“Cultural Self-confidence” or “Cultural Trust”—A Proposal for Teaching Literal Translation

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Abstract—The implementation of transmitting China’s classical culture to the world calls for more translators today. So, teachers of English must train more qualified talents to meet the demands. In college English teaching, teaching translation is an indispensable core part. In order to enhance students’ translation competence, English teachers are striving to explore how to teach translation efficiently for the goal. Under such a circumstance, the thesis is to explore literal translation in teaching. Based on Geoffrey Leech’s theory of seven types of meanings, the thesis has provided students’ translators with several guidelines to it, i.e., translating rational sense directly, preserving unique cultural image, insisting to adopted version of English, catching associative sense, forgetting verbal or formal equivalence. To preserve and spread Chinese culture, the paper also suggests that foreignization is the first strategy at present situation, so literal translation will be proper, and that a good translator is an archeologist of knowledge as well. For students, he must have critical eyes in translating.

Index Terms—teaching translation, literal translation, translation strategy, sense

I. INTRODUCTION

Since 2012, in which China has restarted to stress spreading China’s classical culture over the world, more translators and interpreters have been in great need urgently. Translation (Here it refers to C-E translation,1) is immediately attached to high importance in college English teaching. In the last decades, though China has been implementing opening-up policy to the world, the practice of spreading China’s classical culture is not carried out in a large scale yet. Because there was no such a stipulation, which college graduates are supposed to disseminate Chinese classical culture, English teachers haven’t paid much attention to teaching translation. Students’ translation competence is unable to carry out the stipulation. Nowadays, global situation has taken place to China favorably. China is the second biggest economic community among the nations in the world. It is high time for Chinese to transmit the classical culture to the world. The new situation needs more talents capable of the spreading as well. And college is regarded as academic institution with maximum efficiency to train translators. (Schaffner & Adab, 2016, p.8) Naturally, teaching translation is one of the most effective methods in developing students’ competence. It has become an indispensable part of English teaching at college, too. Translation test is an oft-adopted way to measure the competence, also an incentive for students to work hard on it. It has become a big part, occupying 15% of the total scores, in CET,2 so, how to develop student’s translation competence is one of daily topics among English teachers’ teaching affairs. Gradually, literal translation and liberal one or the like are core contents of their repeated discussion because of enormous cultural differences between China and English nations.

Based upon the context given above, the paper is going to explore teaching translation, particularly teaching literal translation, on how to develop students’ translation competence. By doing so, the author of the paper hopes that he could provide students with some of universal guides to be adopted in literal translation, which might be of help in translating

II. OVERVIEW OF THE RELATED STUDIES

A. Foreign Studies

In West, literal translation has been discussed for more than 2,000 years, and is never alone in debate as long as translation is involved. It has long history mainly because of Biblical translation. As it is known that the Holy Bible is written originally in Hebrew and Aramaic, the Jewish Scriptures of Judaism are translated into various native languages as Jews are forced to accept the Diaspora over the corners of the Earth, like Greek, Latin, German, French and English, etc. Throughout the long tradition of Biblical translation, there had existed two schools of translation: the vast majority of the religious believers claim to rigorous word-for-word translation without any addition or reduction; the other

2. CET is the shortened form of college English test.

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school holds that a kind of interpretive translation is acceptable, too. In European history of the translation, there are some notorious cases in point to indicate how miserable the dispute is. In 1546, Etienne Dolet, a humanist scholar of Sorbonne University in Paris, France, was sentenced to death by fire by Divinity School of the University, just for he had added an expression of rien du tout \(^3\) to a paragraph of Plato's Dialogue with no ground, whose theme is centered on human existence after death. It is Dolet's addition that he has been accused of blasphemy, because the Divinity School holds that the addition advocates human has no spirit after death, which simply goes against the Holy Bible. (Zhang Weiping, 2010, pp.24) Of course, this is an extreme case, cited to show the debate is bloody and dehumanized during ancient era.

