

A Pragmatic-Functional Model for Assessment of Translation Quality

A case Study of Two Chinese Versions of David Copperfield

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Abstract—Translation quality assessment presupposes a theory of translation. Thus different views of translation itself lead to different concepts of translation quality, and different ways of assessing it. The following discussion of various approaches to translation will focus on a functional—pragmatic model for translation assessment. This tentative study will focus on a functional—pragmatic model for assessment of the quality of translation. As this study in this paper is tentative, since the writer is a beginner in the field of translation. She compares the two Chinese versions of Charles Dickens' novel David Copperfield (translated by Dong Qiusi and Zhang Guroo respectively), first, against the original under the functional—pragmatic model for translation assessment. And finally, a report is formed to show the two translators' translation styles and which version is relatively better by exhibiting their comparative strength and weakness, and above all, to explain the possible causes of the differences between the versions.

Keywords- David Copperfield; translation quality assessment; pragmatic-functional model

I. INTRODUCTION:

Translation quality assessment presupposes a theory of translation. Thus different views of translation itself lead to different concepts of translation quality, and different ways of assessing it. The following discussion of various approaches to translation will focus on a functional—pragmatic model for translation assessment.

House proposes a model based on pragmatic theories of language use; [1] this model provides for the analysis of the linguistic-situational particularities of source and target texts, a comparison of the two texts and the resultant assessment of their relative match. The basic requirement for equivalence of original and translation in this model is that the translation should have a function (consisting of an ideational and an interpersonal functional component, in the Hallidayan sense) which is equivalent to that of the original. The translation should also employ equivalent pragmatic means for achieving that function.

The operation of the model involves initially an analysis of the original according to a set of situational dimensions, for which linguistic correlates are established. The resulting textual profile of the original characterizes its function, which is then taken as the norm against which the translation is measured; the degree to which the textual profile and

function of the translation (as derived from an analogous analysis) match the profile and function of the original is the degree to which the translation is adequate in quality. [2] In evaluating the relative match between original and translation, a distinction is made between dimensional mismatches and non-dimensional mismatches. Dimensional mismatches are pragmatic errors that have to do with language users and language use; non-dimensional mismatches are mismatches in the denotative meanings of the original and translation elements and breaches of the target language system at various levels. The final qualitative judgment of the translation consists of a listing of both types of errors and of a statement of the relative match of the two functional components.

Thus, in order to formulate hypotheses about why, how and to what degree one translation is better than another; large corpora of translations from and into different languages must be analyzed. As this study in this paper is tentative, since the writer is a beginner in the field of translation. She compares the two Chinese versions of Charles Dickens' novel David Copperfield (translated by Dong Qiusi and Zhang Guroo respectively), first, against the original under the functional—pragmatic model for translation assessment. And finally, a report is formed to show the two translators' translation styles and which version is relatively better by exhibiting their comparative strength and weakness, and above all, to explain the possible causes of the differences between the versions.

II. FUNCTIONAL—PRAGMATIC MODEL FOR TRANSLATION ASSESSMENT

Before attending the issues of assessing the quality of translation, one must take into the factors affecting translation on the whole. He must know what translation is. Often, though not by any means always, it is rendering the meaning of a text into another language in the way that the author intended the text. [3] A German master of philosophy once said, " what sort of philosophy one chooses depends on what sort of person one is ." thus ,it may be said that what sort of translation theory one prefers or constructs depends on what sort of personality one possesses. The functional-pragmatic model for translation assessment assures us the truthfulness of it.

The factors involved in the process of translation are innumerable in the way that it must be an extremely difficult task for one to conclude in a few sentences. However, there are some apparently visible factors one can count for in

translation and the assessment of it. The followings illustrate the dynamics of translation, which shows the opposing factors full the translation activity in opposite directions. Before a translator comes to translate or assess the quality of translation of the others, he must consider he factors such as the intention of the text and that of the translator, the text styles, the readership, stylistic scales, attitude, setting, and the quality of writing. [4] And in the process of assessing the quality of translation, one shall bear in mind those factors, such as the target receptor, the cultural background, and the degree of the target receptors welcome the translated text. [5]

Fully understanding that translation itself and assessment of its quality are dynamic with so many affecting forces, one shall take care of those important ones no matter what model the assessment is built on.

