

普通高等教育"十五"国家级规划教材

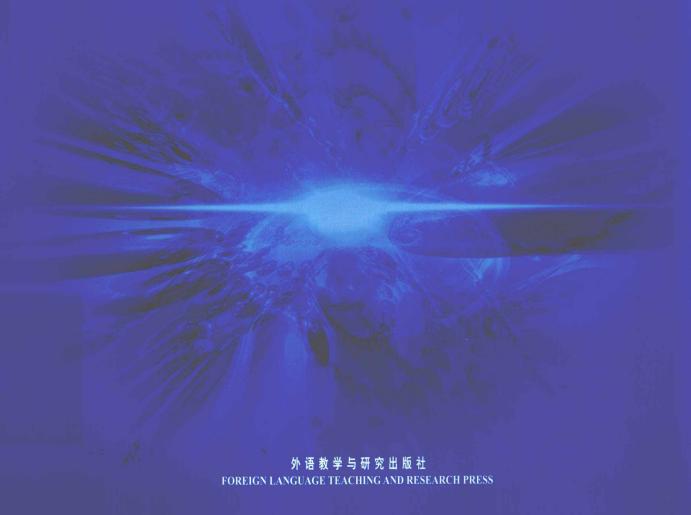


高等学校英语专业系列教材

英汉翻译入门(第二版)

Approach to Translation Between English and Chinese (Second Edition)

陈德彰 编著



英汉翻译入门(第二版)

Approach to Translation Between English and Chinese (Second Edition)

陈德彰 编著

外语教学与研究出版社 FOREIGN LANGUAGE TEACHING AND RESEARCH PRESS

北京 BEIJING

图书在版编目(CIP)数据

英汉翻译入门 = Approach to Translation Between English and Chinese / 陈德彰编著. — 2 版. — 北京: 外语教学与研究出版社, 2012. 4

高等学校英语专业系列教材 ISBN 978-7-5135-1787-4

I. ①英··· II. ①陈··· III. ①英语—翻译—高等学校—教材 IV. ①H315.9

中国版本图书馆 CIP 数据核字 (2012) 第 058069 号

出版人:蔡剑峰

项目负责: 祝文杰

责任编辑: 都帮森 杨晓丽

封面设计: 刘 冬 版式设计: 刘 冬

出版发行: 外语教学与研究出版社

杜 址: 北京市西三环北路 19 号 (100089)

M 址: http://www.fltrp.com

印刷:中国农业出版社印刷厂

开 本: 787×1092 1/16

印 张: 21.5

版 次: 2012 年 4 月第 2 版 2012 年 4 月第 1 次印刷

书 号: ISBN 978-7-5135-1787-4

定 价: 43.90 元

* * *

购书咨询: (010)88819929 电子邮箱: club@fltrp.com

如有印刷、装订质量问题,请与出版社联系

联系电话: (010)61207896 电子邮箱: zhijian@fltrp.com

制售盗版必究 举报查实奖励

版权保护办公室举报电话: (010)88817519

物料号: 217870001

新版前言

本书第一版于2005年由外语教学与研究出版社出版,被列为北京外国语大学"211工程"项目之一,并被教育部列为"普通高等教育'十五'国家级规划教材"。出版后颇受好评,先后印刷八次,并被许多院校作为授课教材,受到师生喜爱。笔者使用这一教材教授的"翻译入门"课,先后被评为北京外国语大学和北京市高等学校精品课程,笔者则多次被评为北京外国语大学英语学院优秀教师。以笔者为首的翻译教学团队完成的"本科翻译专业系列核心课程建设——用学科最新理念培养21世纪翻译人才"项目还荣获2008年北京市教育教学成果(高等教育)二等奖。

