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THE THEORY AND PRACTICE  
OF  
TRANSLATION

翻译理论与实践

EUGENE A. NIDA & CHARLES R. TABER



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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。

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# 借鉴和创造

## (代序)

上海外语教育出版社自成立以来一直是我国外语教育最优秀的后勤部和侦察部。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。

杨自俭

青岛海洋大学六三居室

2001年3月28日

## 出版前言

本书是继 *Toward a Science of Translating* 之后又一部论述翻译的经典著作,作者为尤金·奈达(Eugene A. Nida)和查尔斯·泰伯(Charles R. Taber)。尤金·奈达博士是美国著名的翻译理论家和语言学家,也是西方语言学翻译理论学派的代表人物之一,曾担任过美国语言学会的主席。查尔斯·泰伯博士是美国田纳西州以马内利宗教学院的著名教授。

翻译理论与实践的紧密结合是本书的主要特点。作者从《圣经》的不同翻译版本中选取了大量的语言实例,进行对比分析,并在每一章节后配备了问题,便于教学和探讨。众所周知,《圣经》的翻译历史很长,而且要涉及不同的语言和文化,涵盖多种文体形式,尽管本书选用的实例大都源自《圣经》,但这些例证却覆盖了翻译的方方面面,不仅具有说服力和代表性,且不失可读性和趣味性。本书旨在帮助翻译者在领会翻译理论精髓的同时,注意掌握翻译技巧和步骤。本书一方面对翻译问题进行了语言学分析,另一方面也指出翻译不仅是一门科学,也是一门技术,真正理想的翻译甚至还是一门艺术。

全书分为八章。第一章和第二章为宏观论述,扼要概括了在翻译过程中应优先考虑的问题,并探讨了翻译的本质所在。继而,作者将翻译过程分成了分析(analysis)、转换(transfer)、重组(restructuring)和检验(testing)四个阶段,依次进行了详细的阐述。第三章从语法分析角度,指出看似相同的语法结构却可能包含迥然不同的意义。第四章和第五章从指称意义和内涵意义的角度,对如何理解不同语境下的语义进行了举例论证。第六章说明了在将分析结果从源语转换成的语这一转换过程中,翻译者可能会遇到的问题和正确的做法。第七章

探讨了如何通过重组这一翻译过程保留和重现原作风格。第八章指明了检验翻译优劣的标准及检验的具体步骤和方法。附录则重点介绍了翻译工作的具体组织和实施方法。书后列有术语解释表,供检索之用。

本书的写作历时四年,几易其稿,凝聚了作者和圣经协会翻译工作者之多年经验和心血。全书理论联系实际,脉络清晰,语言深入浅出,世界各地很多的翻译学院和研讨会都使用过本专著。相信本书也是我国广大翻译工作者、英语教师、研究人员和大专院校英语专业研究生、本科生及其他英语爱好者不可多得的参考资料。



## PREFACE (2003)

While the volume *Toward a Science of Translating*, describes the major components of translation, *The Theory and Practice of Translation* describes the set of processes that are actually employed in translating. The focus is on Bible translation because this has been a major concern for interlingual communication for an exceptionally long period of time, (2) involved more than 2,000 diverse languages, (3) is concerned with a wide range of cultures, and (4) represents a broader range of literary structures than any other type of translating. This volume is essentially a set of procedures in translating, namely, analysis, transfer, restructuring, and testing.

Translating is essentially a process of communication and this means that a translator must go beyond the lexical structures to consider the manner in which an intended audience is likely to understand a text, because so much depends on the underlying presuppositions of the respective source and target cultures. In testing the adequacy of a translation, the crucial questions are "For whom?" and "In what cultural setting?" The answers are never simple, but highly complex, because both the source text and the translated text may represent very diverse cultural orientations and values.

A translator of a text involving significant cultural differences is like a juggler trying to toss and catch a variety of objects all at the same time. Accordingly, a translator must establish certain priorities: (1) contextual consistency should have priority over purely verbal consistency, (2) dynamic equivalence has priority over formal correspondence, (3) orality has

priority over scribal forms, and (4) expressions that are used by and are acceptable to the intended audience have priority over expressions that may be traditionally more prestigious.

Analyzing and testing these sets of priorities are the crucial concerns of this volume.

The essential purpose of this volume on translating is to highlight different sets of meanings, for example, grammatical, referential, and connotative, and this means that these diverse meanings must be carefully studied in terms of transfer, restructuring and testing, especially in relation to the channel capacity of a target language. In fact, such procedures must involve the total range of cultural similarities and divergencies. Spelling this out for a number of different kinds of texts is the focus of this volume and the principal reason why it has been so widely used by translators working in a number of diverse language families and cultures.

Basic to these principles of translation are four fundamental views concerning Scripture. In the first place a translation must make sense, and often Bible translations are not understandable. For example, few English speakers understand the real meaning of *hallowed be thy name* (Matthew 6.9). The first word in the underlying Greek text is a passive imperative, a construction that no longer exists actively in English, but it means that the one identified by the phrase "thy name" should be recognized by everyone as truly God.