However, the argument between literal translation and liberal one is constantly carried on and has never stopped in current times. In the West, from the 1950s until the 1990s, the Biblical translation is dominated by American translator Eugene A. Nida, who championed his theory of “dynamic equivalence.” Instead, what is reverse with Nida’s claim is literal translation, like Leland Ryken, American translator of Bible. He has proposed his new idea, essentially literal translation, in his books; the representative one is The Word of God in English. (Leland Ryken, 2002, pp.23-103) In Europe, French scholars stick to interpretation in translating, while Peter Newmark, British theorist of translation declares he prefers “semantic equivalence and communicative equivalence”. Obviously, the controversy between literal and liberal will continue to carry on though it would be no fruit in the end.

B. Domestic Studies

In China, the debate between literal translation and liberal one has been centered on translation of Buddhist scriptures with long history, too. Since Buddhism was first introduced into China in the Western Han Dynasty (206BCE—8CE), the discussion on literal and liberal has commenced. In the first stage of spreading Buddhism, some Buddhist masters adopted adapt translation to the followers of Buddhism, for which they think the interpretation of the Buddhist scriptures is more easily understood and accepted by them. Sometimes they have mixed Chinese culture into their translation to attract more Buddhist disciples. Consequently, such kind of Buddhist sutra translation is abridged, refined, which is not close to the source sutra. The approach is called refined translation, similar to today’s liberal translation. The Buddhist situation at the time was just like what someone has described, “…polemical and political attacks from hostile Chinese quarters forced Buddhists to respond with apologia and ultimately reshape Buddhism into something the Chinese would find not only inoffensive, but attractive”.(Craig,1998, pp.81) It explains Buddhism’s adaptation to existing Chinese religions, such as Taoism to establish its foothold. With time’s elapse, together with frequent wars, Buddhism has become more and more popular, which is accepted as a spiritual support and psychological repose by the people. (Luo Xinzhang & Chen Yingnian, 2009, p.2–5) The Buddhist apostles require more accurate sutra translation. Zhi Qian (fl.233—253CE) and Dao An (314–385 CE), scholars of Buddhism in the Eastern Jin Dynasty (317–420) made response to the requirements actually. They have proclaimed a series of standards for translating Buddhist sutra, though Kumarajiva (344–409CE) is a strongest opponent to their proclamations. The approach adopted by Dao An and Zhi Qian is called unhewn translation, which is current literal translation essentially; the translation is source-sutra-oriented. Hereafter, Dao An and Zhi Qian are regarded as representatives of literal translation, Kumarajiva as a representative of liberal translation. (Martha Cheung, trans., 2006, pp.57-95)

In modern China, there are still debates between literal translation and liberal one. Most influential cases are the verbal fights among Lu Xun (1881—1936) and Zhao Jingshen (1902—1985) and Liang Shiqiu (1903—1987). Lu Xun is a strong advocate of literal translation. He even insists on preserving the syntactic structure of original text, for which he is criticized as rigid translation, essentially, a kind of calqued translation. \(^4\) (Jean Delisle, et al, 1999, pp.123) He declared that it would be faithful to the original rather than readable. No wonder, readers of Lu Xun’s translation don’t think they are fluent, readable and easy to be understood, which is totally different from his writing in the least. But, Liang Shiqiu claims that translation should be smooth rather than faithful to the original. Lu Xun and Liang Shiqiu had most remarkable verbal fights in newspapers in the 1930s. As for Zhao Jingshen, he is noted for his preserving original image. Of course, the debate between literal and liberal still goes on today. For instance, some translators claim to be spiritual similarity to the original, in fact it is a kind of literal translation; and others hold that direct translation, essentially literal translation, is preferable in practice.

In short, the arguments, foreign or domestic, old or new, are beneficial to both translation studies and teaching translation. The current debate is continuum of the old one.

III. GUIDELINES TO TRANSLATE CULTURE-SPECIFIC WORDS

A. Principles to Translate Culture-specific Words

As we have mentioned in Introduction of the thesis, teaching translation is a core part of college English teaching.

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\(^3\) rien du tout is a French expression, meaning all is vanity.