Now comes the point of the pragmatic-functional model of assessment.

This model includes two inseparable parts: the pragmatic (situational) aspect, and the functional aspect.

A. *Pragmatic (situational) aspect*

The pragmatics can be defined as the study of language in use. [6]The notion of context is particularly important in pragmatics because it contributes a lot to the meaning of an utterance , and the pragmatics studies how contextual features determine or influence the interpretation of the meaning in texts and utterances. Two kinds of contexts are recognized; the situational context and the linguistic context. Situational context is the particular spatiotemporal situation which an utterance or a piece of text occurs in. the linguistic context is in fact the linguistic setting. (141)

B. *Functional aspect*

The Prague school argues that meaning could only be interpreted from its use of function in social life. Halliday also interprets language from a functional point of view and formulates a functional theory of language. As a matter of fact, language provides the mechanisms for different functions to be combined in one utterance or text in the way that language user desires. Halliday recognizes three meta-functions of language: ideational, interpersonal, and textual. The ideational function is a meaning potential, which is to convey new information, to communicate a content that is unknown to the receptor. The interpersonal function embodies all uses of language to express social and personal relations. This includes the various ways the speaker enters a speech situation and performs a speech act. The textual function refers to the fact that language has mechanisms to make any stretch of spoken or written discourse into a coherent and unified text and make a living message different from a random list of sentences. [7]

C. *simplified model of pragmatic-functional assessment*

Overlaps could be found between the two aspects of the model. The linguistic context in the pragmatic aspect appears to be alike the textual function and ideational function in the functional aspect, however, the fact that those functions are naturally born in the context proves the complexity of language interpretation and translation. To save space of the

tentative study, the overlaps will be analyzed only once in the economized model shown in the following analysis.

III. CONTRASTIVE ASSESSMENT OF THE QUALITY OF THE TWO VERSIONS

In the course of history, there haven a debate on the criterion for the assessment of the quality of translation without reaching a consensus, however, the criterion in three aspects-faithfulness, expressiveness and elegance has been universally accepted, though, to various degrees.

David Copperfield, published in 1849-1950, is Dickens' "favorite child". Several versions have been produced by Chinese translators, among which the versions by Dong Qiusi and Zhang Guruo have attracted the attention of both the readers and the critics.

In the following, the writer will compare the two Chinese versions by Dong and Zhang against the original under the pragmatic and functional model.

Though it is an extremely difficult requirement, it is supposed that a translator be faithful to all aspects of the original as much as possible. In this section, the writer will solely deal with the function of text and the rendition of associative meanings in achieving faithfulness.

A. *Pragmatic perspective: Meaning by context*

For great literature is always a matter of language art which one cannot take apart to deal with minor elements separately, due regard should be paid to the whole text. J.R.Firth, a British linguist, remarks that each word when seen in a new context is a new word. He emphasizes the importance of relating the function of language to the co-text and the social context in which language operates.

To determine the meaning of any text, one must inevitably refer to the co-text, which means the parts of a discourse surround a word or passage and can throw light on its meaning, and he also must inevitably turn to the social context determining the specific text production and reception. There being a large and complex types of context in broad or narrow sense, it naturally follows that no word can be properly processed ever out of context. In the process of translating, context is essential in correctly understanding the original text. And only when the individual words are put in the larger context of text, situation and culture can you attain to an accurate comprehension. Let us take the following as example:

Example: "All good attend you, dear *old woman*," he said, embracing Pegotty,"and you too, Mas'r Davy!" shaking hands with me. (Chapter 32, p.534)[8]

Dong's version: p 548 [9]

Zhang's version: p700 [10]

This happens when Mr.Pegotty says goodbye to his sister Pegotty and David before he goes to seek for his niece Emily. Here "old woman" refers to his sister, and the Chinese word "Mei Mei(younger sister)" is exactly its equivalent in this specific situation. Zhang gets the meaning according to the context and accurately represents it while Dong does not get the exact meaning.

