

The Aesthetics of Translation

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Abstract: With the rapid development of globalization, the relationships among nations are closer while communications become pretty important. To overcome barriers of language, translation is the key. The present study investigates whether translation studies especially principles would be strengthened or weakened when there is great diversity in it, and the significance of the study of translation aesthetics and its reference value for translation principles. Translation is a complex and fascinating activity which involves language and culture contact, etc. Even though translation varies in different culture, in different period, among which some are distinctive, it still can be discovered the universal patterns of translation sometimes. The uniqueness of different countries' translation works may prompt mutual inspiration, mutual verification and correctives. No matter current trends in translation studies pay more attention to diversity, it's constant that the functioning of language involves negotiating to arrive at understanding with and between languages. In other words, appropriateness on different occasions is of particular importance, which means contexts in translating play vital role. The real clues to meaning depend on contexts. Moreover, the aesthetics of translation could provide us with a poetic language and promote the communications. On basis of dealing with Lin Yutang's concept of "aesthetic translation" and his three principles of translation, namely, faithfulness, smoothness and beautifulness, this paper depicted that beautifulness can be a good solution to translation works in different contexts and not be weakened but strengthened. Besides, it explored the origin and development of translation aesthetics. Lin was the first Chinese translator to put a kind of aestheticism into practice and to provide us with a poetic language, especially in his work Six Chapter of a Floating Life.

1. Introduction

Each nation has its own language. With the development of human civilization and globalization, there are communications among different countries in terms of economy, politics, and culture and so on. Then translation appeared. The influx of foreign ideas into China began with the translation of religious tracts from India in the early Han Dynasty. The second wave of Chinese translating was ushered in Pre-Opium War, with emphasis initially again on religion before shifting to a diversity of science and technology, the commercials, the humanities, etc. As to literary translation, it began at 18th century, which was put forward by Liang Qichao, a capitalist reformation politician whose work showed purpose and meaning of translating foreign novels. At the end of 19th century, literary translation moved forward by leaps and bounds in response to the need of culture reformation. On basis of dealing with Lin Yutang's concept of "aesthetic translation" and his three principles of translation, namely, faithfulness, smoothness and beautifulness, this paper depicted that beautifulness can be a good solution to translation works in different contexts and not be weakened but strengthened. Besides, it explored the origin and development of translation aesthetics.

2. The Development of Translation in China

Since the end of 19th century, the development of literary translation can be divided into five phases as follows:

2.1 The Late Qing Dynasty

There are two main figures at this period. Liang Qichao promoted political novel translation and put his idea into practice. Yan Fu has been a central figure not only in pioneering a new direction in China's effort to understand the outside world through translation and writing as a publicist. His adaptation of ancient Buddhist translators' theories into threefold criterion, namely, fidelity, fluency, elegance remains a quasi-ideology for modern Chinese practitioners and theorists. Although exalting the supremacy of the originals, Yan seldom lived up to his own creed. On the contrary, aware of many a pitfall in the syntactical differences between Chinese and English, Yan came out with renditions nothing short of summaries or even paraphrasing in idiomatic classical Chinese.

2.2 From 1919 to 1930

A large number of literary associations came into being one by one, many of which dealt with not only theoretical production and research, editing periodicals but also translating foreign literature. For instance, the association named Wei Ming She literally had some famous figures as Lu Xun, whose contribution to literary translation was praised by all.

2.3 Left-wing Author Association Period

During the period of left-wing author association, literary translation made great progress. A monthly periodical named Yi Wen, which was the earliest one to publish literary translation, only came out in Shanghai in 1934.

2.4 From the War against Japan to 1949

Literary translation developed and improved. Moreover, it has profound effort on literature in our country. Firstly, the early literary translation widened the sight of ideology. Secondly, the finest of foreign literature could be reoccurred through national language. Thirdly, language is essentially a social activity. Also, it is a tool for human to communicate.