\(^4\) It is a type of literal translation where the translator transfers the elements of the source text to the target text in such a way as to reproduce their semantic, etymological, and temporal aspects.
whose score percentage is 15% in CET as listed above. More importantly, it is a beacon to lead to teaching translation orientation because every college student has to participate in the test. That is to say, to a large extent, whether an English teacher has attached importance to teaching translation or not is dominated by the test type and its score percentage. Of course, the test-orientated teaching is a bit myopic. Unfortunately, at present, such test-orientated teaching have to be carried on for some time before a new popular method is adopted. Therefore, English teachers have to consider how to teach translation more effectively to students. As for teaching translation, a set of guidelines will be the best way to both teachers and students. So, it is a theoretical development and demand from both teaching and translation.

On the other hand, in a practical way, from micro-translation practice and macro-societal situation, some summary of translation skills are necessary. Under the present circumstance, i.e., spreading China’s classical culture is being undertaken, more and more China’s cultural materials, including both soft culture and hard ones, are presented in course books. Inevitably, the test part for translation is occupied by the materials, too, which has resulted in twofold positive effects. First, participants of CET are welcome to it for they assume that they are familiar with them, more or less. Second, students have come to awaken the importance of Chinese classical culture and begun to read them day by day. Influenced by the macro-situation, in CET, some of terms with Chinese specific culture are seen frequently. Like “春晚” (chun wan), “端午节” (duan wu jie), “中秋节” (zhong qiu jie), “清明节” (qing ming jie), “东/西汉” (dong/xi han), “汉服” (han fu), “唐诗” (tang shi), “宋词” (song ci), “元曲” (yuan qu), “京剧” (jing ju), “道家学派” (dao jia xue pai), “儒家学派” (ru jia xue pai), “气功” (qi gong), “太极” (tai ji), “饺子” (jiao zi), “粽子” (zong zi), “春卷” (chun juan), “二胡” (er hu), “梁山伯与祝英台” (Liang Shan bo yu Zhu Ying tai), “光棍节” (guang gun jie), “一带一路” (yi dai yi lu). Influenced by the macro-situation in CET, some of terms with Chinese specific culture are frequently seen in CET. As to these words, for an experienced translator, it is very difficult to render them well within a limited time, let alone asking a student translator to finish doing. Nonetheless, as a teacher of translation, it is one of his responsibilities to teach or train students to grasp and grip with translation skills to deal with them efficiently.

Faced with such varieties of culture-specific words, students translators frequently ask, “Sir! Are there any rules and regulations for us to translate them well?” In other words, they hope some skills or principles would be available to solving the nut of problem in translation. As we have known that there are two ways in general, literal translation and free translation, let alone asking a student translator to finish doing. Nonetheless, as a teacher of translation, it is one of his responsibilities to teach or train students to grasp and grip with translation skills to deal with them efficiently.

British linguist Geoffrey Leech’s theory of seven types of meaning will give us some guide to the problem. According to his theory, there are seven kinds of senses, they are:

1. Conceptual meaning or sense, including logical, cognitive, denotative content;
2. Connotative meaning, what is communicated by virtue of what language refers to;
3. Social meaning, what is communicated of social circumstances in language use;
4. Affective meaning, what is communicated of the feelings and attitudes of speaker/writer;
5. Reflected meaning, what is communicated through association with another sense of the same expression;
6. Collocative meaning, what is communicated through association with word which tends to occur in the environment of another word;
7. Thematic meaning, what is communicated by the way in which the message is organized in terms of order and emphasis. (Geoffrey Leech, 1985, p. 23) Leech refers to 2, 3, 4, 5 and 6 as associative sense. The divisions of meanings can be of great help for us to translate culture-specific words, especially beneficial to translation from Chinese to English (shortened as C-E) or vice versa (shortened as E-C).

So far as C-E or E-C is concerned, particularly in Chinese context, because there are more complex situations in Chinese culture, we have two parts to resolve the problem related with culture-specific words. The first part presented here is a series of guidelines to translate the words; the second one is translation strategy.

