

Analysis of Translation Strategies for Biography

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Abstract

The translation of the history of the Communist Party of China is an important way to tell Chinese story and spread the voice of China. The translation of the Party history biographies is also a key means to show China's outstanding revolutionary heroes and establish a good international image to the world. The translator selects Biography of Ma Jun as the translation material, and discuss translation methods according to the principle of "content first, form second" of Functional Equivalence Theory to carry out the English translation practice study of the biography text.

Keywords

Biography; Functional Equivalence Theory; Translation methods.

1. Introduction

Biography is a kind of work that tells the true stories of real persons. It means that the important plots and even the key details of the biography cannot be mistaken, or people will lose their trust of the biography (石玉山, 1995:64). And the authenticity of the biography has extremely strong educational and practical significance, which can guide readers to understand the world better and establish correct values. Therefore, in the process of translation, the translator should restore the authenticity of the source text to the translation faithfully, and give priority to the information and intrinsic value conveyed by the biography. Then, on the basis of conveying the "content" faithfully, the translator should try to restore the writing form of the original text in the translation as much as possible, and bring the same reading experience to the target language readers to the greatest extent as the source language readers. The requirement of biographical translation coincides with the principle of "content first, form second" required by Functional Equivalence Theory.

This translation practice material is *Biography of Ma Jun*, a biography about the Communist Party History written by Zhao Xinhua and Sun Liandi, which is from the first part of the first volume of Biographies of historical figures of the Communist Party of China in Mudanjiang, edited by the Party History Research Office of the CPC Mudanjiang Municipal Committee. *Biography of Ma Jun* is divided into five chapters, describing his life of fighting for the country, the people and the communist faith. Ma Jun was staunch with moral integrity and brave in fighting with injustice since he was young. During the May 4th Movement, he led the students to establish the National Student Union and launched many marches and petitions. At the same time, he and more than 20 progressive young people such as Zhou Enlai and Deng Yingchao jointly founded the revolutionary and progressive group "Awakening Society". In 1925, Ma Jun went to Moscow to study. In addition to studying hard, he also made unremitting efforts to ease the relationship between Hui and Han. In 1927, White Terror shrouded the whole country. Ma Jun returned to rebuild the Beijing Municipal Party Committee resolutely, but was soon arrested by the Fengtian Warlord. In 1928, he died bravely for the country at the age of 33.

2. Characteristics of the Translation Task

The translation practice material is a piece of biography, which adopts the form and technique of prose writing generally, some of which are close to the novel writing. From the perspective of the vocabulary, due to the special historical background of the character, there are a large number of names of events, official titles, institutions and other proper nouns unique to the revolutionary period in the text, so the translator needs to consult many sources to determine the specific meaning of such words. From the perspective of the sentence, the writers used a large number of words and sentences to describe the characters' language and the whole plot. The writers used a combination of long and short sentences in the language description of this material to make the text staggered and rhythmic, fully reflecting the characteristics of Chinese writing which is called parataxis. From the perspective of the text, the biography has tight plots, natural transition, clear logic, and the language is easy to understand. In summary, the overall difficulty of this material is moderate. It is an excellent biography with both readability and significance.

3. Overview of Functional Equivalence Theory

Eugene A. Nida is a famous American linguist, translator, and translation theorist, who is regarded as "one of the most influential theorists in the translation field". His main academic activities are centered on the translation of the Bible and have developed the world-famous translation theory based on practical translation experience. He developed the world-renowned Functional Equivalence Theory based on his practical translation experience, which includes four aspects: lexical equivalence, syntactic equivalence, textual equivalence, and stylistic equivalence. In his book *Toward Science of Translating* published in 1964, Nida proposed a prototype of "Functional Equivalence" called "Dynamic Equivalence". At the same time, Nida also proposed "Formal Equivalence" in the book, which is the opposite of "Dynamic Equivalence". "Formal Equivalence" emphasized that the information in the translated language should be consistent with the various forms in the source language as far as possible, and prefers the structure of the source text, which in turn has a serious effect on accuracy and correctness. (谭载喜,1999:55)

In Nida's opinion, "Formal Equivalence" is not realistic, because there are huge differences in form and content between languages, so translators should not stick to the "Formal Equivalence" of word-by-word standard, but should pursue "Dynamic Equivalence" that is the most closest to the original meaning. Subsequently, in *From one language to another: Functional Equivalence in Bible Translation*, Nida changed the term "Dynamic Equivalence" to "Functional Equivalence". He emphasized that the purpose of translation was not to pursue the formal equivalence of language simply, but to achieve the equivalence of language functions, which can elicit the same psychological response from the readers from source text and the translated text. Nida proposed that the translator should achieve the equivalence of form as much as possible on the base of achieving the equivalence of content. But the translator should give priority to content equivalence in the face of choice.

