



The Creativity of Literary Translation

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Abstract. This paper utilises translation creativity as its research object. In order to examine the organic coherence between content and forms of literary translated work, it analyses the creativity qualities in Chinese-English translations of four genres, including fiction, prose, poetry and script, based on methods of empirical analysis and descriptive analysis. The conclusion is that, in order to turn literary translation into translational literature, translators should fully utilise their creativity in strengthening the literary quality of the translated work based on the right transfer of original content, form and effect.

Keywords: literary translation · creativity

1 Introduction

In its broadest definition, creativity refers to a person's ability to come up with novel or original concepts, inventions, or artistic creations. When it comes to literary translation, creativity is defined as the original text's nature—including its content, shape, style, and other elements—being interpreted in a fresh and acceptable way [1]. So far, case study on literary translation focused on characteristic of creativity is in scarcity. In order to study the organic coherence between the content and forms of translated work, this essay addresses the research problem of how translators should appropriately interpret the originality of literary translation. The study attempts to increase literary translation expertise among translators.

The paper is structured as followed—through the presentation of background and relevant research on creativity in translation, relevant research methodology is proposed to address literary translation. This study is followed by analysis and results to evaluate against pertinent literature. The subject is then put to rest in the part that follows by outlining important aspects of literary translation.

2 Literature Review

Guo Moruo, a contemporary Chinese writer, once said that “excellent translation is equal to or even beyond creation.” Xu Yuanchong adopted this idea as a credo and enthusiastically supported it. Based on this, Xu conducted extensive research into literary translation by examining translated works of English and French literature. He demonstrated that creative translation may be used to translate works in the major four literary genres of

poetry, fiction, nonfiction, and drama. The spirit of invention is intended to be maximised in order to establish a fresh environment for literary translation [2].

Regarding creativity in translation, Escarpit pointed out that translation work is creative as it empowers original works a brand new visage and thus enabling them to unreservedly communicate with more widespread readers. Translation not only extends the original work's life, but also gives it a second life [3]. According to Chinese translator Xu Jun, a literary translation must maintain the original text's distinct expression style in addition to recreating its distinctive artistic effect. Literature's actual worth as a language art is shown through linguistic performances. Factual variations can be found in distinct languages' structural features, sound, form, and semanteme combinations, or both. As a result, translators' originality stems from their ability to overcome these obstacles while revealing them. In order to have personalised texts accepted by target language readers without damaging its original value, translators must manage to explore all feasible means and take initiative for bilingual exchange, which itself is a sort of art and creation [4].

Gaballo believes that creative translation necessitates new conceptual, linguistic, and cultural mechanisms from translators to make up for the absence or flaws of the current mechanism. Integrating the translator's knowledge base, experience, and fresh ideas to create a new text is creativity in translation. According to him, a creative translation is a language transformation that is based on the audience for the translated work. Translators should make full use of imagination, utilise various translation strategies and methods, apply creative conversion to content and forms in order to make the translated work understandable, convey the expressive aims of original work [5]. According to the eco-translatology theory, innovative translation could appear to be a betrayal of the original text. However, it has been demonstrated to be more profoundly loyal to the original in terms of artistic merit, atmosphere, and character. Methods such as amplification, annotation, supplementary explanations and so on manifestly embody the creativity of literary translation [6].

To sum up, the current research on *creativity in literal translation* mainly focus on the translation theory and expressive methods, there is less research on practical guidance for literary translation. In order to thoroughly study the creative qualities in Chinese-English translation, this paper will make use of Xu Jun's theory of literal translation.

3 Methodology

According to the fundamental classification of literal forms, this study analyses one instance of Chinese-English translation of four genres, including fiction, prose, poetry, and script, using the methodology of empirical analysis and descriptive analysis, respectively. Despite that the analysed content is not comprehensive due to space constraints, this method selects representative texts within the scope of literary works. Each original text has its correspondence to well-received translation version in order to verify the significance of creativity in literary translation, provide practical guidance for literary translation, and make translator's translation activities more traceable. By using empirical analysis, the translator can better appreciate the uniqueness of literary works, use innovative translation techniques to preserve, extend, and enhance the value of the original language, and recognise the importance of the translator personally [7].