5. The Chinese expressions listed here are taken from the translation test or exercises from 2012 until 2019, by the author of the thesis.
7. Here the English translation Qing Ming Festival, Qi Tian Temple and Tomb Sweeping Day are adopted from http://www.youdao.com/, 11/23, 2019; and Equally Heaven Temple and Heavenly High Temple is the author’s translation himself.
First, we should remember that, ST words could be rendered directly into TT, the other, reciprocally, if the words of ST and TT share the same “conceptual meaning or sense, i.e. logical, cognitive, denotative content”. (Geoffrey Leech, 1985, p. 23)

E.g. 道家学派 ←→ Taoist school 儒家学派 ←→ Confucian school

The examples cited above are faithful to ST. To a large degree, here both “学派” and “school” share the same “conceptual, logical, cognitive or denotative content” so they can be translated into each other literally. But, “道家” and “儒家” are unique and specific in Chinese culture and should be kept the uniqueness in TT, so a literal translation, transliteration, is preferred. Then, according to the criterion, 春卷, 光棍节, 汉服, 唐诗, 东/西汉 could be conveyed into Spring roll, Bachelor’s Day, Han Dynastyle Clothes, Tang Dynasty poetry, Eastern/Western Han Dynasty. Hence, the translation is rendition of the conceptual sense.

Second, the translation/TT should strive to preserve the uniqueness in original text/ST if it could keep by using a liberal method rather literal one, i.e. transliteration; transliteration is the last choice for pinyin is totally Greek to most of non-native Chinese, beyond understanding, and conveys something meaningful least to audience. Especially, during transmitting China’s classical culture, a receiver-oriented text is more popular and effective.

E.g. 清明节 ←→ Tomb Sweeping Day/Festival 齐天寺 ←→ Equally Heaven Temple or Heavenly High Temple, the cases here have retained associative sense of ST.

On the contrary, respectively, Qing Ming Festival or Qi Tian Temple isn’t recommended to student’s translator. The reason is listed as above. If Clear and Bright Day or Soul Mourning Day is employed, annotation is a must. Hereafter, the translation here is a way to transfer the image of ST, like 梁山伯与祝英台, which could be Liang Shan-bo and Zhu Ying-tai, as Romeo and Juliet, the names are less attractive and impressive than the love stories hidden behind them. If there is no annotation to the TT, the TT Liang Shan-bo and Zhu Ying-tai is hard to accept at first look.

Third, as to some of culture-specific words, for which have no corresponding words in TT culture, we could create neologisms to convey original meaning in order to spread Chinese culture. For example, the unique musical instruments or food and etc., like “二胡”, “古筝”, “武术”, “气功”, “饺子”, “粽子” or “意境”, they have no counterparts in TT culture, so the translation could be erhu, guzheng, wushu, qigong, jiao zi, zong zi or yijing respectively. The translation martial art for “武术”, dumpling for “饺子”, Chinese traditional rice pudding for “粽子” and artistic conception for “意境” is not proper rendition because it follows the TT culture rigorously and ignores the ST culture, which means domestication strategy is adopted favorably by the translator. The TT is transparent to receivers, translators are invisible, for which reads like the text written originally in the target language. (Lawrence Venuti, 2008, pp.48) As far as the problem is concerned in detail, we will further discuss translation strategy in subsequent part separately. Here, the traditional principle to translate names, i.e., “complying with the original forms of expression”, is interpretable to the TTs. The loanwords have both preserved Chinese culture and enriched English culture, particularly, new forms of expression.

Then, the culture-specific words accepted and admitted in English like “太极(tai ji)”, “蒋介石(jiang jie shi)”, “孙中山(sun zhong shan)”, “清华(qing hua)” and “北京大学(Beijing daxue)”, etc., the adopted English expression Tai Chi, Chiang Kai-shek, Sun Yat-sen, Tsinghua and Peking University is the best version of the ST correspondingly instead of Tai Ji, Jiang Jie-shi, Sun Zhong-shan, Qing Hua and Beijng University. Because the adopted version is influential not only in English culture but also over the cultures of world community, the new TT, though it is written according to standard retrieval system of Chinese Pinyin, it is still strange to TT receivers, which needs a long time to be accepted.