Often translators find it easier to follow tradition, even though the tradition is clearly wrong. For example, in Matthew 6.13 most translations end the Lord's Prayer with the phrase "deliver us from evil," when the Greek text refers to "the Evil One," namely, the Devil.

Some Greek and Hebrew texts are ambiguous, in the sense that a set of words may have more than one responsible meaning. For example, in Genesis 1.1 there are two different ways to understand the Hebrew text, for example, "In the beginning God created the universe" or "When God began to create the universe."

Some biblical texts are, however, so different from a standard theologi-

cal tradition that some people become seriously worried. In Genesis 6. 6 the text says that “God was sorry that he had created people and put them on the earth.” But some people argue that since God is omniscient, he could not have regretted creating people. Nevertheless, that is precisely what the Hebrew text says. The translator’s task is to represent the meaning of the source text in the clearest and most acceptable form.

Techniques of translation are always secondary to the understanding of the source text.

EUGENE A. NIDA

*Brussels*, 2003

## PREFACE (1969)

This volume on *The Theory and Practice of Translation* is the logical outgrowth of the previous book *Toward a Science of Translating* (1964), which explored some of the basic factors constituting a scientific approach to translation. This second volume presents certain of these same theories in a pedagogically oriented order, designed to assist the translator to master the theoretical elements as well as to gain certain practical skills in learning how to carry out the procedures. Though this present book treats the problems of translating primarily in terms of a scientific orientation to linguistic structures, semantic analysis, and information theory, it does not lose sight of the fact that translating is far more than a science. It is also a skill, and in the ultimate analysis fully satisfactory translation is always an art.

In this volume the illustrative data are drawn primarily from the field of Bible translating. This reflects both the immediate concerns of those for whom the book has been specifically prepared and the background experience of the authors. There are, however, certain ways in which this may be a distinct advantage to the reader interested in the broadest possible aspects of translating, for Bible translating has a longer tradition (it began in the third century B. C.), involves far more languages (1393 languages by the end of 1968), is concerned with a greater variety of cultures (Bible translators have worked in all areas of the world), and includes a wider range of literary types (from lyric poetry to theological discourse) than any comparable kind of translating. Accordingly, even though the illustrative data may seem somewhat restricted, the total range of background experience is unusually wide, and hence the basis for observations on the essen-

tial problems of semantic analysis, discourse structures, and cultural transfers is particularly valid.

The first two chapters are essentially introductory, for they deal with certain of the broader issues and attempt to orient the reader with respect to the total task. The following chapters take up in a systematic order the fundamental procedures of translating; analysis, transfer, restructuring, and testing. Purely practical considerations of committee organization and procedures for carrying out the work of translating are treated in the Appendix. A glossary of technical terms is also added, as a kind of index, in which difficult words are briefly defined. The reader is then referred to that particular place in the text where the subject is discussed in greatest detail and thoroughness.

This volume is the result of three different drafts, prepared over a period of approximately four years, and used in varying form in a number of translators' institutes and seminars held in various places throughout the world. It has also benefited from the advice and counsel of a number of Translations Consultants working under the auspices of the United Bible Societies.

*The Theory and Practice of Translation* is not, however, to be considered exhaustive in the sense that it explores fully all the important areas and problems of the translator. In two respects especially there is need for further amplification: 1. the presentation of structural semantics, including componential analysis, and 2. discourse analysis. As regards the first kind of problems, another volume is now in preparation, tentatively titled *Introduction to Structural Semantics*, which will deal much more fully with the theoretical and structural aspects of semantics. The whole matter of grammatical meaning will be treated there, including especially the important notions of "case" and "role" as discussed in recent writings of Fillmore and Langendoen. In the second area, research is also being carried out by the technical staff of the Bible Societies, which will lead to publications in the not-too-distant future.

EUGENE A. NIDA and CHARLES R. TABER

New York, 1969

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## CHAPTER ONE

### A NEW CONCEPT OF TRANSLATING

Never before in the history of the world have there been so many persons engaged in the translating of both secular and religious materials. It is estimated that at least 100,000 persons dedicate most or all of their time to such work, and of these at least 3,000 are engaged primarily in the translation of the Bible into some 800 languages, representing about 80 percent of the world's population.

Unfortunately, the underlying theory of translating has not caught up with the development of skills; and in religious translating, despite consecrated talent and painstaking efforts, a comprehension of the basic principles of translation and communication has lagged behind translating in the secular fields. One specialist in translating and interpreting for the aviation industry commented that in his work he did not dare to employ the principles often followed by translators of the Bible: "With us," he said, "complete intelligibility is a matter of life and death." Unfortunately, translators of religious materials have sometimes not been prompted by the same feeling of urgency to make sense.

