An Empirical Analysis to the Translation Pitfalls

Zhao Yuntao

Beijing Rende Haoyue International Education & Science Limited Company, Beijing 102206, China

ABSTRACT. *With the evolution of human languages and the increasing interaction of human civilizations, the asymmetry of translation is becoming severer and acuter, the outdated translation methods are no longer applicable in current situations. Many English words' meaning cannot be understood by Chinese, a variety of proper nouns' translation versions urge a systematic and standard regulation in the filed of translation. This thesis collects commonly-made translation errors from a wide range of materials as well as our daily life, using empirical study method to analyse these pitfalls and offer solutions in order to make a cultural equivalence.*

KEYWORDS: *Translation pitfalls; Literal Translation and Paraphrase; Foreignizing Translation; Domesticating Translation; cultural exchange*

1. Introduction

1.1 The development of translating activities

Language is the unique skill of human race and also the most important feature which differs human beings from other creatures. It is the diversity that makes "translating" possible and necessary. Translating is one of the most ancient human race cultural exchange activities, it has a long history and different development stages. According to the historical materials, back to 3000 BC there already exists formal words translation during the Assyrian Empire period. In the 18th century BC-the period of Babylonian Empire, the legislations and government decrees which were made for the folks needed to be translated into several different languages, translators were required in order to implement those laws and decrees.The earliest translation work can be traced back to the ancient Greek times (5th century BC). Likewise, China's recorded translating history can be traced back to AnShigao'stranslation of the Buddhist classics in the late East Han Dynasty(25-220). The translation of the Buddhist scriptures from East Han Dynasty to Tang and Song Dynasty, the science and technology translation during the late Ming and early Qing periods, and the translation of the western knowledge from the Opium War to the May Fourth period are considered as the three climaxes in China translation history. The practices of translating never stopped in the two thousand years long history river, numerous outstanding translators accumulated rich experience and explored

many practical translation skills and strategies.

1.2 The definition of translation

How did these translation experts from both domestic China and foreign countries define "Translation" during the past two thousand years?

Fedorov, Soviet translation theorist once defined, "translation is to use one language to express what has already been expressed by another language correctly and thoroughly."

Lin Handa, a modern scholar from China, said that a correct translation is to try one's best to express the original text faithfully and, at the same time, obey the Chinese reading custom.

Eugene Nida, a famous American translation theorist defined translation as "using the most appropriate and natural approach to reproduce the meaning conveyed by the original text. "

Peter Newmark's definition to translation is "a craft consisting in the attempt to replace a written message and/or statement in one language by the same message and/or statement in another language. "

1.3 The criteria of translation

Just like the definition of translation, the criteria of translation also differ a lot. Equivalence and Equivalent Effect principles are the most frequently cited principles in foreign translation theories. The Equivalence principle does not only ask the translation to be equivalent with the original text in terms of the ideological contents, but also in terms of the language style. The goal that Equivalent Effect pursues is that the target-text readers and the source-text readers can get the same or basically the same information. In China, the most typical principles of translation are as follows: Yan Fu put forward "Faithfulness, Expressiveness and Elegance" in his Evolution and Ethics in 1935; Lu Xun said in his Ti Wei Ding Cao that translation must have it both way-one is to make it understandable, the other is to maintain the elegance of the source text; Fu Lei put forward the principle of "Similarity in Spirit" in 1951, he said, "In terms of the effect, translation should be like drawing, which emphasizes the similarity of the spirit, but not the similarity of the form. The last typical principle was come up with Qian Zhongshu, he thinks translation should stick to the criteria of "Perfection" in Lin Zhu in 1964.

1.4 The categories of translation pitfalls

This article intends to identify these pitfalls occurred in two circumstances:

1) Pitfalls caused by the violation of specific translation methods and theories;

2) Pitfalls caused by cultural differences;

1.5 AnalysisMethod

The study method which this article adopts is empirical study. The basic principles it advocates are the scientific conclusion's objectivity and universality, it emphasizes that knowledge must be based on observation and experiments, to draw generalizations through the data observed from experiments and the means of experimental study. According to the above features, empirical studies can be summarized by "a study method which gets objective materials and concludes things' essential attributes and the law of development through the observation of the study objects, through the experiments and researches".

2. The Pitfalls Caused by the Violation of Specific Translation Methods and Theories

2.1 Literal Translation and Paraphrase

Literal Translation and Paraphrase are the two lengthy debated topics in the field of translation studies. Actually, Chinese ancient scholars had different understanding toward those two methods. Dao An(314-385),who translated the Buddhist Scriptures during the Eastern Jin Dynasty and the Former Qin Dynasty period had contributed a lot to translation theories. He advocates that the translation of Buddhist Scriptures must "try its best to reflect the original meaning of the source text", he thinks strict literal translation is required in translating. Sui Dynasty's famous monk Yan Zong(557-610) come up with the principle of "rather be simple and unadorned but close to the original meaning than be sophisticated but run counter to the source text."

