Noun to adjective

It is a great importance mastering two or more foreign languages nowadays. (当今掌握两门或更多的外语是很重要的。)

To the disappointment of the spectator, the match has to be abandoned. (使观众失望的是, 这次比赛不得不取消。)

He is a great success in his career, but a total failure as a father. (他在事业上很出色, 但是一个不完全称职的父亲。)

B. Negation

Negation can also be called ‘the positive expression with negative translation’ or ‘the negative expression with positive translation’. Its basic conception is that the source text is written in one point, yet the translation from opposite one.

(1) Lily was Stephen’s stepmother, and had been not one of the families anytime these 34 years. (丽莉是斯蒂芬的继母。34年来, 这家子一直把他当外人。)

(2) With Mark’s notorious score in mind, I expected to see a much worse score this time. (由于对迈克的差透的成绩有所耳闻, 所以看到这次成绩还过得去, 真出乎我的意料。)(Zhong, 2012. P. 46)

(3) I hear everything. (什么都瞒不过我。)

C. Amplification

In English-Chinese translation, sometimes translators have to slightly add some words to make the translation more vivid. In fact, this kind of method has a golden rule: add words but not add meanings, delete words but not delete meanings.

Amplification, also called addition, which means adding some certain words to explain the sentence that is easily understand for source readers but not for target readers (Peter, 2001). Since English and Chinese are two part of language areas and each has their own historical and cultural background, many ideas and idiomatic expressions which are tacit for the original people, but may be difficult to understand for people abroad. Therefore, for easily understand for the target readers, the translator should amplify the source text a little.

(1) There are a crowd of all sorts, some passant holding umbrella, some talking happily in the teahouse, which constitute a vivid life picture.

译文：看着人群，有打着伞穿梭的路人，有在茶馆谈笑风生的好朋友们，形形色色，构成了一幅生活百态图。

This sentence, we can say it was the masterpiece of amplification. In fact, the adding meaning in the target language, which we can find in the source language, however, it is just not obvious. ‘crowd’, the translation ‘形形色色’ better express the meaning of its plural form. It is not impossible to delete the adding words, but it affects the readability of reading.

(2) We have not lost control of our time, but every little things wasting time will cause our fear. The shortsighted people has sold his birthright for present, but the smart people will concern longer affection.

译文：我们尚未丧失对时间的控制，不过任何浪费时间的小事都引发人们对未来的担忧，为了眼前的利益，目光短浅的人在浪费现在的时间，但是聪明的人会为了更长远的未来考虑。

Here, the adding meaning, “为了眼前的利益” is added in order to make Chinese readers have a better understanding of the text.

D. Domestication

In the book of Lian Shuneng, *A Course book on English-Chinese Translation* defined domestication as follow: “Domestication is a strategy in which a transparent, fluent style is adopted to minimize the strangeness of the foreign text for target language readers.” (Lian, 2006, P: 167). And the advocates of domestication forcefully state that the target text should be translated into a language that is as natural and fluent as the target language. That is to say, domestication is a TL-reader oriented translation strategy. This strategy can make the target readers refrain from the cultural non-equivalence. Take the “Benz” for example; Mercedes-Benz is one of the most famous automobile brands all over the world. At first, it was translated into “本茨”，which was not impressive for Chinese buyer as this translation did not make them realize that this is a brand name of a car. So they will be less likely to buy it. Later operator was aware of this reason and decided to retranslated into “奔驰”，which makes Chinese consumers imagine the feature of high quality. And this translation helped boost sales. Example 1: I’d much rather see her once or twice and not do anything about it---what could I do about it anyway? She is a bit out of my class, don’t you think? If I did try to do anything, I’d only get sent off with a flea in my ear.

我宁愿见他一两面就算了----我还能干什么？你没看到她和我怎么相称吗？我要干点什么，也只会碰一鼻子灰。

In the original text, ‘a flea in one’s ear’ means ‘耳朵上有跳蚤’，which is a metaphor implied an irony; And ‘send somebody off with a flea in one’s ear’ means drive somebody away with harsh words, which is similar with the Chinese ‘碰一鼻子灰’。But if translate it into the former one, too plain; instead of, the latter one will be more active and native. (Zhou 2005. P: 59)

E. Foreignization

Foreignization is related to source language culture, which strives to preserve the foreign style as possible in order to turn the source language and culture into the target one (Baker, 1993).

In the long history of China, Chinese language has formed large amount of words which are culture-related and from religions, customs, foods, festivals and so on. For translators, it’s difficult for them to use equivalent words to express those culture-featured words. On the basis of what have been discussed, foreignization can preserve the original culture and avoid misunderstand, so translators often use this kind of approach. For example, ‘臭豆腐’. ‘臭豆腐’ is Chinese special food with strong smell. But for English, they might have no idea about it. However, only if adopting the foreignizing strategy and translating into ‘stinky tofu’, can the foreigners get a vivid image.

IV. CONCLUSION

By constantly deepening study to the translation, non-equivalence, as a very essential criterion, has begun attracted people’s eyeball from some new heights. The previous research pays more attention to the equivalence, for instance, distinguished translator---Eugene Nida, he has a vital theory “functional equivalence”. There are fewer researches about non-equivalence, and how to deal with the contradiction to finally achieve the equivalence at the greatest extent.

In the process of translation, we should transfer the focus from the source text and the target text to target reader, that is to say, as receivers of message is more stressed and the response of readers is the real criterion. (Nida. 1964) Because the cultural and linguistic differences between Chinese and English, non-equivalence is inevitable in the process of Chinese-English translation. So author analyzes the non-equivalence from the points of cultural difference and linguistic difference and cites it in detailed by some practical examples. Then, the author lists five translation strategies to compensate the non-equivalence. They are respectively conversion, negation, amplification, domestication and foreignization. By doing so, the final goal can be achieved and it also needs us to never-ending pursuit to the equivalence.

According to the above mention, how to be an excellent translator or reader, the author will give some advice as follow: Firstly, they not only need to grasp the native culture and language, but also the foreign. Both the possession of

knowledge between the source language and the target language, we can correctly deal with the differences. Secondly, receptor-oriented is efficient strategy. Only standing in the view of receptor, we can translate vividly and natively. For instance, if the reader is children, translators need to employ plain or vivid words on account of their limited knowledge and experience, standing the children's point of view.

There are some mistakes and weakness in this thesis on account of the limitation of certain knowledge and experience. Hence, those who have the chance to read this thesis mildly point out the deficiency so that the author can correct them. The author will be overwhelmed with gratitude.

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Ling Wang was born in Jian, China in 1967. She received her bachelor of Art degree in linguistics from Jiangxi Normal University, China in 1995.

She is currently an associate professor in the School of Foreign Languages, Nanchang Normal University, Nanchang, China. Her research interests include cross-cultural teaching and teaching methods.

Prof. Wang is a member of the Chinese Association of Foreign Language Teacher.