

英语方言汉译初探

DIALECTS IN LITERARY TRANSLATION
FROM ENGLISH INTO CHINESE

韩子满 著

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前言

作为文学作品中常见的一种语言现象,方言因为其地域性以及作为一种非标准语独特的语言及文体特征,常常对文学翻译工作者构成极其棘手而且常常是无法回避的挑战。如何在传达原作中方言字面意义的同时,又体现它在原文中的文体功能,是许多译者和译论研究者都关心的问题。然而尽管大量含有方言成分的文学作品已被或正被从一种语言翻译成另一种语言,理论上对方言翻译的探讨却并不多见。就作者所知,迄今为止,关于文学作品中方言的翻译,理论上零零散散的探讨多数都是经验总结,缺乏理论上的论证,其结论往往难以令人信服。

这显然是不正常的。作为文学翻译中一个比较特殊的难题,文学作品中方言的翻译是一个牵涉到语言学、文学、翻译学等许多学科理论的复杂问题,从当前文学翻译的现实来看,也是一个需要统一认识的问题。方言翻译之所以有别于一般的翻译,就是因为方言作为地域性非标准语,有着特殊的文化内涵和语言特性,在文学作品中具有特殊的艺术功能,而且在两种语言及其文学之间存在着相当大的差异。探讨方言翻译,首先必须从方言的这些特性和差异谈起,否则就不可能对方言翻译的问题作出客观的结论。现有的大多数关于方言翻译的讨论,致命的弱点就在于缺乏对两种语言及其文学间方言的研究与比较。

正是着意于克服这个弱点,本书力求在有限的篇幅内,对方

言的一般特征及其在文学中的运用作一个简单的探讨,并着重比较英汉两种语言间方言及其在文学中运用的异同;在此基础上,对当前文学作品中方言翻译的方法作一个简短的回顾和评价,确立文学作品中方言翻译的原则,最后提出了两种常见的方言翻译方法。这里讨论的主要是英文方言汉译的问题。

通过比较,不难发现,尽管方言及其在文学中的运用在英汉两种语言间有着诸多的相同或是相似之处,它们之间也存在着相当多的差异,正是这些差异决定了方言翻译的性质和特点。首先,英汉方言的差异体现在书面语与口语的差别上。英语各方言的口语与标准书面语之间的差别远较汉语中方言口语与书面标准语之间的差别为小,又由于英汉两种文字性质不同,这就导致了英汉文学作品中方言特点表现的差异,即在英语文学中,主要是通过对词汇拼写的处理来表现方言相对于标准语的语音变异,而在汉语文学中,方言特点则主要表现在对词汇的选择运用上,语音变异几乎表现不出,这样就从根本上否定了以汉语谐音字来翻译英语方言的方法。其次,英汉方言的差别还体现社会含义的不同上。在英语中,方言往往被当作一种“社会标志”(social marker),表现不同说话人地位及身份的差别。文学作品中(通篇使用方言者除外)的方言通常只局限于少数非主要人物,以表明他们社会地位之低和受教育之少;在汉语中情况比较复杂,不过总的来说,很难说方言就一定具有表明人物身份的作用,因此,那种认为英汉两种语言之间有“对等方言”(equivalent dialect),可以用一种汉语方言去翻译一种英语方言的主张是站不住脚的。再次,英汉方言的区别还体现在对方言理解能力的差别上。汉语各方言,尤其是南方各方言之间的差别,一般来说要比英语各方言间的差别大得多,由此就造成汉语文学作品中的方言成分远比英语文学中的方言成分更难以被读者接

受,这又从另一个侧面否定了方言对方言的方法。

因此,在方言翻译中,我们必须认识到,通常所说的“等值”或“忠实”的标准是很难达到的,原文在风格或语义方面某种程度的损失是不可避免的。因此,在翻译过程中,译者应根据自己的翻译目的和所译作品的具体情况,采取恰当的翻译方法,以尽量减少这种损失。我们在评价含有方言作品的汉译文时,也应秉持公正客观的态度,给予公允的评价。不过,忽视方言特点、使用谐音字或是以方言对方言,无疑都是不可取的。就中国读者当前的接受水平来看,译者翻译英语文学作品中的方言成分,还是采取淡化方言特点、使用通俗语汇的方法比较合适。实在难以采用这种方法时,添加注释也不失为一种选择。有些时候,则可以通俗语汇和注释并用,也可以取得良好的效果。

