Different Language Features Between Lu Xun's and Liang Shiqiu's Translation*

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In the history of Chinese translation, a debate between Lu Xun and Liang Shiqiu on translation took place in China during 1920–1930s. Lu Xun and Liang Shiqiu held different ideas on the translation principles and methods. This led to their different language features in translation. Lu Xun preferred literal translation and transliteration while Liang Shiqiu thought mere literal translation and transliteration might cause misunderstandings and make the translation hard even impossible to understand. Since Lu Xun once studied medicine in Japan, and most of his translation of European works is from the translated versions of Japanese, and the language is greatly influenced by Japanese. Liang Shiqiu preferred a combination of literal translation and liberal translation, since he is good at English, thus his language of translation is more easily to be understood and more appreciated. The paper aims to have a research on their language features showed by their translation ideas and works, in order that more attention can be paid to the study of Chinese translation history.

Keywords: Lu Xun, Liang Shiqiu, translation, language features

Introduction

During the May 4th Movement in 1919–1920s, a debate on translation between Lu Xun and Liang Shiqiu, two translation masters in China, broke out fiercely, which attracted many scholars' attention at that time. Until today the debate remains a hot topic whenever we refer to translation in China. And it is mainly about what principles the translators should insist and what skills they should adopt when they are doing the translation, namely, which translation is better (YANG, 1931). Based on different translation ideas, Lu and Liang put forward different suggestions on how to translate, and applied different methods to the translation practice. They both translated a lot of great works by some foreign thinkers and writers, and did much contribution to the introduction to modern science and concept of modern democracy about which few Chinese knew anything at that time (SONG, 2005). Differences of their translation ideas and methods lead to different language features when they try to convey thoughts and ideals of some important philosophical or literary works by some western thinkers and writers in a way of translation. Considering this, the paper will try to give a comparatively detailed description about Lu Xun's and Liang Shiqiu's language features of translation respectively, and make a contrastive study on the causes that have led to the situation.

* **Acknowledgements:** 浙江省社科联 2015 年研究项目阶段性成果, 项目编号: 2015NO35.

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Lu Xun's Translation and Its Language Features

Lu Xun once studied in Japan for several years, which makes him know Japanese better than any other foreign language. Many Russian literary and political books he translated are not from Russian to Chinese directly but from Japanese version to Chinese. In translating Lunacharsky's works, he examined several Japanese versions and said in one of the prefaces:

原本既是为压缩精粹的书，所依据的又是生物学的社会学，其中涉及生物，生理，心理，化学，哲学等等。凡这些，译者都并无素养，因此每多窒滞，遇有不解处，则参考茂森唯士……，费时颇久，而仍只能成一本诘屈苦涩的书，至于错误，尤必不免。(LU, 1981a, p. 266)

(The original version is condensed and based on sociology of biology. It concerns biology, physiology, psychology, chemistry and philosophy etc., about which the translators knows little. Every time I translate, the work has to be stopped. When I had difficulties in understanding, I always turned to Mansfield Tadashi's version of Japanese translation... It took me much time to have such a book of translated version which is a little bit hard to understand, and inevitably there are some mistakes.)

From the above words it can be seen that Lu Xun's translation is a hard job and most of his translation work is based on the Japanese version but not the original version. Of course, this is decided by his Japanese study experience and his ability of Japanese language. Lu Xun's mastery of Japanese language made his works have very obvious characters of Japanese language either on the book he wrote or the one he translated (LI, 1997). Generally speaking, there are two language features in his work of translation. The first one is that he frequently used the Chinese words in his works. This was quite popular among the students who were studying in Japan. In *The Story of Studying Abroad*, which is written by an early Chinese student who was studying in Japan, the author directly applied some Chinese words in Japanese. For instance “运转手 (driver)”, “澳样 (madam)” and “料理 (food)”, etc. In fact, many Chinese characters and phrases are widely used in Lu Xun's works in Japanese especially when he was in Japan. The second one is that in Lu Xun's works especially his translation works from Japanese language, the Chinese character “的” which has a structural sense in grammar is applied in a very high frequency. This “的” is translated from the Japanese structural word “の”, which is used to express coordination, compounding, and modification. Lu Xun habitually used the “介绍” in his translation works, which is Chinese vocabulary meaning “introduce”. In his translation work *Destruction by a Russian Writer* he used such a sentence:

对于新的极好的有力量的慈善的人的渴望，这种渴望是极大的，无论什么别的愿望都比不上的。(LU, 1981b)

In the sentence, the “的” is applied altogether eight times in spite of a total number of 39 Chinese characters in the sentence. This kind of translation is naturally connected with the language style of Japanese. Meanwhile “渴望” is put at the end of the whole sentence, which goes also in accordance with the characteristics of Japanese language. Chinese language is different in structure with Japanese language. In a verb-object sentence, the order of the words in Chinese is just the opposite of Japanese. Japanese language puts the object ahead of the the verb and Chinese language the object behind the verb. In order to make some change on the rules of Chinese expression, the preposition “对于” must be added to the nouns which are used as object. This kind of linguistic phenomenon is frequent found in the Lu Xun's translation from Japanese to Chinese. About such translation Lu Xun once said:

文句大概是直译的，也极原意一并保存原文的口吻。但我于国语文法是外行，想必很有不合规范地句子在里面。其中尤须声明的，是几处不用“的”字，而特用“底”字的缘故。(LU, 1981c, p. 128)

(The sentences are translated in a literal way, and I am very much willing to keep the original style. Since I am not good at Chinese grammar, there must be some incorrect sentences in my translation, among which what I want to mostly stress is that in several places of the translation “底” is applied instead of “的”.)

