

# The Intersection of Language and Culture—Interpretation of Schleiermacher's on the Different Methods of Translating

Pei Min

Tianjin University, Jinnan District, Tianjin City, 300073, China

**Abstract:** Friedrich Schleiermacher's *On the Different Methods of Translating* refers to the intersection of language and culture. He argues that translation is a way of transforming and disseminating information, and one should choose the appropriate method based on the purpose of the translation and the cultural context. The essay does not take up the issue of literal translation and paraphrasing positively, but we can summarize his views in these two commonly used terms. And it emphasizes the balance between preserving the structure of the original text and conveying the meaning. Schleiermacher points out that as language and culture are closely interrelated, it is necessary to consider the cultural habits and values of the target language while translating. He emphasized the importance and challenges of translation and believed that translation combines art and skill, which requires extensive knowledge and language ability. By interpreting this essay, we are deeply aware of the close connection between language and culture, and the important role of translation in promoting cross-cultural communication. This essay provides an invaluable guide to translation research and practice, allowing for a better understanding and application of translation methods.

**Keywords:** Schleiermacher; *On the Different Methods of Translating*; Language

## 1. Introduction

With the acceleration of globalization, there is a growing importance of exchange and integration between languages and cultures. Under these circumstances, translation, as an important tool and way, acts as a bridge connecting different languages and cultures. In his famous essay 'On the Different Methods of Translating', German scholar Schleiermacher discussed the relationship between the intersection of language and culture, and proposed different methods in the translation process and their influence on cultural communication. Starting from the close relationship between language and culture, he pointed out that translation is an important way of information transformation and transmission between different languages and cultures. He believed that there are huge differences between various languages and cultures, so the translation process needed to choose the translation purpose and cultural context. Schleiermacher distinguishes two different ways of translating: either the translator moves the reader to the author or the translator moves the author to the reader. That is, literal translation and free translation. The literal translation focuses on the fidelity of the original text and tries to retain the structure and characteristics of the original text and the meaning and thought of the expression of the target language. Additionally, he emphasized the importance of cultural factors in translation. He points out that as a part of culture, language is strongly influenced by the cultural context. Therefore, it is necessary to consider the cultural habits, values and contexts of the target language when translating to ensure the accurate transmission of the text. The importance and challenges of translation are also the core of this essay. He believed that translation is a combination of art and skill that requires translators to have a wide range of knowledge and language skills.

## 2. The relationship between language and culture

### 2.1 The intersection of language and culture

The intersection of language and culture refers to the close relationship between the two inseparable elements of language and culture. As a tool of human thinking communication, language is not only a tool of transmitting information, but also a part of culture. The formation and evolution of language are influenced and shaped by culture. Culture expresses and transmits through language, giving language

with specific meanings and symbols. Therefore, the intersection between language and culture is the cultural element reflected in the language. For language, culture is transmitted and embodied through vocabulary, grammar, expression and other forms. Different cultural backgrounds can lead to different language habits and expression ways. For example, some languages focus more on the accuracy and rigor of time expression, while others focus more on the order and relativity of events. This difference reflects the understanding and emphasis of time by different cultures.

In addition, language is shaped and evolved through cultural influences. People use certain words to describe specific concepts, things, or emotions in cultural contexts. The frequency and importance of these words in the language reflect the attention given to these concepts by the culture. For example, in some cultures, the description of family relationships may be richer and more detailed, reflecting the culture values family values. The intersection of language and culture plays a vital role in translation. Considering the cultural characteristics and linguistic conventions of the target language is very important in the translation process. A successful translation is not only simply to change vocabulary and syntax, but also to convey the cultural connotation and emotion of the original text. Only by transforming the linguistic and cultural factors in the original text into their equivalents in the target language, can it be achieved to convey information and culture accurately.

## ***2.2 Impact of culture on language***

That culture has an effect on language cannot be ignored, and it plays a major role in the formation and evolution of language. Language is an expression tool of a specific culture. People communicate and express culture-specific values, beliefs, knowledge and habits through language.

First, culture directly influences the vocabulary and expressions of a language<sup>[1]</sup>. Each culture has its unique words and form of expression, used to describe specific things, concepts, or emotions. These words and expressions reflect the extent of attention and understanding culture shows towards these things. For example, some cultures may have specific words to describe family relationships, reflecting the importance the culture places on family values. While other cultures may focus more on social relationships, they may have more vocabulary in their language to describe social relationships.

Secondly, culture influences the grammar structure and syntactic rules of a language. Different cultures have different preferences for thinking modes and logical structure. These preferences are reflected in grammatical structures and syntactic rules. For example, some cultures prefer to use directly stated sentence structures, while others prefer to use indirect statements or implied sentence structures. It reflects the preferences and habits of different cultures when expressing ideas and opinions.

