

国外翻译研究丛书之二十一

TOWARD A SCIENCE OF TRANSLATING

翻译科学探索

EUGENE A. NIDA



外教社

上海外语教育出版社

SHANGHAI FOREIGN LANGUAGE EDUCATION PRESS

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FRANÇOIS J. TAFFET



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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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(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此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

尤金·奈达是美国著名的翻译理论家,曾担任美国语言学会会长和美国圣经协会翻译部执行秘书,专门组织和指导《圣经》的翻译工作。他把语言学的理论同翻译活动相结合,开创了富有特色的翻译理论。他著作颇丰,发表了40多部专著和250余篇论文。

《翻译科学探索》发表于1964年,是奈达翻译理论成熟期的一部力作,是对其多年从事《圣经》翻译工作的理论总结和升华,内容十分丰富,论证也极其详尽。

全书共分为十二章。其中第一章为引言。虽然翻译的必要性已被人们普遍认识,但是对翻译活动持批评态度的仍大有人在,翻译工作者在翻译活动中也遇到许多问题,这使奈达意识到对翻译活动的理论研究远远跟不上翻译活动的实际需要,应该利用各学科知识来充实、完善翻译理论,从而为翻译活动提供有力的指导。第二章是对西方翻译史的回顾和总结,直接或间接地触及了本书其余各章所要论述的问题。第三章到第五章分别从语言学意义、所指意义和情感意义对意义的内涵进行了讨论。第六章主要论述翻译中语言的能动性。信息接受者所接受的信息可能与信息发出者想要传递的信息大相径庭,因此翻译工作者在翻译活动中不仅要把语言看成是一种代码,更要重视其在信息交流上的意义。作为交流过程中的一个特殊因素,译者的作用在第七章得到了分析。奈达认为如果对译者个人在翻译过程中所承担的重要角色没有一个清晰的认识,就不可能充分理解或者客观评价翻译的原则和程序。第八章和第九章论述了翻译对等原则,包括翻译的类型、翻译的原则和对等的类型。第十章中介绍了一些实用的翻译技巧。第十一章讨论了翻译的程序,包括对源文本的分析和对等的选择等。最后一章介绍了翻译研究中一个崭新的领域,即机器翻

译在实际和理论两个层面上的发展。

综观全书,奈达充分论述了以下观点:首先,奈达认为人类的语言尽管各不相同,但还是有着很多的共同点,都具有丰富的表达功能,因此语言交流可以有效地进行,而翻译这一语际间的转换活动也是完全可能的。其次,奈达提出了翻译不仅是一种艺术,更是一门科学,是可以而且必须用客观原则来加以规范和描述的,翻译活动决不能随心所欲地进行。此外,奈达还提出了形式对等和动态对等的概念。

书中的许多观点不论在理论上还是在实践上都有着重要的指导意义,是广大翻译工作者和翻译理论研究者必不可少的参考书。

PREFACE

The volume *Toward a Science of Translating* has been used by more types of translators and for a longer period of time than either the author or the publisher contemplated, probably because so many of the illustrative examples came from field experience of trying to help translators in various areas of Latin America, Africa, Europe, and Asia. In fact, in terms of range of literary types, varieties of language, history of translating, and use by people in diverse cultures, Bible translating exceeds all other major classes of texts. Perhaps the most important aspect of the 1964 edition is the fact that it has proven to be exceptionally useful to translators working in many different families of languages and in radically diverse cultures.

Various aspects of *Toward a Science of Translating* have served as core concepts which have been expanded in three supplementary volumes: *The Theory and Practice of Translating* (1969) with Charles R. Taber, *From One Language to Another* with Jan de Waard (1986), and *Contexts in Translating* (2003).

There can never be a final and comprehensive volume on translating, because the range of linguistic problems, the varieties of text types, and the needs of special audiences are constantly changing. This volume does not, however, deal exclusively with present-day problems, but attempts to put translating into a context of historical changes in principles and procedures during the last two centuries.

Many readers of *Toward a Science of Translating* have assumed that I am essentially a Bible translator who became interested in linguistic theory. In reality, however, I was trained as a linguist and anthropologist. For this reason, I was asked by the Bible societies to find out why so many translations of the Hebrew Bible and the Greek New Testament are not only difficult to understand but are also frequently misunderstood.

My work during the last forty years has opened my eyes to a new world of language and religion, in which translators need to deal with the functions of mantras, expressions of religious rapture, the complexities

of religious hierarchies, and especially those areas in which the language of religion is not the daily language of the people.

