Study On Translation Compensation Strategies: An Analysis of English Translation of Mo Yan's *Red Sorghum*

LUO Ying[a],*; LI Yuying[a]

[a]Foreign Language College, Jiangxi Normal University, Nanchang, China.
*Corresponding author.

Abstract

The study on translation compensation at home could date back to the 1980s, but the scope of the research still remains narrow. In order to study the theory from a more panoramic and comprehensive perspective, the study pays closer attention to the translation compensation strategies. Combined with some typical cases in Howard Goldblatt's English version of *Red Sorghum* by Mo Yan, the thesis analyzes the four most frequently used translation compensation strategies employed in this classic literary work, including amplification, annotation, paraphrase and substitution. The conclusion is reached that the compensation strategies are expected to be employed flexibly rather than mechanically during the translating process.

Key words: Translation compensation strategies; Amplification; Annotation; Paraphrase; Substitution

INTRODUCTION

Study on translation compensation at home started in the 1980s. It is universally acknowledged that a certain amount of the original meaning or information in a context may lose to some extent during the translation process, which is generally referred to as translation loss. To be more accurate, translation loss means the loss of information, meaning, pragmatic function, cultural implication and the aesthetic value during the translation. Nida (2001, p.33, 87) proposes that this kind of loss is inevitable as "there is no complete same referential meaning and connotative meaning of phonetic system, lexicon, grammar and discourse character to two different communicators" in his *Language and Culture: Context in Translating*. To ensure that the information could be conveyed accurately, translation compensation is of great necessity as it can make up for the loss. However, the study on translation compensation at home remains immature, the scope of the study being quite narrow with two reasons. On the one hand, translation loss itself could be very obscure, defying easy detection and classification. On the other hand, inadequate attention is paid to translation compensation by scholars currently. Translation loss exists on different levels and translators are expected to exercise appropriate translation compensation strategies to make up for the loss to the largest degree, and only in that way could the target readers more likely appreciate literary works as the source readers.

Red Sorghum is a brilliant and splendid Chinese language novel written by Mo Yan, the vice president of China Writers Association, and he has won the Nobel Prize in 2012. He is also the first writer to win this prize in China. His novel *Red Sorghum* has created much of a stir in the literary arena since its publication. *Red Sorghum* centers on the story between "my grandmother—Dai Jiuliang" and "my grandfather —Yu Zhanao" in Shandong Province. It is a classic literary work manifesting the people's tenacious vitality and the national spirit in Gaomi Town during the Sino-Japanese War. *Red Sorghum* is quite popular not only in China but also around the world. Its literary value has attracted much attention of the scholars both at home or abroad. This classic literary work was then translated into English version in 1993 by Howard Glodblatt, the editor of *Modern Chinese Literature*.

1. TRANSLATION COMPENSATION STRATEGY

Since the 20th century, the research on translation theory has achieved unprecedented and remarkable development in terms of its quantity and quality. Centering on translation theory, many books or papers with high-caliber have appeared. However, inadequate attention was paid to the research on translation compensation theory, a sub-category of translation theory so that the study in this area has fallen behind to a large extent. Modern translation compensation thought is based upon modern linguistics and relevant discipline theory, getting rid of the arbitrariness of conventional translation theories. The thesis aims to build a more systematic and scientific translation theory.

Scholars abroad have categorized translation compensation from different perspectives. Hervey and Higgins (1992, pp.34-40) proposed four kinds of translation compensation: compensation in kind; compensation in place; compensation by merging; compensation by splitting in *Thinking Translation: A Course in Translation Method: French-English*. Compensation in kind refers to using the same language means equivalent to the source language in the target language so as to achieve the same effect. Compensation in place means the position of the sentence element in the translation is different from that in the original text in an effort to achieve the same effect. Compensation by merging refers that the translation merges multiple features of the original text and compensation by splitting means that the translation incorporates the meanings and features of the shorter sentences into a longer paragraph in the translation.

