



高等学校翻译专业本科教材

总主编：仲伟合 何刚强

汉英笔译

CHINESE-ENGLISH TRANSLATION

叶子南 施晓菁 编著

外语教学与研究出版社
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Introduction

China's growing role in world affairs has led to increasing contacts with other countries, and greater international interest in Chinese politics, economics, and culture. For decades, translation from English into Chinese has been extremely popular in China, resulting in a large corpus of translated works, mostly by native speakers of Chinese, which is the optimal situation since one usually works best translating into one's mother tongue. Today though, translation in the opposite direction from Chinese into English has also begun to expand exponentially, but due to the shortage of native English speakers with sufficient Chinese proficiency, this task has fallen largely to native Chinese speakers who are thus working into their foreign language. Their efforts have indeed helped to tell the world about China's complex society, rapid economic development, rich history, and glorious culture, but the translations have not always produced the desired effect. The stiff, clumsy style known as "Chinglish" is often confusing and awkward, while some translations have even managed to turn a serious message into a joke.

There are many reasons for this unintended result: lack of knowledge of the differences between Chinese and English, poor proficiency in English, ignorance of what translation really entails, and lack of specific translation skills, to name a few. This volume is compiled in the hope of addressing some of these problems. It is our hope that a contrastive linguistic perspective illustrated with practical examples will allow the translator to gain a better understanding of the source text and thus produce a better translation.

This book focuses squarely on the practice of translation. Some theoretical concepts and terminology are indeed essential for a better understanding of the process, but we have dealt with these without going into too much detail. We have tried to limit the use of specialized terms, and we cite many examples that, we hope, illustrate the point. The reader thus will have, in one short volume, most of the concepts and tools to deal with translation problems.

The book is divided into four parts. Part One deals with basic issues, Part Two with basic techniques, and Part Three with a number of more advanced issues. Each contains exercises, sample answers with notes, and short tests at the end. Part Four presents eight short practice texts covering economics, law, society, culture, and literature, also with sample translations and detailed notes. All English translations come directly from the pens of native speakers of English or have been revised by them. This is the ideal way for doing this kind of work: a native and a non-native speaker as a team each making up for the other's deficiencies, and revising the final translation together.

Though there are many books on translation on the market, there are not many dealing with Chinese-English translation, and even fewer of these are written in English itself. In the course of compiling this work, we have received great encouragement and assistance from Dr. Lynn Visson, our editor, and from Dr. John Balcom, who generously shared his materials and ideas. We wish to thank them both for giving their time and energy to make this volume possible. We also wish to acknowledge support from the Joseph and Sheila Mark Faculty Development Fund of the Monterey Institute of International Studies, now the Middlebury Institute of International Studies at Monterey.

This present edition is based on the first one published in 2007. However, to adapt it to students of translation in China, we have made a number of changes, mostly in the practice texts in Part Four. We hope this new content will be more useful to translators in their continued efforts to “tell China’s story.”

The authors

July 2016

About the Authors

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Part One

Basic Issues in Chinese-English Translation



Chapter 1

Basic Concepts of Translation

When visiting the cities of China, any English speaker knowing no Chinese will be delighted to see many signs and notices in English, providing information on directions, shops, restaurants, bus stops, and even toilets. These well-meaning attempts, however, very often leave the visitor nonplussed, disappointed, even irritated, and more often than not in stitches of laughter. After all, how else can one react to this:

本厕所为免冲式，请您便后立即离开。

This WC is free of washing. Please leave off after pissing or shitting.

Clearly, the writer was quite serious and was trying to be considerate by providing useful information, but the result is indeed the opposite. “Free of washing” is misleading and inaccurate, while the choice of “pissing” and “shitting,” while accurate in meaning, has turned a polite Chinese expression into a vulgar English one. The translator obviously had no clue about the appropriateness of register (polite or vulgar) or of context. Though many translations of commonly used signs are acceptable, an equally large number are totally wrong:

小心坠河

Carefully fall to the river

Chinese-English Translation

酸菜包	Acid food
自助终端机	Help oneself terminating machine
钢琴教师联络本	Piano Teachers' Intercourse Book

Such translations sound like a comic routine in a variety show. One can only wipe away tears of laughter and wonder what happened. Surely the translator consulted some sort of reference book! But then how did the result end up so outrageous and inappropriate? Clearly, translation is a much more complicated business than that of merely looking words up in a dictionary.

So what is translation? In the broadest sense, it means the process of transferring meaning between different languages and cultures through the written word. In this book, however, we will focus mainly on the language aspect of this practical process.

For some, the most important thing in translation is to be “faithful” to the original source text. Others say that the concept of “faithfulness” is too vague. After all, what does it actually mean? A number of systematic and comprehensive concepts have evolved over the years—for example, the theory of functional equivalence proposed by Western scholars, or the standards of “faithfulness, expressiveness, and elegance” suggested by Chinese translators. New tools, methodologies, and translation theories will no doubt continue to appear, but nothing can change the basic nature of translation, which involves rendering the meaning of a source text in to a target one.

