

# 纯理功能的传译

——功能语言学理论框架下的翻译研究

赵德全 著

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# 前 言

该书从系统功能语言学的角度对英汉翻译进行了研究,主要探讨了纯理功能的传译,并从功能语言学和纯理功能的角度剖析了翻译界一直争论不休的话题——“直译”和“意译”,认为“直译”和“意译”的灵活使用是纯理功能的动态传译的最佳手段。该研究的理论基础是系统功能语言学、中国翻译史上的“忠实”概念和国外翻译界的“对等”概念。

功能语言学将语言看成是社会符号系统,它将语言的功能概括为三大纯理功能:概念功能、人际功能和语篇功能。这三种功能是语言意义的三个方面,在交际中同时发挥作用。在此基础上,功能语言学又将每一纯理功能分解成若干组成部分,每一组成部分都在整个意义系统中发挥作用。因此,通过对语言的系统功能分析,语言意义就能够得到更为充分的解读,这就为翻译研究提供了两个可贵的条件:(1)对原文的充分解读,(2)对原文和译文的充分比较。对原文的理解是翻译的前提,系统功能语言学对翻译研究的贡献就在于它能够将原文分解成若干具体的意义载体,而对这些载体的确认与翻译对译者来说无疑是可操作性的工作;原文和译文的比较为翻译的评价提供客观基础,功能语言学为原文和译文的对比提供了可操作性的途径,人们可以参照译文和原文的功能因素,从纯理功能的角度对翻译效果进行评判。

由于该研究以文本为中心,因此仍然局限于“译文对原文的忠实”和“译文与原文对等”的翻译准则。前者是中国翻译史上公认的翻译目标,后者是许多西方翻译理论家们所追求的效果。总体上说,两者殊途同归,追求的都是理想的翻译。但在目标取向方面,两者略有不同:“忠实”是原语取向的,“对等”是目标语取向。笔者认为,译者应该从追求“忠实”的翻译开始,但达到的应该是“对等”的翻译。不论是“忠实”还是“对等”,它们的客观性和可行性是不可否认的,然而对于如何获得“忠实”或“对等”的翻译,翻译理论家们却莫衷一是,至今尚无定论。究其原因,首先应归因于这两种目标过高,实际操作中难以达到;其次是由于它们的所指比较宽泛,译文和原文对照时缺乏具体的信息载体作为参照。功能语言学为意义分析提供了非常详细的信息载体,该研究从纯理功能的角度提出了具体而切合实际的翻译目标:原文和译文的纯理功能对等。这是翻译的最高标准,因为纯理功能包含了意义的各个方面。从某种意义上讲,纯理功能对等的翻译是完美的翻译。

然而,这一目标的提出并不意味着所有的优秀翻译都必须做到纯理功能完全对等,这在理论和实践上都是行不通的。事实上,两种语言之间的任何差异都会导致某一文本纯理功能分布的不均衡,而翻译活动的首要动因就是语言差异。人们因差异而翻译,又因翻译而产生差异,这种差异主要体现于原文和译文纯理功能上的偏离。这是客观的,不可避免的,也是合理的。从严格意义上讲,原文和译文在纯理功能上实现三维的立体对等是不可能的。

因此,该研究为翻译活动提出了比较切合实际的功能对等目标:

(1)如果不能同时传译原文的三种纯理功能,那么应根据原文的语境和翻译目的,优先传译某一纯理功能,同时最大限度地传译其他两种功能。

(2)本研究对“忠实”和“对等”的定位是:“忠实”是“原语取向”,“对等”是“目标语取向”。体现在翻译目标上,提倡译者从

追求“忠实”的翻译开始,以“对等”的翻译结束;体现在翻译策略上则提倡译者从“直译”入手,而以“直译”和“意译”有机结合结束;体现在纯理功能的传译上,提倡从传译“概念功能”的功能成分开始,然后根据需要进行调整,做到突出重点“纯理功能”,兼顾所有“纯理功能”。

在以上翻译原则的基础上,论文分别对三种纯理功能的传译进行了探讨,并得出如下结论:

### 1. 概念功能的传译

概念功能反映客观世界和主观世界,涵盖语言的最基本信息。概念功能的成功传译能为其他两个纯理功能的传译打下基础。

从功能的角度看,人类语言的初始功能是一致的,各语言的内核都是相同或至少是相似的。因此那些最基本的句型往往都可以在另一种语言中找到它们的对等形式。在翻译实践中,译者为了追求原文和译文的概念功能对等,往往首先追求功能成分诸如参与者、过程类型和环境成分等方面的形式对等,因为概念功能是由这些具体的语言形式来体现的,合适的形式可以表达确切的内容。实践证明,功能成分的形式对等往往导致概念功能对等。在很多情况下,在准确传译概念功能的同时,其他两种纯理功能就会自动随概念功能一起融入到译文之中。

然而,语言差异常常导致一种功能偏离现象,即相同的功能成分所组成的句子在两种语言中所体现的概念功能却不同。这种现象属于翻译后所产生的形式与功能的“移位”。为避免这种概念功能的偏离,译者所应采取的翻译策略是,在译文中采取形式“移位”从而避免概念功能的“移位”。

### 2. 人际功能的传译

在某种语境下,人际功能有时在交际中占主导地位。人际功能的实现与文化语境和社会语境息息相关。两种语言在语言结构方面差距越大,它们的人际功能表达方式越是不同。这就形成了概念功

能与人际功能组合在两种语言中的失衡,也就是说,一种概念功能同时所表达的人际功能在另一语言中却表达了不同的人际功能,这是概念功能与人际功能的关系在翻译后产生的“移位”现象。有时为了避免人际功能“移位”,译者不得不省略甚至更改译文中的概念功能成分,放弃翻译中概念功能成分的形式对等。这种现象在戏剧翻译中尤其普遍,因为人际功能在情节发展中占有很重要的地位。

毋庸置疑,概念功能的传译在小说翻译中占有最重要的地位,因为小说的主要内容都是由具体的概念功能成分承载的。然而,人际功能的成功传译对于译本的质量也起到至关重要的作用。小说对人物性格的细微刻画以及复杂的人物关系都体现于语言的人际功能之中,译者在成功解读与传译其概念功能成分所表达的概念意义的同时,要准确挖掘其带有的人际含义,然后在不影响概念功能传译的条件下,尽量传译其中的人际意义。

#### 3. 语篇功能的传译

语篇功能指语言所具有的联结概念功能和人际功能的机制。语篇功能的成功传译能保障另外两种纯理功能在译文中的连贯与协调。

“主位—述位结构”是话语展开的动态框架,是语篇传译所关注的首要目标。从某种意义上说,“主位—述位结构”在一定程度上代表了语篇的文体风格,而文体风格的保存在翻译中的地位是不言而喻的。

“信息结构”把语言的信息分出主次,使重要的信息得以强调。英汉两种语言在“信息结构”上是相似的,都采用尾重句,即都将新信息放在句子尾部。从理论上讲,词序的保存能使译文在“信息结构”上与原文一致。然而,由于两种语言在句法和形态结构上的不同,两种语言除了非标记信息结构外,都有其各自的标记性信息表达方式,被强调的信息在不同的语言中不一定出现在同一位置;反之,在同一位置的信息在不同的语言中其凸显程度也不尽一致。译者在翻译时,要着眼于重要信息的强调,必要时采取信息“移位”从而保证重要

信息得以强调。

连贯手段是体现语篇功能的又一方面。英汉两种语言在这方面不尽一致。连贯手段的成功传译并不一定靠机械地照搬原文的关联词,译者要根据英汉两种语言的特点,灵活把握译文语篇的连贯问题。

三种纯理功能是语言中不可分割的三个方面。从理论上讲,它们的地位应当均等,没有轻重主次之分。然而在具体的语境中,总会有一种功能的作用更突出,呈前景化特征,而另外两种功能作为隐性意义与之伴随。从翻译的角度看,如果说难以做到同时准确而完整地传译三种纯理功能,那么译者就应该根据特定的语言环境优先传译某一功能,同时最大限度地传译其他两种功能。这在翻译实践中是切实可行的原则,本书采用大量例句从纯理功能的各种角度对此进行分别论证。

