

Analysis of Lin Yutang's Translation Thoughts and Translation Examples

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Abstract: Lin Yutang, a famous translator and linguist in China, produced a large number of translations throughout his life and made great contributions to the cause of cultural exchange between China and the West. With his excellent bilingual skills and unique insights into Chinese and Western cultures, he translated a large amount of excellent literary works into the West, greatly promoting the effective dissemination of traditional Chinese culture. He creatively combined linguistics and psychology, making a new breakthrough on the basis of his predecessors' translation theories. He proposed that translation is an art and the three criteria of translation are "faithfulness, fluency and beauty", and he advocated that translation should be "sentence for sentence translation" rather than "word for word translation". Among his many wonderful English translations, the translation of *Six Chapters of a Floating Life* is natural and authentic, and fully reflects his artistic interest and outstanding translation skills. The thesis first studies Lin Yutang's translation thoughts, and on the basis of a full understanding of his translation thoughts, it analyzes the translation of the classical phrases in the translation of *Six Chapters of a Floating Life*, and explores the concrete presentation of his three criteria of translation in the English version.

Keywords: Lin Yutang; *Six Chapters of a Floating Life*; Translation Thoughts; Translation Criteria.

1. Introduction

Lin Yutang, native of Longxi, Fujian, was originally named Hele and wrote under the pen name Yutang. He was a renowned translator, linguist, and literary giant in China. Lin Yutang was a prolific writer throughout his life, authoring works such as "The Art of Living," "My Country and My People," and "Moment in Peking," among others. His translations include "Six Chapters of a Floating Life" and "Selections from the Poems and Prose of Su Dongpo." He successfully introduced the literary works of figures such as Su Dongpo and Cao Xueqin, as well as the philosophies of Confucius and Mencius, to the West in English. Among his numerous translations, the version of "Six Chapters of a Floating Life" stands out for its authentic language expression and serene beauty. Lin Yutang also authored numerous articles related to translation theory throughout his life, with the most systematic and famous being "On Translation." With his thorough understanding of both Chinese and Western cultures and his unique insights into traditional cultures of both, Lin Yutang was honored as "one of the wise men of the 20th century" by American cultural circles. The concise phrase "With feet in both Eastern and Western cultures, and a heart dedicated to reviewing the articles of the universe" fully encapsulates Mr. Lin Yutang's translation career.

2. Lin Yutang's Translation Thoughts

2.1. Translation as an Art

At the outset of "On Translation," Lin Yutang posits that translation is an art. Here, "translation" refers to the act of translating, and specifically, he delves into literary works in his discussion on this topic. The debate on whether translation is an art or a science has long been a contentious issue in both Chinese and Western translation circles, thus it is crucial to first clarify the nature of translation. As we all know, translation is the subject of translation studies, just as language is the subject of linguistics. Science represents a

theorized and systematized body of knowledge, language serves as a tool for human communication, and linguistics is the science that studies language. By extension, translation studies are the science that examines translation activities. From this perspective, it is evident that translation studies constitute a science, whereas translation itself is an art.

Lin Yutang believed that the paramount challenge in translating literary works lies in faithfully reproducing both the style and content of the original, which is a crucial determinant in achieving equivalence between the impact of the translation on target language readers and that of the original on source language readers. Each author's personality, artistic temperament, and literary prowess all seep into their works during the writing process, forming their unique writing style and expressive mode. Furthermore, every language, shaped by diverse cultural backgrounds and historical developments, possesses its own unique linguistic characteristics, which are often appreciated intuitively but difficult to articulate. It is precisely these unique stylistic elements forged by the original author, influenced by these differences, that constitute the original work's distinctive artistic allure. Therefore, when engaging in translation, the translator must first ascertain the literary style of the original and then faithfully reproduce this style, avoiding any awkwardness or stiffness that might reveal the translation's artificiality. Of course, this viewpoint does not discount the translator's personal style altogether. Translation is an artistic recreation based on the original work. Hence, whether consciously or unconsciously, the translator will inevitably infuse personal style into the translation. To perfectly capture the style of the original, the translator should organically integrate their individual writing style into the original's style, without allowing it to overshadow or dominate, thereby rendering the translation more harmonious and perfect.

2.2. The Qualities of the Translator

In his essay "On Translation," Mr. Lin Yutang clearly elucidates three requirements for translators. Firstly, a