由于篇幅所限,本书对方言翻译的研究还不够深入,对于一些极有意义的问题,如方言翻译与国内文学创作观念的关系,以及方言翻译与方言文学的关系,未能加以阐述,而对这些关系的分析,无疑将会加深对方言翻译问题的认识。我将沿着这个方向努力,继续自己在这方面的研究。

本书在写作过程中,得到了我的导师、解放军外国语学院孙致礼教授的悉心指导,武汉大学郭著章教授也给予了无私的教诲,在此谨向两位译界前辈表示深深的谢意。当然,由于自身水平有限,书中肯定还有许多不当之处。这些纰漏完全是我的责任,同时我也期待着读者与同行的批评与指正。

韩子满

2004年4月

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Introduction

The use of regional dialects has been a recurrent phenomenon in literature both in English and Chinese. In the early days of a nation's civilization, when there was no standard speech, or even no written form of its language, every member of society was a dialect speaker. Writers were no exception. While writing, they would use the dialect of the part of the country where they happened to have been brought up or to live. In fact, the works they produced can all be classified as dialect literature. In English, the use of dialects in literature first appeared in a poem in Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales* in the fifteenth century. From then on, various dialects of the English language have been frequently employed in literature. From the fifteenth century to the eighteenth century, there was a gap during which very little English literature was written in dialects. (Potter, 1981: 19) The writing of dialect literature

then began to revive in the eighteenth century. In the nineteenth century, dialect literature flourished, especially in the north of England, because it satisfied the needs of the new industrial communities that were then coming into existence. In modern times, even though English has long been standardized, and has developed a rather mature form of literary language, dialects are still a favorite medium of literature for some great writers, who use them in order to achieve some artistic effects. All through history, dialects have played an undeniable role in both English and American literature.

When turning our attention to Chinese literature, we find the same situation. Chinese literature from its very beginning has made use of dialects. In the pre-Qin period, when the Chinese language was not standardized, dialects were widely used in poetical works. In *The Book of Songs* (《诗经》), the earliest anthology of 305 poems, and the first monument in Chinese poetic tradition, we find many instances of dialect use, especially in the section of *Songs* (《风》), which are mainly folk-songs from various vassal states. In Qu Yuan's poems, which were developed from

folk songs of the Chu kingdom in the Yangtze River area, we also find many instances of dialect use. Later in the Tang Dynasty, and from then on, novels and dramas began to flourish in Chinese literature. Dialects were frequently used in both these two genres. In modern times, dialects are used with even quicker frequency in Chinese literature. The use of them can be easily found in many literary works with a certain “flavor”, such as Lao She’s Beijing-flavored novels and plays(老舍的“京味”小说和戏剧).

Thus, we can see that dialects have always been a useful medium frequently employed in literature both in Chinese and English. Sometimes as an important stylistic feature, dialects can produce very wonderful artistic effects if masterly used. Though readers may fail to notice these effects in a literary work, critics rarely do. In the U. K. and the U. S., many books have been published on the use of dialects in works of such great writers as Thomas Hardy and Mark Twain. In China, though we have not seen a profusion of books of this kind, we do sometimes come across in books and periodicals critical articles on the use of dialects in literary works. For instance, the

use of dialects in *A Dream of Red Mansion* (《红楼梦》) has long been hotly debated among some critics. Generally speaking, however, it is believed that dialects in literature are an artistic merit. The use of them is supported by many people.