由于形势在不断发展,我国的进一步开放和全球化进程的加速使翻译人才的需求空前增加,为此,国内大批高校开设了本科翻译专业、翻译硕士专业以及其他翻译实践的硕士生班,因此对翻译教材的需求也有所增加。此外,翻译是时代性很强的一种实践活动,教材内容要紧跟时代。但本书第一版还是7年前出版的,为了使内容与时俱进,笔者对原书进行了修订增补,以进一步完善。笔者退休前教授翻译课时十分注重翻译的时代性,头一天发生重大的事件,往往第二天就会拿到课堂上,与学生讨论有关的词语如何翻译。这一做法受到学生的欢迎。这次修改增加了不少新的、能体现时代特点的例句。而且,近年来国内外翻译研究成果显著,笔者认为有必要适当地把一些新的理论介绍给学生。此外,笔者在教学、学习和翻译实践的过程中发现了一些尚未见到讨论、但值得探讨的问题,有必要补充到此书的新版中去,例如词义的方向性、语言表达的主客观性和动作的表达(不是从词汇转换的角度讨论,而是从英汉语不同的动态程度进行讨论)等。但这些探讨多从实际出发,是描述性的,根据观察和总结语言现象得出的结论也可能是不成熟的,目的是希望引起大家的兴趣,共同探讨。同时,对于我国对外传播面临的不少问题,例如一些政治口号和汉语新词语的英译等,新版中也进行了探讨。

本次增补和修改保留了原书的基本思路和结构,保留其不同于许多翻译教材的特点,仍然不求大而全或系统性,而是重点讨论若干对中国学生造成困惑的问题。为了使原来使用本教材的教师使用新版教材有连贯性,本次修订以增加新内容为主,仅有少量删节和改写。

本教材不强调系统性,而是以解决实际问题为主,所以教学安排不一定按课本的顺序进行,可以结合学生翻译实践的问题讲解和讨论有关章节。教师可布置学生课前阅读有关课文,课堂上则就某一个或几个典型句子的翻译进行比较深入的讨论。翻译教学尤其要注

意师生互动,让学生比较不同的译文,说明各种译法的理据,不能轻易否定某一种译法,即使讨论不能达成一致意见也没有关系,要鼓励学生提出自己的看法和不同的观点。

举例丰富翔实是本书一大特点,也是本书深受使用者好评的原因之一。笔者的本意是让事实说话,不是先提出某个理论,然后再找例子证明,而是从语言的实际运用中归纳出一些有共性的现象,在此基础上进行探讨。有人提出,说明某一个论点,三个例子就足够了。写论文也许三个例子能勉强说明某个论点,但本书不是学术论文,而是供学生和自学者使用的。翻译本身是实践性很强的科目,本书有时提出一个见解会举十几甚至几十个例子,目的不仅在于让学生印象深刻,更在于让他们通过大量的例子举一反三,仔细体会,从而作出自己的判断,得出自己的心得体会。此外,这也是为了用事实告诉读者,书中讨论的语言现象不是孤立的例子,而是有一定的普遍意义。本书中所举的例子本身有很强的实用性,大多是可供学习借鉴的样例,也是翻译实践中用得到的。为此,这次新版又增加了许多例子,尤其是符合时代的新的例子。笔者认为,说明翻译中一些问题的例句往往可遇而不可求,找具有共性的例句常常比找合适的翻译篇章难得多,这是写论文和翻译教学中常遇到的一个问题。所以,大家要当有心人,注意观察,随时收集材料,笔者也一直是这么做的。希望从事翻译教学的教师和研究翻译的学者能从本书找到对他们有用的例句。

本书第一版有不少练习,大多看似简单但不好译,正是这些练习增加了学生的兴趣。这次新版增加了练习量。第一版没有提供练习的参考译文,主要原因是笔者认为任何句子都可以有不同的译法,应该鼓励学生展开讨论,不想让"参考译文"影响和限制学生的思路。从某种意义上说,翻译"没有最好,只有更好"。但是考虑到实际教学操作中如果没有参考范围也会造成一定困难,加上有不少非英语专业的学生和社会人士自学翻译的需要,这次新版提供了绝大部分翻译练习的参考译文,原来没有提供译文的一些例句,也补上了译文(当然也是"参考译文")。但是要强调指出的是,这些参考译文仅供参考,开阔思路,而绝不是什么"标准译文"。相信使用本书的教师和学生一定能译出更精彩的译文。因为有读者提出原书练习中文学作品的例子太少,这次修订也增加了这方面的例句和练习。此外,新版的练习中还增加了一些有关翻译理论的问答题,目的在于鼓励学生进行有关的探讨和研究。这一部分练习没有提供参考答案。

