An Analysis of Zhang Peiji’s Translation Carpenter Lao Chen from Functional Equivalence Theory in Terms of Meaning

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Keywords: Zhang Peiji, functional equivalence theory, Carpenter Lao Chen.

Abstract. There are a large number of great prose works in China, but compared with other literary genres, the research on prose translation by translators and scholars has long been lagging behind other literary genres for many years. Zhang Peiji, a distinguished translator in China, has made great contributions to the development of modern Chinese prose translation and his works have exerted tremendous influence over the translation field. Among his books, the four volumes of Selected Modern Chinese Essays are especially famous and worth our further research because of the application of many translation theories. Functional equivalence theory is one of the translation theories, which is put forward by Eugene A. Nida and emphasizes to produce the closet equivalent of the source language message.

This paper gives a thorough research on Zhang Peiji's translation work Carpenter Lao Chen from the perspective of meaning using Nida's functional equivalence. In terms of meaning, the thesis analyzes whether Zhang's translation reproduces the original meaning on the aspects of the referential meaning and connotative meaning. The study comes to a conclusion that Carpenter Lao Chen has achieved the functional equivalence as much as possible and accurately transmits the original meaning of source text. At the same time, the study may provide a novel viewing angle for the interpretation of the translation of Chinese prose, a basic research material for functional equivalence theory.

Introduction

There are four important literary genres including poem, prose, fiction and drama. According to the time sequence of appearance, prose and poem are the earlier ones. In consequence, prose is one of the most significant literary genres in Chinese works. With fine language and profound conceptions, it has attracted a large number of scholars to be devoted in its creations. Therefore, many extraordinary prosers, such as Zhu Ziqing and Ba Jin, appear and their works, combined with Chinese traditions and culture, usually convey deep meanings. However, how to translate them into English, an international language, without losing the original meaning is an issue that Chinese prose translator must be concerned about.

Zhang Peiji, making tremendous achievements in translation practice, is a famous Chinese translator. He has produced many excellent translation books and especially exerts tremendous impacts to Chinese prose translation. Since the publication of his Selected Modern Chinese Essays, a myriad of people have studied it from different perspectives and translation theories, such as aesthetics, domestication, foreignization and so on.

Eugene A. Nida is a prestigious American linguist and translation theorist, who put forward many distinguished translation theories in his works, including functional equivalence theory, also called dynamic equivalence theory, in Language, Culture and Translating. In Nida’s view, whether translation is successful depends on the response of target language readers. Therefore, translation should not be restricted by the form and he advocates free translation.

In this thesis, the author tries to use functional equivalence theory put forward by Eugene A. Nida to analyze specific examples in Zhang Peiji’s translation work Carpenter Lao Chen.
Literature Review

Eugene A. Nida, American linguist and translation theorist, has a good command of linguistic and has rich experience in translating Bible into other languages. Nida touches upon many problems such as the logical relations between words, cultural issues in translation and so on and he renders that translation should focus on readership. In Nida’s thought, whether the translation is successful depends on the response of the target language readers and he holds that all the languages in the world have equal ability of expression.

In Nida’s book *Towards a Science of Translating*, Nida points out that there are fundamentally two different types of equivalence: formal equivalence and dynamic equivalence. Formal equivalence mainly focuses on the original message, in both form and content. Therefore, Nida and Taber assert that “formal equivalence is the quality of a translation in which the features of the form of the source text have been mechanically reproduced in the receptor language”. (Nida, Taber, 2004) In such a translation, it is similar to word-to-word translation, which is source-oriented, and sometimes maybe difficult for readers to understand. In contrast, dynamic equivalence is based upon the principle of equivalent effect and mainly focuses on receptor's response.

Since Nida's functional equivalence was introduced to China in the 1980s, it has gained great popularity among Chinese scholars and researchers. The theory and practice of functional equivalence in the book *A Research on equivalent Translation* is discussed (Jin Di, 1999). Tai Zaixi, an outstanding figure in studying Nida’s theory, introduces the development, change and content of Nida’s translation theory in *Nida’s Theory in Translation*. What’s more, a systematic research on Nida' theory including functional equivalence in the book *A Study on Nida's Translation Theory* is carried out (Ma Huijuan, 2003).

After the publication of Selected Modern Chinese Essays, a lot of translators have taken great interest in the series and have carried out many researches from different perspectives. Liu Yinyan gives a brief introduction to the style of Zhang Peiji’s prose translation in *Zhang Peiji and His Translation*. Then the study from aesthetics and mood theory based on Selected Modern Chinese Essays is conducted.

Analysis of Functional Equivalence in Terms of Meaning

As to the nature of translating, Nida and Taber state that, “translating consists in reproducing in the receptor language the closest natural equivalence of the source-language message, first in terms of meaning and secondly in terms of style.” (Nida, Taber, 2004) In this statement, they give priority to the meaning of the source text, thus, the most significant thing is to reproduce the message of the source language in translating. In consequence, understanding the meaning of the Chinese essays correctly and accurately is the most essential step.

In the book *The Theory and Practice of Translating*, Nida and Taber divide the meaning of words into two different types: “(1)the words as symbols which refer to objects, events, abstracts, relations (the referential meaning), and (2) the words as prompters of reactions of the participants in communication (the connotative meaning).” (Nida, Taber, 2004) Therefore, functional equivalence in terms of meaning will be discussed in these two aspects.

