

英语读物

# ON TRANSLATION

with special reference to Chinese and English

(论 翻 译)

Jin Di

Eugene A. Nida

中国对外翻译出版公司

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1984年6月北京



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## 前 言

过去我国关于翻译的书籍，多数只限于翻译技巧的探讨，我在翻译实践与翻译教学工作中，深感需要进一步的理论指导。三中全会以来蓬勃开展学术研究的浓厚空气，为理论研究工作创造了良好的条件，使我能在四年前结合当时教学工作的需要，开始整理手边积累的材料加以编写，作为朝这个方向迈步的一个尝试。

在这项工作中，我得到了领导和国内外学术界的积极支持。国外语言学界近三十年来对翻译理论做了不少探讨工作，虽然国外的一些专著由于种种原因不很适宜直接用作教材，但是在理论观点方面颇有值得借鉴之处，尤其是美国奈达博士(Dr. Eugene A. Nida)提出的“动态对等”论，以及他运用现代信息理论和符号学观点解决翻译理论中一些关键问题的办法，有许多值得吸收的合理成分，对我的理论研究工作起了一定的推进作用。特别难得的是我去年在美期间，奈达博士出于对翻译理论事业的关心和对中国人民的热情友好，积极地亲自参加了本书的编写工作，使它能迅速完稿，作为中美学术交流的成果和国内外同好见面，这是非常值得庆幸的。

本书虽然探讨了一些主要的翻译理论问题，总的目的还是直接为提高翻译实践能力服务的，从内容和实例的安排上都可以看出来，这是它有别于西方一些距离实践比较远的理论著作的一个主要特点。可是与我国某些讨论翻译的著作相比，本书的特点还是比较侧重理论，某些章节甚至还嫌实例不够，我希望以后能另写一本系统性更强、实例更多的书作为续篇。事实上，四年前所订的计划中本来包括从词汇、句法、文体、特殊表达法等方面比较系统地探讨翻译难点的篇章，这次因为要突出主要的理论问题，不能不把这些篇章大大压缩，准备将这一部分的系统讨论放在下一本书中。这样

安排还能使我有机会在研究过程中更多地听取广大读者的意见，以便及时修正错误，提高认识。这本书既是一个尝试，错误和不妥之处在所难免，很需要读者随时提出批评，不论在理论问题上或是个别词句问题上，都是欢迎的。

此书能及时完成，除了在英文序言中已经提到的中外朋友、学者的热心帮助外，还应该归功于许多师友的积极支持，而这次能及时在国内出版，则是同中国对外翻译出版公司同志们的大力支持分不开的，特此表示衷心的感谢。

天津外国语学院

金隄

1983年3月



## Preface

This book is the outgrowth of the first author's years of experience in lecturing on translation theory and practice at Nankai University and the Foreign Languages Institute of Tianjin, China. His personal experience as a translator and translation consultant has enriched the presentation with significant examples of translation problems and solutions. The second author has contributed the theoretical framework, as reflected in a number of his books and technical articles.

The primary purpose of this volume is to provide a theoretical orientation and practical help to translators dealing with the numerous difficulties involved in translating from English into Chinese and from Chinese into English. In addition, this material can be useful to persons concerned with the broader implications of interlingual communication, since the underlying basis for the principles and procedures is essentially sociosemiotic in that the concept of dynamic equivalence in translating focuses on the meaning for receptors.

The *pinyin* system is followed in this book in the transliteration of Chinese words, but for the convenience of people not familiar with the system, usually a hyphen is placed between syllables (e.g., *pin-yin*).

The first author wishes to express his special thanks to the United Board for Christian Higher Education in Asia for making possible his research and study in the United States. He is also indebted to Drexel University, the University of Pennsylvania, and Yale University for making academic facilities available to him.

He is also grateful to the Warden and Fellows of All Souls

College, Oxford University, for the Visiting Fellowship they offered him just at the time when this work was being completed. It gave him an opportunity to discuss the problems involved with many scholars in England, particularly Sir William Empson, Mr. Rom Harré, Dr. David Hawkes and Professor Rodney Needham, who read the typescript and made valuable suggestions for improvement. Likewise, he is deeply indebted to Professor and Mrs. Hans H. Frankel of Yale University for reading and commenting on the typescript as well as offering him their generous hospitality in their house while he was working on it.