还有一点要再次重申一下:本书中大量的例句都选自实际语言材料,没有为了说明某个问题而自己杜撰的句子。其译文有一部分是笔者自己试译的,但大量的是从别处引来的(笔者对其中不少进行了改动)。由于来源太广,恕不一一注明出处。

书后附有一个翻译书单,大部分不是本书编写时用的参考书目,而是为读者进一步学

习提供的推荐书目。这不是一个完整的书单,也不排除是根据笔者的偏爱选择的,但是这些书反映了我国学者在翻译研究方面可喜的成果。这些书也许没有西方一些翻译理论书那么高深,也没有太多的时髦术语,但是言之有物、有理、有据,许多是多年乃至毕生从事翻译教学的教师的心得,能解决翻译中的实际问题,对教授翻译的教师有一定参考作用,更是学生在探讨研究、撰写论文时的重要参考。

希望广大师生和读者提出意见,共同探讨,进一步推动我国的翻译教学发展。

陈德彰 2012年3月

原版前言

笔者二十多年前开始在北京外国语大学英语系教授英语专业高年级的英汉、汉英笔 译实践课,在讲评学生翻译作业中的一些问题时,往往需要相当数量的例子(尤其是结构 类似却需要不同译法的例子),以便能举一反三说明某种译法,起到一定的启发和指导作 用、干是在课余有意识地收集积累各种例句。笔者在教学过程中发现、对英汉语言进行语 义、结构、习惯用法、语用意义、文化等方面的分析对比,找出一些有规律性的东西,不 仅让学生知其"然",而且让他们知其"所以然",有助于学生在翻译实践中养成一定的自 觉性。后来,我觉得每次20分钟左右的讲评很难将问题说透,于是在陆续积累的材料的 基础上把有关的理论部分分开来,形成了一门单独的课,称之为"翻译人门",作为翻译 实践课的平行课同时开设,以提高学生的翻译实践水平。10年前,我系在本科高年级开 设了翻译专业倾向班,选修该专业倾向的学生很踊跃,"翻译入门"成了该专业倾向的必 修课。这么多年来,经过不断补充和更新,这门课的材料日益丰富,并在吸收翻译界研究 成果的基础上形成了自己的系统,编成了十几个题目的讲义。这门课开设以来颇受学生欢 迎。同事们和学生们,还有每年来进修的许多访问学者都建议我出书,但我始终觉得不少 提法和理论依据还不成熟,需要进一步充实,所以就拖了下来。三年前,教育部征求高校 文科"十五"重点推广教材,我在同事们的说服下提出了申报,结果批了下来,于是正式 开始编写本书。

多年以前教育部推广使用的翻译教材《英汉翻译教程》(张培基等编著)和《汉英翻译教程》(吕瑞昌等编著)显然已显得陈旧。近几年国内出版的各种翻译教程少说有上百种,许多都是从事翻译教学多年的教师的经验之谈,是教学和研究成果的结晶,而且各有千秋。所以,在谈到要编写这本教材的时候,有一位同事提出:不要搞成那种"多一本不嫌多,少一本不嫌少"的教材,也就是说,要有特点,有新意——这成为编写本书的一条宗旨。但是,体现一个"新"字却不是一件容易的事。从20世纪80年代以来,国外的翻译理论被大量介绍到国内,国内的翻译理论研究也异常活跃,学术成果颇丰。有的用符号论、交际理论等分析解剖翻译,不少学者将语言学研究的诸多成果引入翻译研究;有人提出要建立"翻译学",其中有不少人提出要创建"有中国特色的翻译学",有的则提出要研究翻译的心理过程,还有人企图找出翻译中的"量化"规律,以求发现其中的科学规律;有的教材以各种文体的翻译为系统,有的以常用翻译技巧或方法担纲,真是百花齐放,佳作不断。作为英语专业的翻译教学,当然有必要向学生介绍有关学科学术研究方面的发展