最后,该研究还从系统功能的角度对“直译”和“意译”的概念进行剖析,认为纯理功能的动态传译必然会导致这两种手段在翻译过程中的动态转换。

“直译”和“意译”之争由来已久。从本质上看,它们无非是译者所选择的翻译基点不同而已。功能语言学使用不同的精密度来描述语言:字母—词素—词—词组—句子—段落—篇章。翻译时,译者选择某一基点作为翻译的出发点。一般来说,译者所选择的精密度越高,所产生的译文“直译”程度就越高;所选择精密度越低,所产生的译文“意译”程度就越高。字母和词素不能独立地表达意义,因此词就成为翻译时所参照的精密度最高的基点,而段落或语篇则是精密度最低的翻译单位。作为翻译策略,译者往往不自觉地选择词或词组作为翻译的起点,翻译焦点主要落在概念功能成分上,因为在很多情况下,对等的功能成分传递对等的纯理功能。也就是说,翻译实际上是从直译开始的。随着翻译活动的推进,有时译者会发现某些直译不能理想地传译原文的某一纯理功能,这时译者就会根据翻译重点,将翻译的基点移向精密度较低的语言单位——句子,甚至段落,

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从而产生出“意译”程度较高的译文。翻译基点的选择完全取决于纯理功能的传译,是为传译纯理功能服务的,“直译”和“意译”的结合是最佳传译纯理功能的手段。

该研究探讨了英汉翻译的系统功能途径,它虽然无法厘清翻译研究的所有问题,但构建了系统功能语言学的翻译框架,在一定程度上为翻译研究提供了新的视角,我们期待在此框架下出现更细致更具体的研究。

赵德全

2006年12月



# Foreword

This book aims to provide a functional approach to translation studies. It mainly focuses on the techniques of transferring the metafunctions between English and Chinese. The theoretical bases of this study are Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL), the concepts of faithfulness in China, and the concepts of equivalence in western translation theories.

Systemic Functional Linguistics regards language as one of social semiotic systems. In terms of SFL, the functions of language may be categorized into three metafunctions: the ideational function, the interpersonal function and the textual function. According to functional grammar, meaning can be thoroughly decoded by functional analysis and this provides an ideal method for understanding the source language as well as for comparison between the original and the target. The former is a prerequisite for a good translation and the latter is the guarantee for an objective assessment of the translation.

‘Faithfulness’ and ‘Equivalence’ both have profound connotations in the plurality of translation theories. The variety of the explanations for these two concepts often leads to confusion, and a consistent strategy to achieve them has not been fixed yet. Based

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on these two concepts in a broad sense, this book puts forward a functional concept for equivalence, which is also the aim for a translator to pursue; a metafunctional equivalence between the source and the target language. It is the highest goal for translation, for the metafunctions cover all aspects of language in terms of meaning. If the metafunctions of one language are fully transferred to another, the translation is deemed to be perfect.

The ideal aim, however, does not necessarily mean that any good translation must be a perfect three-dimensional equivalence of the source language. As a matter of fact, it is hardly possible to transfer the metafunctions simultaneously to the target language in translation practice, for any difference between the two languages may result in variations in terms of the metafunctions. Translation is necessary because the languages involved are different, which, in turn, is bound to lead to the metafunctional variations between the two languages. This means, in a strict sense, the impossibility for a three-dimensional equivalence.

What we can pursue, as supposed in Chapter Two of this book, is a practical and attainable equivalence, also in terms of the metafunctions but not necessarily in an equal priority among them:

(1) If it is impossible to simultaneously transfer the three metafunctions of the source language, the translator should, based on the contexts and the purpose of the translation activity, give priority to a certain function, while maximally transferring the other two metafunctions.

(2) This research regards ‘faithfulness’ as the source language oriented and ‘equivalence’ as the target language oriented. We propose that the translator

initiate his work from pursuing ‘a faithful translation’ and complete his work with ‘an equivalent translation’. And accordingly, we suggest that the translator begin his work with literal translation and finish his work with a compromised method between them. As far as the functional translation is concerned, the translator should first try to get a formal equivalence in terms of ideational components, and then properly adjust these components, if necessary, in order to guarantee the most prominent metafunction being emphasized. In other words, he should initiate his work from pursuing a formal equivalence and complete his work with a functional equivalence.

