Two Orientations in Translation from the Cultural Perspective

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Abstract. Approaches to cultures involved in translation are generally divided into domestication (TL culture-orientation) and foreignization (SL culture-orientation). Domestication aims to minimize the strangeness of the foreign text, while foreignization aims to preserve the exotic flavor of the source language and culture. The analysis in this paper leads to the conclusion that both strategies are not contradictory but supplementary to each other. With more and more intercultural communication, both strategies will work side by side.

1. Introduction

Translation from language to language is in fact translation from culture to culture. Susan Bassnett believes that translation must take place within a framework of culture [1]. Translation, as cross-cultural communication, must be made both on linguistic basis and on a cultural one, because language and culture are so independent that one implies the other. Since translation and culture is closely linked, how should we deal with cultural factors in our translation, especially when there appear great discrepancies between the source culture and target culture? Since English and Chinese belong to two fundamentally different cultures, the translator dealing with these two languages has to fulfill his task of translation over the striking gaps between the SL culture and TL culture. Usually, he has to make a choice between a domestication method--- a reduction of the foreign text to the target-language culture system, making the foreign text recognizable and familiar, and a foreignizing method---a representation of the particular culture genius of the foreign text, making the reader see the cultural and linguistic differences.

Domestication and foreignization can be regarded as either global translation strategies or specific translation methods, and sometimes principles [2]. The dichotomy of domestication and foreignization can be traced back to over 200 years ago. In a lecture On the Different Methods of Translation, Friedrich Schleiermacher, a German theologian and philosopher said, "there are only two methods of translating, either the translator leaves the author in peace, as much as possible, and moves the reader towards him; or he leaves the reader in peace, as much as possible, and moves the author towards him" [2]. Schleiermacher shows respect for the original work [3]. He holds that a translator should be faithful to the original and should not make it easier for the reader and faithfulness should be the most important factor in a translation. Venuti has long been known as a supporter of Schleiermacher's theory of foreignization as opposed to domestication. He suggests that translation has the power to construct representations of foreign cultures and establish canons for the interpretation of these cultures and calls for the visibility of the translator and for the preservation of "foreignness" in opposition to "domestication" in the translated work [4]. The most well-known representative of domestication is Nida, an American translator and translation theorist, who puts forward dynamic equivalence and functional equivalence. In his opinion, the purpose of domestication is to make sure that the original receptors understood and appreciated the text the same way that target receptors understood and appreciated the translated text. As luck would have it, Qian Zhongshu, a famous Chinese scholar, has a comment which appears to be a sheer reproductive version of Schleiermacher's: 钱氏认为："化"分为"欧化"和"汉化"。前者"尽可能让外国读者安居不动,而引导我国读者走向他们那里去";而后者"尽可能让我国读者安居不动,而引导外国读者走向咱们这儿来"[5]。

2. Domestication

Domestication is a translation strategy in which a transparent, fluent style is adopted in order to minimize the strangeness of the foreign text for target language readers [6]. It tends to bring out the "communicative" aspect of language and translation. The viewpoint is that since translation is for the purpose of communication between the SL author and the TL reader, the greatest possible effort is to be made for the benefit of the reader, who is believed to be put off by a text perceived in any way as "foreign". The result is a greater or lesser degree of "normalization" and "localization". The "foreignness" should be removed by means of substitution with domestic cultural equivalents so that the target text is made more familiar to the reader. If we simply put it, domesticating translation is a kind of communicative translation, attempting to render the exact contextual meaning of the original in such a way that both the content and language are readily acceptable and comprehensible to the readership. In the west, Eugene A. Nida, a famous American translator and translation theorist, is generally regarded as the most influential representative of domestication. In his long practice of Bible translation, he introduced linguistics into translation studies and put forward "the closest natural equivalent". By "closest" he means that the target language text should be faithful to the source language text. By "natural" he holds that the language in TT should be fluent and idiomatic in TL. By "equivalent" he maintains that the TT readers' response to TT should be equal to the SL readers' response to ST. He emphasizes the important status of target readers to such an extent that he even considers "Reader's Equal Response" as an evaluation criterion for translation. For example, for the English expression "to grow like mushrooms", it is appropriate in Chinese to talk about "to grow like bamboo shoots" (如雨后春笋般迅速生长). By doing so, TL readers can share the same response to TT just as SL readers to ST [7]. Since Nida is a Bible translator, his translation purpose is to preach so that in his translation he used domestication for the benefit of target readers' better understanding.