Generally speaking, the translation theory in our country began systematically since the famous translator Yan Fu who put forward threefold criterion. Since the May Fourth Movement, quite a few translators demonstrated their own opinions and understandings on the basis of the theory of Yan Fu, among which Lin Yutang put forward three principles of translation, namely, faithfulness, smoothness and beautifulness.

3. Three Principles from the Perspective of Translation Aesthetics

As to Lin Yutang, he is a quite complex and influential figure in modern literature history in China. In his life, Lin Yutang wrote lots of literary works and worked on literary translation at the same time. He is good at English, for which he not only translated many foreign literary works into Chinese but also introduced some Chinese literary translations into foreign countries. Moreover, he wrote in English, which was a conspicuous characteristic in his literary translation activities. The president of Elemira College took highly praise of Lin and said, "Have spoken to the people of the English speaking world in their own language with an artistry that is at once their envy, admiration and despair". Lin's bilingual and bicultural proficiency was without doubt. However, because of his complication, some comments about him were always simple lacking of details. In the history of literary translation, Lin Yutang played a very important role in the research of translation theory. He issued the work "The Argument on Translation" in 1932 which can be divided into four parts as follows:

In the first part, he put forward the three principles of translation, namely, "faithfulness, smoothness and beautifulness". Faithfulness is the same as fidelity while smoothness is the same as fluency. As to beautifulness, we can talk about the aesthetics of translation. Lin held that the essence of Yan Fu's principles consists of three aspects: firstly, the translator should be responsible for the original work. Secondly, the translator should be responsible for readers in China. Thirdly, the translator should be responsible for art. A qualified translator should be responsible for all these three.

The similarity of human physiological structure and human habitat determines that human experiential structures are also similar to each other, which is the cognitive basis for translating. The second part is dealt with faithfulness. In Lin's work "My Country and My People", there are some direct translations. For instance,

- (1) of all the thirty-six alternatives, running away is the best. (三十六计, 走为上计)
- (2) a true hero never incurs present risks. (好汉不吃眼前亏)
- (3) a tray of loose sands(一盘散沙)
- (4) officials protect officials. (官官相护)
- (5) "to have the same heart", which is the word for harmony. (同心)

In "Six Chapters of A Floating Life", Chinese culture was embodied by direct translation. For instance,

- (1) traditional eight-legged essays (八股文)
- (2) child daughter-in-law (童媳)
- (3) It is difficult to be water for one who has been the great seas, and difficult to be clouds for one who has seen the Yangtze Gorges. (曾经沧海难为水, 除却巫山不是云.)

The third part is about smoothness. And the last part is about aesthetics of translation. Lin Yutang and his work played an important role in the research of translation theory.

Lin Yutang is a well-known literary translator, a knowledgeable author and an excellent linguist in China. Moreover, he is a novelist, essayist, philosopher, philologist and lexicographer. As an author, he wrote both in Chinese and in English. He has much more fame overseas than in our country. Lin was born in a religious family which believes in Jesus. He was affected by both local and foreign cultures. He encouraged himself to learn both eastern and western culture and tell foreigners Chinese culture while telling Chinese foreign cultures and customs. He translated Chinese into English, the most notable work of which was Qing dynasty author Shen Fu's Six Chapters of a Floating Life, which was published in bilingual form in Shanghai in 1935. The author wrote about the idyllic life he led with his wife Yun whom Lin described in a preface as "one of the loveliest of women in Chinese literature." It's an autobiographical story mixed with observations and comments on the art of living, the little pleasures of life, and some vivid sketches of scenery and art criticism. Lin truly believed that a humble life happily lived is the most beautiful thing in the universe. The reading of Shen Fu's story gives one the sense of the mystery of happiness. Lin also thought the life of the couple is one of the saddest and yet at the same time "gayest" lives, the type of gaiety that bears sorrow so well. Lin believed that translation is art as Croce said that translation is not reproduction but production. Translation is the key that played a decisive role in translation activity.