4 Theoretical Basis

According to Xu Jun, the fundamental rule of translating creatively is to refrain from changing the meaning, aesthetic impact, or style of the source material. Translators should therefore respect appropriateness, endeavour to pick non-corresponding expressions fairly, and faithfully recreate the original meaning and effect [4].

4.1 Reproduce Original Work's Value of Formal Factors

Formal factors include phonetics, linguistic form, and structure. It seeks to replicate the intrinsic value of the original text while conveying its semantic value. The main ways that phonetics is expressed are through pause frequency, voice tone, and text intensity. It can enhance language's capacity for expression and reveal hidden potential in neutral terms. Utilizing techniques like elision and archaism to reveal the identity, status, and literacy of the speaker is known as linguistic form. Structure includes word order, pattern adjustments, and implicit sentence-to-sentence logic [4].

4.2 Transfer Cultural Factors' Value

Achieving this makes sure the translation vividly expresses the specific cultural phenomenon of the original language in the target language. Combining historical and cultural contexts, translators must examine the original work's inner thoughts and feelings and develop a profound understanding of phrases that are culturally weighted, such as idioms and allusions. Translators will know exactly how to deal with and to what extent the readers can accept regarding the cultural value of a foreign language once they have a thorough awareness of the national cultural milieu that their target readers are in. The procedures and evaluation of the translated material vary depending on the goals of the translation. The translator's translation perspective and understanding of the literary translation mission will influence the translation approaches they choose [4].

4.3 Recreate Literary Identity of the Original Work

Recreation is a refinement of literary images that derives from people's observation, experience, and encapsulation of their various social lives. For instance, describing something to express one's feeling, citing similar examples to demonstrate reason, harmonizing the scenery with feeling. It requires translators to integrate imagery, emotion and meaning in his translated work, using vivid and specific rhetorical techniques to render artistic conception, thus enhancing its artistic appeal.

4.4 Deliver Internal Linguistic Meaning

The connection between two symbols within a single system of symbols; this connection can be expressed in a variety of ways, including sound, form, and meaning. In contrast to English, where the two matching symbols do not always establish a similar relationship, Chinese can create a relationship between one symbol and another within itself and

add additional meaning to this relationship. Translators must identify matching terms that have equivalent effects in the target language when the originating language uses homophony, pun, resemble, and other unique techniques to create the effect of “meaning between the lines.” [4].

5 Analysis on Creativity in Literary Translation of Four Genres

5.1 Poetry <Invitation to Wine>

Selected Poems of Li Bai (pp. 94–95) [9].

Source text (Pin Yin):

Ren sheng de yi xu jin huan, mo shi jin zun kong dui yue. Tian sheng wo cai bi you yong, qian jin san jin huan fu lai.

Translation:

When hopes are won, oh! Drink your fill in high delight, and never leave your wine cup empty in moonlight! Heaven has made us talents, we’re not made in vain. A thousand gold coins spent, more will turn up again.

The translation utilises the technique of preliminary reading combined with synonymous substitution, subtly transferring the linguistic value between English and Chinese even though it does not recreate the tone pattern of Chinese poetry. For instance, “hopes” has the same vowel as “won,” underlining the original word’s “de yi” connotation (Pin Yin). Reversing the word “empty”, which has several euphemistic meanings, into “great joy” is consistent with English’s simple, speedy, and clear statements. Xu has restored the rhythmic elegance of the poem by introducing rhyme using the suffixes “-light” and “-ain” [8].

The exclamation “oh” is introduced in the middle of the sentence, conforming to the lyrical English language, reflecting the translator’s profound understanding of the shift in feelings of the original text, and splitting the sentence into sections based on the emotion contained in every two or three words. In Chinese, the pause of the poem can be understood according to the pronunciation, while in English it needs to be handled with punctuation and phrase collocation, such as “drink one’s fill”, “made in vain”. At that time, Li Bai was ostracised from the capital due to the slander of the powerful, and was sent back in gold by Emperor Xuanzong of Tang. With extreme tedium and depression, he embarked on a long journey to travel around the natural landscape of his country. The literary image of Li Bai as a lonely, arrogant and indulgent man who drinks away his sorrows is the essence of this poem.

