

A Brief Analysis on Literal Translation and Free Translation

Xinlian Zhang¹

¹ College of Foreign Studies, Shandong Institute of Business and Technology, Yantai, Shandong 264005, China

ABSTRACT

In Chinese and foreign translation theories, literal translation and free translation have been regarded as the two most basic translation methods, which are applicable to different translation purposes, reader types, text nature and author's intention, etc. Therefore, each has its own advantages and values, but both have their limitations at the same time. Literal translation and free translation are mutually coordinated and infiltrated. They complement each other and are inseparable. This paper will start with the definitions of literal translation and free translation, explain the interrelationship and differences between the two translation methods and their applications in translation, and then conclude that the highest level of translation should be the perfect unification of literal translation and free translation.

Keywords: Translation, Literal translation, Free translation.

1. INTRODUCTION

Throughout history, famous translators have given many definitions of translation, trying to explain the essence of translation in order to guide it. In the introduction of the book "English-Chinese Translation Course", Mr. Zhang Peiji, a famous translator in China, defines translation from the perspective of linguistics: "Translation is the linguistic activity of using one language to re-express the thinking content expressed by another language accurately and completely." [1] In his book "Practical Translation Course", Mr. Feng Qinghua defines the essence of translation from the perspective of both linguistics and literature: "Translation is one of the many linguistic activities, which is the linguistic practice of re-expressing the content in one linguistic form to another linguistic form. Translation is an art, a re-creation of language art." Translation is "the accurate and complete re-expression of what has been expressed in one language in another language"; it is "the promotion of political, economic and cultural progress between two language-communities, whose task is to transfer the logical or artistic reflection of the real world contained in the original work from one language to another intact"; it is "the reproduction of the information of the original

language in the translator's language in the closest natural equivalent, both semantically and stylistically" [2]. The American translation theorist Naida believes that a translation can be said to be successful if the reaction of the readers of the translated text to the translated text is basically the same as the reaction of the readers of the original text to the original text. Naida also advocates that the information conveyed by a translation should include not only the content of ideas, but also the form of language. The translator cannot arbitrarily add ideas that are not in the original work, let alone arbitrarily delete ideas from the original work. [3]

In the process of translating English, there are two different views among Chinese scholars. One view is that English should be translated word by word, which is later called the direct translation method, while others believe that the translation of English should not be rigid, and translating word by word will definitely cause some unreasonable meanings and even lead to translation errors. By comparing these two translation methods, it is found that both methods have advantages and disadvantages, and neither of them can achieve perfect translation results, but by considering their meanings and limitations, it is found that by combining them instead of splitting them, they can often achieve unexpected effects in the process of

translation. If translators want to figure out when to use direct translation and when to use free translation, they need to clarify their definitions and differences first.

2. LITERAL TRANSLATION

The term "literal translation" refers to the translation method that maintains the content and language form of the original text as much as possible when translating. "Generally speaking, it is said that a direct translation is one in which both the form and content of the translation are consistent with the original. A translation with the same content but in a different form is called a literal translation." [4] As Lin Huangtian said in his book *The Chinese Translation Dictionary*, a true direct translation is one that preserves the meaning, image and grammatical structure of the original text, while the translation is clear and smooth. During the May Fourth Movement, the method of direct translation emerged. The emphasis of direct translation is that it must be faithful to the original text, so that the translation can achieve "reach" and "elegance".

A literal translation is not a mechanical word-for-word translation. A literal translation must fully and accurately clarify the meaning of the original work without any distortion or arbitrary addition or deletion of ideas from the original work, while maintaining the original style. Sometimes even the original mood or emotion, such as anger or embarrassment, sarcasm or irony, joy or happiness, should not be ignored. In the history of modern Chinese translation, literal translation is the overriding norm. It is estimated that about 70% of English sentences have to be dealt with by the literal translation method, so literal translation is widely adopted by translators.

However, literal translation is by no means a dead translation. The translation is considered on a word-by-word basis, aiming for absolute equivalence between each word in the target language and the word in the original language. This is a kind of "right person" translation, which is mostly possible between languages of the same language family. However, if the translation is still done in this way between languages of different families, it will be a dead translation. What people call direct translation is more about maintaining the content and form of the original text, but it is not a rigid translation of "word-for-word and sentence-for-sentence", but a direct and clear expression of the original message with a smooth and natural text.

In general, people usually use direct translation if the content and form of the translation are consistent with the original text and produce the same communication effect. In the process of literal translation, translators should pay special attention to avoid blindly pursuing the structural consistency between the translation and the original text while ignoring the flexibility of the language. In particular, the simpler the words, the more attention the translator needs to pay attention to them, such as the difference in color vocabulary caused by the difference in thinking. For example, "black coffee" and "white coffee" cannot be translated as "black coffee" and "white coffee". In English, "black" and "white" refer to the addition of milk or not, so they should be directly translated as "espresso" and "milk coffee".

3. FREE TRANSLATION

Free translation is "a translation method that maintains only the content of the original text and not the form of the original text".[5] Free translation is a method of reproducing the connotation of the original text by using a translation that conforms to the norms of the translated language and is natural and fluent. Free translation means "free translation"; the "free" here mainly refers to the "freedom of structure", when translating. If translators cannot follow the structure and expression of the original, they need to express the real meaning of the original sentence by changing the expression and result of the sentence. In the original language, the rhetoric, order and grammar are very different from our translation, so translators can only try their best to restore and reproduce the semantic meaning of the original language through appropriate ways and means. In the process of translation, translators can make their translations more convincing and compelling by clarifying the language and adapting it to the language habits of the original country. In this process, translators should try to follow the language habits and correct usage of the original language, but they do not necessarily stick to the expressions in the original language. To put it simply, when the difference between the English and Chinese languages is so great that it is difficult to translate the meaning of the original text directly, translators have to resort to translation, which is the reason for the existence of free translation.

