LANGUAGE AND CULTURE
Contexts in Translating

语言与文化
——翻译中的语境

Eugene A. Nida

外教社

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出 版 说 明

　　近年来,国内翻译研究取得了很大进展,有关翻译研究的丛书也出了多套。不过,长期以来,国内引进的原版翻译著作匮乏,不少研究都是根据二手资料;另外,学习翻译专业的研究生人数越来越多,这种状况若继续存在,将十分不利于学科的发展和翻译人才的培养。鉴于此,上海外语教育出版社约请了多名国内翻译研究著名学者分别开列出最值得引进的国外翻译研究论著的书目,并对这些书目进行整理、排序,最终确定了准备引进的正式书单。该丛书涉及的论著时间跨度大,既有经典,也有新论;内容的覆盖面也相当广泛,既有翻译本体的研究,也有跨学科的研究。这套丛书的引进将会满足翻译专业研究生教学原版参考书和翻译理论研究的需要。

　　上海外语教育出版社谨以此丛书献给我国的翻译学界。

"国外翻译研究丛书"专家委员会

借 鉴 和 创 造
（代序）

  上海外语教育出版社从成立以来一直是我国外语教育最优秀的后勤部和侦调部。因为它不但为我国各个层次（尤其本科与研究生层次）的外语教育提供了多种高水平的教材、教参和工具书，而且还出版了多学科、多语种和多系列的中文版和外文版的学术著作，比如"现代语言学丛书"、"牛津应用语言学丛书"、"美国文学史论译丛"、"外国文学史丛书"、"剑桥文学指南丛书"、"当代英语语言学丛书"以及列入国家及教育部规划的人文社科重点项目的外国语言文学、文化等方面的图书等。为了适应我国现代化建设和教育改革的需要，还出版了一批国际金融、对外贸易、涉外保险、国际经济法、国际新闻和管理科学等方面的教材与专著。这些著作在外语的学科建设与学术研究以及复合型人才培养等方面都在发挥着强有力的侦察、调研和指导作用。这是外语界有口皆碑的。

  随着中外文化交流的纵深发展以及我国现代化建设对人才的需求，对比语言学和翻译学近些年来在我国有了较快的发展，最突出的证据就是①外语类硕士博士点上研究对比与翻译方向的学生在逐年迅速增多，而且我们的高校已经有了翻译学院和翻译系（当然还太少）。②外语专业的学生考中文、法律等其他人文社科专业的硕士、博士以及反方向的走向已经起步。这种跨学科的人才已成为人才资源竞争的最主要对象，因此发展趋势定会看好。上海外语教育出版社为适应这种高层次人才培养和新学科建设的需要，不但积极出版国内关于对比研究和翻译研究的专著和论文集，最近又推

出了原版"国外翻译研究丛书",这套丛书时间跨度从古代到现代,所选书目皆为译学发展史上有里程碑作用的名家名著,堪称译学经典。他们计划分批出版,以满足读者的需求。

这套丛书的出版首先可以解决国内翻译教学原版参考书多年匮乏的困难,真可以说是我国翻译教学与理论研究的及时雨。我想学习和关心这个学科的师生和其他人士定会对这套书的引进为之欢呼,为之祝贺。

这套丛书的价值还在于能大大促进我国翻译学科建设的发展。译学学科的发展依赖于研究者在三个方面的深入研究和结合。一是对本国译学的继承性研究;二是对外国译学的借鉴性研究;三是对翻译实践和翻译教学中新问题的探索性研究。只有这三者研究深入并结合好了,才可能从经验与技巧逐步升华为具有科学性的译学理论。这三个方面的研究,改革开放以来,在我国已取得了很显著的成就,这是有目共睹的。翻译学在我国已于 20 世纪 80 年代末有了独立学科的初级形态,90 年代又有了新的发展,对学科的独立性以及理论体系的结构与功能有了更多的探讨。依照学科建设的规律和研究现状,我们尚需在上述三个方面加大研究力度,而这套丛书就是借鉴性研究的主要资源。从这个角度讲,这套丛书的引进也是我国文化基本建设的重要工程之一。