和动态,但是这里有个"度"的问题,要有所选择,更要适可而止,太多的理论有时让人眼花缭乱,有的"纯"理论对指导翻译实践不见得有多大作用。老实说,有些所谓的"理论"把简单的事情搞得很复杂,不但有故弄玄虚之嫌,简直就是"学术泡沫",没有什么真正的价值。诚然,对本科生而言,让他们学一些必要的理论既可以指导翻译实践,也可以引导他们进行一定的研究(如写好毕业论文,为学习研究生课程打下基础等),但一定要有针对性。笔者以为,对英汉语言的各种语言现象进行对比,将翻译放到具体语言交际(即语用)中进行分析,是最实用最有效的办法,这也是本书的主要思路。

由于翻译理论处于百花齐放、百家争鸣的状态,本书不一定遵循某一家的说法,有不少观点得益于前辈和同行的著作,有些看法和提法只是笔者自己归纳出来的,也许没有权威的支持,甚至有的术语都是笔者自己"发明"的,但绝不是为了故意追求"新"或时尚,更不想"一鸣惊人",目的只有一个,即希望能对学生有所启发。本书有自己的体例,更强调实用性,以能有的放矢地解决学生遇到的一些实际问题。翻译理论涉及许多方面,如符号学、交际理论、心理学、社会学、美学等等,本书不一定一一提到,但是对学生容易出错或常被忽视的方面有较多阐述。选用本书作教材,也可有选择地或"创造性地"使用各章节。翻译课应该强调师生互动,不仅翻译实践是一种以任务为中心的交际活动,翻译理论与技巧的讨论也应该这样,要培养和帮助学生提高实践的自觉性,讲授理论或介绍翻译时要留有余地,让学生发挥主动性,进行积极思考,所以,本书有大量的例句,只有一部分进行了讲解,提供了译文,但也只是仅供参考。相当多的例句作为作业或供学生自我练习用,没有附上常见的"参考译文",目的是鼓励学生在理解的基础上发挥"再创造"的能动性,教师可以鼓励学生讨论。尤其要说明的是,不少例句在不同的上下文中可以有多种译法,教师应该指出各种可能性。

加强启发性是我国高等教育教学改革的一个重要方面。本书所提供的诸多例句的译文也绝不是最好的,更谈不上是"标准译文",只起参考或借鉴启发作用,或是介绍给学生别人是怎么翻译的(即所谓的 descriptive, 而不是 prescriptive)。学生们可以进行讨论,得出更好的译文来。同时还要指出的是,这门"翻译人门"课要和翻译实践课同时开设,不单独开设此课的,可以将此书作为翻译讲评课的补充参考。许多翻译理论和技巧要通过篇章整体翻译才能讲清楚。本书没有像不少翻译教材那样附有翻译练习的篇子,一是因为翻译练习篇子好找,二是因为篇子容易过时,在书里还会占用大量篇幅。

许多翻译教材将英汉翻译和汉英翻译分成两大块。其实两者是一个问题的两个方面。 笔者认为两者是相辅相成的,比较两种语言的异同既可以指导英汉翻译也可以指导汉英翻译。翻译的第一步是理解,这在英汉翻译中似乎比较突出,不少学生在理解英语原文上有 较多的困难,尤其是那些由于习惯用法而不能从汉语角度思维的词语和习惯用法,看似简单,其实有难度。所以,本书的例句以英译汉为主。但是反过来看,许多时候可以将英汉翻译分析的英语表达形式,尤其是英语特有的习惯用法运用到汉英翻译中,这对译出地道的英语大有帮助。所以本书往往将英汉翻译和汉英翻译放在一起讲。