Ma Hongjun(2003) put forward two supplemented strategies: explicit compensation and implicit compensation in the paper *The Classification and Amplification of Translation Compensation--an Analysis of the Compensation Strategies in Hawkes's Translation of The Story of the Stone*. The former includes explicit annotation, which consists of footnote, endnote, transposition note, internal note, preface, appendix and so forth. The latter means giving full play to the means in the target language to make some adjustment of the source language in an attempt to ensure the target readers appreciating the literary work as the source readers. The implicit compensation encompasses amplification, paraphrase, substitution, adaptation, generalization and so on.

Xia Tingde (2006, pp.72-80) absorbed and further developed the research findings of scholars at home and abroad and brought forth eight types of translation compensation: compensation in integration; compensation by isolation; compensation with the same device; compensation with a difference device; compensation in a parallel location; compensation in a displaced location; synchronous compensation; compensation in difference in *A Study On Translation Compensation*. This method of classification is more systematic and has made unprecedented and practical breakthrough in the classification of translation compensation.

2. TRANSLATION COMPENSATION STRATEGIES IN ENGLISH TRANSLATION OF RED SORGHUM

When translating literary works, the loss of information is inevitable due to the disparity among different history, cultures, traditional customs and so forth. Hence, we are required to utilize a variety of compensation strategies to make up for the loss to the largest degree. In terms of compensation strategies, opinions vary. More than 20 types of compensation strategies have been altogether put forward by different scholars: amplification, generalization, omission, annotation, paraphrase, adaptation, substitution, imitation and so on. No matter which kind of compensation strategies we may employ, translators are supposed to get the main idea of the original text and convey the most important content at first. The study will focus on these four compensation strategies: amplification, annotation, paraphrase and substitution and analyze some cases in *Red Sorghum* by Howard Goldblatt so as to study the functions and effects of different compensation strategies.

2.1 Amplification

Amplification is a way of translating the source language literally with the addition of some appropriate words in the target language to better explain the original schema. There are some huge differences between English and Chinese and the cultural backgrounds or thinking patterns between the target readers and the source readers vary. The translator is required to create the same effect as the original text by all means. By amplification, the translator is able to add some words which the target readers are quite familiar with to reduce the ambiguity caused by different language and cultural backgrounds. In this way, the target readers are more likely to get the main idea of the original text accurately and evade some unnecessary misunderstanding of the text. Amplification is quite ubiquitous in translating some literary works.

Example 1

ST:"老哥，你是新来的吧？"中年人问。
罗汉大爷说，"是。"
他问："你没送他点见面礼？"
罗汉大爷说："不讲理，狗！不讲理，他们硬抓我来的！"
（莫言《红高粱家族》）

TT: 'Are you new here, elder brother?' the man asked.
Uncle Arhat said he was.
'You didn't give him anything to grease the skids?'
Those mad dogs dragged me here against my will.'

Analysis: In this example, we could see obvious difference between the original text and the translation version. In the source language, Uncle Arhat describes those who dragged him against his will as dogs. However, in the target language, there is an adjective before the word "dog"--- mad. Goldblatt added a word in the sentence to display Uncle Arhat's indignation. The expression "mad dog" can vividly show Uncle Arhat's emotion in a more accurate way, but the word "dog" alone is inadequate as dog sometimes even symbolizes something pleasant like loyalty or cuteness in the western culture. Hence, adding the word "mad" here enables the target readers to obtain a better understanding of the original text.

Example 2

ST: 父亲听着河声，想着从前的秋天晚上，跟着我家的老伙计刘罗汉大爷去河边捉螃蟹的情景。

（莫言《红高粱家族》）

TT: The sound of the river reminded Father of an autumn night during his childhood, when the foreman of our family business, <u>Arhat Liu, named after Buddhist saints,</u> took him crabbing on the river bank.

Analysis: In this example, amplification is employed to further explain the original text. When dealing with a Chinese name, a translator usually choose to translate the name word by word. But in this case, Goldblatt does not merely translate "刘罗汉" into "Arhat Liu". He added some words after the name to explain the meaning of "罗汉". "Named after Buddhist saints" shows the target readers the origin of the name. "罗汉" is the short name of Asura who deserves being consecrated by ordinary people, suggesting ending all the troubles and being free from human desire and passions. If the translator translated "刘罗汉" literally without further explanation, the target readers would not understand the real meaning of the name, which may influence their understanding of the image of Arhat Liu in *Red Sorghum*. Conversely, with the relevant explanation about the image, the target readers may have a further understanding of the image of "罗汉" so that they are able to appreciate the original text from a more panoramic perspective.