In addition, culture also influences the pronunciation, intonation, and tone of the language. Phonology refers to the pronunciation of the language, while intonation and tone involve the pitch and sound changes of the language. Different cultures attach different importance to and use of pronunciation, intonation, and tone. For example, some cultures may be more concerned with the accuracy and clarity of language, while others are more interested in using intonation to express emotions and attitudes<sup>[2]</sup>.

In the essay "On the Different Methods of Translating", Schleiermacher used the word "spirit" many times, believing that there is the spirit of the language itself, the self-spirit of the language user and the individual feeling in the language. The concept of "spirit" fully shows that he adopts the same method as ordinary hermeneutics, trying to further explain and grasp the specific content of translation at the psychological level. In other words, the object of translation is regarded by Schleiermacher as a spiritual product (mental product), "not subject to anything else, but only governed by thought and emotion". (Schleiermacher, 1992:144) However, the psychological definition does not mean Schleiermacher directly denies objectivity, because he also emphasizes the inherent "history" of language as a "historical fact": "lack of sense of history will lead to wrong language cognition".(Schleiermacher, 1992:153) Then he pointed out that "there is a two-way relationship in each discourse, that is, the relationship with the whole language and the overall thinking of the speaker".(Schleiermacher, 1992:8) There are two different levels of objective and subjective in the language concept of Schleiermacher. Objectively, the history and knowledge of the language make the language itself internally historic; subjectively, the spirit of the language and the language users need to make sense of it at the psychological level. Hence, the task of writing translation is much more complicated than that of interpreting. Compared with the interpreter, the translator should not only be familiar with the author's way of thinking, but also understand the language and the history the author

used, showing the rich connotation of the language as much as possible. Since each language has its spirit and history, each language user has its unique thinking, so translators and target readers need to understand and understand the source language and the spirit of the original author through their mother language, feelings and knowledge. Schleiermacher suggested that a good translator should bridge the original author and the reader, helping the latter fully and correctly understand and appreciate the meaning of the original author without giving up one's familiar native language.

### ***2.3 Feedback effect of language on culture***

Language is a carrier of culture. It is not only used as a tool for communication but also as a carrier of cultural values, history, traditions, and ways of thinking. In forming culture, there is a significant feedback role for language, which either reflects or influences the evolution of culture.

First, the language reflects the culture. Different cultures have unique linguistic expressions and vocabulary. For example, Chinese culture emphasizes collectivism and family concepts, so the words and expressions in Chinese emphasize collective concepts such as "we" and "family". In contrast, English emphasizes individualism, so the words and expressions in English focus more on individual subjects and individual concepts such as "I" and "myself" are used more frequently. Through language, we can understand the values and social structure of culture.

Secondly, language influences culture. Language not only conveys information but also forms human thought and behavioral habits. Each language has its unique grammar and vocabulary system, and these systematic differences affect thinking. For example, English has more tense situations and definite concepts of time, whereas Chinese emphasizes more situational and contextual interpretations. This different grammatical structure can lead to differences when people think about and process information. Language also conveys cultural identity and wisdom through idioms and proverbs, which allow people to follow and continue specific values and codes of conduct for everyday life.

Finally, language and culture interact. There is culture not only influencing language development but also changing it to some extent. Over time and communication in different regions, language develops new words and expressions to adapt to social change and convey new concepts. The evolution of this language can reflect cultural change and development. At the same time, language can facilitate cultural exchange and communication, so that different cultures can better understand and communicate.

## **3. Basic methods of translation**

### ***3.1 Definition and characteristics of literal translation***

Faithful: the literal translation is faithful to the original text and tries not to change or interpret its meaning. The literal translator pays attention to conveying the original meaning of the original text so that readers can accurately understand the content and intention of the original text.

Logical: the literal translation maintains the grammatical structure and logical relationship to the original text as much as possible<sup>[3]</sup>. During literal translation, the order and construction of words, phrases, and sentences do not adjust or change too much. It can maintain the way of thinking and expression habits of the original text, and translate results more in line with the expression style of the original language.

Literal translation: it seeks direct correspondence with the words of the original language and avoids free translation or rewriting as much as possible. The translator performs a literal translation by looking for words and phrases corresponding to the source language in the target language to maintain the semantics of the original text. Such a literal translation method can give readers a better understanding of the words and expressions in the original text.

Reflections of cultural differences: the literal translation reflects the cultural differences between the source language and the target language to some extent. Since different languages and cultures have different ways of expression and concepts, literal translation may expose cultural differences between the source and target languages. It is also one of the reasons for the possible misunderstanding or inaccurate translation in literal translation.