A special word of appreciation is due those colleagues and friends who read and commented on various parts of the work before the final, co-authored stage, without whose kind encouragement it might never have reached it.

A word of thanks is also due Dr. Louis Dorn and Mrs. Leila Wright who have provided so much valuable help in the editing and typing of the manuscript.

**Jin Di** **Eugene A. Nida**  
**Tianjin, China** **Greenwich, Ct., USA**

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## CHAPTER ONE MORE FREEDOM FOR THE TRANSLATOR

### 本章内容提要

翻译理论应当能帮助翻译工作者正确掌握翻译的规律，从而较快地达到庄子描写的庖丁解牛那样得心应手，游刃有余的自由境界。

有人认为翻译无所谓理论，但实际上每个人的翻译实践都有一些指导原则，区别只在于自觉与不自觉，在于那些原则是否符合客观规律。

翻译理论需要回答三个基本问题：（一）翻译的性质；（二）翻译的标准；（三）翻译过程中一般有什么困难。本书试图通过汉、英互译及其它实例，对这些问题的主要方面进行探讨。

A delightful Chinese parable of twenty-four centuries ago is perhaps the most vivid and effective account of the intimate relationships of skill, theory, and art:

Once Lord Wen-hui had a cook cut up a bullock for him. So rhythmical were his movements — the thrust of his hand, the heave of his shoulder, the stamp of his foot, and the movement of his knee — and so well did they harmonize with the swish of his knife, that the whole performance was like the graceful dance of the Mulberry Grove or the sublime music of Jing-shou.



"Ha! Bravo!" cried the Lord Wen-hui. "How did you attain such skill?"

"My lord," replied the cook, laying down his knife, "I devote myself to *dao*, which is something more than skill. When I first began my work, I had my eyes riveted on the carcass; after three years I was no longer concerned about the body of the animal in its entirety. Now instead of using my eyes, I depend upon my spirit, which remains active while my senses are virtually idle. Following the law of nature, I strike at wide crevices and pierce through large openings. I always guide myself by what is intrinsic to the nature and constitution of the ox, and never force a knotty joint, still less the big bones.

"A good butcher changes his knife once a year: he cuts. An ordinary butcher, once a month: he hacks. But I have had this knife of mine for nineteen years and have cut up thousands of oxen, and yet its edge is as sharp as if fresh from the whetstone. How is that possible? Well, the edge of the knife has no thickness, but a joint always has spaces within it, and if you insert an object without thickness into a space which is empty, you will naturally have plenty of room in which to turn it about. That is how I have managed through nineteen years of use to keep my knife always as sharp as if fresh from the whetstone.

"Even so, when I come to a complicated place and find it hard to deal with, I have to be very cautious. I fix my eye on it and stay my hand, until at a slight movement of my knife the whole thing yields and flops to the ground with a thump. Then I look around, knife in hand, but not without a sense of pride, before I wipe my knife and sheathe it."

"How wonderful!" said Wen-hui. "What you have said is really a lesson in the art of life."

The clumsiness of a beginner, with his eyes "riveted on the

carcass," is overcome when he acquires sufficient skill through years of practice, but it is only when he becomes devoted to *dao*, which is "something more than skill," that he is able to do his job so expertly. What ancient Chinese philosophers generally meant by *dao* may be open to debate, but in this context there seems to be no doubt that it refers to the law of nature and man's mastery of it. The author of the parable, the famous mystic Zhuang-zi, was explicitly advocating the importance of following this law of nature — in other words, adding to man's skill a theoretical mastery which would ultimately lead to art.

