On Chinese Translation of English Proverbs—A Dynamic Equivalence Perspective[*]

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Abstract—Mainly derived from daily life of common people, English proverbs, as a highly condensed encyclopedia of the English-speaking nations and their cultures, cover the widest possible fields of the society ranging from the universal deepest philosophic contemplation to the commonest daily activities. English proverb translation has always been heatedly discussed in language field, and many scholars have made great contribution to it. They put forward different translation methods from different views. The paper attempts to discuss the Chinese translation methods on the basis of the dynamic equivalence theory.

Index Terms—English proverbs, factors, dynamic equivalence, translation methods

I. INTRODUCTION

English proverbs are concise in wording, incisive in content and profound in meaning. They are colorful，figurative and philosophical. To a certain extent, they reflect the cultural characteristics of the English nation and are the treasures of English culture. It is impossible to learn English language without learning English proverbs, especially the translation of proverbs plays an important role in correctly understanding the meaning of proverbs and the national culture reflected by them. Learning English proverb translation into Chinese is helpful to communicate with foreigners, and enriches our culture. As oral products of nations and gems of languages, both Chinese and English proverbs reflect the wit and wisdom of nations and provide the most convenient method for people to learn about culture, history and language. But how to translate English proverbs well has all the time been a controversial topic. Up to now, many translators have contributed their successful practices in this field and shown their own valuable ideas.

In Western countries, there has been formed a relatively complete system. In our country, many famous scholars have studied this topic. Zhang Ning and Peng Baoliang are the representatives of the first group that analyze English and Chinese proverbs only from the viewpoint of each unique culture. Zhang Ning claims that cultural factors in proverbs are the key points of their translations (1999, p. 23). Peng Baoliang thinks English and Chinese cultures are sometimes partly overlapped, non-correspondent or contradictory, thus different rendering strategies should be applied into divergent cultural backgrounds (1998, p. 25). Both of them stress the cultural differences between English and Chinese. The second group is the translators who take into account proverbs from the cultural perspective, but mainly concern the correspondences or similarities between two cultures. Chen Wenbo and Ji Yizhi should be mentioned, they think the translation of proverbs is a matter of dealing with the cultural features of the original proverbs, especially dealing with correspondences between two languages. Chen Wenbo divides the corresponding phenomena between English and Chinese proverbs into the following seven groups: identical in form and meaning, basically equivalent in form and meaning, similar in form but different in meaning, similar in form but opposite in meaning, divergent in form but close in meaning, different in both form and meaning, non-corresponding phenomena (1987, p. 38) In comparison, Ji Yizhi emphasizes that translating proverbs really involves a problem of solving the contradiction between understanding and expression in intercultural communication, and therefore it is important for a translator to improve his or her intercultural sensibility (1993, p.16). In a word, all these views above are the dominant current studies of translating proverbs. Such studies are discussed from the perspectives of the culture, linguistics or both the culture and linguistics; nonetheless, they have played the guiding role in the practice of translation. This thesis will discuss Chinese translation methods on the basis of the dynamic equivalence.

II. PROBLEMS IN TRANSLATING ENGLISH PROVERBS INTO CHINESE

The differences in geography, history, religious belief and living habits between English and China lead to difficulties of proverb translation. The English proverb has its specific characteristics and information of cultural connotation. There are some things that are self-evident in one culture, but difficult to understand in another culture. Such factors usually come to influence the translation of English proverbs; these factors always bring several problems to the quality of translation, so that some translators fail to achieve satisfactory translations. We can get a better translation if we have

a good command of these factors. The major factors include living environments, living customs, religious beliefs and moral standards. Because of these translation factors, there exist lots of problems in the translation of English proverbs. Some translators may misunderstand or guess the meaning literally, some wrongly substitute the original images of the proverbs; some lose exotic flavors and so on.

A. Misunderstanding or Literally Guessing

Ignoring the cultural background usually leads to the misunderstanding of proverbs. For example: "Once bitten, twice shy." is commonly translated as: 一朝被蛇咬，十年怕井绳。However, the proverb has the connotation that if we have had an unpleasant experience, many people are very anxious to avoid a repetition and will learn from the lesson and it is positive. It means gaining flexibility is the power of learning. I think the proverb "Once bitten, twice shy" is applicable to all vertebrates, and it is similar to the proverb "it is not only the burnt child who dreads the fire". Therefore, the correct translation should be: 吃一回亏，学一回乖。

B. Incorrect Substitution

It is possible that there are similar expressions between English proverbs and Chinese proverbs. In many cases, not all expressions in a language can find an equivalent form in another language. The English proverbs and Chinese proverbs are actually not the same in the expressing. In such a case, incorrect substitution results in misunderstanding. For example: "Agues come on horseback, but go away on foot." is commonly translated as: 病来如山倒，病去如抽丝。The proverb has the connotation: misfortune comes rapidly and leaves slowly. "Agues" is explicated as "misfortune". That is to say, "agues" does not refer to "sickness" only.