The language of the translation and the language of the original do not in many cases have the same form of expression to reflect the same

content, let alone produce the same effect. Douglas Robinson considers free translation "an all-encompassing category. It includes any translation that is not faithful to the original. Basically, any acceptable translation that does not belong to a definite norm can be called a free translation, even if the so-called translation that deviates from the original text is in fact closely related to the source language text." Barkhudarov believes that free translation is "translation beyond the necessary level to keep the content unchanged and to comply with the norms of the target language".[6] For example: 塞翁失马, 焉知非福. The literal translation is: When the old man on the frontier lost his mare, who could have guessed it was a blessing in disguise? The free translation is: A loss may turn out to be gain.

Comparing these two different translations, it is not difficult to see that when the contradiction between the ideological content of the original text and the expression form of the translation cannot be handled by the literal translation method, the free translation method should be used. Free translation requires that the translation can correctly express the content of the original text, but it can not be bound by the form of the original text. Because some idioms cannot retain the literal and figurative meanings of the original language during translation due to cultural factors, the image of the original language can be replaced by another image familiar to the readers of the translated text, so as to convey the pragmatic purpose of the original language and translate it out.

4. INTERRELATIONSHIPS AND DIFFERENCES BETWEEN LIBERAL TRANSLATION AND FREE TRANSLATION

At the end of the Qing Dynasty, the famous translator Yan Fu proposed that translation is an art, and there are three main difficulties in translation, that is, the letter, expression and elegance of translation. At that time, there were only two main methods of translation: literal translation and free translation, but people have realized that only one method of translation is far from being able to achieve satisfactory results, so people combine the two methods, and use them together as needed, and finally reached the translation realm proposed by the translator Yan Fu.

4.1 Using Literal Translation for Content and Free Translation for Form

For any language, it has its fixed sentence structure and grammar. If it is converted into another language, and its internal meaning cannot be changed, then the content and form will inevitably be encountered in the process of translation. The problem is that the content is the meaning to be expressed by the original text, and the form is a means or method of expression. The same meaning is expressed in different languages, and the form is necessarily different. If you consider the difference between literal translation and free translation, then you can find the middle point. In terms of the integrity of the content, you can use literal translation to translate the content, and then cooperate with free translation to express its form or tone, then such a translation can do the best of both worlds without being biased. This is a comprehensive translation method that uses literal translation for content and free translation for form.

4.2 Combining Literal Translation and Free Translation with Stylistic Types

Translation needs to take care of all aspects, and there are many styles to be translated, such as novels or natural sciences. For novels and other emotional categories, or there are occasional figures to illustrate this style, then the free translation is mainly used, taking into account the emotions and various beauty descriptions of the original novel, and the literal translation is supplemented, taking care of reasoning or digital proof in some novels. This translation method is also a comprehensive translation method that combines literal translation and free translation, but it depends on the style of translation to be translated.

4.3 Literal Translation and Free Translation Are Interdependent

To translate an article in a foreign language, if you do not mix literal translation and free translation, you will not get a good translation. How should translators choose translation techniques? Under normal circumstances, free translation is used a lot when dealing with emotionally rich and lively poems and literary articles; on the other hand, literal translation is the best choice if the accuracy requirements are high and there are many professional terms, which need to directly reflect the overall text of the original text. Indeed, both literal translation and free translation

are important and cannot be separated from each other. The two finally reached a consensus - "Suitable Translation". Whether it is a literal translation or a free translation, the "translator's ambition" is to seek "equivalence with the original text". Translators should use both literal translation and free translation flexibly as appropriate, and make unremitting efforts to provide translations that are faithful to the original text and that are natural and understandable.

In the process of translation, literal translation and free translation are interdependent and closely related, and both have their own functions. In translation practice, literal translation and free translation are closely integrated and separable. In specific translation practice, literal translation and free translation often do not have clear boundaries. Conscious translators should consider various variables, find a balance between literal translation and free translation, and use the two together to achieve the best translation effect.

5. CONCLUSION

Literal translation and free translation are two strategies that serve us to convert the source language into the target language. Only using literal translation or only free translation, the translated text cannot meet the translation standards of faithfulness, smoothness and beauty. In the process of translation, it is only necessary to fully understand the thoughts and feelings expressed in the original text and flexibly utilize these two strategies according to the basic principles of translation. In specific translation practice, literal translation and free translation often do not have clear boundaries. Conscious translators should consider various variables, find a balance between literal translation and free translation, and use the two together to achieve the best translation effect.

REFERENCES

- [1] Zhang Peiji. English-Chinese Translation Course [M]. Shanghai foreign language education press, 1980. (in Chinese)
- [2] Feng Qinghua. Practical Translation Course [M]. Shanghai Foreign Language Education Press, 1997. (in Chinese)
- [3] Eugene A. Nida. Language, Culture And Translating[M]. Shanghai Foreign Language Education Press, 2004.
- [4] Lin Huangtian, Chinese Translation Dictionary [M]. Hubei Education Press, 2005. (in Chinese)
- [5] Fan Cunzhong, Translation Theory and Techniques [M]. China Foreign Translation and Publication Company, 1985. (in Chinese)
- [6] Tan Zaixi, A Brief History of Western Translation [M]. Commercial Press, 1991. (in Chinese)