translator must have a thorough understanding of both the literal and contextual content of the original text. Secondly, the translator should possess a high level of proficiency in Chinese, enabling them to write clear, smooth, and coherent Chinese. The translator is the pivotal element in translation activities, and their translation skills determine the quality of the translated text. Therefore, to transform classic Chinese literary works into equally classic foreign literary works, translators need to possess profound cultural attainments and exceptional bilingual proficiency. The third requirement is training in translation techniques, where the translator holds accurate views on translation standards and methodologies. Here, "methodologies" refers to "translation methods or skills." In this regard, Lin Yutang raises questions such as "What should be the standards for translators? What attitude should translators adopt towards the original text? What is the translator's mindset during translation? Is word-for-word translation feasible?" He believes that translation requires an understanding of the translator's psychological factors, and to solve the above methodology issues, one must first comprehend language and the translator's writing psychology. Therefore, he suggests viewing translation activities from the perspectives of linguistics and psychology, as only then can translators hold accurate views on translation methodologies. Thus, it is evident that Lin Yutang attaches great importance to the role of translators' psychological factors in the translation process. This viewpoint makes him the first translator in Chinese translation history to explicitly analyze translation theory from the perspectives of modern linguistics and psychology, thereby opening up a new perspective and broadening the research scope for Chinese translation studies. Mr. Lin's three requirements for translator qualities can be summarized as: a thorough understanding of the text, proficiency in language mastery, practical translation experience, and accurate academic insights. These three requirements may seem ordinary, but they hit the mark and resonate with many subsequent generations of translators, demonstrating the profound and unique nature of Mr. Lin's translation thoughts.

2.3. Translation Standards

Building upon the translation theories of predecessors, Lin Yutang proposed that translation should aspire to three criteria: faithfulness, fluency, and beauty. He concurrently believed that these three criteria are "largely consistent" with Yan Fu's "faithfulness, expressiveness, and elegance." Faithfulness corresponds to "faithfulness," fluency to "expressiveness," while the relationship between translation and poetry, drama, and opera cannot be fully encompassed by the term "elegance." Thus, it is evident that Lin Yutang's three criteria and Yan Fu's "faithfulness, expressiveness, and elegance" complement each other.

2.3.1. Standards of Faithfulness in Translation

Modern linguistics aligns with faithfulness, specifically faithfulness to the original text. Lin Yutang elaborated on the criterion of faithfulness in translation into four aspects: Firstly, it is not word-for-word translation; rather, the translator should translate based on sentence imagery, not just lexical meaning. While lexical meaning is fundamental for understanding sentence meaning, the translator's faithfulness lies not in fixed, rigid word meanings but in the coherent semantics formed by those words. Secondly, it must convey the spirit; that is, the translator should strive not only for accuracy but also for the spirit of the original text,

understanding its implied meanings. Thirdly, it is not absolute; perfect faithfulness in translation is unattainable due to cultural differences and variations in morphology, syntax, and semantics. Therefore, what a translator can achieve is a thorough understanding of the original meaning, grasping its core idea, and expressing it aptly in a way that conforms to the conventions of the target language. Fourthly, it must be smooth; the translator should adopt a domesticating translation strategy, translating according to the idiomatic expressions of the target language for natural fluidity.

Lin Yutang also questioned the terminology of literal translation and free translation, believing it could lead to misunderstandings by suggesting two parallel standards of translation. Hence, he advocated replacing these terms with word-based translation and sentence-based translation. Word-based translation refers to translating based on individual words, while sentence-based translation integrates the meanings of individual words into a coherent overall meaning. He unequivocally stated that sentence-based translation is correct, while word-based translation is incorrect. Forcibly dissecting coherent, fused contexts to understand individual word meanings will inevitably lead to awkward and cumbersome translations. Thus, Lin Yutang's negation of the dichotomy between literal and free translation, and his proposal of word-based and sentence-based translation, can be seen as a comprehensive reflection and summation of the topic, reflecting his thoughts on translation faithfulness.

2.3.2. Standards of Fluency in Translation

The criterion of fluency is the fourth aspect of the criterion of fidelity mentioned earlier. The criterion of fidelity refers to the translator's responsibility to the original text, while the criterion of fluency is the translator's responsibility to the readers of the target language. Lin Yutang, analyzing from a psychological perspective, pointed out that to achieve fluency in translation, the translator should follow the following two aspects: Firstly, the translation "must be sentence-oriented." In other words, the translator should prioritize sentence meaning over word meaning. This perspective aligns translation with creation in that both require a holistic outline before delving into the details. Fluent writers usually have a clear mental picture of the entire article before they start writing, and then fill in the details with confidence. Translation works similarly, where sentences, rather than individual words, should be the unit of translation to avoid obscure and difficult-to-understand translations. Secondly, the translation "must fully conform to the Chinese psychological mindset." Due to differences in cultural backgrounds, grammar, and syntax, different languages have distinct expressive habits. It is essential to adhere to the expressive conventions of the target language, considering the reception of the target readers and avoiding heavy translationese.

2.3.3. Standards of Beauty in Translation

Lin Yutang believed that in addition to using the language, translation should also take into account the beauty of the translated text. The ideal translator should also be an artist, and should regard translation as an art, love translation with the same heart as art, and treat translation with the same rigor as art, so that translation can become an art. He believes that when translating foreign literary works, translators should pay more attention to the beauty of the language. This is because literary works are different from general texts. Translators cannot satisfy the need to convey the vividness of literary works by simply translating the information of the

original text. Instead, they should aim to convey the charm of literary works by translating them vividly. Secondly, he believes that translators should consider the stylistic beauty of the translated text while considering the beauty of the words. The stylistic style of the original author constitutes the unique artistic characteristics of the original text, so in the process of translation, the translator should also try to reproduce the stylistic style of the original work in order to convey the literary appeal of the original text to the target language readers. In short, translators should respect the original text and the readers of their own country, and use the cultural and expression habits of the target language readers as the standard to achieve a beautiful state. It can be seen that the ultimate goal of loyalty and smoothness is to meet the standard of beauty.