Translating is never an easy task because the cultural contexts that provide the meaning of words and texts are never the same. Even short-stories are often too short to provide the clues to unusual cultural values, for example, a story about South American Indians retreating from civilization and returning to the jungle. On the other hand, some texts are simply too long, especially when they seem to wither away toward the end, as in Tolstoy's *War and Peace*. Some Japanese poetry is magnificent in its original cultural context, but when transported into another culture, it is too often awkwardly meaningless, precisely the reason why some translators have insisted that they will only translate texts that are culturally transmissible. And many legal documents can only make sense when translators provide directly or indirectly the cultural information that is indispensable for understanding the respective legal systems.

Expert translators are not only multilingual, but also multicultural.

Eugene A. Nida
Brussels, 2003

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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

The polyglot empire of ancient Babylon, with its hard-working core of multilingual scribes sending out official communications on cuneiform tablets to the far corners of the realm, is a far cry from the electronic equipment used today in simultaneous interpretation at the United Nations in New York. The basic problems of interlingual communication, however, remain the same, though in our day the terrifying potentialities of modern technology require us to increase our efforts to guarantee effective understanding between peoples. Whether one is dealing with translation in international gatherings, or with the highly publicized efforts to put machines to work translating masses of scientific abstracts, or with the pioneering efforts of missionaries translating the Scriptures for remote, primitive tribes, one thing is certain: at no time in the history of the world have there been so many persons as today who are dedicating so much time and effort to the task of translation.

OPPOSITION TO TRANSLATION

Though interlingual translation is accepted by all as a practical necessity, the task and its results have not been without detractors. Grant Showerman (1916, p.100) has declared that "translation is meddling with inspiration," while Harry de Forest Smith (Brower, 1959, p.173) has insisted that a translation of a literary work is as tasteless as "a stewed strawberry," and Max Eastman (1936) contends that "almost all translations are bad," for they are made by ordinary people who match the unusual foreign expression with the commonplace in their own tongue. Moreover, they add insult to injury by their desperate concern to be literary.¹

There may well be reason to complain of translating when one examines closely what happens to a document in the process of being transferred from one language to another. As an experiment, the editors of *Politiken*, a newspaper in Denmark, sent a delightfully written essay of 700 words by J. V. Jansen to a succession of Swedish, German, English, and French translators. Finally, this successively retranslated article, which started out as a descriptive essay with "rhythmical sentences, simple phrases and well-chosen words, giving a vivid impression of forest smells, and colors, of abundant animal life and the dignity of nature and of labor," ended up as so prosaic a jumble that a Danish professor, who was asked to produce the final translation from

¹ For a number of equally poignant criticisms of translations by well-known literary figures, see Mounin (1955).

French back into Danish, protested that he could not see any point to his wasting time in translating material "that seemed to have been written by a school child."¹

Some objections to translation have reflected theological considerations. The *Masseketh Sopherim* (Tractate of the Scribes), for example, reflects the medieval Jewish attitude toward the translation of the Old Testament into Greek by saying, "Five elders wrote the Law in Greek for King Tolmai (Ptolemy); and that day was a hard day for Israel, like the day on which Israel made the golden calf." The *Megillath Taanith* (The Roll of Fasting) describes thus the same translation: "On the eighth day of Tebeth the Law was written in Greek in the days of King Tolmai, and darkness came upon the world for three days," (Thackeray, 1917, pp. 89-93). Sir Thomas More was opposed to all Bible translations because the expressions used in them were contrary to the tradition of the Roman Church, a position emphasized by the strictures of the Council of Trent.²

Nevertheless, men have not always despaired of translation, for it has at least some advantages, even though, as some have said, "Nothing improves by translation except bishops."³ Even so, Fitzgerald (1903, p. 100) would contend that "a live sparrow is better than a stuffed eagle." Though a translation may be like old wine in new bottles or a woman in man's clothing, the results can be both tasteful and alive, despite the judgment of early Renaissance Italian writers, who contended that translations are like women—homely when they are faithful and unfaithful when they are lovely.

Underlying all the complications of translation is the fundamental fact that languages differ radically one from the other. In fact, so different are they that some insist that one cannot communicate adequately in one language what has been said originally in another. Nevertheless, as linguists and anthropologists have discovered, that which unites mankind is much greater than that which divides, and hence there is, even in cases of very disparate languages and cultures, a basis for communication. This common core of human experience and the relatable modes of speaking about it do not, however, eliminate the striking and fundamental differences between languages. Moreover, the divergences seem to be not only far more numerous than the similarities, but also to provide many more obstacles to understanding than the similarities are able to clear away.

At the same time, the translator is under constant pressure from the conflict between form and meaning. If he attempts to approximate the stylistic qualities of the original, he is likely to sacrifice much of the meaning, while strict adherence to the literal content usually results in considerable loss of the stylistic flavor.

Similarly, the translator is caught in the dilemma of "the letter vs. the

¹ This procedure has been described in an anonymous editorial, entitled "Transformation by Translation," *Living Age* 333.1117-1118 (1927).

