

Foreignization Strategy in Translating *To Live*

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Abstract

Literary translation is a kind of special translation because it involves both the form and the style. Since literary works are always born in context certain cultural context, it also contain unique cultural elements. To effectively deal with all these factors in translation, foreignization strategy could be employed, for it not only keeps the original form and style, but also helps to convey complex cultural images into the target language, thus ensuring the effective communication between two cultures. To illustrate this point, this essay analyzes the novel *To Live*, the English version of Yu Hua's *Huozhe*, to observe how foreignization translation helps to bring the readers close to the author and how it guarantees effective comprehension among the readers. Besides, the paper also suggests three methods for foreignization.

Key words: Foreignization; *To Live*; Translation methods

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INTRODUCTION

A novel is something produced in a certain cultural background, and thus it contains certain cultural elements. Therefore, the translation of a novel can be regarded as the

translation of a certain culture into a different one. In such a process, the translation not only deals with the language, but also touches the very essence of the source culture. Generally, there are two major strategies for translation: foreignization and domestication. As regards novel translation, it is more preferable to adopt foreignization because it can better preserve the original features of the source text and culture and it can effectively convey all these to the target readers to let them feel and know an exotic culture. This is certainly beneficial to cultural communication. To prove this, this paper studies the translation of Yu Hua's *Huozhe* (*To Live*), a novel that reflects a typical social and cultural background of China that had undergone a series of great social changes, and then emphasizes the three translation methods applied.

1. FOREIGNIZATION AND THE RESEARCHES IN CHINA

Whether domestication or foreignization should be chosen is a common issue in translation. It has always been mentioned and debated in the translation field, but no consensus has reached yet. But in the last decade, as the focus of the humanities and the social science have gradually shifted to cultural studies, translators started to pay more attention to the investigation on the global cultural exchange environment. In this background, researchers started to cast a new look at the relationship between domestication and foreignization in translation and their applications in practice.

1.1 Foreignization

At the beginning of the nineteenth century, German philosopher and translator F. Schleiermacher (1981) put forward two roads for translators to follow: one is that the translator leaves the author in peace, as much as possible, and moves the reader toward him; the other is that he leaves the reader in peace, as much as possible, and moves

the author toward him. His two ways could be regarded as the origin of foreignization and domestication. However, Schleiermacher inclined to support the former, for he once mentioned that if the readers' purpose is to understand an article, they must understand and grasp the essence of the author's mother tongue, and understand the author's ideas and patterns of consciousness.

However, it was Lawrence Venuti, American translation theorist, who came up with the terms Foreignization and Domestication in his book *The Translator's Invisibility: A History of Translation*. Comparing with the method of domestication, Venuti preferred foreignization translation, believing that foreignization is a kind of cultural intervention and a kind of resistance against cultural narcissism, imperialism, etc. (Venuti, 1995). He also emphasized that the differences between languages and cultures deserve more respect in the process of translation reading and translation analysis (Venuti, 1998).

1.2 The Researches in China

Foreignization translation also has its root in the history of China. As early as in the Three Kingdoms period, Zhiqian put forward the concept of literal translation, which was later considered by Qian Zhongshu as an original and artistic way of translation. After that, the monk translators, such as Xuan Zang, also adopted foreignization to translate Buddhist sutras into Chinese.

During the May 4th Movement, foreignization translation reached a climax. In that time, Qu Qiubai and Guo Moruo, two distinguished Chinese writers, had advocated foreignization strategy and introduced new ways of expression to enrich Chinese language (Chen, 2000). They thought that foreign texts should be directly translated into Chinese to help absorb new words and syntax and enrich the Chinese language. Lu Xun, one of the scholars who strongly recommend the method of foreignization, pointed out that literal translation needed to focus on introducing new ways of expression rather than merely on new things. Also, he valued faithfulness over smoothness, insisting that a translator should sacrifice smoothness for the goal of faithfulness.

In the early 1990s, Liu Yingkai wrote an article *Domestication, A Branch Road of Translation* in which he criticized domestication translation and actively advocated foreignization translation. He believed that in the future, foreignization translation would become the mainstream (Liu, 1987). With the development cultural studies, the Chinese translation critics gradually turned to foreignization. Sun Zhili (2002) clearly defined the trend of contemporary literary translation and highly praised the foreignization translation method, because foreignization could keep the source culture as much as possible and could better convey it into the target language context. Other scholars have also discussed and considered that foreignization is more practical. Wang Dongfeng (2003) pointed out the importance of foreignization, arguing that

the development of a language and culture is dependent on communication and the acceptance of different cultures. Xu Jun and Gao Fang (2004) but admitted that cultural differences are unavoidable and proposed that foreignization could be the proper choice.