Fifth, the culture-specific words, which share conceptual sense with TT but different associative meanings, “including connotative meaning, social meaning, affective meaning, reflected meaning, collocative meaning”, (Geoffrey Leech, 1985, pp. 23) TT should keep the associative meaning in ST.

E.g. 端午节 ←→ Dragon Boat-Racing Festival, 中秋节 ←→ Moon Cake Festival, 春节 ←→ Spring Festival Gala

The examples given above “节” is literally translated into festival for its rational sense; other parts of TTs have properly preserved associative sense of ST. 中秋节 is translated into Moon Cake Festival instead of Mid-Autumn Festival because the former has conveyed associative sense, the latter just the denotative one. Dragon Boat-Racing Festival has also kept the associative tradition in ST, but dragon needs explaining for different connotations in China and West.

Last, the culture-specific words tied with politics and ideology, such as 一带一路, 大力宣传, 精神文明, 文化自信, 习近平新时代 etc., translation teachers should require students to verify the TTs again and again, and never take any translation for granted though they are repeatedly employed in dictionaries, by authority translators or online; a critical eye is vital to do translation. Accordingly, the translations One Belt and One Road, vigorous propagation, spiritual civilization, cultural confidence/ self-confidence, Xi Jin-ping’s New Era/Time seem to be faithful to the original respectively at our first glance over them. However, it doesn’t comply with the original truth more or less. First, the
word belt and road haven’t shared equal conceptual sense with the ST 丝绸之路 because the ST 一带一路(One Belt) here refers to Silk Road, 一路(One Road) to the Route on sea in China’s history. One Belt is acceptable for it has connotative senses, meaning both abstract, like Bible Belt, and concrete, like cotton or silk belt; as for One Road, it could be debatable, for road means:

1. a hard surface (the author’s emphasis) built for vehicles to travel on;
2. used in names of roads, especially in towns;
( Oxford English Dictionary Online)

Hence, road doesn’t refer to the way or path on sea. It could be better to adopt route, for it refers to:

1. an established line of travel or access;
2. an open way (generally public) for travel or transportation.
( Oxford English Dictionary Online) 10

Second, cultural confidence/self-confidence, apparently, they are fully faithful to the ST. And yet, if teachers of translation have thought about them for a bit longer time, they could still find some problem about it. As it is known to us, what the classical culture China’s been transmitting is also recognized by others, by the world, for it is a rich mine of heritage, wisdom, design and a considerable contribution to construct world community with shared future. (Xi Jinping) So, psychologically, in the eyes of average people, cultural self-confidence/confidence refers to “I” or “we”, i.e. the speaker as a party believes something is right; here it refers to we believe our culture is acceptable and great. This idea is a self-consciousness or one-sided thoughts, or one-dimensional idea of Chinese culture. Actually, we don’t know the other party, others’ idea or attitude about China’s culture, that is, whether others agree with us or not is uncertain; under such a circumstance, if we want to transmit Chinese culture to others, we would encounter with unfavorable result because others don’t necessarily trust it and aren’t willing to accept it. Therefore, from the perspectives of psychology, cross-cultural studies, and sociology, only the culture trusted by both the parties of the speaker and other could be adopted more easily, could cultural transmission and communication be available among diverse cultures in the world. If cultural confidence/self-confidence is adopted, that is to say, what we want to spread China’s culture is the one, which is believed by ourselves only, probably not believed or trusted by others or the world. What’s more, from conceptual sense and associative one, confidence means:

1. [U]~ (in sb/sth)the feeling that you can trust, believe in and be sure about the abilities or good qualities of sb/sth;
2. [U] a belief in your own ability to do things and be successful;
3. [U] the feeling that you are certain about sth..
( Oxford English Dictionary Online)

From the senses listed above, we are more convinced that cultural confidence means what we have believed culture, which is not always recognized universally. Thus, in a way, the TT cultural confidence goes against our purpose to spread China’s culture. After careful thoughts, the translation belief in culture or cultural trust would be better choices than cultural confidence/self-confidence, for it is more persuasive and reasonable. Hereafter, we should remind of students that, verbal or formal equivalence, such as cultural confidence/self-confidence is not necessarily faithful to the sense of ST—文化自信. Here associative sense is what TT counts on.