Referential Meaning

Referential meaning, also called designative meaning, is the most basic meaning of a word given by the dictionary, and misunderstanding of the referential meaning will cause confusion in communication.

For example, “叔叔” in Chinese means the younger brother of one's father, but “uncle” has a much wider scope of meaning, which can refer to the brother of one's father or mother.

Then, there are some examples from *Selected Modern Chinese Essays*.

(1)木匠老陈那时不过四十岁光景，脸长得像驴子脸，左眼下面有块疤痕，嘴唇上略有几根胡须。

《木匠老陈》 (张培基, 2007, p.61)
Carpenter Lao Chen was then only about forty years old, with a longish face like that of a donkey, a scar under his left eye, and a wispy moustache on his upper lip.

*Carpenter Lao Chen* (张培基, 2007, p.65)

In the above example, the author depicts the appearance of Lao Chen and when describing his face, a metaphor is used. If “驴子脸” is translated as "face that of a donkey" literally, the length of Lao Chen’s face could not be expressed, so Zhang Peiji adopts “longish face that of a donkey” to convey the original meaning of the word successfully.

(2)他平时在店里，但是他常常到相熟的公馆里去做活，或者做包公，或者做零工。

《木匠老陈》 (张培基, 2007, p.61)

He usually worked in his own shops. But from time to time he was employed by some rich people he knew well to work at their residences, either as a hired hand on contract or as an old jobber.

*Carpenter Lao Chen* (张培基, 2007, p.65)

The literal meaning of “公馆” is "mansion". But if the translator translates it literally, the foreigner will feel strange and difficult to understand the implied meaning. In this case, it is appropriate to translate it as "rich people", which conveys the referential meaning properly.

The above examples indicate that translators must understand the conceptual meaning of every word before translating, and endeavor to find the referential meaning in the context to produce a satisfying translation.

**Connotative Meaning**

Connotative meaning, also called associative meaning, is much more difficult to translate compared with the referential meaning of a word. Nida gives the definition of connotative meaning as follows, "We not only understand the reference of words, but also react to them emotionally, sometimes strongly, sometimes weakly, sometimes affirmatively, and sometimes negatively. This aspect of the meaning which deals with our emotional reactions to words is called connotative meaning” (Nida, 1993). Therefore, understanding the connotative meaning is essential for a successful translation.

Here are the examples in *Selected Modern Chinese Essays*, which have special connotative meanings.

(1)那时我还在家里读书，祖父聘请了一位前清的老秀才来管教我们。

《木匠老陈》 (张培基, 2007, p.61)

I was then studying at home under the tutorship of an old scholar of the Qing Dynasty whom my grandfather had engaged.

*Carpenter Lao Chen* (张培基, 2007, p.66)

Because of the different culture values, “秀才” are common expressions in China, especially in ancient China, to describe "one who passed the imperial examination at the county level". Although during the translation, the word "xiucai" can be used because an increasing number of westerners have known it. However, in Zhang Peiji’s translation, the word "scholar", which ignores the complicated meaning of “xiucai”, is used instead of "xiucai" to make reader understand it easily.

(2)“老陈，你还在省城！人家说你吃粮去了！”我快活地大声叫起来。

《木匠老陈》 (张培基, 2007, p.61)

“Lao Chen,” I yelled out in joy, “you're still here in the provincial capital! People say you've joined up!”

*Carpenter Lao Chen* (张培基, 2007, p.65)

The conceptual meaning of “吃粮” is “eat food”, however in the above context, it could be seen that it has no relation with food. Actually, in China, “吃粮” has connotative meaning with “join the army”. Therefore, it's not appropriate to translate its conceptual meaning, which will confuse the target readers. As a result, having recognized the connotative meaning of this word, Zhang Peiji translates it into “join up”, which can be considered as the accurate equivalent of the target language.
In the course of the fighting, soldiers looted Lao Chen's shop until it was empty of everything. Carpenter Lao Chen (张培基,2007, p.67)

The conceptual meaning “丘八” in this sentence is “soldiers addressed at that time”. Actually, at that time, people will not use straightforward word like soldier and borrow other words to indicate the implied meaning, similar like the riddle. Here, if the author adopts the original form of “qiuba”, the target readers might wonder who is “xiuba” and become totally confused. Therefore, the translator adopts the version "soldier", which keeps the original connotative meaning and has the close equivalent response among the foreign readers.

The selected examples show that translators may encounter various problems in transmitting the connotative meanings of the original text because the connotative meaning isn’t same from different communities and cultures. In this case, the translator must adopt some changes in translation to transmit the accurate message of the source text.

Conclusion

In this paper, the author analyzes Zhang's translation from two aspects of meaning, including referential meaning and connotative meaning. During the translation process, what translators should do is making every effort to reduce the loss of meaning to the minimum extent because of differences in languages and cultures.

From this study, it can be concluded that, though there are some small problems in the translation in terms of meaning, Zhang Peiji's translation work Carpenter Lao Chen achieves the functional equivalence on the whole, and Nida's functional equivalence theory plays an important part in the prose translation.

The author of this paper hopes that the analysis of the specific example from Selected Modern Chinese Essays from the perspective of meaning of functional equivalence theory can shed some light on prose translation.

References
