

Loss of Meaning in C-e Translation and the Subjectivity of the Original Text

Zhang Yu

Xinyang Agriculture and Forestry University, Xinyang, Henan Province, 464000, China

Keywords: Loss of meaning, Subjectivity of original text, Linguistic features

Abstract: Loss of meaning in Chinese-English translation is frequently seen and can be attributed to superfluous and repetitive information in Chinese and the lack of original text-centered awareness. A thin understanding on the linguistic features of original text and improper exercising of power endowed by the author and original text will both result in loss of meaning in target text, and the latter issue has been elucidated in *The Translator's Invisibility* written by Lawrence Venuti. A translator should not view it commonplace, instead, to probe into the cause and adopt countermeasures is the right formula. This paper manages to have an explication of the causes for loss of meaning in C-E translation and proposes corresponding steps to ameliorate the present situation.

1. Introduction

Two factors must be included when it comes to loss of meaning in C-E translation: translators have superficial realization of the linguistic features of source language; translators give over-emphasis on translator's subjectivity, thus converting translation a personal show. Here the author respectively elaborates the above-mentioned causes.

1.1 A thin Understanding of Linguistic Features of Chinese

Superfluous and repetitive information in Chinese will largely influence the deciphering of the original text, so it is understandable that a sea of translators specializing in C-E translation cannot completely eradicate loss of meaning in the target text, even for those whose mother tongue is Chinese. So strategies like reinventing structure and re-framing discourses are needed with high probability to simplify the paragraph for translation. For translators, a thorough understanding of the inherent feature of Chinese is a prerequisite for judging whether the component he intends to cut off is only an accessory or a principal in this sentence. Tytler once argued, "It must likewise be confessedly redundant, so that the retrenchment shall not impair or weaken the original text".

The linguistic features are generally epitomized by repetition, four to eight-character idioms, function words or numeral words in Chinese language, which are mostly employed as emphatic tactics. Here is a case:

Original text:

大力推进双边合作,努力搞好规划布局,不断完善政策措施,切实加快大通道建设。

The Chinese sentence featured six-character idioms and there exist several underlined adverbs in front of verbs as emphatic part; they are actually accessories, so they can be contained in translation version. The point is that the sentence consists of four simple ones, the first is the frame, the latter two explain measures and the last presents the goal, so they are not the parallel semantically. It is not easy to be captured for a translator with thin understanding about Chinese, it is naturally possible that translators fail to convey the logic within the sentence and alter the adverbs (translation version 1), thus causing the loss of meaning and deviation from the intention of the original text.

Translation version 1:

We will deepen the bilateral cooperation strenuously, draw up plans for further development tirelessly, work out policy measures with unwavering determination, and speed up the construction of major transportation network in an unswerving manner.

A translator with a thorough understanding will stand a good chance of giving a better version

(translation version 2).

Translation version 2:

We will make greater efforts to deepen bilateral cooperation. We will draw up plans for further development and work out policy measures to speed up the construction of major transportation network.

By giving this case, it is apparent that insufficient realization of Chinese will lead to inaccurate expression, so rectification is needed, including within the paragraph and beyond it.

1.2 Overemphasis on the Subjectivity of Translator

The original text should be the center of translation and the point of departure for translation activities, but overemphasis on the subjectivity of the translator makes translators derail the track of fulfilling the holy mission endowed by the original work, resulting in over-translation and other problems which are not in line with translation norms. The invisibility of translator proposed by Lawrence further proved this. Just like a teacher giving a lecture, his mind is full of boasting about his achievements but forgets that to share knowledge with students is his sole task.

The desire of expression does not mean the translator is an exhibitionist, but the original work-centered task has been shifted into another mode they had not realized under the latent power, it is the so-called translator-centered mode. A translator has two identities: one is to provide readers with high-quality translation; the other is to be responsible to the author of the original text. To create something out of nothing is not a wise move; if translation version largely depends on the thoughts and feelings of the translator, it can only be called improvisation. In this case, the hidden feelings and implications cannot be successfully delivered to target readers, instead, what the readers received is the translator's thoughts. It is ridiculous but indeed a commonly seen phenomenon in the field of translation because translators are too eager to be recognized and conquer the unfriendly atmosphere which regard translators as cheap labor due to the burgeoning CAT and machine translation industry.