To translators, however, dialects in literary works often prove to be a hard nut to crack. They often present serious, sometimes even insuperable, difficulties in translation. To translate this non-standard form of language, none of the translation principles currently adopted seems to be fully applicable. For theories such as “dynamic equivalence”, the translation of dialects affords great challenges. They can hardly give a satisfactory account for the loss which is inevitable in dialect translation. “Translating,” as Nida believes, “consists in reproducing in the receptor language the closest natural equivalent of the source language, first in terms of meaning, secondly in terms of style.” (Nida, 1969: 12). In translating dialects, however, the translator finds that not only some of the stylistic significance of the dialects must be lost, but also the meanings of them at times turn to be difficult to be conveyed into the target language. On certain occasions, a writ-

er may have to use some dialect words to describe something that is peculiar to a region and has no equivalent expressions in the standard speech. In such cases, what a translator can do is at best to paraphrase, but rarely to translate. Dialects more often than not put the translator into a predicament. On the one hand, he is expected to strive for a translation as close to the original as possible; while on the other hand, on many occasions he has to resign to the loss in translating dialects. This undoubtedly is not an easy situation to deal with. As can be seen from many instances, the difficulty in translating dialects often leads to failures in translation. The translator either has no theoretical guidance while translating, so as to get a clear idea of the role dialect translation plays in the translation of the whole text, or cannot be certain what translating methods should be taken. Dialects, so we can see, pose great challenges to both translation theory and translation practice.

It is quite curious, however, that these challenges seem to receive so little attention from translation theories. Both in China and the West, theoretical discussions about dialect translation

are rather scarce. Most theorists tend to treat dialect translation under the category of the translation of style, and devote very small a proportion of their discussions to it. What's more, their treatment is usually no more than just some random remarks. Detailed discussions of dialect translation are quite rare. Only in Newmark (1988, 194) have we found several paragraphs particularly devoted to "*translation of dialect*" in the chapter of "*short item*". Besides, what is discussed in these random remarks is almost always centered on the translatability of dialects in literature. This is especially the case in the discussions of some Chinese theorists. In this book, however, the author holds that it is too simplistic to discuss the translatability of dialects only. To put forth any claims about translatability, the scholars have to offer their theoretical backings to justify their claims, which most of their discussions fail to do. Furthermore, it is to no avail to make such discussions. Dialects are there in a literary work, sometimes even as an important element of style. To translate the work, there is no way for the translator to circumvent them. Whether translatable or not, he has to translate them. With this reali-

zation, we can say that while talking about translation of dialects, our main focus should not be on their translatability, though it is also very important, but should be on: how can we find some ways to translate them to work out a satisfactory translation? and why should they be translated in these ways? To answer these two questions, we have to get some knowledge about the characteristics of dialects in general, and those in Chinese and English in particular, and about how dialects are used in literature both in Chinese and English. Random remarks or claims with little theoretical justification are not enough for a translator or theorist to deal with the complicated situation in dialect translation. Present discussions just cannot suffice the needs in actual translation.

This book is a tentative effort of the author to bridge the gap between the theoretical exploration and the actual practice of dialect translation. The author intends to make a brief study of dialects, especially dialects in literature in Chinese and English, and to search for some methods for translating them in literary works. To come to this end, features of dialects and dialect use in literature in general are examined, and compari-

sons will be made between their characteristics and literary uses in Chinese and English. On such a basis, methods currently adopted in dialect translation will be analyzed, and what the author believes to be good dialect translating methods will be proposed.

As to the criterion of dialect translation, we hold that none of the criteria currently adopted in the translation of standard language is fully applicable to the translation of dialects. The loss in dialect translation would fail any criteria, be it “faithfulness” or “equivalence”. Mostly as a deliberate stylistic feature, dialects in a literary work sometimes demand to be represented in the target language, which of course is very difficult. However, as is commonly acknowledged, translation, especially literary translation, is actually a matter of compromise. In dialect translation, we have to make do with the loss, on the condition that the semantic meaning of the dialects is conveyed, and that the stylistic significance of them is impossible to be represented in the target language in certain cases. “Faithfulness”, or “equivalence” has some limitations in the translation of this sub-standard variety of language. Only on some

levels can it be achieved. The effort to strive for it at all linguistic levels at the same time is rarely fruitful.