There are more debates involves this issue in modern times. Some of the typical theorists are Mao Dun, Lu Xun,Z hou Zuoren, Zhu Guangqian, Tao Fen etc. With the deepening of the discussion, people had reached a consensus:literal translation should not be stiff; paraphrase should not be blind. Both of them are merely approaches of translating, they should interact and blend with each other, they are a pair of paradox which contradict each other while mutually united.

Some of the errors made by translators were due to they favoured one particular method of translation(literal translation or paraphrase) but not a combination of the two. These kinds of errors are the most obvious and prevalent ones. Here we take empirical study method to have a close look at three illustrations.

(1)The translation of food

Some people tend to translate "black tea" into "黑茶", "black coffee" into "黑咖啡", "brown sugar" into "黑糖". They all fell into the pitfall of "literal translation". This is due to the lack of common knowledge of English vocabularies. Actually they

are "红茶",",不加糖或牛奶的咖啡" and "红糖". Another salient example is the translation of "dry bread". "Dry bread" has long been interpreted as "干面包" in China, which indicates the bread is waterless and crisp. In fact, dry bread is the beard slices without butter or jam.

(2)The translation emphasis

Please translate the following Chinese sentence into English:

他笑而不语,很久,他说:"…"

Here is an example of a false translation:

But he only went on smiling and said nothing. It was a long time before he said, "......"

People may hardly notice the inappropriateness of this translation, that is because Chinese thinking pattern is reverse with that of Westerners. The usage of "after" is a pitfall of this kind of translation. In English cognitive patter, "before" is more similar than "after", totally different with Chinese cognitive pattern.

Similarly, the corresponding English translation of "左右" is "right and left", "膳宿" is "bed and board". More are as follows:

山水--waters and mountains

东南/西北--southeast/northwest

水火--fire and water

贫富--rich and poor

饮食--food and drink

(3) The translation of "Yu Hua Shi"

We all know that Nanjing is famous for its Yu Hua Shi,but how should it be translated into English? Many tend to translate Yu Hua Shi into rain-flower pebbles, this is an obvious literal translation which regardless of the story of Yu Hua Shi. It is said that during the period of Emperor Liang Wudi in the South Dynasty, the temples were enjoying a booming time.Gao Zuo temple's Buddhist master Yun Guang was good at teaching monks the Buddhist Scriptures, the God was moved by his persistent and sincerity, so he poured flowers onto the ground like rains. The flower petals turned into beautiful pebbles once hit the ground.

According to this recorded tale of Yu Hua Shi, we can see that the original meaning of Yu Hua Shi is flowers drops like rains, so the proper translation would be flower-rain pebbles instead of rain-flower pebbles.

2.2 Communicative Translation and Semantic Translation

Communicative Translation and Semantic Translation were created by Peter

Newmark, the world-famous translation theorist, in his work Approaches to Translation in 1981. Communicative Translation emphasizes the smoothness of the translation works, target readers' cognition and the practical effect, it asks the translation to express the original text content as much as possible, making the translation acceptable in both content and language style; Semantic Translation,on the other hand, attaches great importance to the loyalty to the original text, it advocates that translators should try their best to re-create the original meaning under certain rules.

The disparities between Communicative Translation and Semantic Translation are as follows:

Semantic Translation	Communicative Translation
Author-oriented	Reader-oriented
The process of understanding the author's spirit	Try to understand the author's purpose
Related with the thoughts	Related with the language
Regard the author as an individual	Adjust the source text's thoughts and culture in order to make them easier to be understood
Emphasizes on the structure,try to maintain the original text's sentences and words.	Emphasizes on the effect at the cost of the features of the source text
Informativity	Effectiveness
The translation can be more complex and difficult than the original one	Easy to read and understand

Likewise, there is another pair of principles which bear a close resemblance to Communicative Translation and Semantic Translation. Foreignizing Translation and Domesticating Translation were put forward by Italian-American translation theorist Venutti in 1995. Foreignizing translation is a translation strategy which deliberately breaks the target language conventions by retaining the foreignness of the original text. It is source culture-oriented. He said, "translators either do their best not to disturb the author of the original works and let the readers come close to the author, or not to trouble the readers and make the author close to the readers. Venutti also said, "in today's world situation, we desperately need this kind of cultural intervention to fight against the cultural hegemonism of English-speaking world, we fight against any unfair phenomenon in cultural exchange activities."

Domesticating Translation has a dominating role in Western world, it advocates "to definite the exotic content to the greatest extent and to provide the target reader a smooth and natural translation text. "

Actually, Lawrence Venutti's Foreignizing Translation and Domesticating Translation approaches are the reproductions of Communicative Translation and Semantic Translation.

Here are three examples which fell into the pitfalls of disobeying the principles of Communicative Translation and Semantic Translation.

1) The translation of tourist attractions

If you ask people how to translate "Kun Ning Gong(坤宁宫)" into English, nine out of ten would say Kunning Palace. This translation version is not that unacceptable, but it lost the function of conveying traditional culture to foreign tourists. I think the Hall of Earthly Tranquility should be a properer one since it is target reader-oriented and explained the deeper meaning under the name, foreignizing translation's merit is showed here.