C. Loss of Exotic Flavor

Some people think translation should convey accurate and adequate information; others believe translation should keep the national flavor of the original as much as possible. However, we often find that some translations loose the original flavor when the translators translate English proverbs into Chinese. For example: "Talk of the devil, and he will appear." Someone translated it into: 说曹操，曹操到。I think this translation is unacceptable. According to my understanding, the meaning of the proverb is that something will become true when you talk about it. The word "devil" stands for something bad. However, "曹操" is a famous character in Chinese history. Many foreigners may feel puzzled about such translation. The majority of foreigners do not know who Cao cao is and what relationship between "Cao cao" and the proverb is about. In my opinion, the translation does not show the original flavor and it reads like a Chinese proverb. The most appropriate translation should be: 谈到恶魔，恶魔就戛然而至。Such kind of translation is inappropriate because they have lost their English original flavor and become the incarnation of Chinese culture.

As is well known, language is the carrier of culture. English proverbs are colorful language forms, which, to a certain extent, reflect the cultural characteristics of English-speaking nations. Therefore, when translating English proverbs, it is not enough to seek equivalence only on the premise of the synonymous words (equivalence) between languages. Translators are suggested to follow the principle of dynamic equivalence and make more use of Chinese expressions to reproduce the language style and rich connotation of English proverbs, only by this way, can the translation be allegorized and reasoned properly without losing the language image of the original proverbs.

III. THE DYNAMIC EQUIVALENCE THEORY

Concerning about all the problems discussed in the preceding parts, it is easy to realize that it is necessary to find a method which can overcome such problems during the Chinese translation of English proverbs. So the author takes the dynamic equivalence theory to solve the above discussed problems. The dynamic equivalence is not a simple translating method but a process of choosing the most appropriate method from several translation methods that is able to achieve satisfactory translation. Before choosing translation methods, knowing the definition and the requirements of the dynamic equivalence is necessary.

Dynamic equivalence is put forward on the basis of Nida's principle of equivalent effect, according to which the relationship between receptor and message should keep substantially the same as what existed between the original receptors and the message (1964, p.159). It is considered as a principle of translation which directs a translator to translate the meaning of the original text in such a way that the TL wording will trigger the same impact on the TC audience as the original wording did upon the ST audience. They claim that the form of the original text is frequently changed, but as long as the change follows the rules of back transformation in the source language, of contextual consistency in the transfer, and of transformation in the receptor language, the message is preserved and the translation is faithful (Nida & Taber, 1982, p.200). Therefore, dynamic equivalence is to be defined in terms of the degree to which the receptors of the message in the receptor language respond to it in substantially the same manner as the message receptors in the source language. (Jeremy, 2010, 42)

Nida's viewpoint on translation indicates that translation is not only lexical equivalence, but also semantic equivalence, style equivalence and stylistic equivalence. The information conveyed by translation includes both superficial lexical information and deep cultural information. Equivalence in "dynamic equivalence" includes four aspects: a. Lexical equivalence, b. Syntactic equivalence, c. Textual equivalence and d. Stylistic equivalence. Among

these four aspects, Nida thinks that meaning is the most important, followed by form (Guo Jianzhong, 2000, p.67). Form is likely to hide the cultural significance of the source language and hinder cultural communication. Therefore, Abiding by Nida's theory, translators should take four aspects of dynamic equivalence as translation principles to accurately reproduce the cultural connotation of the source language in the target language. According to Nida, the goal of dynamic equivalence aims to seek the closest natural equivalent to the source-language message (1964, p.166). So a successful translation depends on whether the translator can achieve equivalent response or not, which belongs to the four basic requirements of a translation (1964, p.164): 1) making sense; 2) conveying the spirit and manner of the original text; 3) having a natural and easy form of expression; 4) producing an equivalent response.