What Lu Xun tries to do is that he knows that too much use of “的” will make the whole translation boring and dull, and he expects the use of “底” instead of “的” can eliminate the bad feeling of the readers. Today when we look at Lu Xun’s translation, we will find his efforts just made little change of the situation, because we are now using “生物社会学” and “科学社会主义” instead of “生物底社会学” and “科学底社会主义”. Generally speaking, the language features in Lu Xun’s translation are mainly caused by the Japanese language itself which has independent grammar. And when he translated some Russian works from the Japanese version, in order to be faithful to the original meaning of the work and not make any damage of the writer’s idea for a second translation, he chose a method of word-to-word translation which is well known as “硬译”, Lu Xun’s special way of translation.

Liang Shiqiu’s Translation and Its Language Features

In the time of the Republic of China, due to the disorder of the domestic situation, many young students went to Britain, America and Japan to study, and Liang Shiqiu was one of them. At that time the European-American industrial culture was stronger than that of China. Thus many young students abroad tried to introduce some western culture to China in a way of translation. The works they translated include literature, philosophy, chemistry, physics, and some other subjects of science. For Liang Shiqiu, because he knew English well, so his translation from English to Chinese has a natural advantage of language. They did not need to worry about the problems from a second translation and have a feeling of innate superiority. Later a debate in translation broke out between Lu Xun and Liang Shiqiu, especially about what should be the right way of translation and which translation is good translation. In fact, it is not the debate between Lu Xun and Liang Shiqiu but a debate between scholars with a Japanese studying background and European-American studying background. In 1930s, Liang Shiqiu once criticized the translation of European-style (欧化文), especially Lu Xun’s translation of European works from Japanese. He said:

有一种白话文，句子长得可怕，里面充了不少“底”“地”“地底”“地的”，读起来莫名其妙，一有人说这就是欧化文…… 我看，是何翻译有关系的，尤其是和“硬译”那一种东西。……贤明如鲁迅先生者，也是硬译的大师。(LIANG, 2002, p. 93)

(There is a Baihua style, in which there are a lot of long sentences and “底”“地”“地底”“地的”. You can’t know what they mean. Some said they are European style. As I see it, it has something to do with the translation, especially with the way of word-to-word translation. Translators so wise as Lu Xun, is a master of word-to-word Translation.)

From the above it can be seen that Liang Shiqiu opposed this way of word-to-word translation, which is widely applied by Lu Xun in his translation. At the same time, Liang Shiqiu did not agree with a second translation of European works from another language especially from Japanese (ZHAO, 1931). In 1928, Liang in his article clearly put forward his disapproval of translating some European works from other languages. He

compared this kind of translation to the liquor and said that if your translation is from a translated version of another language, the idea of the translation will be farther and farther from the original idea. And it just like that you put more and more water into the liquor and the taste will be changed little by little. Liang Shiqiu translated Shakespeare into Chinese in almost 40 years and did great contribution to the history of Chinese translation. He insisted that translation should be as faithful as possible. He said:

凡原文为无韵诗体，则亦译为散文，因为无韵诗中文根本无此记载。莎士比亚之运用无韵诗体亦甚自由，实已接近散文，不过节奏较散文稍为齐整；莎士比亚戏剧在舞台上，演员并不咿呀吟诵，无韵诗亦读若散文一般。所以译文以散文为主，求其能达原意。至于原文节奏声调之美，则译者力有未逮，未能传达其万一，唯读者谅之。
(LIANG, 1988, p. 352)

(When the original text is poems without rhyme, I translated it into prose. Because there is no such poems in Chinese. Shakespeare uses such poems so freely, and it is equal to prose in fact. Compared with prose, the rhythm is a little bit better. In the stage, the actors don't intone but speak. So poems without rhyme are just like prose. Such translation is trying to convey the idea of the original work. As for the beauty of the tone, owing to my ability, can't be expressed fully.)

It is clear that Liang also thinks that faithfulness is the first principle that a translator should insist on. In treating with the language the two translators, Lu Xun and Liang Shiqiu have similar opinion, but are different in some cases.

Conclusion

In a word, Lu Xun and Liang Shiqiu are both masters of translation, but they insist on different translation principles. Lu Xun approves word-to-word translation and Liang Shiqiu thinks a combination of literal translation and liberal translation is better. Lu Xun supports the translation from the translation of another language in order to introduce more foreign culture to China, while Liang Shiqiu is strongly against it. Due to these differences, the language they use shows different features. The language applied by Lu Xun is a little harder to understand since he insists the complete European style, while Liang Shiqiu's language is more vivid and easier to be accepted by Chinese readers. Their debate deserves more research in the field of Chinese translation.

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