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论翻译的原则

ESSAY ON THE PRINCIPLES OF TRANSLATION

(英) Alexander Fraser Tytler 著



外语教学与研究出版社

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北京 BEIJING

图书在版编目(CIP)数据

论翻译的原则 = Essay on the Principles of Translation / (英)泰特勒
(Tytler, A. F.) 著. — 北京: 外语教学与研究出版社, 2007. 6

(外研社翻译研究文库)

ISBN 978-7-5600-6651-6

I. 论… II. 泰… III. 翻译理论—研究—英文 IV. H059

中国版本图书馆 CIP 数据核字 (2007) 第 076304 号

出 版 人: 于春迟

责任编辑: 车云峰

封面设计: 袁 璐

出版发行: 外语教学与研究出版社

社 址: 北京市西三环北路 19 号 (100089)

网 址: <http://www.fltrp.com>

印 刷: 北京市鑫霸印务有限公司

开 本: 650×980 1/16

印 张: 16

版 次: 2007 年 6 月第 1 版 2008 年 2 月第 2 次印刷

书 号: ISBN 978-7-5600-6651-6

定 价: 24.90 元

* * *

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出版说明

1791年，英国爱丁堡大学历史学教授亚历山大·弗雷泽·泰特勒（Alexander Fraser Tytler, 1747–1814）在其所著的《论翻译的原则》(*Essay on the Principles of Translation*)一书中提出了著名的“翻译三原则”，标志着西方译学研究从此走上了从理论推证理论的道路。故而，将《论翻译的原则》誉为西方现代译学研究的开山之作并不为过。

在国内学界，泰特勒的“翻译三原则”几乎人人耳熟能详，正如严复的“信、达、雅”一样如雷贯耳。但遗憾的是，由于本书出版较早，国内未曾出版过，故读过原著者寥寥，学界不得不转来转去地二手引用。有鉴于此，我们决定在国内影印出版本书，以扭转原著难觅的局面。

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INTRODUCTION

ALEXANDER FRASER TYTLER, LORD WOODHOUSELEE, author of the present essay on Translation, and of various works on Universal and on Local History, was one of that Edinburgh circle which was revolving when Sir Walter Scott was a young probationer. Tytler was born at Edinburgh, October 15, 1747, went to the High School there, and after two years at Kensington, under Elphinston—Dr. Johnson's Elphinston—entered Edinburgh University (where he afterwards became Professor of Universal History). He seems to have been Elphinston's favourite pupil, and to have particularly gratified his master, "the celebrated Dr. Jortin" too, by his Latin verse.

In 1770 he was called to the bar; in 1776 married a wife; in 1790 was appointed Judge-Advocate of Scotland; in 1792 became the master of Woodhouselee on the death of his father. Ten years later he was raised to the bench of the court of session, with his father's title—Lord Woodhouselee. But the law was only the professional background to his other avocation—of literature. Like his father, something of a personage at the Royal Society of Edinburgh, it was before its members that he read the papers which were afterwards cast into the present work. In them we have all that is still valid of his very considerable literary labours. Before it appeared, his effect on his younger contemporaries in Edinburgh had already been very marked—if we may judge by Lockhart. His encouragement undoubtedly helped to speed Scott on his way, especially into that German romantic region out of which a new Gothic breath was breathed on the Scottish thistle.

It was in 1790 that Tytler read in the Royal Society

his papers on Translation, and they were soon after published, without his name. Hardly had the work seen the light, than it led to a critical correspondence with Dr. Campbell, then Principal of Marischal College, Aberdeen. Dr. Campbell had at some time previous to this published his Translations of the Gospels, to which he had prefixed some observations upon the principles of translation. When Tytler's anonymous work appeared he was led to express some suspicion that the author might have borrowed from his Dissertation, without acknowledging the obligation. Thereupon Tytler instantly wrote to Dr. Campbell, acknowledging himself to be the author, and assuring him that the coincidence, such as it was, "was purely accidental, and that the name of Dr. Campbell's work had never reached him until his own had been composed. . . . There seems to me no wonder," he continued, "that two persons, moderately conversant in critical occupations, sitting down professedly to investigate the principles of this art, should hit upon the same principles, when in fact there are none other to hit upon, and the truth of these is acknowledged at their first enunciation. But in truth, the merit of this little essay (if it has any) does not, in my opinion, lie in these particulars. It lies in the establishment of those various subordinate rules and precepts which apply to the nicer parts and difficulties of the art of translation ; in deducing those rules and precepts which carry not their own authority *in gremio*, from the general principles which are of acknowledged truth, and in proving and illustrating them by examples."