According to the data of CNKI, there are more than 5,300 articles on the topic of "Functional Equivalence Theory" in China, including 1,197 journals, 3594 papers, and 37 conference articles. The translator made statistics on the trend of the number of articles on "Functional Equivalence Theory" from 2000 to 2022, and found that the theory was increasingly accepted in China. From 2000 to 2005, a total of 57 papers related to the "Functional Equivalence Theory" were published, 406 papers were published from 2006 to 2010, 1,097 papers were published from 2011 to 2015, and 3,770 papers have been published since 2016. The number of papers on "Functional Equivalence Theory" in China has been increasing, which shows that the theory has

attracted more and more scholars in China and proves that the theory has had an important impact on Chinese translation. Then the translator classified the types of more than 5,300 related papers in detail and found that the theory had a wide range of applications.

Most scholars applied it to the translation of tourism texts, business English texts, research texts of translation theories, literary texts, legal texts, news texts, government reports and many other types of texts. For example, in the article *On the Functional Equivalence of English Translation of Article Titles*, Lu Gang used the theory to explain the principles of English article title translation in terms of information function, prayer function and aesthetic function. In the *Translation of Fixed Terms in English Business Contracts from the Perspective of Functional Equivalence*, Zhao Zhenfeng analyzed the translation of fixed terms in English business contracts based on the theory. Yang Dingyi, in the *Chinese-English Translation of "Soup" in the Four Translations of The Dream Of Red Mansions from the Perspective of Functional Equivalence*, combined Neda's theory with the four translations of *The Dream Of Red Mansions* to examine the food culture in the novel using "soup" as an example mainly. In conclusion, the study of Functional Equivalence Theory in China has become more and more in-depth and extensive. And the theory is widely accepted in China and still plays an important role in the development of Chinese translation.

4. Translation Strategies Under Functional Equivalence Theory

4.1. Translation of Four-Character Words

According to the "lexical equivalence" of "Functional Equivalence Theory", the translator followed the principle of "making the translation and the original text achieve equivalence in language function rather than in language form", and translated the above words into English by means of omitting, free translation, literal translation and other methods.

Example 1: 马骏写道：“毕业后要做一只雄鹰，凌空而起，驾云高飞，飞得越高，看得越远.....”

Translation: Ma Jun wrote: "After graduation I want to be an eagle, I'll ride the cloud towards the high air, the higher I fly, the farther I see..."

Analysis: The original sentence is from Ma Jun's composition *What Will You Do in the Future?* when he was in primary school. Ma Jun used the eagle of "凌空而起" and "驾云高飞" to describe his ambition. The four-character words "凌空而起" and "驾云高飞" are the key and difficult points in the translation of this sentence. First of all, the translator analyzed the internal logic of the above two four-character words, and the translator realized that the eagle only can complete the action of "驾云高飞" after making a state of "凌空而起". Therefore, "凌空而起" is the prerequisite for "驾云高飞" in this sentence. In order to restore the implied logical relationship in the original text to the target text accurately and clearly, the translator abandoned the original form of text and translated "凌空而起" into "towards the high air" as an adverbial of "驾云高飞" in the target text in accordance with the principle of "reproducing the information of source language from semantics to style in an appropriate and equivalent form" advocated by the Functional Equivalence Theory. The translation can help the target language readers understand the internal logic between the two words more clearly. Secondly, "cloud" is a symbol of nature in the views of Chinese. For thousands of years, "cloud" has played an extremely important role in Chinese culture. Whether in *Journey to the West* or in other ancient mythological works, "cloud" was regarded as the transport for immortals. Therefore, as a cultural image with both aesthetic and interesting features, "驾云高飞" is of great value to export to western culture. At the same time, because there are similar expressions such as "ride the rainbow" in English, the translator translated "驾云高飞" into "ride the cloud" through free translation, which retained the internal information and external expression form conveyed by

the original text directly. So the translation is not only easy for the target language readers to understand, but also conducive to the dissemination of Chinese characteristic culture. In the translation of this sentence, the translator retained the writing form of the original text as much as possible on the basis of transmitting the information of original text faithfully in accordance with the requirements of Functional Equivalence Theory, which focused on the target language text and was guided by the target language reader and the target language culture. So that the reader can appreciate the writing style of the original text to the maximum extent on the basis of obtaining the complete information of the original text.

4.2. Translation of Newspaper Names

During the Revolutionary Period in China, various newspapers like *New Youth* became the revolutionary base for patriots and progressive youth, and made great contributions to breaking the shackles of feudal rule for promoting ideological emancipation. Due to the unique revolutionary historical background of the biography, there are a large number of newspaper names in the Revolutionary Period in the text. And because some newspapers were not well known or had long ceased publication, the translation of their names had brought a great challenge to the translator. Under the guidance of the Functional Equivalence Theory, after consulting various materials, the translator translated the names of newspapers into English through addition, free translation and literal translation in order to convey the information of the original text to the translation accurately, faithfully and smoothly.