Although domestication and foreignization translations still remain debatable, it's worth noting that more and more scholars have shown their interest in and paid attention to foreignization strategy.

2. HUOZHE AND ITS ENGLISH VERSION TO LIVE

2.1 Yu Hua and *Huozhe*

Yu Hua is a representative of the avant-garde writers. Born to a doctor's family and growing up in a hospital, he witnessed almost every day of deaths and sufferings. These experiences, subconsciously but deeply, affected his real and writing career. People who read Yu Hua's early works were shocked by his true and absurd and even bizarre, terrifying life and existence. But the more brutal the reality was, the more elusive the hidden human nature was. Finally, the death struggles and people's daily life prevailed in his novels.

Huozhe is a story happened in the background of the old times during which China had undergone a series of great social changes. It describes the whole life of Fugui, the son of a landowner in the old times. The rich life of Fugui ends up in a gambling due to his "bad luck". And later, he is even taken away and forced to become a soldier. After he comes back, he finds his mother dead because of illness. Soon, deaths come to him one after another; first his son, then his daughter followed by his wife, son-in-law and finally his grandson. He is all alone himself with only one old cow accompanying him. To him, death seems to be a "luck", but he does not have that kind of "luck". He has to live on, with all the burdens that life throws upon him.

It is a typical story reflecting a typical social background and reality, and thus it carries certain traditional cultural elements. The translation of such cultural elements will surely require effective strategies to make them known to the target readers.

2.2 Michael Berry and *To Live*

Michael Berry got his doctoral degree on Chinese contemporary literature and film from Columbia University, and now his main field of research involves contemporary Chinese literature, film, popular culture and translation. His contributions to translation are his translations of many Chinese works, such as *To Live*, *Nanjing 1937: A Love Story*, *Wild Kids: Two Novels about Growing Up* and so on. As he once mentioned, his life was greatly changed by Chinese films. In 1994, after watching the film *Huozhe*, Berry was determined to translate it into

English. Driven by his enthusiasm for Chinese literature and films, he wanted to convey China and the culture to Chinese West

In translating *Huozhe*, Berry stuck to the strategy of foreignization. He said, "If your article is too literal, no one can get it. But do not put too much of your own idea in the translation." Just because of foreignization, much of the Chinese culture can be preserved and well communicated in his English version *To Live*. Thus, the study on *To Live* could bring some enlightenment to the future researches on foreignization.

3. FOREIGNIZATION IN *TO LIVE*

As discussed above, it is clear that both Schleiermacher and Venuti strongly recommended foreignization. With regard to the translation of cultural elements, foreignization sometimes is regarded as the best choice. Although the differences between cultures may create a sense of distance, an absolute isolation between two cultures is by no means impossible because people are eager to experience different cultures (Sun, 2004). This means that differences will not cause hindrance to the readers' comprehension, but will satisfy the readers' eagerness instead. In *To Live*, Michael Berry adopted foreignization to reproduce an exotic Chinese style and culture to the readers. Generally, three methods are employed: literal translation, transliteration and annotation.

3.1 Literal translation

Literal translation requests little change to the original text, both in the form and the style, which makes it a good choice for literary translation because form and style are of vital importance to any literary works. Therefore, the application of literal translation will maintain the original meaning of the source text, both in the form and the style, and bring a true story to the readers. In this regard, literal translation is a kind of effective method for cultural transformation.

Example 1: 我是徐家仅有的一根香火, 我要是灭了, 徐家就得断子绝孙.

Berry's translation: I'm the only flame the Xu family still has burning. If I'm extinguished, the Xu family will be finished. (Berry, 2003)

Analysis: "香火" is a very typical Chinese expression, meaning a male who can carry on the family line. In English, however, there is no equivalent concept. Hence, it is quite an innovation for Berry to translate it into "flame". This expression carries a very typical Chinese culture and a special religious culture. In the old times, males enjoyed greater privilege than females did. As a result, every family wanted only boys rather than girls. Because of this, they would burn incense and pray for boys. By and by, "香火" becomes a symbol of males. So, "flame" is a very appropriate translation to this expression, which not only enables the readers know the exact meaning of

"flame" in a Chinese context but also makes them aware of the culture involved. If the translator simply conveys it into "male" or "boy", the cultural symbol will definitely be lost and the sentence will turn into an ordinary one.

Example 2: 常言道:大难不死, 必有后福.

Berry's translation: As the saying goes: "if you escape a calamity with your life, there is bound to be good fortune to follow."

Analysis: This translation does reflect the real essence of the saying "大难不死必有后福". For some readers, they may not really understand the English version because there is no definite connection between escaping a calamity and the good fortune that follows. But this translation could serve as a good opportunity for the English readers to know the Chinese way of thinking—if bad things are avoided, good things are bound to happen.