Care should be taken to determine from the context the shade of meaning of a word in the original and the choice of

an appropriate expression in the translation. Occasionally, one needs to seek information from a larger context. Take another as example:

Example 2: as I knew she was anxious to get home, and, between fire, food, and pickpockets, could never be considered at her ease for half-an-hour in London,.....(chapter 23,p.413)

Dong's version: p411

Zhang's version: p525

In the above extract, there is something understood or implied in the original, which is quite clear to the native reader. In order to make the translation clear to target receptors, a translator has to expatiate on it. Otherwise, the translation would be semantically incomplete, or even totally unintelligible to target receptors. Dong's version appears more faithful to the original form without any omission or addition. Nevertheless, his seemingly faithful translation is actually above the comprehension of Chinese readers. Zhang employs the technique of amplification, appealing to the preceding paragraphs in the same chapter, thus making his version correct and clear. He renders the three coordinate clauses with three connective "you(again)"between them, which makes his version clear and cohesive.

Thus, it is apparent from the above that a translator can never ignore the function of context in the process of translation and assessment. However, in translating a translator ought to have a command of the associative meanings in the original of both informative and aesthetic functions (both cultural and linguistic). After that, he is to try to find a corresponding expression in the target language that can perform both the informative and aesthetic functions.

Example:"what! My flower!" she pleasantly began, shaking her large head at him.(chapter 22, p.386)

Dong's version: p 380

Zhang's version: p 484

This is what Miss Mowcher says to Steerforth when she visits him in Yarmouth. Miss Mowcher, an extraordinary and talkative dwarf, is very familiar with Steerforth as she grooms him frequently. Steerforth was born in a noble family and lives a life of expensive pleasure. He is charming, handsome, and confident, and seems friendly, generous and noble, but also proud, irresponsible and selfish. His charm is a deliberately false pretence used for his own purposes: to trap Emily and Rosa Dartle before her.

Here, Miss Mowcher has good reason to call him "flower", which implies his playboy lifestyle and his interest in mixing with girls. Zhang's version succeeds in performing both the informative and aesthetic functions of the term "flower", accurately representing the associative meanings while keeping the original form. Preference can be easily made of the two versions in this example.

B. Functional perspective

Halliday's marco-functions include ideational, interpersonal, and textual functions. As shown above, there are certain overlaps between the pragmatic and functional assessments, as a consequence of which, certain overlaps having been discussed will be save here in this functional perspective.

Ideational function:

The ideational function is a meaning potential, which is to convey new information, to communicate a content that is unknown to the receptor. It the fundamental function of the language, so it appears more economical to only choose one facet from it to indicate the whole picture of the fact. It is well acknowledged that adequacy fist comes from the choice of appropriate words. Diction is, therefore, of great importance in translating and assessing the quality of the translated text. Particularly, attention should be directed to the use of reduplicated words and four-character adjectival phrases here.

Example: it was remarked that the clock began to strike, and I began to cry, simultaneously. (chapter 1, p.49) .

Dong's version: p 3

Zhang's version: p 3

This is a sentence in the first paragraph of chapter one in which David related of his birth. In the original, the repetition of "began" and the assonance of "strike" and "cry" produce on the reader an effect of lingering sound. In Dong's version, the mere repetition of "kai shi(beging)" cannot retain the effect for Chinese readers; whereas Zhang uses tow onomatopoeic repudiated words"dang dang"and "gua gua"to describe the striking of the clock and the crying of the new born baby, providing the reader with the possibility of imagination. The use of reduplicated syllables makes it a vivid representation of the original, and therefore Zhang's version sounds more like the original work.

C. Interpersonal function

The interpersonal function embodies all uses of language to express social and personal relations. This includes the various ways the speaker enters a speech situation and performs a speech act. In literary works the speech of each participant in the conversation is peculiar in a certain way. Certain features in one's utterance identify someone and distinguish him from other users of the same language or the same dialect of the language. Such idiosyncratic features provide the basis of his individuality of speech, which is an outstanding characteristic in world literary works. For a good translator, he pays particular attention to the individualized speech and makes sure that the tone of the speaker in the target language is in agreement with the status and the temperament of the speaker in the original and with the particular situation in question.