Consequently, he draws a famous conclusion that translation consists in reproducing in the receptor language, the closest natural equivalent of the source language message. In the process of translating proverbs, meaning is firstly ranked, and style in the second place. Hence, dynamic equivalence is as well named functional equivalence. In essence, in order to get a satisfactory dynamic equivalent in translation, one cannot merely make a compromise between the literal and free rendering, nor can one succeed by merely simplifying the grammar and restricting the number of words in a vocabulary. One needs to (1) weigh the factors involved in the communication, (2) produce various alternative renderings, especially of complex passages, and (3) test the acceptability and intelligibility of such renderings with receptors. To sum up, we'll try to eliminate cultural differences when translating English proverbs in to Chinese. As a translator, his job is to strive to create translations that conform to the semantics of the original text and reflect the cultural characteristics of the original text. If meaning and culture cannot be taken into account at the same time, the translator can only abandon formal equivalence and achieve the purpose of reproducing the semantics and culture of the original text by changing the form of the original text in the translation. When the change of form is still not enough to express the semantics and culture of the original text, the translator can transform the deep structure of the source language into the surface structure of the target language to solve the cultural differences and make the source language and the target language equal in meaning by means of explaining the cultural connotation of the source language with the vocabulary of the target language.

IV. Dynamic Equivalence in Translating English Proverbs

A. Common Methods of Translating English Proverbs into Chinese

When we launch into a dynamic equivalent translation, the focus is usually placed on the same impact of the verbal signs. However, generally speaking, it is appropriate to speak of "dynamic equivalence" in terms of a range of functional adequacy, since there exist no absolutely equivalent translations. What's more, many different translations can individually demonstrate varying degrees of functional equivalence. For the translator, what signifies is that the chosen rendering methods can essentially work for the closest function in the target language to accurately deliver out the message of the source language. Namely, the dynamic equivalence of proverb translation is primarily measured by a comparison of the effect and appeal in the texts of the source language and the target language, so what a translator is asked to do is nothing but to make good use of extensive rendering means to achieve the valid closest equivalent translation to the original text. Consequently, it is significant for us to list several common rendering methods here in order that we may further discuss the realization of dynamic equivalence in translating English proverbs into Chinese.

1. Word-for-word translation

Some English proverbs are consistent or basically consistent with Chinese idioms and sayings in terms of expression and meaning. When we translate these English into Chinese, it's acceptable that idioms or proverbs with the same or similar figurative meanings are directly translated. This can not only keep the charm and form of the original text, but also make the translation easy for readers or listeners to accept. Word-for-word translation (literal translation) is always presented by means of interlinear translation, with the source language words immediately coming above the target language, and the word order of the source language is uniformly preserved and the words are translated singly by their most common meanings. Since such kind of translation often violates the grammar or structure of the target language, it is very hard to understand and only used to understand the mechanics of the source language or to explain a difficult text as a pre-translation process. For example: The English proverb "A friend is a second self." means that your friend has much in common with you in the aspects of characteristics, interest, ideas and so on. It can be literally translated as "朋友是另一个自我". The proverb "Walls have ears" can also be directly translated "隔墙有耳", which warns that the conversation is likely to be overheard out of expectation.

2. Free translation

Adaptation is the "freest" form of translation. It is also called free translation or paraphrase, which reproduces the matter or the content of the proverb with absence of manner and the form of the original. In this way, the themes of the target proverbs are precisely preserved, but the original culture has been converted to the target culture, as a result, the text has to be rewritten accordingly. Free translation is applied to at least two kinds of the English proverbs. Some English proverbs differ from their Chinese counterparts in terms of language habits and cultural background, and the metaphorical things are different, but their metaphorical meanings are consistent with each other and their expressions are very similar. When translating these kind of English proverbs into Chinese, it is often necessary to change their forms and preserve their spirit essence of the proverbs, that is, to use free translation of Chinese idioms with similar

images. Some English proverbs are implicit and have profound meanings. If we only literally translate into Chinese without understanding the specific meaning and effect of the original text, the translation will be dull and tasteless. This cannot express the meaning, but also damage the language image and rich connotation of the original text. Therefore, in Chinese translation of such kind of English proverbs, it is appropriate to use idioms, proverbs or colloquial expressions with the same figurative meanings or similar effects as the original text, which will make the translated text vivid and accurate.

For example, the proverb "He who lies with dogs stands with fleas" means that one's conduct will be influenced by the moralities of his companies around. If one gets along with a noble person, he will learn to be an excellent one and vice versa. But here we can't convert it into "与狗睡在一起的人站起来身上有许多跳蚤", which is just the dictionary meaning of the words. We'd adopt free translation to convey the theme of the proverb, it can be exactly translated into Chinese"近朱者赤，近墨者黑". Similarly, the proverb "In fair weather prepare for the foul." means that one needs to make good preparation for the bad situation when in time of prosperity, the translated Chinese text as "居安思危"can convey the more exact meaning than the expression "天气晴朗时，慎防阴雨日".