Example 2: 他还组织了秘密的读书会，把鲁迅、李大钊等人及其著作和《新青年》《向导》等进步刊物介绍给大家。

Translation: He also secretly organized a Reading Club to introduce Lu Xun, Li Dazhao and their works to students, as well as advanced magazines such as *New Youth* and *The Guide Weekly*.

Analysis: The original sentence comes from the description of Ma Jun's patriotic activities in the biography. There are two names of newspapers in this sentence, “《新青年》” and “《向导》”. How to translate the names was the difficulty for the translator. The patriotic young people in China founded many revolutionary newspapers and magazines with great influence around 1919. “《新青年》” was one of the most influential newspapers during the Revolutionary Period. After consulting various materials, the translator learned that “《新青年》” was the main battlefield of the New Culture Movement during the May 4th Movement, which represented the direction of the advanced culture and was an important force for promoting democracy and science at that time. Many senior Communist Party members had been affected by it. The official translation of the publication is *LA JEUNESSE*, which is a French translation and there is no official English translation for it. If the translator quoted the official French translation directly, English readers without knowledge of the background of this period would have difficulty in understanding. According to the Functional Equivalence Theory, the translation should restore the writing form of the original text as much as possible under the condition of transmitting the original information faithfully. The translator used literal translation to translate it into *New Youth* with reference to its French translation, so as to convey the meaning and connotation of the name to the reader clearly and accurately. And the newspaper “《向导》”, one of the longest-running and continuous publications of the early Communist Party of China press, contributed extremely far-reaching value to the spread of revolutionary ideas. Its official English translation is *The Guide Weekly* that has been verified by the translator in many ways. This translation version added the English equivalent word “weekly” on the basis of literal translation to help the reader understand the relevant information of the newspaper more comprehensively and conformed to the “Lexical Equivalence” standard advocated by the Functional Equivalence Theory. Therefore, the

translator quoted its official English translation directly to restore the “true style” of the text to the readers faithfully.

4.3. Translation of Multi-adverbial Sentences

Due to the different cultural backgrounds of English and Chinese, there are great differences in the grammatical structures and expression habits of the two languages, and the differences in the use of adverbials have brought great challenges to this translation practice. The using of adverbials in Chinese is relatively simple, and most of them are used before predicates. And because of the characteristics of parataxis in Chinese, the complex use of multiple adverbials is also very common. The using of adverbials in English is more complex than that in Chinese, and the adverbials can be used before, after and even in the predicate. For the English translation of multi-adverbial sentences in this biography, the translator used translation methods such as division and combination to translate the original text as smoothly as possible on the basis of faithfully restoring the original information according to the principle of “content first, form second” of Functional Equivalence Theory.

Example 3: 由于马骏智力超群、目光远大、待人热忱、深受同学爱戴，中山大学学习公社改选时，马骏当选为公社书记。

Translation: Ma Jun was very intelligent, far-sighted and warm-hearted, so he was well-loved by his classmates. Thus, Ma Jun was elected as its secretary when the Commune of Learning in Moscow Sun Yat-Sen University was re-elected.

Analysis: The original sentence is from the description of Ma Jun’s study and work life at the university. The Chinese language emphasizes parataxis, so the writers used three short sentences to form two layers of causality when only one conjunction was used. How to transfer the logical relationship implied in this sentence into the translation reasonably is the key and difficulty. The first causality in the original sentence is that “马骏智力超群、目光远大、待人热忱”，so he is “深受同学爱戴”. The second causality is that Ma Jun is “深受同学爱戴”，so “中山大学学习公社改选时，马骏当选为公社书记”. According to the expression habits of English, the translator used division to translate the original sentence into two independent adverbial clauses guided by “so” and “thus”，so as to convey the causality in the sentence to the target language readers clearly in a way that is consistent with the reading habits of the target language readers. On the one hand, the translator met the requirement of “content first” of Functional Equivalence Theory. On the other hand, the translator conformed to the principle of “paying attention to readers’ reading experience” advocated by Nida.

5. Conclusion

The English translation of the historical documents of the Communist Party of China will help English readers understand the history and glorious image of the Party. The biographies of the figures in the history of the Party vividly represent the history of the struggle of the Communists through introducing the lives of revolutionary heroes. The English translation of the biographies of the figures in the history of the Party will help English readers to understand and accept the spiritual connotation of the CPC deeply. The material of this translation practice is *Biography of Ma Jun*, a biography of the Party history, which describes the revolutionary career of the hero Ma Jun from the perspective of “describing history by telling the heroes’ stories”.

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