2) The translation of festivals

Some people tend to translate "Chong Yang Jie(重阳节)" as "Chong Yang Festival". In fact it does not make any sense and may confuse the target readers. The proper translation should be Double-9th Festival. If allows, add a brief introduction of Double-9th Festival below the text would be a better translation.

3) The translation of universities' names

We all know that the correct translations of "石家庄铁道大学" and "北京交通大学" are Shi JiazhuangTiedao University and Beijing Jiaotong University. Here the foreignizing approach does not fit anymore. There is an argument that Tiedao and Jiaotong do not make any sense to foreigners, so they should be Shi Jiazhuang Railway University and Beijing Transportation University. Actually 石家庄铁道大学 has developed into a comprehensive university for more than fifty years, it does not only expertise in railway constructions anymore, so we cannot translate "Tie dao" into "railway", neither "Jiao tong" into "transportation". Furthermore, though foreigners will not understand what is the meaning of Tiedao, they will definitely regard it as a part of the school's name, it is fair enough and acceptable, just like Fudan University, no one tends to figure out what the deep meaning of "Fudan".

3. Pitfalls Caused by Cultural Differences

3.1 The differences of thinking patterns

The concept that man is an integral part of nature has a dominant status in Chinese custom. Chinese people think that human kind is in a harmonious and integral world with nature. So Chinese have an integrated thinking pattern and this is called Global Precedence. Chinese are prone to pay attention to the overall thing first then the part.

On the contrary, Western culture insists that the nature and man divides mutually, namely, people is the centre of everything, human is opposite to the nature. Westerners think a whole is made up of individuals, thus their thinking pattern starts from the part, the individual.

When expressing logical thinking, English usually put the judgement or conclusion at the start of the sentence,but put the fact or description at the end of the sentence; Chinese language tends to emphasize the fact and description instead of

the judgement and conclusion. Speaking from the grammatical perspective, main clauses are always come first in a composite sentence, followed by subordinate clauses, this also shows English-speaking people tend to put the main information at the beginning of a sentence. Westerners are usually straightforward, so we cannot translate English according to its own language patterns.

The following three examples are sufficient enough to illustrate this kind of discrepancy.

(1) The translation of date

In Chinese we say 2013 年 6 月 15 日,but in English the year is put at the end---June 15th, 2013

(2) The translation of address

The proper translation of 保定市莲池大街 98 号 102 室 should be Suite 102, 98, Lianchi Road, Baoding. From this translation we can also see that westerners stress the smallest unit first then to the bigger part.

(3) Communication in daily life

In Chinese we say "今天我在朋友家吃了顿饭",the most important information in this sentence is "我吃了顿饭". If we translate it into English, the "饭"would come first in a sentence: I had a meal at my friend's home today.

3.2 The differences of social etiquette

I went to Beijing to attend the "FLTRP CUP"National English Debating Competition on behalf of my college when I was still a student.On the first day there was an opening greeting presented by the chairman of the competition, she said, "in the following five days Zhu Laoshi and Li Laoshi will be your adjudicators." It was the first time that Ihad heard this kind of expression. After that competition I returned school with a question: why the chairman said Zhu Laoshi but not teacher Zhu?

Later I realized that it may due to the gap of social etiquette. In China, "老师" is a very flattering and respectable appellation, people who have a relative high social status deserve others call him or her "老师", even though they are not literally "teachers" at schools. Chinese do not care whether they can learn something from "老师" or not, they just want to show their respect and make the target person feel being respected and valued. Thus we cannot translate "朱老师" into "teacher Zhu", because she is not literally a teacher at school, she is a scholar in translation field. Zhu Laoshi is appropriate enough as even foreigners can say Zhu Laoshi to show their respect and courtesy.

There is another example of this kind of translation pitfalls. Chen Kaige's movie Caught in the Web was a box-office hit in 2012. What left me a deep impression was not only the plot of the story, but also a dialogue in the movie. A secretary of a listed

company was introducing some guests to the CEO, she said, "This is Zhang Xiaojie."

Many people may be confused that why she did not say Miss Zhang. My explanations are: firstly, by calling a lady **Xiaojie is more acceptable in China, since her family name is attached with appellation, foreigners can say ** Xiaojie at once, this is more suitable in China; secondly, by calling a lady **Xiaojie can circumvent the embarrassment of mixing her marital status.

This example has a subtle difference with the former one. I think the expression of "Zhang Xiaojie" only can be adopted in informal situations.

4. Conclusion

Due to various of factors there exist a considerable amount of false translations in the English and Chinese Translation, they are seen in every field---airports, hospitals, restaurants as well as TV commercials. The most dangerous thing, however, is not the existence of these mistakes but people are increasingly getting used to these kinds of false translations. Then some specific measures should be adopted to curb this trend and correct people with appropriate translations.

This article deeply analyses the most commonly-made translation mistakes in two aspects---the pitfalls caused by the violation of specific translation methods and theories and the pitfalls caused by cultural differences. They cover a wide range of translation pitfall fields which previous scholars seldom pay attention to, or, the outcomes and specific research are not sufficient enough.

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