最后还要说明的是,本书用英语写成,这是因为作为为英语专业高年级学生开设的专业课,应该用英语讲解,而且这和要求学生用英语写毕业论文是一致的。但是,引用的原文是中文的理论阐述和中文例句时,则保留中文原文,以免翻译"走样"。恐怕这也是翻译教材的"特权"。国外类似的文章将汉语部分用汉语拼音,笔者认为不可取,因为汉语的同音词特别多,常使意思不清楚,即使标上四声也无济于事。

本教材可供英语专业本科高年级使用,也可供翻译专业和其他专业研究生和自学翻译者使用。也建议准备报考英语专业研究生考试和参加全国翻译资格证书考试的同志们一读。

本书中的不少例句转引自一些翻译教材和论文,有的进行了加工改译。由于来源较广,没有一一注明来源和原译者,大部分见诸附录中列的推荐书目。在此向有关同行们表示真诚感谢。本书的出版还得到了外语教学与研究出版社的大力支持,在此一并表示感谢!

陈德彰 2005年6月

Contents

Chapter 1 Introduction	1
1. Definition of Translation	1
2. Criteria of Translation	4
3. Is Translation Easy?	10
4. Literal Translation vs. Liberal Translation	14
5. Some Translation Theories in the West	18
6. Translatability	22
7. Basic Differences Between English and Chinese	29
Chapter 2 Disparity Between "Corresponding Words" in English and Chinese	37
1. Semantic Range and Classification	37
2. Collocational Meaning	52
3. Colorful Meaning	62
4. The Innocent-Looking Preposition	69
5. Personal Names	75
6. Special Plurals	78
7. Vogue Words	81
Chapter Oifferent Ways of Expressing Actions	93
1. The Verb	93
2. The Noun	103
3. The Preposition	128
4. The Adjective	132

Chapter 2 Different Perspectives Behind the Language	137
1. Nomenclature and Focus	137
2. View of Time and Space	140
3. Specific and General	142
4. Passive and Active	150
5. Negative and Affirmative	160
6. Objectivity and Subjectivity	175
Chapter	183
1. Word Order	183
2. Disjunctive Modifier	188
3. Behind the Parallel Structure: the Conjunction And	190
4. The Conjunction When	202
5. Repetition Word and Word Repetition	203
6. Information Condensed in the Attributive Modifier	207
7. The Relative Clause	222
8. Rhetorical Comparison	228
9. Hypotaxis and Parataxis	232
10. Punctuation	243
Chapter	245
1. Purpose of Communication	245
2. Communicative Euphemism	250
3. Addressing Terms	255
4. Conventional Greetings	259
5. Stylistic Connotations	260

Co	nte	nte
	l II.	1113

Chapter 7 Translation as Cross-Cultural Communication	269
1. Cultural Connotation and Idioms	270
2. Some Special Terms	279
3. Culturally Unique Terms	281
4. Trademarks and Advertisements	283
5. Allusions	289
6. Implication of Color Terms	292
Appendix	299
Appendix (1) Recommended Books on Translation	329

Chapter 1

Introduction

1. Definition of Translation

There are many definitions of translation. Now let us look at a few of them:

Translating is the art of recomposing a work in another language without losing its original flavor.

—Columbia Encyclopedia

把已说出或写出的话的意思用另一种言语表达出来的活动。

——《中国大百科全书·语言文字卷》

Translating is the replacement of textual material in one language (SL) by equivalent textual material in another language (TL).

—J. C. Catford

Translating consists in reproducing in the receptor language the closest natural equivalent of the source language message, first in terms of meaning and secondly in terms of style.

—Eugene A. Nida

To translate is to change into another language, retaining as much of the sense as one can.

—Samuel Johnson

(Translating) is rendering the meaning of a text into another language in the way the author intended the text.

—Peter Newmark

Translation is an art that involves the re-creation of a work in another language for readers with a different background.