This all sounds quite straightforward and understandable, but the problem lies in the “meaning.” The sentence “There is a book on the table” is clear and easy to translate. However, not all sentences are quite so simple. For example, 他的姿势不大寻常，头朝下，两腿高举在沙发上，倒竖

蜻蜓. A strict translation would render 倒竖蜻蜓 “upside-down dragonfly” which is inappropriate, since the analogy is not a common one in English. An accurate translation should be “He was doing this in a quite unusual posture, holding his body upside down and his legs straight up against the back of his chair, like *a gymnast performing a headstand.*” (From *A Cottager’s Sketchbook*, Vol. 2, p. 384) Another example from the English: “Your guess is as good as mine,” actually means “I don’t know either.” The translator has to know this and cannot translate it literally as 你的猜想和我的一样好 which makes no sense in Chinese. Such examples show that simply rendering the “meaning” is not quite as straightforward as it sounds. Many problems can arise that require the translator to stop and think carefully before putting pen to paper.

Should the translation:

1. be literal or free?
2. have functional equivalence or formal correspondence?
3. emphasize form or content?
4. be source oriented or target oriented?
5. be author centered or reader centered?
6. meet the objective of the author or of the translator?

These six considerations raise different questions, yet they all revolve around the same basic problem and are closely linked. Let us now examine them one by one.

Literal Translation or Free Translation?

This is a topic of endless controversy. Sometimes there is no problem—e.g., “I like the movie” becomes 我喜欢这部电影, which does not involve

Chinese-English Translation

questions of literal or free translation because here the translator is not faced with any such choice. Sometimes, however, the translator has to make a choice because both approaches are possible, resulting in much debate. For one thing, different people have different interpretations of "literal." For some, it means word-for-word translation, while for others, it means basically following the original language structures without a rigid word-for-word rendering. A free translation, on the other hand, would completely ignore the original language structures. There is in fact no clear dividing line between word-for-word, literal, free translation, and paraphrasing. Let us consider a few examples:

公立高中挤破头。

Public high schools are so crowded they have to turn away many prospective students.

The idiom 挤破头 cannot be translated literally and therefore must be explicated in accordance with the context. This adds more words, but the meaning is unchanged and clear. This shows that translation can sometimes be very close to paraphrasing. However, this does not mean we can do that all the time. For example:

繁华也罢，穷困也罢，丈夫和妻子携手一生，情深意长。

For richer or for poorer, the husband and the wife are a loving couple for life.

The translator has been flexible here: the first part follows the source text, but the second part, starting with 携手, has ignored the original structures. As opposed to the first example, not many words have been added. There are times, however, when we must stick even closer to the original:

Chapter 1 Basic Concepts of Translation

过度授权与地方权力滥用一直是中国历史上突出的两大问题。

Excessive power and abuse of authority at local levels have been two major problems throughout Chinese history.

Here there is very little room for flexibility, and the translator has followed the original closely, more or less word for word.

Why do we sometimes stick more closely to the source text than at other times, and sometimes even add words that did not appear in the original? There are many reasons for this, and we will discuss them in the chapters that follow. Generally speaking, since a literal translation tends to read less fluently, it should not generally be used as a primary technique, aside from some very specific texts (such as literary ones), and even then with discretion. Free translation is the most commonly used way of rendering meaning, but here the danger lies in overdoing things and distorting the source meaning, usually by adding something that was not there. Clearly, literal and free translation both have their uses, but each must be employed depending on the specific textual circumstances. When working from Chinese to English, the greatest difficulty for the translator is that of getting away from the limitations of the original Chinese and producing a target text that does not sound too Chinese (“Chinglish”). Though this generally means working on the “free” side, both techniques are equally valid; they merely need to be used in different ways.

Functional Equivalence or Formal Correspondence?

Although this concept has been around for some time, it was the scholar of translation Eugene Nida who expanded and elucidated it. As a result, today it is one of the important theories in translation studies. Functional equivalence means the rendering of a thought expressed in a source text in

such a way that the target text has the same function, though not necessarily the same form, as the source text. Form is mechanical and superficial, and owing to the differences between language systems, the same linguistic form may not have the same meaning or function in the two languages. For example, “He is the last person I will ask for help” can be translated as 他是我求助的最后一个人, which follows the same form as the source text but does not have the same meaning, which is 我是不会求助于他的. The function may be the same, but the form is not. Consider the following:

要是你认为他懒惰的话, 那你可就错了。

If you think he is lazy, think again.

The Chinese explicitly states negation (可错了), but the English translation “think again” is oblique. Another example: the student who sits down for an exam and says to himself “成败在此一举” which, translated with formal correspondence, becomes “success or failure depends on this,” a very clumsy and unidiomatic phrase. A native English speaker would probably say, “This is it!” or “Here goes!” which is completely different in form but has the functional equivalence. The specific choice of translation will depend on the context, and we hope this book will provide you with some such considerations.

Literal and free translation, functional equivalence, and formal correspondence are different concepts that approach the same issues of translation from different perspectives.

Form or Content?

The debate between form and content is an old one. In most circumstances, the actual form of the source is not the main focus of translation. Chinese and English belong to two very different language