The nobleman, Wen-hui, readily saw the implications of this parable for the art of life. The translator's deduction can be far more modest, but it does suggest that, in any activity, there must be certain underlying principles which relate to the nature of the task, and that an integrated set of such principles constitutes an underlying theory, which can assist translators in doing a more expert piece of work. Such a theory can provide a means of doing something not only with skill, but also with artistic competence, since one can far more readily see the way in which all the parts fit together in a harmonious manner. The study of theory can, indeed, be harmful, if it is not based on the reality of practical experience. If, however, one understands the theory of translation as essentially a description of those principles which are intrinsic to the task, then only the lack of a theory can really be harmful to a translator.

There is no doubt about the fact that the truly effective use of language involves skill, resulting usually from years of practice. Most ordinary uses of language are automatic. A speaker is normally only aware of certain thoughts and then the sounds which come out of his mouth. The processes of encoding thoughts into sounds are largely automatic, but in contrast with intralingual communication, translation (which is simply a form of interlingual communication) requires concentrated attention and awareness. One must see the whole of a discourse, as well

as recognize how the parts fit together. It is the combination of the broad picture and the numerous details which not only implies, but also requires, a theory as to what one should do and why.

The right combination of skill, acquired through practice, and a theory, developed by understanding of the task, should lead to aesthetic results. The cook's performance in the Chinese parable exhibited a rhythmic quality, and in translation, the blend of skill and theory can pave the way for sensitivity to the beauty and power of language, which will transform the results from perfunctory reproduction to an aesthetic production.

There is no doubt that effective translation involves skill, but this skill can be acquired more readily and meaningfully by means of an adequate theory. Effective translation is also obviously an art, in somewhat the same sense that great literature is always a matter of language art. But to understand how skill and art combine to produce first-rate translations that are both effective in communicating the content and acceptable to receptors, one does need a theory of translation to explain the nature of good translations and how they can be best produced.

A theory of translation, as expression of *dao*, is only the elucidation of the reality which lies behind appearances. In a sense, a theory is only organized insights gained from experience. A theory simply explains how each problem can be best seen in terms of the larger whole, and how the whole is made up of integrated parts. It is of course true that some translators produce outstanding translations without necessarily being aware of any particular theory of translation. This is also true of some virtuosos who produce outstanding performances of music with only a very limited knowledge of music theory. But truly great music is normally the result of a creative blend of skill, theory, and art.

Some persons object to a theory of translation, first of all, because it seems unnecessary or even misleading. This is serious-



ly true of some wrong theories of translation, but everyone has a theory of translation as to what one should do, how it should be done, and why. Such a theory may be overt or covert; it may be well defined or only vaguely felt. The truth of the matter is that everyone does have a theory of what one should do in translating, and many of these theories are quite inadequate. Good translations inevitably represent effective theories—in other words, organized sets of principles and procedures. A theory, however, is more than simply a list of rules, for no list could ever cover everything which a translator must or can do. The theory is an organized set of principles pointing the way to finding proper solutions.

Some persons object to a theory of translation because the evidence available with regard to such a theory is highly fragmentary. It is likely to consist of "rival hypotheses, intuitive conjectures and bundles of images" (George Steiner, 1975). Others object to the study of translation because they insist that translating is a perfectly normal and natural process, and that anyone who knows two languages can obviously be a good translator. This is not true. Many people may be fully competent in two or three languages and yet produce incredibly inadequate translations. One certainly would not say that an individual who possessed plenty of woodworking tools would necessarily be a good cabinetmaker or a designer of furniture.

Inadequate translations almost always reflect a wrong theory. Literal translations result from a wrong idea as to why one must sacrifice the target language to the source language. On the other hand, highly paraphrastic translations result from a theory of interlingual communication which justifies the addition of extraneous material or the need to "improve" on the original by rewriting it.

Even those who may write well in their own mother tongue may not be satisfactory translators because of a wrong theory as to the nature of translating. Arthur Waley once edited a vol-

ume in which a number of British archaeologists undertook to translate articles by their German colleagues. They were all proficient writers of English when expressing their own ideas, and the subject matter of the articles which they were to translate was perfectly familiar to them. "But one and all, they were unable to produce anything but the most abject translator's pidgin. The sight of German sentences put them completely out of their stride." And his conclusion was that "People...who write very well when expressing their own ideas tend (unless they have been to some extent schooled in translation) to lose all power of normal expression when faced with a foreign text" (Ivan Morris, 1970, p. 157).