—Malcolm Cowley

In the above definitions, several words are of much importance. The first one is "textual" (or "text"), which reminds us what we usually translate are texts rather than independent words or sentences. The second word is "natural", which tells us that it is not enough to produce grammatically correct sentences (that is the basic demand, especially in Chinese-English translation) but idiomatic, natural sentences. A further demand is raised in the third word "flavor"

(or "style"), that is, the translator should do his best to retain the special characteristics of the original writer. For example, political essays or colloquialisms, or works by Hemingway and by Mark Twain should be reproduced into different styles based on the original ones.

We may add some definitions by modern translation theorists.

Israeli translation theorist Gideon Toury says: "A translation is taken to be any targetlanguage utterance which is presented or regarded as such within the target culture, on whatever grounds."

German translation theorist Christiane Nord gives this definition: "Translation is the production of a functional target text maintaining a relationship with a given source text that is specified according to the intended or demanded function of the target text."

Toury emphasizes the culture while Nord gives more emphasis to the pragmatic approach, that is, to fulfill the function through the text. However, American translation theorist Jean Sager points out another aspect: "Translation is an externally motivated industrial activity, supported by information technology, which is diversified in response to the particular needs of this form of communication." This definition puts translation as an industry, and translators have to suit the needs of their employers, who may make special demands.

Traditionally, the translator was held to be responsible for the source text. This is not enough. From the above definitions we find not only "in the way the author intended" but also "for readers with a different background". This clearly reveals that the process of translation consists of five links:



Translation (or the translator) is often compared to a bridge, which is not just between the source text and the target text, but between the author of the text (dispatcher of the original information) and the reader of the target text (final and indirect receiver or receptor of the information). So, as an intermediate information receiver and at the same time the secondary dispatcher, the translator has to analyze the intention of the author in writing the source text and try to convey it to the reader of the translation, who should understand the intention of the author through the target text. That is why translation is considered as an ostensive-inferential cognitive process.

We would find more or less the same emphasis in some of the definitions given by some Chinese translators:



翻译是一种跨文化的信息交流与交换活动,其本质是传播,是传播学中一个有特殊性质的领域。——吕俊

翻译是把具有某一文化背景的发送者用某种语言(文字)所表述的内容尽可能充分地、有效地传达给使用另一种语言(文字)、具有另一种文化背景的接受者。

-----沈苏儒

翻译是两个语言社会之间的交际过程和交际工具,它的目的是要促进本语言社会的政治、经济和文化进步,它的任务是要把原作中包含的现实世界的逻辑映像或艺术映像,完好无损地从一种语言译注到另一种语言中去。——张今

We can quote the *Cambridge Encyclopedia of Language* to sum up translation as a task to be accomplished:

It is sometimes said that there is no task more complex than translation—a claim that can be readily believed when all the variables involved are taken into account. Translators not only need to know their source language well; they must also have a thorough understanding of the field of knowledge covered by the source text, and of any social, cultural, or emotional connotations that need to be specified in the target language if the intended effect is to be conveyed. The same special awareness needs to be present for the target language, so that points of special phrasing, local (e.g. regional) expectations, and so on, can all be taken into account.

Here "intended effect" is determined by the original author, the very translator, and very often the employer or the commissioner of the translation.

Translation can be classified into the following types:

- 1) Oral (interpretation): instantaneous (consecutive), simultaneous
- 2) Written: whole text literature, pragmatic excerpt, partial, gist, summary, selective, and adapted translation and rewriting in another language (including "general translation" and "gloss translation")
 - 3) Machine aided translation and machine (computer) translation

Then, there is indirect translation, referring to translation not from the source text but from the translation of the source text in another language.

In a sense, capacity in written translation is the basis of oral interpretation, but the former allows more refining and better accuracy while the latter requires more on-the-spot handling capacity. Our entrance into the information age often asks for different kinds of translation other than whole text translation. For example, the translator may be given a text of, say, 3,000 words, and is asked to sum up the main idea in 300 words in the target language. In this case, more than language transformation is needed.