Despite the advantages of literal translation, there are some limitations. Paraphrasing may lead to some cultural features and local habits that are difficult to reflect in the translation, making it too hard

or not natural enough to understand the translation result. Therefore, based on the specific context and the needs of the target audience, translators need to consider literal translation, paraphrasing, and other translation methods in actual application to achieve a more correct, natural, and fluent translation effect.

### ***3.2 Application of literal translation in cultural communication***

Preserve the cultural characteristics of the original text: the literal translation can retain the features of culture and unique style of the original text in the translation process so that the readers of the target language can better understand the background and values of the culture of the original text. Through literal translation, it is possible to preserve cultural elements and phenomena, helping the reader to have a better experience of the message of culture transmitted by the original text.

Transfer the cultural background and story of the original text: the literal translation can more accurately convey the cultural background and story plot to the original text, allowing readers can feel the cultural atmosphere and emotion embedded in the original text. Through the literal translation, readers can have a deeper understanding of the customs, traditions, and historical background covered in the original text, further enhancing the comprehension and appreciation of the original text culture.

Maintain the charm and characteristics of the original text: literal translation helps readers maintain the verve and features of the original text so that the readers of the target language can feel the beauty and uniqueness of the original text<sup>[4]</sup>. The literal translation can retain the rhetorical devices, rhythm, and expression methods in the original text so that readers can feel the language art of the original text more truly.

Promoting cross-cultural communication and understanding: literal translation can improve communication and understanding among different cultures. Through the literal translation, readers can not only understand the specific meaning conveyed by the original text but also feel the cultural thinking and values represented by the original text. It contributes to mutual understanding and respect between various cultures and promotes cross-cultural exchanges and cooperation.

However, literal translation also has some challenges and limitations in cultural communication. There are language and cultural differences among various cultures, so literal translations will probably not accurately convey certain cultural features, or make readers unable to fully know the cultural context.

In the process of literal translation, translators need to appropriately adjust and interpret it according to the specific context and the needs of the target audiences, to ensure that the translation results can better adapt to the cultural environment of the target language.

### ***3.3 Definition and characteristics of free translation***

Based on the above translation concept, Schleiermacher criticized the "interpretation method" (paraphrase) and "simulation method" (imitation) frequently used in the translation of academic, literary and artistic works and proposed two "real" translation methods. Schleiermacher thinks that although the "paraphrase method" and "simulation" can effectively avoid the difficulties in the translation process, because the language is "irrational" (irrationality), namely "a language can not copy another work of art, not let alone let the individual parts and the original correspond to the" (Schleiermacher, 1992:148), therefore, through translation let a work contains the language spirit of continuation and history in another language is very difficult<sup>[5]</sup>. If the translator chooses the "paraphrase method" or the "simulation method", only can preserve the meaning of the original language, or close to the original language at large. However, such methods still fail to break away from the "unreasonableness" of the language and show the spirit of the original language and the original author. And if readers are to use their mother tongue to connect with the spirit, thoughts, and history of the author, the translator is required to hold a correct view of language, impressing both the author and the readers through language, so the translator only can choose the two translation methods: "moving to the reader" or "moving to the author", but in fact, it is this, two methods to ensure the translator is engaged in actual translation rather than simple interpretation. Thus, the two ways of translation, the "moving to the author" or the "moving to the reader", are indeed forging a relationship of specialization in translation. That is the particular and central position of language in translation.

#### 4. Conclusion

On The Different Methods of Translating by Schleiermacher reveals the profound relationship between language and culture and the significant role of translation in cross-cultural communication. While translating, it is not only to change the language simply but also to transmit and communicate cultural connotations and values. By analyzing the two main translation methods, literal translation and paraphrase, there is a mutual interaction between language and culture. While the literal translation preserves the semantics and construction of the original text and communicates the cultural identity of the original text, the free translation pays more attention to delivering the meaning and emotion of the original text and adapting to the cultural expressions of the target language. These two approaches are not opposites but complement and select each other to achieve the best translation effect. In Schleiermacher's discussion, we should also realize that translation is not only the transformation of language but also the dissemination and communication of culture. Language is an essential part of the culture, holding cultural backgrounds, mindsets, and values. Therefore, we need to understand and respect different cultures profoundly and transmit the cultural connotations and characteristics of the original text accurately when translating. In general, On the Different Methods of Translating by Schleiermacher provides a broader perspective on the mutual relationship between language and culture in translation. As a medium of cross-cultural communication, translation not only requires the accurate communication of the meaning of the original text but also pays attention to the understanding and respect of cultural differences. By better understanding the intersection of language and culture, we can promote mutual understanding and friendly communication between different cultures.

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