² For a discussion of various theological aspects of translation, see Schwarz, 1995.

³ Cited by Grand'combe, 1949.

spirit," for in being faithful to the things talked about, he can destroy the spirit that pervades an original communication. At the same time, if he concentrates too much upon trying to reproduce the original "feeling" and "tone" of the message, he may be accused of playing loose with the substance of the document—the letter of the law.

To make matters even worse, translators must deal with a medium of communication which is constantly in process of change. To be a useful instrument for social intercourse, language must be able to admit new knowledge and new organization of knowledge. In a sense, it must fit reality or it is useless; but it cannot fit reality too closely, or it would be equally unserviceable, for language cannot uniquely specify all the infinitely different events. It must be able to classify and group experiences. Moreover, it must have sufficient generality of utility to be employed by the masses of the people, and not merely by some small coterie of initiates. It is therefore not a private code but a public system of symbols, constantly, if slowly, being remade to fit the exigencies of a changing world. Translators themselves, however, are responsible for a good deal of the change that does take place within languages, for as Julio Casares (1956) has so aptly said, "Translation is a customs house through which passes, if the custom officers are not alert, more smuggled goods of foreign idioms than through any other linguistic frontier."

Another problem facing the translator is the proper understanding of his own role. Is translating, for example, an art or a science? Is it a skill which can only be acquired by practice, or are there certain procedures which can be described and studied? The truth is that practice in translating has far outdistanced theory; and though no one will deny the artistic elements in good translating, linguists and philologists are becoming increasingly aware that the processes of translation are amenable to rigorous description. When we speak of "the science of translating," we are of course concerned with the descriptive aspect; for just as linguistics may be classified as a descriptive science, so the transference of a message from one language to another is likewise a valid subject for scientific description. Those who have insisted that translation is an art, and nothing more, have often failed to probe beneath the surface of the obvious principles and procedures that govern its functioning. Similarly, those who have espoused an entirely opposite view have rarely studied translating enough to appreciate the artistic sensitivity which is an indispensable ingredient in any first-rate translation of a literary work.

THE FIELD OF TRANSLATION

The general field of translation may be divided into three parts, following Jakobson (1959b, p. 233). The first type, or "intralingual" translation, consists essentially in rewording something within the same language. By this process we may interpret the verbal signs by means of other signs in the same language, a process much more frequently practiced than we generally imagine, and one basic to an adequate theory

of meaning.¹ The second type, or “interlingual translation,” may be called “translation proper,” for it comprises the interpretation of the verbal signs of one language by means of the verbal signs of another. However, in interlingual translation we are concerned not merely with matching symbols (i.e. word-for-word comparisons) but also with the equivalence of both symbols and their arrangements. That is to say, we must know the meaning of the entire utterance.

A third type of translation may be called “intersemiotic,” or transmutation, by which we mean the transference of a message from one kind of symbolic system to another. For example, in the U. S. Navy a verbal message may be transmuted into a flag message by hoisting up the proper flags in the right sequence. Similarly, a speech by a Kiowa chief may be transmuted into sign language without verbal accompaniment, to be understood not only by the speakers of other languages, but also by any other Kiowas who may be present.

In many instances, however, translating does involve certain rather severe restrictions imposed by the cultural contexts and linguistic literary styles, or media of communication. The translation of legal documents from English to Spanish, for example, involves some basic differences between English common law and Roman law. The translator of American comic strips is constantly beset by problems arising out of cultural specialties; for example, corned beef and cabbage—a dish that fits so well the character of Jiggs—just does not make sense in many cultures. Accordingly, Jiggs’s favorite food becomes rice and fish in Southeast Asia, cabbage stuffed with hamburger in Turkey, and stewed codfish in Italy (McManus, 1952).

Stylistic restrictions are a particularly important element in the translation of poetry, for so much of the essence of poetry consists in a formal envelope for a meaningful content.

An even more trying set of formal restrictions resulting from the particular medium of communication is encountered in trying to dub in live sound for a foreign motion picture, for one must not only communicate the story but also—particularly in close-up scenes—match the timing, the syllabic structure, and even the corresponding facial movements.²

Of all the various types of translating, however, one can safely say that none surpasses Bible translating in: (1) the range of subject matter (e.g. poetry, law, proverbs, narration, exposition, conversation); (2) linguistic variety (directly or indirectly from Greek and Hebrew into more than 1,200 other languages and dialects); (3) historical depth (from the third century B. C. to the present); (4) cultural diversity (there is no cultural area in the world which is not represented by Bible translating); (5) volume of manuscript evidence; (6) number of translators involved; (7) conflicting viewpoints; and (8) accumulation of data on principles and procedures employed. It is thus with some

¹ See the sections on the determination of meaning by substitution techniques and hierarchical structuring, in Chapter 5.

² Caillé, 1960.