3. Literal translation combined with free translation

Literal translation is advantageous in its maintenance of the national flavors of the source proverbs; in contrast, adaptation is easy to be understood with the loss of its form. But sometimes during the course of translating English proverbs, neither literal translation nor free translation can accurately and effectively express the meaning of the original proverbs. At this time, many translators combine these two methods in order to develop their strong points and avoid their weak points. As for some proverbs, these translators render the original proverbs literally in the former part to keep their national features and then paraphrase them in the latter part so that the readers can grasp them without any trouble. To other proverbs, these translators employ literal translation for the parts that is easily acceptable in target readers while adaptation for the difficult parts. For example: The proverb "Flow has its ebb" can be understood in Chinese "潮有涨落时，人有盛衰日". The former part of this Chinese translation "潮有涨落时" carries the vivid literal expression of the proverb, which draws a clear image; the latter part "人有盛衰日" denotes the true meaning of the proverb, which denotes the theme with a finishing touch. Two translation methods combine to get such precisely understanding effect, so either translating method is indispensable for this type of English proverbs.

B. Employing Dynamic Equivalence to Translate English Proverbs

As a matter of fact, dynamic equivalence of translating proverbs is an activity of using the most appropriate translation method to pursue the closest natural equivalent of original proverbs. Such a natural equivalent does not mean identity in mathematics, but proximity based on degrees of closeness to functional identity. Therefore, the realization of dynamic equivalence in translating proverbs is in fact a dynamic process of selecting the perfect translation from various alternatives, which are able to help the translator produce rendering of the close translation to the original. Therefore, the translator has no choice but to consider the different factors. Consequently, to realize dynamic equivalence in translating English proverbs into Chinese forms, the translator do remember to choose the best rendering method in terms of such considerations in Chinese reader's position. And which rendering is the best or most appropriate fully depends on the degree of its equivalence to the original proverbs. Accordingly, due to the lack of relevant reference material and the limitation of our capacity, the writer will only suggest here some strategies of realizing dynamic equivalence based on merely several different conditions as follows:

1. If both the source and target texts are very plain and the target audience is not highly educated and unfamiliar with the source culture, translators should employ free translation or loan translation to result in an easy translation and even conform to the cultural features of the target text.

2. When the target receptors are not familiar with the original culture and language, but the target text is still required to keep the cultural feature of the original, not its rhetorical structure, then we will often render it literally, through literal translation with annotation or through literal translation combined with adaptation.

3. If the target audience does not know the original language and culture well, the source text is colorful in its national characteristic but the target needs high presentation of the rhetorical structure, translator shall usually deal with this problem through loan translation, varied loan translation or literal translation with adaptation to show both the features of the source proverbs and the requirements of the target text.

4. If the target receptor is familiar with the original language and culture, translators may easily employ literal translation, loan translation or varied loan translation to keep the brevity and color of the original.

In a word, dynamic equivalence as for translating proverbs refers to the closest natural equivalence of the original proverbs in the target language by employing the most suitable way from word-for-word translation, literal translation, free translation, and so on. And the essence of the dynamic equivalence in translation is just a dynamic process that adjusts the function of the rendering to the same response of the original in a specific condition. Therefore, a good translator is always thinking in terms of alternative ways of expressing the same thing and chooses the best rendering that is bound to have the same impact on the target receptors as the original proverb does upon the original reader.

V. CONCLUSION

In the process of translating English Proverbs into Chinese, Don't take literal meaning for granted, We remember to pay attention to its colloquialism, nationality and original language artistry, flexibly use literal translation, free translation, literal and free translation, using Chinese proverbs and annotation and other methods, so as to faithfully express the ideological content of the original text, maintain the national characteristics and rhetorical effect of the original text, make the language smooth and fluent, and strive to reproduce the language style and rich connotation of English proverbs. English proverbs are deeply influenced by their native culture, which puts forward higher requirements for translators. When translating English proverbs, we'd better treat them differently and adopt various methods to deal with them. Undoubtedly, translating English proverbs involves a series of factors such as environment, religion and so on, and it is not a process of blindly following mechanical rules to reflect the factors or problems of plus-minus categories for easy pigeonholing examples. Sometimes, an English proverb con-notates a very profound idea beyond the word meaning. In order to successfully reproduce the theme of the original, it is central for a translator to take the dynamic equivalence to choose the appropriate method. In this thesis, the author talked about some suggestions for several methods. These methods of dynamic equivalence contribute to the only one purpose that the translation can make the learners of the source proverbs respond in substantially the same way as the receptors of the target proverbs do; however, they are far from completeness. Up to now, proverb translation on the basis of the theory of dynamic equivalence has just found its way to the development of a new translation theoretical system, so translation of English proverbs as quite a broad academic field urgently demands more and more insightful and dedicative researches from wider perspectives.

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