在新的世纪,文化(包括各类科学技术)会多方面快速深入人类的日常生活,各国之间的交流会空前深广,因此翻译的功能会逐步扩大,实用性翻译人才的需求量定会空前增加。这就要求我们除了做好高层次研究型人才的培养以外,还应十分重视实用性人才的培养和应用译学的研究。我想出版社一定会关注和引导译学建设的理论研究与应用的发展趋势。

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杨自俭

青岛海洋大学六三居室

2001 年 3 月 28 日

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出　版　前　言

著名语言学家、翻译家和翻译理论家尤金·奈达博士于 1914 年 11 月 11 日生于美国俄克拉何马市,1943 年获密歇根大学语言学博士学位,接着长期在美国圣经学会主持翻译部的工作,1980 年退休后任顾问。

奈达博士在美国和世界翻译界都有广泛的影响,是一位备受推崇的"长青学者"(evergreen scholar)。这位学者具有两个方面的特点:

第一、理论和实践相结合。他先后访问过近 90 个国家和地区,进行翻译讲座,培训翻译人员,参加翻译学术研讨活动,指导翻译实践与翻译教学,具有丰富的理论素养和实际经验。他单独与合作出版了 40 多部书,发表论文 250 余篇。在有关翻译是技术/艺术还是科学的问题上,他在本书的序言中重申了自己的观点,表明了他在理论与实践关系上的正确立场。

第二、虚心学习,不断进取。尽管 87 岁高龄,但奈达博士老骥伏枥,仍继续坚持研究、写作和外出讲学或参加学术会议,忙得不亦乐乎。有的人退休后患"退休综合症",他却说:"我要是早退休 15 年才好!"奈达博士特别喜欢他的读者或听众向他提问,欢迎批评或建议,不因为自己是知名学者就固执己见。这一点在本书中也有所反映。

总的看来,奈达博士的翻译研究途径表现出从语言学到社会语言学的特点,大体上可以分为三个时期:

从 40 年代到 60 年代初为第一个时期,重点在语言学,以分析词语和句子结构为主题,主要作品有 *Morphology: The Descriptive*

Analysis of Words（1946），"The analysis of grammatical con-stituents"，*Language*（1948），*A Synopsis of English Syntax*（1960）等。

从 60 年代中期到 70 年代中期为第二个时期，重点研究"等效理论"，代表作品有 *Toward a Science of Translating*（1964），*The Theory and Practice of Translation*（1969）等。

从 80 年代初到现在为第三个时期，重点是从多学科角度研究翻译，重要作品有 *Meaning Across Cultures*（1981），*Sign，Sense，and Translation*（1983），*Style and Discourse in Translating*（1983），*From One Language to Another*（1986），*Social Lin-guistics and Translating*（1986），*Understanding English*（1997），*The Sociolinguistics of Interlingual Communication*（1999），*Language and Culture：Contexts in Translating*（2001）等。

本书由三部分组成：一是作者 1993 年在我社出版的《语言、文化与翻译》(*Language，Culture and Translating*)一书的修订版；二是根据作者 1999 年在中国 10 余所著名外语院校巡回讲学的讲稿整理而成的《翻译中的语境》(*Contexts in Translating*)；三是作者近几年同中国记者、专家和朋友的部分谈话或通信。在这部新著中，奈达博士从不同侧面分析了语言与文化的密切联系，并进而从语境角度论述怎样处理翻译中的种种关系和问题。此外，他还在科学与技术／艺术、理论与实践以及改进翻译教学等问题上阐明或重申了自己的观点。这些不仅对我们正确地了解和研究奈达有重要意义，对我国的整个翻译理论研究也有重要参考价值。

To my wife

Maria Elena Fernández-Miranda,
My colleague and inspiration

Preface

Combining two books into one publication may seem to be a strange way of presenting readers with strategic help about one of the most crucial activities in our present world, namely, interlingual communication, traditionally divided into translating and interpreting and studied as both a skill and a science. Effective translating and interpreting from one language to another is a highly developed skill and must be learned primarily as a skill by imitating the experience of proven experts. But the activity and the resulting texts produced by translators and interpreters can and should also be studied as a science, in the same way that any human activity can be analyzed scientifically.