Tytler has here put his finger on one of the critical good services rendered by his book. But it has a further value now, and one that he could not quite foresee it was going to have. The essay is an admirably typical dissertation on the classic art of poetic translation, and of literary style, as the eighteenth century understood it ; and even where it accepts Pope's Homer or Melmoth's Cicero in a

way that is impossible to us now, the test that is applied, and the difference between that test and our own, will be found, if not convincing, extremely suggestive. In fact, Tytler, while not a great critic, was a charming dilettante, and a man of exceeding taste; and something of that grace which he is said to have had personally is to be found lingering in these pages. Reading them, one learns as much by dissenting from some of his judgments as by subscribing to others. Woodhouselee, Lord Cockburn said, was not a Tusculum, but it was a country-house with a fine tradition of culture, and its quondam master was a delightful host, with whom it was a memorable experience to spend an evening discussing the *Don Quixote* of Motteux and of Smollett, or how to capture the aroma of Virgil in an English medium, in the era before the Scottish prose Homer had changed the literary perspective north of the Tweed. It is sometimes said that the real art of poetic translation is still to seek; yet one of its most effective demonstrators was certainly Alexander Fraser Tytler, who died in 1814.

The following is his list of works :

Piscatory Eclogues, with other Poetical Miscellanies of Phineas Fletcher, illustrated with notes, critical and explanatory, 1771; The Decisions of the Court of Sessions, from its first Institution to the present Time, etc. (supplementary volume to Lord Kames's "Dictionary of Decisions"), 1778; Plan and Outline of a Course of Lectures on Universal History, Ancient and Modern (delivered at Edinburgh), 1782; Elements of General History, Ancient and Modern (with table of Chronology and a comparative view of Ancient and Modern Geography), 2 vols., 1801. A third volume was added by E. Nares, being a continuation to death of George III., 1822; further editions continued to be issued with continuations, and the work was finally brought down to the present time, and edited by G. Bell, 1875; separate editions have appeared of the ancient and modern parts, and an abridged edition in 1809 by

T. D. Hincks. To Vols. I. and II. (1788, 1790) of the *Transactions of the Royal Society of Edinburgh* Tytler contributed *History of the Royal Society of Edinburgh*, *Life of Lord-President Dundas*, and *An Account of some Extraordinary Structures on the Tops of Hills in the Highlands*, etc.; to Vol. V., *Remarks on a Mixed Species of Evidence in Matters of History*, 1805; *A Life of Sir John Gregory*, prefixed to an edition of the latter's works, 1788; *Essay on the Principles of Translations*, 1791, 1797; Third Edition, with additions and alterations, 1813; Translation of Schiller's "The Robbers," 1792; *A Critical Examination of Mr. Whitaker's Course of Hannibal over the Alps*, 1798; *A Dissertation on Final Causes*, with a *Life of Dr. Derham*, in edition of the latter's works, 1798; *Ireland Profiting by Example, or the Question Considered whether Scotland has Gained or Lost by the Union*, 1799; *Essay on Military Law and the Practice of Courts-Martial*, 1800; *Remarks on the Writings and Genius of Ramsay* (preface to edition of works), 1800, 1851, 1866; *Memoirs of the Life and Writings of the Hon. Henry Horne, Lord Kames*, 1807, 1814; *Essay on the Life and Character of Petrarch*, with Translation of Seven Sonnets, 1784; *An Historical and Critical Essay on the Life and Character of Petrarch*, with a Translation of a few of his Sonnets (including the above pamphlet and the dissertation mentioned above in Vol. V. of *Trans. Roy. Soc. Edin.*), 1812; *Consideration of the Present Political State of India*, etc., 1815, 1816. Tytler contributed to the "Mirror," 1779-80, and to the "Lounger," 1785-6.