Li Bai implied his emotions in the scenery poetry as wine cup and moonlight have strong imagery in classical Chinese literature. While regarding “moonlight”, Xu uses a more common imagery “moonlight” to replace the word ‘moon’ in the original text, which can be better understood in English culture and is creative in its details. The change in imagery in this passage demonstrates the translator’s proficiency in fusing Chinese and Western cultural traditions and his or her courage in coming up with appropriate substitutions, leading to a translation of the poem that pursues both accurate meaning and the poem’s literary quality between the lines. Empty is a pun that means there is no wine in the cup and no possibility of success. Moonlight contains inherent meaning of coldness,

isolation and depression, responding to the word “vain” above. In the final sentence, Xu perfectly transfers the metaphor of “a thousand pieces of gold” to English, using “gold coins” in the western culture to vividly convey the meaning of wealth and power with the principle of “less is more”. The ending word “vain” is a perfect interpretation of “turn up again”, which restores Li Bai’s grief and anger without depravity, instead releasing a sense of confidence and pride.

5.2 Prose <The Pavilion of an Old Drunkard>

A Selection from the Eight Great Prose Masters of the Tang and Song Dynasties (Bilingual Edition) (pp. 86–87) [10].

Source text (Pin Yin):

Ruo fu ri chu er lin fei kai, yun gui er yan xue min, hui ming bian hua zhe, shan jian zhi zhao mu ye. Ye fang fa er you xiang, jia mu xiu er fan yin, feng shuang gao jie, shui luo er shi chu zhe, shan jian zhi si shi ye.

Translation:

When the sun rises, the mist in the forests lifts; when the sky hazes over, the valleys blur. This alternation of brightness and dimness characterises the mornings and dusks in the hills. When the wild flowers bloom, a faint fragrance permeates; when the sturdy trees flourish, they turn bosky and bowery; when the wind drifts high, frost appears white; when the water recedes, rocks emerge. These shifts typify the four seasons in the hills.

The original work uses mostly parallel pairs of sentences, layered and structured, symmetrical in form, harmonious and beautiful in sound. As an illustration, consider the phrases “brightness-darkness,” “mornings-dusks,” “drifts high-appears white,” and “recedes-emerge.” If written in English, the word “and” would be superfluous and repetitious in old Chinese, which might even disturb the juxtaposition in the phrase. The translation would be more concise and understandable if a comma or semicolon were used to modify it. The translator specifically employs the word “typify” in English to define the traits of the four seasons mentioned above. As the previous sentence already used a number of commas, it would be confusing to add another comma at the end of the sentence to lead the subordinate clause.

The translation retains the clarity of the original sentence structure by using a combination of nouns and verbs: sun rises-forests raise; sky hazes over-valleys blur. The song’s structure is simple, the pauses are brief, and the tone shifts are gentle and comforting. This prose perfectly captures the laid-back atmosphere of the old drunkard’s pavilion, celebrating the breathtaking beauty of the surrounding landscape and reflecting the peaceful lives of the locals. The phrase “wind drifts high, frost appears white” in the original text uses pun, referring both to the scenery seen before us and to Ouyang Xiu’s own character. The translation uses the adjectives “high” and “white”, which also mean staying high, lofty and pure.

The literary portrait that Ouyang Xiu here offers is of a guy who appreciates the beauty of the natural world, who enjoys the company of others, and who is open-minded and at ease in the moment. The original text overlays a variety of images, emphasizing the prose’s flexibility and flow. In order to transfer the cultural values contained therein to English literature, the choice of words in the translation is neutral and literary. Literal

translation is the main method, aimed at maximizing the multiple meanings contained within the words themselves, thus leaving room for the reader's imagination and not adding to the translator's understanding and emotion. This kind of preservation is also a form of creative translation.

5.3 Fiction <A Madman's Diary>

Selected Stories of Lu Xun (pp. 10–12) [11].

Source text (Pin Yin):

Fan shi zong xu yan jiu, cai hui ming bai. Gu lai shi chang chi ren, wo ye hai ji de, ke shi bu shen qing chu. Wo fan kai li shi yi cha, zhe li shi mei you nian dai, wai wai xie xie de mei ye shang dou xie zhe “ren yi dao de” ji ge zi. Wo heng shu shui bu zhao, zi xi kan le ban ye, cai cong zi feng li kan chu zi lai, man ben dou xie zhe liang ge zi shi “chi ren”!

Translation: Everything requires careful consideration if one is to understand it. In ancient times, as I recollect, people often ate human beings, but I am rather hazy about it. I tried to look this up, but my history has no chronology and scrawled all over each page are the words: “Confucian Virtue and Morality”. Since I could not sleep anyway, I read intently half the night until I began to see words between the lines. The whole book was filled with the two words— “Eat people.”