The present volume is a combination of two complementary and supplementary books: *Language, Culture and Translating*, published in 1993 by the Shanghai Foreign Language Education Press, and *Contexts in Translating*, being published by Benjamins, Amsterdam, the Netherlands. The first book focuses primarily on the details of correspondences between languages while the second tries to provide help in understanding different scientific factors in interlingual communication. There is, accordingly, some overlapping, but this should be taken as reinforcement of basic concepts and not as contradictions. In fact, it may be particularly useful to note how essentially the same language structures can be viewed from different functional perspectives.

One of the very important features of this book is the interviews and letters that highlight the issues of practice in translating and of the underlying linguistic structures that make interlingual communication possible.

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Eugene A. Nida
January, 2001

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Preface to Part One

This book on *Language*, *Culture*, *and Translating* has its origin in a series of lectures on translating given at the Shanghai International Studies University in the spring of 1989 and later that same year at the Maurice Thorez Institute of Languages and Translating in Moscow. The approach is essentially practical, although the principal theories of translating are discussed in Chapter 10.

This book has four main emphases: (1) the need to understand thoroughly the source text, (2) the close relation between language and culture, (3) the necessity to focus attention on style and discourse, and (4) the relevance of insights coming from several different disciplines.

Since a majority of failures in translating seemingly result from an inadequate understanding of the text in the source language, three chapters are given to a description of the crucial semantic and formal features of lexemes (words and idioms), syntax, and discourse. Unfortunately, many translators have only very hazy ideas about how languages are structured and how to explore the meanings of words and combinations of words.

The role of language within a culture and the influence of the culture on the meanings of words and idioms are so pervasive that scarcely any text can be adequately understood without careful consideration of its cultural background. Even though only one chapter is given to the specific subject of Language and Culture, there are constant references in other chapters to the relevance of culture both in understanding the source text and in representing the meaning in a target language-culture.

The significance of style and discourse and their role in associative (or connotative) meaning is a major concern of this book. Certain mistakes in terminology or grammar can be forgiven, but a failure to reflect the spirit and dynamic of a source document is a "mortal sin".

Many people assume that the only prerequisites for translating are a bilingual dictionary, an exhaustive encyclopedia, and an ability to speak and write two languages. But ability to translate

also depends on a number of very important insights which come directly or indirectly from several different disciplines, e. g. cultural anthropology, linguistics, psychology, communication theory, and literary analysis. It is the interdisciplinary approach to interlingual communication which contributes the major new insights for effective translating and interpreting.

In the preparation of this volume I have been greatly helped by the criticism and insights of my colleague Johannes P. Louw, and I am especially indebted to my editorial associate Karen Munson for her advice on how to make this volume more meaningful and useful.

Eugene A. Nida

New York, 1991

Chapter 1
Paradoxes of Translating

Translating is a complex and fascinating task. In fact, I. A. Richards (1953) has claimed that it is probably the most complex type of event in the history of the cosmos. And yet, translating is so natural and easy that children seem to have no difficulty in interpreting for their immigrant parents. These children normally do very well until they have gone to school and have learned about nouns, verbs, and adverbs. Then they often seem tongue-tied because they try to match the words and grammar rather than the content.

Because of experience in learning a foreign language in school, most persons assume that literalness in translating means faithfulness to the text, even though close, literal renderings are often seriously misleading. In English, for example, the repetition of a word usually implies emphasis, but not in Bahasa Indonesia, where repetition only signals plurality. In the Quechua dialect of Bolivia the suffix -*runa* marks the preceding noun as plural, but in conversation Quechua speakers use the suffix only at the beginning of a section and do not constantly repeat it, as is the case with the plural suffix in Spanish. Accordingly, a literal translation which represents every plural -*s* in Spanish by the Quechua suffix -*runa* is regarded by Quechua speakers as being not only strange but even an insult to the intelligence of hearers.

Because of the many discrepancies between meanings and structures of different languages, some persons have insisted that translating is impossible, and yet more and more translating is done and done well. Those who insist that translating is impossible are usually concerned with some of the more marginal features of figurative language and complex poetic structures. The use of figurative language is universal, but the precise figures of speech in one language rarely match those in another.