Guo Jianzhong , a famous Chinese scholar, has ever raised some theoretical bases and reasons for domestication as follows [8]. Firstly, it's impractical to impose linguistic rules of the source language on the target language. Similarly, it's also dangerous for translators to impose SL culture system on TL culture system. Secondly, since translation is an important and indispensable medium of interlingual and intercultural communication, the modes of behavior of the source language should be embedded into the target culture in translation. In order to avoid cultural conflicts, domestication is not only necessary but also unavoidable. For instance, "as timid as a rabbit" is used to describe one's cowardice, for "rabbit" is the symbol of timidity in English culture. However, in Chinese culture, "rabbit" is symbolic of agility, while "老鼠" (mouse) symbolizes cowardice. Therefore, "as timid as a rabbit" is better translated into "胆小如鼠". Another example, "packed like sardines" is used to describe the crowdedness of a place. If it is rendered into "像沙丁鱼罐头一样拥挤不堪", the vividness would be lost, for very few Chinese have ever seen newly-opened can of sardines, with neat rows of finger-sized fish packed tightly in a small flat container. Due to different dietary habits, Chinese people are more familiar with dumplings and sesame paste than sardines. In their mind, it must be very crowded when dumplings are being cooked in sesame paste. Thus, this phrase is better rendered into "像芝麻酱里煮饺子一样拥挤不堪". Thirdly, the language of the translated version should be natural, idiomatic and intelligible for the target readers in order to avoid misunderstanding caused by the linguistic obstacles. In Nida's viewpoint of "naturalness of expression" in translation, the fluent translation strategy involving domestication is primarily important. Fourthly, an effective mode of communication in one culture is not necessarily effective in another culture. For instance: as drunk as a rat(醉得像老鼠一样), as thin as a lath(骨瘦如板条), as stupid as a goose(愚蠢如鹅), as close as an oyster(像牡蛎一样紧闭其嘴). If these images are reproduced in TL, effective communication cannot be achieved due to different cultural background and one's different cognition of the objective world. As a result, these examples should be rendered into "烂醉如泥", "骨瘦如柴", "愚蠢如猪", "守口如瓶". Therefore, in order to achieve effective communication, translators should

try their best to embed SL culture into TL culture and eliminate the cultural barrier, which can be performed better by domestication.

In a word, domestication strategy aims to make our translation more idiomatic, and thus more acceptable to target readers. Undeniably, the sacrifice of domestication strategy is that all the SL-specific traces or the source cultural flavor are made to disappear. The reader is not facing a foreign text and the particular culture, but rather a domesticating retelling of a story which originally happened to be written in another language. With the increase of readers' cultural awareness, domestication will probably lose its dominant status in translation and gives a way to foreignization strategy.

3. Foreignization

Foreignization designates the type of translation in which a target text "deliberately breaks target conventions by retaining something of the foreignness of the original" [6]. It tends to lay the stress on certain SL-related elements which are seen as fundamental to the essential message being conveyed by a text. Thus, translation works should reflect the alien things in a strange land that are expressed in the original. In his famous lecture "On the Different Ways of Translation", Friedrich Schleiermacher demands, among other things, that translation from different languages into German should read and sound different: the reader should be able to guess the Spanish behind a translation from Spanish, and the Greek behind a translation from Greek. If all translations read and sound alike, the identity of the source text has been lost, leveled in the target text. The Schlereimacher model emphasizes the importance of "foreignizing" translation. The privileged position of the receiving language or culture is denied. Lawrence Venuti is commonly acknowledged as the representative of foreignizing translation. It is he who gave the classical definition of foreignization [6]. In his opinion, translation aims to present foreignness or otherness of the original. He even publicly maintained that he strived to resist the dominant status of the target culture and to demonstrate cultural differences. William von Humbolt, like Schleiermacher, is for the movement toward the original. In his opinion, "A translator should have a foreign flavor to it, but only to a certain degree...as long as one does not feel the foreignness yet does feel the foreign, a translation has reached its highest goal" [3].

The theoretical bases of foreignization may be summarized as follows. Firstly, translation is an intercultural communication activity, the purpose of which is to promote the communication of cultures of different nations. Therefore, it is necessary to display the foreignness of the SL culture to the readers of the TL culture. Foreignization aims to admit and display cultural differences in TL. Secondly, by means of foreignization, the ST culture will be transplanted into the TL culture, which will benefit the enrichment of the target language and target culture. For instance, in A Dream of Red Mansions, we have such a vivid expression as "令郎真乃龙驹凤雏". Although, the connotative meaning of "dragon" is "monster, devil and cruelty" in English culture. In translation, we cannot replace"龙"with something else. With a view to retaining Chinese cultural flavor, Yang Xianyi renders it into "Your son is truly a dragon's colt or young phoenix" [9]. In addition, translators should have confidence in the TL readers' intelligence and imagination, which can help them understand the "foreignness" of an alien culture. Last but not the least, foreignization is believed to be able to enrich the target language by adopting some foreign expressions.

With the increasing contact of human society, people understand and accept more and more "foreignness' in their communication. The degree of tolerance becomes much greater than before. Mu Lei has ever said, "Some seemingly stiff foreign words will have gradually become natural ones through the time" [10]. Some successful examples of foreignization have been assimilated into Chinese, which brings about successful fusion of two cultures. For instance, sour grape(酸葡萄); dark horse(黑马); crocodile's tears(鳄鱼的眼泪); Time is money(时间就是金钱); a stick-and-carrot policy(大棒加胡萝卜政策); an eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth(以眼还眼,以牙还牙).

As a matter of fact, foreignization strategy aims to be loyal to the original and keep the exotic flavor of the original. With more frequent cultural exchanges, it will probably be more widely

employed and regarded as the main strategy in translation. But in using the foreignizing method, if the translator totally ignores the acceptability of the readership, there is the risk of unintelligibility.

4. Summary

Both domestication and foreignization can be justified if we take the translator's purpose and target readers' demand into account. Both strategies contribute to the construction and the enrichment of the target language culture. It is a bias to advocate one and refute the other. They are not contradictory but complementary to each other. Needless to say, domestication has been widely employed for it benefits target readers' reading. However, with more and more cultural exchange, foreignization will probably take a lead, for it aims to preserve the foreignness or otherness of the source culture. Undoubtedly, both strategies will work side by side, supplementary to each other.

Acknowledgements

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