In fact, translation is a cross-culture and cross-language activity to transfer information. There are some regulations on translation in terms of concrete environment, translator and reader. These elements decide the principle of translation. Taking into consideration all three factors (author, text, reader) in communication, this new model ensures the harmony in translation. Firstly, translator's quality is quite important. Lin stressed that translator should know both Chinese and western language well. Besides, translator's purpose, tool and means should be considered. Lin was able to look at Chinese culture from western angle. He wrote many articles including lots of translated text. Secondly, translators should take language context into consideration. In other words, readers' need couldn't be ignored. A translator is both an introducer and a reviewer. Therefore, it's up to him to adopt different methods to translate. By and large, the principle of translation is complementary. Translation has a variety of functions, and human's interests are various, which lead to the variety of principle of translation.

4. The Concept, Form and Value of Aesthetic Translation

Lin Yutang's concept of "aesthetic translation" embodied in both his practice and his schematization of translation. Lin was the first Chinese translator to embrace a kind of aestheticism in his practice, to systematize an aesthetically oriented theory of translation, and to provide us with a poetic language and even a poetic way of living in this world.

4.1 The Concept of Aesthetic Translation

Lin Yutang's concept of "aesthetic translation" is mainly reflected in his famous work "The Argument on Translation". He said as follows:

The principle of translation is about three aspects. We can discuss it one by one as faithfulness, smoothness, beautifulness.

Obviously, Lin believed translation should be based on "faithfulness, smoothness and beautifulness". For faithfulness, Lin objected to translate word by word. Language is used to express emotions and feelings. Absolute faithfulness is impossible. It's sort of dream. For smoothness, Lin viewed that sentence translation is the key. He stressed the beautifulness of art lies in the balance of form and substance. The duty of a translator is to express not only ideas but also emotions, which could make readers close to the situation as the writer. Lin's concept of translation is fundamentally the principle of beautifulness. For language, Lin thought it should be translated sentence by sentence in form while seeking beautifulness in substance. How did he put this principle into practice? I thought he used adaptations to achieve the purpose of beautifulness.

4.2 The Form of Aesthetic Translation

Lin held that form is type or form of literature which is made up of outer form and inner form. Outer form is about length or simplicity of a sentence while inner form is related to author's personality, such as dream, ambition, imagination, optimism and humor, etc. Evidently, outer form defined the facial form of language. Inner form is style including content and spirit.

"Offside" (Yue Wei), originally a term in football game is used as an analogy to explain the language phenomenon. Lin used it in translation practice. Lin considered the shift of language can leap over adjacent parts of language and achieve in a higher level. Furthermore, Lin created new pattern, figure mingling eastern and western images. It embodied in putting phrases into sentences. The phenomenon of sentence translation is that words or phrases are translated into sentences. The reason why Lin valued "sentence translation" (Ju Yi) was because he took the culture of translated text serious. Translation is to deal with word-meaning and sentence type freely and flexibly. It is very important to transfer the spirit of the original in literary translation. Lin has done this very well in his translation of Six Chapters of a Floating Life. His usage of simple but proper words and idiomatic expressions endows his aesthetic translation. For instance,

(1) 诗云：“桃之夭夭！其叶蓁蓁！之子于归，宜其家人。”

The book of songs says: "Look at that peach tree, so fresh and pretty! How green and thick are its leaves! The girl (a princess) is going to her husband's house, and she will live in harmony with the people of her husband's home."

(2) 君子怀刑，小人怀惠。

The superior man always remembers how he was punished for his mistakes; the inferior man always remembers what he got.

(3) 故诗之失，愚；书之失，诬；乐之失，奢；易之失，贼；礼之失，烦；春秋之失，乱。

The danger in the teaching of poetry is that people remain ignorant, or too simple-hearted. The danger in the teaching of history is that people may be filled with incorrect legends and stories of events. The danger in the teaching of music is that the people grow extravagant. The danger in the teaching of philosophy is that the people become crooked. The danger in the teaching of Li is that the rituals become too elaborate. And the danger in the teaching of Spring and Autumn, is that the people get a sense of the prevailing moral chaos.