With this practical aim, the book goes on to explore how to transfer the metafunctions. And we arrive at the following conclusions:

### 1. Transferring the ideational function

The ideational function carries the basic messages of language. Successful translation of the ideational meaning lays an essential foundation for transferring the other two metafunctions.

Languages have the same or at least similar linguistic core in a functional point of view (Halliday, 1978). Therefore most basic structures can find their parallel forms in English and Chinese, and thus in translation, for pursuing a functional equivalence, we should first try to create a formal equivalence with all the corresponding Processes, Participants and Circumstances in the target language, which usually helps to lead to a functional equivalence.

However, the syntactic differences sometimes make it difficult to get an ideal formal equivalence that carries the equivalent ide-

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ational meaning. In such cases, the ‘translation shift’ has to be considered to fit the translation well into the target language. A mechanical imitation of the original pattern can only lead to some unnatural translation.

##### 2. Transferring the interpersonal function

More often than not, the interpersonal function is prioritized in a certain communication. Because of the syntactic differences between the source and the target language, we sometimes have to adjust some of the ideational components in translation in order to fully transfer the interpersonal meaning. This is particularly true for opera translation in which the interpersonal function plays an important role in the plot development.

There is no doubt that the transferring of the ideational meaning is the most important in novel translation, for the main content of a novel is conveyed by the processes and the other ideational components. However, the subtle interpersonal factors are also essential for a good translation. The personalities are embodied by the ideational description and the dialogues in the novel.

##### 3. Transferring the textual function

The textual function refers to the mechanism that integrates the ideational function with the interpersonal function. Properly transferring the textual function makes a coherent translation.

The thematic structure is one of the aspects on which the translator should focus. It is actually a dynamic outline of a discourse. In a sense, the thematic structure helps to constitute the writing style of the source language, which is also an important aspect for a translator to consider.

Information system helps to give prominence to the key content of a discourse. Coincidentally, both English and Chinese have a characteristic of end\_focus(Song, 2002), that is, they both lay the

new information at the end of the clause. However, there are also some marked information arrangements in both English and Chinese, and due to the syntactic differences between the two languages, not all the marked arrangements correspond with each other, and thus in translation, ‘focus shift’ is often necessary so as to guarantee the important information being emphasized.

Developed in different linguistic backgrounds, the cohesive devices of the two languages are not identical. Therefore, a good translation of cohesive devices does not necessarily mean a mechanical imitation of original ones.

As mentioned above, the three metafunctions are inseparable aspects of meaning of language. Theoretically, no one is more important than another. In a certain context, however, there is often a certain function being more prominent than the other two. As far as translation is concerned, if it is hardly possible to fully transfer the three metafunctions at the same time, then the most prominent one should be transferred in priority, with the other two being translated to the largest possible extent. This is a feasible principle for translation practice. It is fully demonstrated with various examples in this book.

Finally, literal translation and free translation are discussed. They are closely related to transferring metafunctions. As two kinds of expressive forms, literal translation and free translation can convey the same meaning from different angles. Without an adequate context, it is often difficult for us to decide which form is better.

The essence of literal or free translation lies in the delicacy that the translator chooses to start his work. The higher delicacy the translation is based on, the more literal the translation will become, and vice versa.

As a whole, this book provides a functional approach to translation studies. But it does not attempt to cover all translation issues once and for all. It just provides a framework for this kind of translation studies. It is expected that a more detailed study be conducted within the framework of systemic functional linguistics.

Here I want to express my great gratitude to my teacher, Professor Li Ji'an from Shanghai International Studies University. It is his insightful advice and his constructive comments, especially his painstaking modification of every draft of every chapter, that not only make my theorization more possible and reasonable, but also add much to the readability of this book. I am especially grateful for his patience, for his scholarly tolerance, and for the inspiration I drew from his philosophic talks whenever I was together with him and also from his optimistic attitude towards life. Without his guidance and encouragement, the accomplishment of the present endeavor would be hardly possible.

Zhao Dequan  
December, 2006

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