In the following extracts of speech of different characters will be presented to see how the two translators reproduce the individuality of utterance in their versions.

Mr. Micawber is a great comic character in the original, and his exaggerated and ridiculous eloquence often contains grand or elaborate ways of saying something very simple.

Example: Said Mr. Micawber, in another burst of confidence, "that you might lose yourself- I shall be happy to call this evening, and install you in the knowledge of the nearest way."(chapter 11,p.211)

Dong's version: p 183

Zhang's version: p 232

On the first day when David begins to work in London, Mr. Micawber makes such a speech to him, a ten-year-boy. In the original, the author purposely chooses such elaborate and pretentious words to show his exaggerated and ridiculous eloquence, such as “install, knowledge”, etc. In syntax, he uses a complex sentence with two coordinate appositive clauses. Both versions reproduce the individuality of his speech in some degree, but there is some difference in them. Zhang deliberately chooses some elaborate expressions, such as “zao fang (pay a visit) ,huo zhi(get to know) ,rong xing zhi ji (get a great honor to)”, which show a vivid representation of his eloquence and pedantic manner. Dong translates it more literally, which makes his version a little awkward, thus reproducing Micawber’s preference of big and pretentious wording and complex syntax even before a child. Both versions achieve the similarity of spirit to the original and successfully reproduce the individualized speech of Mr. Micawber. As to which version is better received in the receptor, it is the question of personal preference. Concerning only the expressiveness of wording, it is justified to say Zhang’s version takes superiority over Dong’s version.

D. textual function

Textual function refers to the fact that language has mechanisms to make any stretch of spoken or written discourse into a coherent and unified text and make a living message different from a random list of sentences. The syntactic structure and the figures of speech serving as a part of the textual mechanism are among the essential components of the literary language. A good translation enables target receptors not only to know how the original receptors must have understood the content of the text, but also to appreciate some of the impact and appeal the original receptors must have perceived from the text. A proper rendering of figures of speech can help the target receptor fully appreciate how the original receptor responds to the original text, while an improper handling will reduce the expressive and aesthetic appeal of the text in the version.

Example: “Ah! What’s that game at forfeit? I love my love with an E, because she’s enticing; I hate her with an E, because she’s engaged. I took her to the sign of the exquisite, and treated her with an elopement, her name’s Emil, and she lives in the east?” (Chapter 22, p.394)

Dong’s version: p 388

Zhang’s version: p 495

Zhang’s version is not confined to the original structure but satisfactorily recreates the original stylistic meanings. He creatively replaces the English letter “E” with “ai(love)”, and reproduces another linguistic game in Chinese, which is also full of fun and functional equivalent to the original text. It is obviously seen from this example that the stylistic devices of the translated work may also help perform the function done by the original text, though the stylistic devices of the two languages are usually different in form. What is impossible to be translated in the individual, isolated parts may often be translated adequately in the united organized whole.

IV. SUMMARY

From the comparison and analysis made in the previous chapters, it is seen that Dong Qiusi and Zhang Guroo are quite different in their translating styles. Under the pragmatic-functional model of quality assessment of the versions, apparently both versions transfer what is said in the original successfully, but Dong concerns himself too much about the original structure, which makes his version awkward and certainly contributes to translationese; whereas Zhang is more creative in his translation, which makes his version readable and favorable to target receptors.

It seems that Dong adopts the word for word translation, in other terms, the literary translation method or semantic translation. However, Zhang concerns more about the pragmatic meaning in reality, reflecting the tendency that he prefers the idiomatic or natural translation, in other terms, the communicative translation. The fundamental differences of the translation strategy are that the semantic translation emphasizes the information of the original while the communicative one pays much attention to the expressiveness and elegance of the content.

However, much attention should be directed to the analysis of the cause of those differences. The text, the readership, and the purpose of translation are the same in the two versions while the conspicuous difference lies in the translators themselves. From this fact, it can be understood that the translator’s interpretation and rendering of the original text play a key role in the process of translating, as a result of which the translation will achieve corresponding effects of faithfulness, expressiveness, and elegance.

INTRODUCTION OF AUTHORS

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