3.2 Transliteration

This translation method is usually used directly in the form of translating the sound. Whenever there is a cultural element that can neither be translated nor be interpreted, transliteration could be a proper choice. "Jiaozi", a traditional Chinese food, and "kung fu" are two good examples of this. The adoption of transliteration could enable the English readers to have a taste of the original culture and bring them closer to the original culture.

Example 3: ...队长陪着城里请来的风水先生在村里转悠开了.

Berry's translation: ...the team leader accompanied the town *fengshui* expert on a leisurely stroll around the village.

Analysis: "风水" is a kind of Chinese philosophy that studies the power of nature, emphasizing the harmony between human and nature. Once a harmonious relation is formed, people will get luck and fortune. However, there is no equivalent expression in English, nor can it be interpreted in other ways. Though the translation of "fengshui" seems improper, but it can reproduce the original Chinese culture to the English readers and let them know some information about "fengshui". The effective communication between two different cultures can thus be secured.

3.3 Annotation

The above mentioned methods could serve literary translation well, but sometimes translators may need to add some explanation to help express the meaning of the original text more clearly.

Example 4: "这孩子生下来没有了娘, 就叫他苦根吧."

Berry's translation: "This child has been without a mother from the moment he entered this world. Let's call him Kugen, 'Bitter Root,'" she said.

Analysis: In the Chinese context, the name "苦根" has a very special meaning. In Chinese, "苦" means "bitter (or miserable)" while "根" means "root (or fate)". It is proper

to translate the Chinese name by transliteration, but the English readers may not know the deep meaning implied in it. With “Bitter Root” placed after the name, the readers may immediately figure out the deep meaning of the name, and will thus feel sympathetic to the little boy.

Example 5: “一百多亩地”

Berry’s translation: One hundred *mu* of land (*mu*: Chinese unit of area equal to 0.0667 hectares)

Example 6: “百十来斤大米”

About one hundred and ten *jin* of rice (*jin*: a Chinese unit weight equal to 1/3 pounds or 1/2 kilogram)

Analysis: Both example 5 and 6 employed explanations to help the readers get the ideas more correctly and precisely. Without these explanations, the readers will not be able to understand what these numbers may mean to the people in the novel. And the hardships of these people will probably mean nothing to the readers. Therefore, using foreignization together with explanations not only keeps the original cultural elements, but also guarantees the readers’ comprehension.

4. GENERAL EVALUATION OF FOREIGNIZATION IN *TO LIVE*

To enhance the communication and understanding between people from different cultural backgrounds, the translated text should bring to the readers the life scene and the world outlook of the original culture, and this is the most fundamental goal of literary translation (Zheng, 2015). After examining the English version *To Live*, foreignization translation gains the following achievements.

First, foreignization translation helps maintain the form of the original text. English and Chinese originate from different roots, so there are occasions when some source texts are relatively untranslatable. But with the foreignization methods, these texts could be successfully conveyed into the target language with little change. Such translation could keep the original form of the source text, and could also bring changes to the use of the English language.

Second, foreignization translation helps maintain the style of the original text. One core of foreignization is that “the translator should not put too much of his own idea in the translation”. Therefore, with little intervention, the style of the original text could be kept, which could make a translation more complete because style is very important to a literary work. Examples of this are “like a diseased chick” (像只瘟鸡) and “Picking her up was like lifting a piece of firewood” (扶着她就跟扶着一捆柴火似的), etc..

Third, foreignization promotes the communication between different cultures. With the help of foreignization, English readers will be able to learn from a different culture, which is hardly achievable by domestication. In

foreignization translation, the readers are not only reading the story itself, but a culture. This can be seen from the more examples, such as “a preserved egg” (松花蛋), “little bound feet” (缠小脚), “the Red Guards” (红卫兵), “big character posters” (大字报), etc..

CONCLUSION

In contemporary Chinese literary translation, domestication, in a long term, has been in a leading position. But with the development of society and culture, more and more scholars start to focus on differences instead of similarities. After the study of *To Live*, it becomes quite apparent that foreignization translation is quite applicable in literary translation, and the benefits are abundant. However, it does not mean that foreignization can be applied without limitation. Otherwise, the readers will be led to nowhere. It is certain that the choice of foreignization or domestication will remain a debate in the long run. No matter which strategy is to choose, the ultimate goal is to reproduce a better translation to enable effective communication between different cultures and to let the readers know a world different from their own ones. Thus, what left to be done is to explore the domains of both foreignization and domestication, to find more effective methods to narrow down the gap between the two strategies and to make both of them better serve literary translation.

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