As for the purpose of translation, let's quote Peter Newmark from his About Translation:

1) to contribute to the understanding and peace between nations, groups, and individuals; 2) to transmit knowledge in plain, appropriate and accessible language, in particular in relation to technology transfer; 3) to explain and mediate between cultures on the basis of common humanity, respecting their strengths, implicitly exposing their weaknesses; 4) to translate the world's great books, the universal works in which the human spirit is enshrined and lives; 5) as a general aid or as a skill required in the acquisition of a foreign language.

2. Criteria of Translation

The activity of translating in China began thousands of years ago when people of different tribes and ethnic groups speaking different languages and dialects communicated with each other. So China has a long history of practice in translation. And later the translation of Buddhist scripture made great contribution to Chinese culture. Xuanzang (玄奘) alone presided over the translation of more than a thousand volumes of Buddhist scriptures. Many translators summed up their experience and raised standards of translation. Zhi Qian (支谦) pointed out in 《法句经序》 that "佛言,依其义不用饰,取其法不以严。其传经者,当令易晓,勿失厥义,是则为善",emphasizing the conveyance of the original meaning and expressiveness of the translation. Dao An (道安) of the Eastern Jin Dynasty also warned translators on guard against 五失本 ("five losses": five ways of losing the original essence in translation) in 《摩诃钵罗若波罗蜜经钞序》.* The "five losses" in improper translation he mentioned are: 1) unnecessary reversion of word order, 2) added description (which does not exist in the original text), 3) cutting of repeated wording (necessary as religious scriptures for prayers), 4) omission of repetition of certain conclusive messages, and 5) cutting of contents repeated as introduction to a new topic. We can see that he emphasized the importance of following the original text faithfully.

Ma Jianzhong (马建忠) is remembered not only for his contribution in writing the first Chinese grammar book 《马氏文通》but also for making important remarks about translation based on the comparison between European languages and Chinese. He held that the translator should see to it that:

^{*} See《中国译学理论史稿》(陈福康著, 上海外语教育出版社, 1992)

所有相当之实义,委曲推究,务审其音声之高下,析其字句之繁简,尽其文体之变态,及其义理精深奥折之所由然。夫如是,则一书到手,经营反复,确知其意旨之所在,而又摹写其神情,仿佛其语气,然后心悟神解,振笔而书,译成之文,适如其所译而止,而曾无毫发出入于其间,夫而后能使阅者所得之益与观原文无异,是则为善译也已。

According to him, the translator should carefully read and analyze the source text to get the real meaning, the structure, the style, the spirit, the tone, and the sound effect before he begins to translate. Actually he also mentioned that the effect of the translation on the target readers should be the same as that of the original text on its readers.

The most popular and acclaimed criterion was the three characters: 信, 达, 雅 (usually translated as "faithfulness", "expressiveness", and "elegance/refinement") raised by Yan Fu (严复). He said in 《天演论·译例言》:

"译"事三难:信、达、雅。求其信已大难矣,顾信矣不达,虽译犹不译也,则 达尚焉。……译文取明深义,故词句之间,时有所颠倒附益,不斤斤于字比句次, 而意义则不倍本文。……至原文词理本深,难于共喻,则当前思后衬,以显其意。 凡此经营,皆以为达,为达即以为信也。《易》曰:修辞立诚。子曰:辞达而已。 又曰:言之无文,行之不远。三者乃文章正轨,亦即为译事楷模。故信、达而 外,求其尔雅。

The three characters have been regarded as guiding principles of translation for many years in China. However, the content summed up in the three characters is very general or even sweeping, especially the first character 信 or "faithfulness". In what way can a translation be considered as "faithful"? There have been many interpretations of them over the years. Professor Wang Zuoliang (王佐良) explained the three characters raised by Yan Fu as follows: 他之所谓"信"是指为读者准确传达原作的内容,"达"指尽量运用他们所习见的表达方式,"雅"是通过艺术地再现和加强原作的风格特色来吸引他们。

Modern scholars also raised different criteria:

译书自以能存真为第一要义……最好一面极力求不失原意,一面要译文流畅。

——郑振铎