It is true that in some languages one cannot say "My God", because native speakers insist that no one can "possess" God, but a person can speak about "the God I worship" or "the God to whom I belong." Translating is simply doing the impossible well, regardless of the objections of such famous authors as Goethe, Schleiemacher, and Ortega y Gasset, who insisted that translating

is impossible and yet did not hesitate to have their own writings translated (Güttinger 1963).

Another paradox of translating is reflceted in the contention that translating is valid but paraphrase is wrong. In fact, all translating involves differing degrees of paraphrase, since there is no way in which one can successfully translate word for word and structure for structure. In Spanish *me fui* is literally 'I went myself,' in which *me* is a so-called reflexive pronoun, but this Spanish phrase can often be best translated into English as 'I left right away' or 'I got away quickly.' In English, as well as in most other European languages, one speaks of the 'heart' as being the center of emotions, but in many languages in West Africa a person 'loves with the liver' and in some of the indigenous languages of Central America people talk about 'loving with the stomach.' Since languages do not differ essentially in what they can say, but in how they say it, paraphrase is inevitable. What is important is the semantic legitimacy of the paraphrase.

A further paradox occurs in the widespread view that a translator should first produce a more or less literal rendering of the source text and then proceed to improve it stylistically. Style, however, is not the frosting on the cake, but an integral part of the process of interlingual communication. It must be built into the text right from the beginning. It is usually better to aim first at a stylistically satisfactory rendering of the source text and then review it carefully to "tighten it up" by analyzing and testing the correspondences. A few errors in the correspondences of lexical meaning are much more excusable than missing the spirit and aesthetic character of the source text.

Since translating is a skill which generally requires considerable practice, most people assume that it can be taught, and to an extent this is true. But it is also true that really exceptional translators are born, not made. Potential translators must have a high level of aptitude for the creative use of language, or they are not likely to be outstanding in their profession. Perhaps the greatest benefit from instruction in translating is to become aware of one's own limitations, something which a translator of Steinbeck's *Of Mice and Men* into Chinese should have learned. Then he would not have translated English *mule-skinner* into a Chinese phrase meaning 'a person who skins the hide off of mules.'

For many people the need for human translators seems paradoxical in this age of computers. Since modern computers can be

loaded with dictionaries and grammars, why not let computers do the work? Computers can perform certain very simple interlingual tasks, providing there is sufficient pre-editing and post-editing. But neither advertising brochures nor lyric poetry can ever be reduced to the kind of logic required for computer programs. Computer printouts of translations can often be understood, if the persons involved already know what the text is supposed to say. But the results of machine translating are usually in an unnatural form of language and sometimes just plain weird. Furthermore, real improvements will not come from merely doctoring the program or adding rules. The human brain is not only digital and analogic, but it also has a built-in system of values which gives it a componentially incalculable advantage over machines. Human translators will always be necessary for any text which is stylistically appealing and semantically complex — which includes most of what is worth communicating in another language.

The most difficult texts to translate are not, however, highly literary productions, but rather those texts which say nothing, the type of language often used by politicians and delegates to international forums. In fact, a group of professional translators at the United Nations headquarters in New York City have insisted that the most difficult text to translate is one in which the speaker or writer has attempted to say nothing. The next most difficult type of text is one filled with irony or sarcasm, since in a written text the paralinguistic clues to the meaning are usually much more difficult to detect than when someone is speaking. And perhaps the third most difficult type of text is a book or article on translating in which the illustrative examples rarely match. In fact, a book on translating almost always requires extensive adaptation.

One of the most surprising paradoxes of translating is that there is never a completely perfect or timeless translation. Both language and culture are always in the process of change. Furthermore, language is an open system with overlapping meanings and fuzzy boundaries — the bane of logicians but the delight of poets. The indeterminacy of language is part of the price that must be paid for creativity and for the new insights which come through symbolic reinterpretation of human experience.

Some people imagine that the greatest problem in translating is to find the right words and constructions in the receptor or target language. On the contrary, the most difficult task for the translator is to understand thoroughly the designative and associa-