The original work is written in a common language with no pretense and is written in the vernacular. Thus, using a literal translation adheres exactly to the original approach. To conform to English writing style, the translation has been correctly rearranged. Conjunctions connect the sentences logically, maintaining the original's conciseness. The first-person perspective is emphasized in “My history,” which highlights Lu Xun's concern for his nation and its citizens. The impact of the word “eat people (cannibal)” is not fully expressed literally as it is colloquial and has no inflection in pronunciation, whereas in Chinese, individual words can vary greatly depending on the grouping of words. The untranslatable nature of this derives from the inherent semantic differences between Chinese and English. Had the translator translated it into a more serious and sharp term with his own understanding, it might have been more cautionary in meaning, but perhaps it would have lost Lu Xun's punning intention - to eat people, alluding to the destruction of the human body and the devouring of human thoughts and emotions, which is at odds with his vernacular style of characteristic straightforwardness. Lu Xun's midnight finding of the word “eat people” is a strong attack and irony on the feudal rituals that bind and distort human nature, as well as the hypocrisy, numbness and ignorance of human beings. Due to lack of familiarity with historical details and China's predicament at the time, English readers may not get the cultural significance of the terms as well as Chinese speakers do. The use of “whole”, “filled with” and “the two” as quantitative adjectives directly emphasises the devastation of the society in front of modern Chinese, which are also thought-provoking for the cross-cultural readers.

5.4 Script <Romeo and Juliet>

Romeo and Juliet ACT TWO SCENE TWO (pp. 80–81) [12].

Source text:

JULIET By whose direction found'st thou out this place?

ROMEO By Love, that first did prompt me to inquire;

He lent me counsel and I lent him eyes.

I am no pilot; yet, wert thou as far.

As that vast shore wash'd with the furthest sea,

I would adventure for such merchandise.

Translation (Pin Yin):

ZHU Shi shei zhi dian ni zhao dao zhe ge di fang de? LUO Shi ai shen shou xian gu dong wo lai xun zhao; ta gei wo yi zhi dao, wo jie gei ta yi yan jing. Wo bu shi duo shou; dan shi, zong ran ni zai huang hai zhi bin, wo wei le zhe yang de qi zhen yi bao ye yao mao xian qu zhui xun.

The original work uses elision and archaism in the English language system, reflecting Juliet's distinguished status as a heiress of a great family, as well as her gentle upbringing, decent and reserved attitude towards love. The translation modifies the word order and sentence breaks while preserving the delicate euphemism of the classical language in both the English and Chinese systems. It integrates "past shore" and "furthest sea" into four-letter words such as "huang hai zhi bin", which is more phonetically beautiful and gives Chinese readers room for reverie. The translation of "love" as "ai shen (Eros)" discloses the poetic and divine nature of Western culture, reminds us of the prosperity of humanistic thought during the Renaissance: present happiness was above everything else, and life was all just pursuit of individual freedom and personal happiness. The translation transforms the noun into a verb (directs), highlighting the subject of the question, i.e. the person whose meaning centers on guiding the direction, in line with Chinese expressions, and the choice of words is artistically beautiful and ideologically precise.

Romeo, on the other hand, uses language that is more literary and symbolic to convey complex yet fervent feelings. Therefore, the words used in the translation are poetic and metaphorical: "gu dong (agitate)" means to stir, to be proactive; "zong ran...ye yao..." corresponds to "As that...I would..." in its resolute, unfailing loyalty. Such evocative language blends well with the play's more somber, sorrowful tone. The literal meaning of "merchandise" is monotonous and dull, referring to goods to sell, but with a little elaboration, Romeo's emotions flow naturally: Juliet is the valuable treasure in his heart, and he cherishes the pure acquaintance and love between them.

6 Conclusion

This paper concludes that translators should utilise all of their ingenuity to improve the literary quality of the translated work based on the accurate transfer of the original content, form and effect in order to turn the literary translation into translational literature. Through reproducing original work's value of formal factors, transferring cultural factors' value, recreating literary identity of the original work and delivering internal linguistic meaning, literary translated work can achieve the organic coherence between content and forms. The awareness and appliance of creativity is highly necessary for the perfection of literary translation.

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