Life of Tytler, by Rev. Archibald Alison, *Trans. Roy. Soc. Edin.*

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ESSAY ON THE PRINCIPLES OF TRANSLATION

INTRODUCTION

THERE is perhaps no department of literature which has been less the object of cultivation, than the *Art of Translating*. Even among the ancients, who seem to have had a very just idea of its importance, and who have accordingly ranked it among the most useful branches of literary education, we meet with no attempt to unfold the principles of this art, or to reduce it to rules. In the works of Quintilian, of Cicero, and of the Younger Pliny, we find many passages which prove that these authors had made translation their peculiar study ; and, conscious themselves of its utility, they have strongly recommended the practice of it, as essential towards the formation both of a good writer and an accomplished orator.¹ But it is much to be

¹ *Vertere Græca in Latinum, veteres nostri oratores optimum judicabant. Id se Lucius Crassus, in illis Ciceronis de oratore libris, dicit factitasse. Id Cicero fuâ ipse personâ frequentissimè præcipit. Quin etiam libros Platonis atque Xenophontis edidit, hoc genere translato. Id Messalæ placuit, multæque sunt ab eo scriptæ ad hunc modum orationes (Quinctil. Inst. Orat. l. 10, c. 5).*

Utile imprimis, ut multi præcipiunt, vel ex Græco in

regretted, that they who were so eminently well qualified to furnish instruction in the art itself, have contributed little more to its advancement than by some general recommendations of its importance. If indeed time had spared to us any complete or finished specimens of translation from the hand of those great masters, it had been some compensation for the want of actual precepts, to have been able to have deduced them ourselves from those exquisite models. But of ancient translations the fragments that remain are so inconsiderable, and so much mutilated, that we can scarcely derive from them any advantage.¹

To the moderns the art of translation is of greater importance than it was to the ancients, in the same proportion that the great mass of ancient and of modern literature, accumulated up to the present times, bears to the general stock of learning in the most enlightened periods of antiquity. But it is a singular consideration, that under the daily experience of the advantages of good translations, in opening to us all the

Latinum, vel ex Latino vertere in Græcum: quo genere exercitationis, proprietas splendorque verborum, copia figurarum, vis explicandi, præterea imitatione optimorum, similia inveniendi facultas paratur: simul quæ legentem fefellissent, transferentem fugere non possunt (*Plin. Epist.* l. 7, ep. 7).

¹ There remain of Cicero's translations some fragments of the *Œconomics* of Xenophon, the *Timæus* of Plato, and part of a poetical version of the *Phænomena* of Aratus.

stores of ancient knowledge, and creating a free intercourse of science and of literature between all modern nations, there should have been so little done towards the improvement of the art itself, by investigating its laws, or unfolding its principles. Unless a very short essay, published by M. D'Alembert, in his *Mélanges de Litterature, d'Histoire, &c.* as introductory to his translations of some pieces of Tacitus, and some remarks on translation by the Abbé Batteux, in his *Principes de la Litterature*, I have met with nothing that has been written professedly upon the subject.¹

¹ When the first edition of this Essay was published, the Author had not seen Dr. Campbell's new translation of the Gospels, a most elaborate and learned work, in one of the preliminary dissertations to which, that ingenious writer has treated professedly "Of the chief things to be attended to in translating." The general laws of the art as briefly laid down in the first part of that dissertation are individually the same with those contained in this Essay; a circumstance which, independently of that satisfaction which always arises from finding our opinions warranted by the concurring judgement of persons of distinguished ingenuity and taste, affords a strong presumption that those opinions are founded in nature and in common sense. Another work on the same subject had likewise escaped the Author's observation when he first published this Essay; an elegant poem on translation, by Mr. Francklin, the ingenious translator of Sophocles and Lucian. It is, however, rather an apology of the art, and a vindication of its just rank in the scale of literature, than a didactic work explanatory of its principles. But above all, the Author has to regret, that, in spite of his most diligent research, he has never yet been fortunate enough to meet with the work of a celebrated writer, professedly on the subject of translation, the treatise of M. Huet, Bishop of Avranches, *De optimo genere interpretandi*; of whose doctrines, however, he has some knowledge, from a pretty