Finally, the TT Xi Jin-ping’s New Ear/Time is kind of redundancy in meaning because President Xi Jin-ping is unique in history. His government and reign is a new story, whatever and however, which is certain to be written down in China’s chronological history. As a result, the translation Xi’s Time or Xi’s Era would be closer to express the ST. As to vigorous propagation, spiritual civilization, a specific sense, rational or associative sense, is the first object to be taken into consideration. Verbal equivalence or word-for-word translation would be trap for our students’ translators. “...somehow, it is similar to translation; what some place or someone refers to on earth is vital, you can’t translate it just by verbal sense at all.”(Howard Goldblatt, 2014, pp. 37-49) What Howard has explained here is the essential element to convey ST well. He could do it better only if he has caught the situation of ST. Therefore, a teacher of translation is an archeologist of knowledge as well, somewhat; he must keep his students fall into the habit to dig out the bottom of the truth, too.

B. Strategy to Translate Culture-specific Words

As to culture-specific words as given above, they are far from enough to be exhausted once for all so we can’t add them all here. It’s impossible for students to remember all the translations. But, definitely, translation strategy is limited. As a teacher, we should give students’ translators some strategy to work them out. That is also why college training translators is most effective and efficient. Then, what is translation strategy? According to Jean Delisle, a Canadian scholar of translation studies, it is “a coherent plan of action adopted by translators based on their intention with respect to a given text.”(Jean Delisle, et al, 1999, pp.192) The definition shows us that, from the situation of culture-specific words discussed here, we should remember why to translate, i.e. translation purpose; what to do, i.e. a series of actions to actualize the purpose, and how to do for the purpose. Obviously, our goal in teaching translation is consistent with that of transmitting China’s classical culture. That is, our translation is to spread Chinese culture. In order to fulfill the mission, we should adopt whatever approach. The oft-adopted translation strategies are domestication and

10. Oxford English Dictionary Online is free to search online by Baidu search engine.

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foreignization. The former is TT oriented, which is realized by liberal translation, free translation; the later ST oriented, done by literal one. So, foreignization is the proper strategy, and literal translation is the proper approach to highlight Chinese culture, embodied by culture-specific words here. But, traditionally, literal translation stresses “TT should retain the formal features of the source text, but conforming generally to the grammar of the target language”. (Jean Delisle, et al, 1999, pp.154) Under today’s condition of spreading China’s culture, for it’s done by literal translation, TT is receiver-oriented, it should retain the cultural uniqueness of ST instead of only being faithful to the original formal equivalence, because of our translation intention. Hereafter, we should ask students to remember the goal in translating such words, and develop student’s competence toward it. Given the contexts of ST, students can choose: literal translation or adaptation or idiomatic translation or word-for-word or calqued translation. (Jean Delisle, et al, 1999, pp.211)

IV. CONCLUSIVE REMARKS

Teaching translation is more complex and comprehensive than other courses for it has involved too many dimensions of the course. Under today’s special situation of disseminating China’s culture, teaching translation well is further advanced to new stages. How to tell China’s good stories and spread classical culture over the world, let our voice be heard and stories be understood without losing China’s uniqueness, we still have a long way to go. But, one of very important ways is to draw upon historical cases related with translation, such as Howard Goldblatt, American translator, regarded as No.1 translator of MoYan, his translation of Chinese literatures has set good examples for us to follow. (Wensheng Deng & Ke Zhang, 2017, pp. 49-54, Wensheng Deng, 2019, pp.1015-1019) The other way is to combine with other disciplines, like linguistics, computer science, politics, anthropology and literary studies and so on, though here we have no mention of them for complexity and breadth. Specifically, taking linguistics as a case in point, combining semantics with translation may be an attempt to convey China’s culture; as to words tied with politics, an archeological method is of great help to excavate the truth of ST. As a translation teacher, he should be rich in the field to train students’ competence with efficiency.

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