Of course, some translators have too strong desire to express themselves, which has gone beyond objective restraints. It may bring about some benefits for them in the short term, but in the long run, they have insufficient stamina and will hardly stand.

2. Measures to Ameliorate the Situation

In view of this, corresponding measures should be adopted to ameliorate this situation without doing harm to the translators' interests. To strengthen the understanding of the linguistic features of Chinese and build an original text-centered awareness are two viable measures.

2.1 To Strengthen Understanding of Chinese Language

A thin understanding of the linguistic features of Chinese is partly responsible for loss of meaning in C-E translation. So it is vital to enhance the understanding of habits in expression and rhetoric in Chinese, and that is closely related to the fact that China is a country featured by high-context communication. Here are several points to be highlighted to reduce the loss of meaning in translation:

The common function words in Chinese have no practical meaning or just marks the tone, which need to be conveyed naturally by translator, it should be integrated with the meaning of the target text, or just a part of the meaning;

The numeral words commonly used in Chinese refer to a concept rather than an exact number; such as “my whole life(一生一世)”, “every corner of the world(三山四海)”, “colorful(五颜六色)”, these concepts are often presented by four-character idioms in Chinese, the translator should have a concise perception of the technique and convey the true meaning of the expressions.

Repetition is not a faulty wording but a tactic to strengthen the manner of speaking, in order to emphasize the kernel. For incidental or superfluous content not closely related to the main idea, the translator must make sure the meaning of the original text remains unchanged after deletion. The style of the original text should be preserved in part or in whole in accordance to the purpose of

translation activities, but that must be based on a thorough understanding about the linguistic features.

High-context communication can be a reason for expounding several linguistic techniques in Chinese. Incidental or superfluous content should be stripped off and the essence of the original text shall be disclosed, that is the obligation of a translator and he is supposed to have such competence to fulfill the mission, and all stated above are underpinned by a thorough and comprehensive understanding of the linguistic features of Chinese.

2.2 To Build Original Text-Centered Awareness

The linguistic characteristics of the original text determine translation strategies, the overall style of it determines the selection of words, sentence making and grammar, and the ultimate purpose the text intends to convey decides the translator's mission. That is the correct way to view translation activity, and just in this process the translator's value is recognized. Put in another way, it is through translation that the translator realizes the integration of himself and the work. The translator will be immortal by integrating with the target text if it is tremendous enough. Of course, a translator is not affiliated to the original text or target text, but without the help of text as a vehicle, the meaning of existence immediately vanishes.

Therefore, to strengthen the text-centered awareness should be a fundamental requirement for translators, especially when tackling with some complicated Chinese texts. Today's website worships a type of translation that solely pursues elegance without considering faithfulness, thus bringing about a negative impact on the philosophy of translation and making translators harder to be recognized. This phenomenon should be stopped for many translators intend to take this opportunity to show talents and attract cash flows, and then they can gain profits. So the respect to the original text must be rooted deeply in the translators' mind through exploring more details about the author or excavating the background of the text. Translators can have an in-depth discussion about the original text with colleagues to figure out the style and linguistic features of it and then take corresponding measures to perfect the translation version.

3. Acknowledgment

Project supported by the Foundation for Young Scholars of Xinyang Agriculture and Forestry University (Grant No.2018RW012), Project Name: A Study on the Initial Development of Translation Major in Newly-Established Universities.

References

- [1] Yuri Balashov. The Translator's Extended Mind[J]. *Minds and Machines*,2020,30(prepublish).
- [2] Jane Fenoulhet. The relational identity of the translator[J]. *Language and Intercultural Communication*,2020,20(5).
- [3] Zhang Xiaoyu. On Linguistic Features of Translationese in English-Chinese Translation[J].*Campus English*,2019(12):246.