#### THE OLD FOCUS AND THE NEW FOCUS

The older focus in translating was the form of the message, and translators took particular delight in being able to reproduce stylistic specialties, e.g., rhythms, rhymes, plays on words, chiasmus, parallelism, and unusual grammatical structures. The new focus, however, has shifted from the form of the message to the response of the receptor. Therefore, what one must determine is the response of the receptor to the translated message. This response must then be compared with the way in which the original receptors presumably reacted to the message when it was given in its original setting.

Even the old question: Is this a correct translation? must be answered in terms of another question, namely: For whom? Correctness must be determined by the extent to which the average reader for which a translation is intended will be likely to understand it correctly. Moreover, we are not concerned merely with the possibility of his understanding correctly, but with the overwhelming likelihood of it. In other words, we are not content merely to translate so that the average receptor is likely to understand the message; rather we aim to make certain that such a person is very unlikely to misunderstand it.

Posing the question of correctness in this manner naturally implies that there will be different translations which can be called "correct." In fact, for the scholar who is himself well acquainted with the original, even the most labored, literal translation will be "correct," for he will not misunderstand it. On the other hand, in most large linguistic com-

munities, especially when they employ so-called international languages spoken by millions of people, there are a number of socioeducational levels of speech and comprehension. This means that several different levels of translation, in terms of vocabulary and grammatical structures, are required, if all people are to have essentially equal opportunities to understand the message.

This test of comprehensibility is concerned primarily with discovering and eliminating two different types of expressions: (1) those which are likely to be misunderstood and (2) those so difficult and "heavy" (whether in vocabulary or grammar) as to discourage the reader from attempting to comprehend the content of the message. Such idioms as "children of the bridechamber" (Mark 2 : 19) and "heap coals of fire on his head" (Rom. 12 : 20) are typical of the first category. The average person unacquainted with Semitic idioms is simply not going to understand that the "children of the bridechamber" are the friends of the bridegroom, or wedding guests, and that "heap coals of fire on his head" means to make a person ashamed of his behavior, and is not a way of torturing people to death.

When a high percentage of people misunderstand a rendering, it cannot be regarded as a legitimate translation. For example, in Romans 1 : 17 most traditional translations have "the righteousness of God is revealed from faith to faith," and most readers naturally assume that this is a reference to God's own personal righteousness. Most scholars are agreed, however, that this is not God's own righteousness, but the process by which God puts men right with himself (*cf.* Today's English Version): It is the act of "justification" (to use a technical, and generally misunderstood word) and not the character of righteousness. But a translation which insists on rendering the Greek literally as "the righteousness of God" is simply violating the meaning for the sake of preserving a formal grammatical correspondence.

In addition to being quite misleading, a translation may also be so stylistically heavy as to make comprehension almost impossible. For example, in the American Standard Version (1901), 2 Corinthians 3 : 10 reads, "For verily that which hath been made glorious hath not been made glorious in this respect, by reason of the glory that surpasseth." The words are all English, but the sentence structure is essentially Greek. The New English Bible quite rightly restructures this passage to read, "Indeed, the splendour that once was is now no splendour at all; it is outshone by a splendour greater still."

#### *Problem 1*

Evaluate the following sets of renderings of Biblical passages in terms of how readily and correctly an ordinary reader or hearer is likely to understand them:

1. Matt. 3 : 15c: "Then he [John] suffered him [Jesus]" (KJV).  
"So John agreed" (TEV).



2. John 1:14: "And the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us, (and we beheld his glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father,) full of grace and truth"(KJV).  
 "So the word of God became a human being and lived among us. We saw his splendour (the splendour as of a father's only son), full of grace and truth" (Phillips).  
 "The Word became a human being and lived among us. We saw his glory, full of grace and truth. This was the glory which he received as the Father's only Son" (TEV).
3. Rom. 3:21-22: "But now the righteousness of God without the law is manifested, being witnessed by the law and the prophets; even the righteousness of God which is by faith of Jesus Christ unto all and upon all them that believe"(KJV).  
 "But, in these days, God's way of justification has at last been brought to light; one which was attested by the law and the prophets, but stands apart from the law; God's way of justification through faith in Jesus Christ, meant for everybody and sent down upon everybody without distinction, if he has faith" (Knox).  
 "But now God's way of putting men right with himself has been revealed, and it has nothing to do with law. The Law and the prophets gave their witness to it; God puts men right through their faith in Jesus Christ. God does this to all who believe in Christ"(TEV).

#### NEW ATTITUDES WITH RESPECT TO RECEPTOR LANGUAGES

Some of the basic difficulties in Bible translation can be traced to the fact that people often have quite wrong views of the receptor as well as of the source languages. Hence, to produce texts which will approximate the goal of equivalent response, translators often need to change their view of the languages in which they are working. This includes not merely a shift in some of the attitudes which tend to place the source languages on a theological pedestal and to bow down before them in blind submission, but it often requires quite a radical rethinking of one's attitude toward the receptor language, even when it is one's own mother tongue.

*Each language has its own genius.*

In the first place, it is essential to recognize that each language has its own genius. That is to say, each language possesses certain distinctive