Some persons fear a theory of translation because it seems to provide a more or less rigid set of rules which could stifle creativity. In reality, however, a proper theory of translation can mean freedom to produce meaningful results, for a theory explores the "why" and "how" of translation and not merely the "what." An adequate theory of translation indicates how one can justify creativity by finding the closest natural equivalent. This means generally discovering the balance between content and form and how this balance differs so much, depending on what is being translated — for example, an article on astrophysics, the text of a popular drama, or a work of fiction.

A practical theory of translation is increasingly strategic in our present world, especially in view of the fact that so many persons must increasingly be trained as translators, if the demand for adequate interlingual communication is to be satisfied. The need is growing exponentially, not only because of the explosion of information, particularly in areas of technology, but because rapid advances in transportation and communication are bringing people closer together. No longer can governments or businesses depend upon the happenstance of people being multilingual and being enticed into translation programs. The acute need for competent translators is being felt all over the

world, as reflected by the rapid development of national and international associations of translators and accrediting agencies. Perhaps the most crucial element in all of this is the widespread recognition that better-quality translations are essential in a world where misunderstanding can be disastrous.

Any practical theory of translation must attempt to answer three fundamental questions: (1) What is the nature of translation as linking together content and form? (2) What are the criteria for adequate and acceptable translations? (3) What are the problems which a translator ought to be able to recognize and resolve in order to produce a satisfactory translation?

The interrelations of these questions are highly complex. After all, interlingual communication, as described by I.A. Richards (1953, p. 250), is "very probably the most complex type of event yet produced in the evolution of the cosmos."

In this volume, it is impossible to deal with every and all phases of translation. Only brief mention is made of the history of translation, and there is no attempt to make a detailed analysis of various theories. But some of the more salient aspects of translation are treated in the following chapters, with special attention being given to relationships between Chinese and English.

Chapter two, entitled "Tackling the Task," deals primarily with some of the diverse approaches to the practice of translation, and then lists a number of requisites for translators. Chapter three, entitled "Translating Means Communicating," deals with the factors involved in communication (primarily in terms of source, message, and receptors) and the various functions of communication, analyzed in terms of the diverse focuses, whether upon receptors, the source, interpersonal relationships, or rhetorical structures and features.

Chapter four treats "Overcoming the Barriers" in terms of the translator's role, diversities of culture and language, and the typical problems produced by orthography, multiple mean-



ings of words, diverse categories of grammar, and different rhetorical devices. In chapter five, "Orientations in Translating," the focus is upon the problem of literal versus free translating, with special attention given to different levels of literalness and freedom, and the resolution of these problems in terms of a dynamic equivalent translation, defined in terms of the closest natural equivalent.

Chapter six, entitled "The Target Area," is designed to define the limits of acceptability in translation, primarily on the basis of readability versus accuracy, and the obvious impossibility of divorcing these two interrelated aspects of translation. Special attention is paid to the problem of communication load, and the extent to which unnaturalness tends to undermine accuracy and comprehension. Chapter seven explains how the fundamental procedure for arriving at the target area implies a thorough analysis of the source language text. Under the title "Taking the Text Apart," one can perhaps best understand the meaning of the source language text as a prelude to restructuring it in the target language. Chapter eight highlights the importance of the context both for understanding the source language text and for producing the closest natural equivalent in the target language. And finally, chapter nine outlines briefly a number of practical procedures which one needs to follow if efficient and satisfactory results are to be readily obtained.

Chapter four treats "Overcoming the Barriers," in terms of the translator's role, diversities of culture and language, and the typical problems produced by orthography, multiple meanings, and then lists a number of requisites for translators. Chapter three, entitled "Translating Means Communicating," deals with the factors involved in communication (primarily in terms of source, message, and receptors) and the various functions of communication, analyzed in terms of the diverse focuses, whether upon receptors, the source, interpersonal relationships, or rhetorical structures and features.

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