From the examples above, it's obvious to see that the blacked parts are all sentenced. “桃” is translated in imperative sentence (look at that peach tree). “刑” is translated in object clause (how he was punished for his mistakes) while “惠” is in an embedded object clause (what presents he got). And “愚”, “诬”, “奢”, “贼”, “烦”, “乱” are replaced by predicative clause respectively. In Lin's translated texts, translating word into sentence is quite common. Such activity like offside is to deal with word and sentence flexibly based on the grasp of the whole meaning, by which Lin created a new beautifulness of form in translating ancient Chinese classics.

(4) 过石屋洞, 不甚可观。水乐洞峭壁多藤萝, 入洞如斗室, 有泉流甚急, 其声琅琅。池广仅三尺, 深五寸许, 不溢亦不竭。

We passed the Stone House Cave which was not much to look at. Another cave, the Cave of Aquatic Pleasure, was full of steep rocks covered with ivy. I entered the cave, which was small like an attic, and saw a gurgling spring, which collected at a pool about three feet wide and five inches deep only; the water, I was told, remained at that constant level throughout the year.

In terms of sentence structure, the relations of sentences in the original text are loose while those in the translated text are natural and fluent by using conjunction (and), pronoun (we, I), preposition (at, of, like, throughout), appositive (Another cave, the Cave of Aquatic Pleasure), past participial phase (covered with ivy), parenthesis (I was told), attributive clause and some other grammatical means such as the change of punctuation mark. Moreover, the original text is without Subject while the translated one has subject (We, I).

As for cultural perfection, Lin's strategy is culture images mutually complementing each other and perfecting. Lin highlighted his desire to one-hundred female by portraying female. In his opinion, the ideal female has both tender appearance and liberal disposition. The aesthetic translation in form showed us beautifulness of form in harmony and familiarity. His translation remained the main idea of the original work and made the form more beautiful. Lin's familiar conversational style is fresh and natural. For instance, Lao Zi said: “道之出口, 淡乎其无味。” Lin translated as “Tao is mild to the taste.”

4.3 The Value of Aesthetic Translation

Firstly, Lin held translated text should be true to the original and its contextual meaning. Translation is by no means a mere matter of finding equivalents between the source and the target language. It involves rather a wide variety of processing tasks whose fulfillment demands much originality and creativeness on the part of the translator. He paid much attention to maintain and express music value, rhythm value, image value, etc of the original text. There are some examples.

(1) 清斯濯纓, 浊斯濯足。

When the water is clear, I will wash the tassels of my hat, and when the water is muddy, I will wash my feet.

(2) 兽云吞落日, 弓月弹流星。

Beast-clouds swallow the sinking sun, and the bow-moon shoots the falling stars.

(3) 相思欲回首, 但上曲江楼。

There shall I go, up the towering Tower of Winding River, when of something I wish to refresh my memory that does wither.

“Wither” is used to describe the decline of losing one's memory, which is pretty vivid and figurative.

(4) 及登舟, 江风如箭, 四肢发战。

When I got to the boat, there was a piercing wind blowing over the river

5. Conclusion

Lin constructed a new translation poetic theory—perceptual poetics, which created anew aesthetic image or form through synthetically mutual activity and communication of aesthetic subject and object. For Lin, translation is the text that can be revised and filled with creativity.

The aesthetic harmony that Lin pursued over cross the border of culture is the essence of his principle. In his translation works, translation has perceptual feature. He pursued the familiarity and harmony of the whole meaning. In conclusion, Lin and the aesthetics of translation provided us with a poetic language and even a poetic way of living in this world.

Languages are too open-ended and human imagination is too creative to ever be rigidly ruled by the regulations of syntax or of any other feature of language. (Eugene A. Nida, 2015) Thus, the real clues to meaning depend on contexts. And Lin's aesthetics of translation is exactly corresponding to contexts in translating aiming at appropriateness and decency, which may make cross-cultural communication more smooth and pleasant.

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