3. Case Study

After clarifying Lin Yutang's translation criteria of "faithfulness, fluency and beauty", in order to further understand the specific content of his translation thoughts, this paper analyzes and studies the specific presentation of Lin Yutang's translation thoughts in his translation of *Six Chapters of a Floating Life*, combined with the translation of Lin Yutang. *Six Chapters of a Floating Life* is a prose work by Shen Fu in the Qing Dynasty, and it is also one of the works that best reflects Lin Yutang's translation skills. This work contains rich traditional Chinese culture and reflects the pursuit of a tranquil and leisurely life by literati at that time. Lin Yutang's easy-to-understand English translation conveys the leisurely charm of the work to foreign readers, allowing them to better understand traditional Chinese culture and feel its charm.

3.1. Faithfulness

ST: 今即得有境地，而知己沦亡，可胜浩叹！

TT: Now the place is still there, while my bosom friend is dead. Alas! Such is life!

Lin Yutang believed that translation should not only be faithful to the original text but also capture its essence, which means understanding and conveying the implied meaning of the original text. The example sentence expresses that the current arrangement of the home is as envisioned in the past, but unfortunately, Yunniang has already passed away, leaving a deep sense of regret and sorrow that is hard to let go. The overall tone and atmosphere of this sentence are filled with sadness and helplessness. In his English translation, Lin Yutang fully appreciated the emotions and charm of this sentence, and successfully conveyed the original's tragic and helpless feelings to the target readers through the use of "Alas" and "Such is life".

3.2. Fluency

ST: 时方七月，绿树阴浓，水面风来，蝉鸣聒耳。

TT: This was in the seventh moon when the trees cast a green shade over the place. The summer breeze blew over the water of the pond, and cicadas filled the air with their singing the whole day.

This sentence is composed of four juxtaposed short clauses, which fully embody the concise and paratactic nature in Chinese. As a paratactic language, Chinese rarely uses conjunctions between words or clauses, focusing instead on implicit coherence. This leads to the succinctness of Chinese, as logical relationships and meanings are mostly expressed

through the implications of words or clauses. In contrast, English sentence construction emphasizes explicit cohesion, often using various formal devices to connect clauses, primarily adopting hypotaxis. This difference can be observed by comparing the original Chinese sentence with its English translation.

Given the different expression habits of various languages, translators must fully consider the linguistic expression habits of the target language readers when translating, ensuring that the translation is smooth and easy to understand. This example sentence describes a landscape. The original Chinese sentence lacks formal connecting devices, with its logical relationships and grammatical meanings implicit in the text. Due to the difference between Chinese parataxis and English hypotaxis, Lin Yutang added conjunctions such as "in," "when," "over," and "with" in his English translation to make it conform to English expression habits and facilitate comprehension for target readers. This example sentence is a concrete manifestation of Lin Yutang's adherence to the criterion of smoothness among his three translation criteria.

3.3. Beauty

Case 3: 少焉，一轮明月已上林梢，渐觉风声袖底，月到波心……

ST: in a while, from behind the forest the moon had already arisen, and about our sleeves the breeze was playing, at that time in the rippling water sparkled the moon's image.

The sentence describes the moonlit scenery witnessed by Shen Fu and his wife during the Mid-Autumn Festival. "明月上树梢，风从袖生出，月到波心。" This simple sentence presents three imagery elements imbued with emotional thoughts: "the bright moon," "the wind," and "the moon's reflection," while employing three vivid verbs "arises," "slips," and "dances" to enhance the artistic conception, making this scenery lively and vibrant. Therefore, when translating, Lin Yutang, in order to convey this lively and enchanting artistic conception, retained the three verbs and translated them as "arisen," "sparkled," and "playing about," respectively, allowing the target readers to appreciate the author's serene and joyful mood.

4. Conclusion

Lin Yutang regarded translation as an art and proposed three requirements for the qualities of translators. Building on the foundations laid by predecessors, he introduced his own three criteria for translation: "faithfulness, fluency, and beauty." After a detailed analysis of Lin Yutang's translation thoughts, this article examines the translated version of "Six Chapters of a Floating Life." It is found that Lin not only fully grasped the core ideas of the original work but also thoroughly implemented his translation philosophy in the translation. The language is natural, idiomatic, and easy to understand, preserving the serene beauty of the original work. This version is worth reading and pondering over by readers. Furthermore, Lin's translation thoughts facilitated the dissemination of traditional Chinese culture to the West. The leisurely and contented atmosphere of his works precisely met the expectations of Western readers for outstanding works under the pressure of the Industrial Revolution, allowing readers to fully appreciate the spiritual charm of Chinese culture.

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