2.2 Substitution

Substitution is a way that some unique linguistic forms are substituted by the counterpart or the similar parts in the target language which could achieve the same or the similar effect as the original does on the source reader. Due to the difference among various cultural background and language patterns, to translate some specific image is a tremendous challenge for the translators. In translation practices, translators prefer to use substitution to address this problem. The substitution of image is quite normal in the translation of some literary works. Substitution allows the target readers to avoid the ambiguity resulted from cultural differences and to obtain a better understanding of the original text.

Example 3

TT: 赶上队伍了，父亲的<u>身前身后</u>响着提提踏踏的脚步声和粗重的呼吸声。

（莫言《红高粱家族》）

ST: As they caught up with the troops, Father heard the tramping of feet and some coarse breathing <u>fore and aft.</u>

Analysis: In this example, the Chinese expression "身前身后" literally means "in front of and behind someone". In fact, this expression is a special folk term in Chinese meaning "just around someone". If translated word by word, the intense tension and atmosphere could not be depicted vividly or would even vanish. "Fore and aft" is a unique expression in English. "Fore" refers to the front parts of an animal, ship or air craft and "aft" the parts at the back of boat or plane. Actually, "fore and aft" is a nautical term at the beginning and now it could be used to replace the Chinese expression "身前身后" to tell the target readers that there are many people around the author's father, helping to create the atmosphere vividly. Under this circumstance, Goldblatt uses substitution properly to assist the target readers to better comprehend the meaning of the original text.

Example 4

TT: 秋风起，天气凉，一群群大雁往南飞，一会儿排成一个"一"字，一会儿排成一个"<u>人</u>"字。

（莫言《红高粱家族》）

ST: Autumn winds brought cool air, and wild geese flew through the sky heading south, their formation changing from a straight line one minute to a <u>V</u> the next.

Analysis: In this example, "人" is a unique Chinese character showing the array of the wild geese vividly. If directly transplanted into the target text , the readers may feel confused about its meaning because they know nothing about the character "人". And the vivid image of the original text may be lost due to the lack of relevant cultural backgrounds. Therefore, Goldblatt uses the alphabet "V" to substitute the Chinese character as the shape of 'V' is quite similar with that of "人". In this way, the target readers are more likely to appreciate the original text as the source readers as they are highly familiar with the English alphabet "V".

2.3 Paraphrase

Paraphrase means that the translator abandons translating the original schema of the source language, which has no counterpart in the target language and is reduced to representing the main idea of it in the target language. Because some cultural schemata cannot find the corresponding counterpart in the target language, paraphrase assists the translator to directly explain the real meaning of those schemata so that the target readers could understand the original text easily. In this situation, amplification is not that useful as it may make the original

text even more complicated. Though the culture is not communicated in this way, the meaning of the text is supposed to be the top priority if it is difficult to maintain both the culture and meaning.

Example 5

TT:"大叔，"父亲说，"大叔，你挂彩了。"

（莫言《红高粱家族》）

ST: 'Uncle,' father said, 'you're <u>wounded</u>.'

Analysis: In this example, "挂彩" is a unique Chinese expression and there is not any equivalent in English. At the very beginning, "挂彩" means to put on colored silk or to celebrate victory under different situations. Now, "挂彩" is a euphemism for being wounded in action and is mostly used as an oral expression in Chinese. Goldblatt uses the word "wounded" to directly paraphrase the real meaning of "挂彩" in this dialogue for the target readers to accurately apprehend the expression.

Example 6

TT: 临上轿前，外曾祖母反复叮咛过她，在路上，千万不要跟轿夫们磨牙斗嘴。轿夫，吹鼓手，都是<u>下九流</u>，奸刁古怪，什么样的坏事都干的出来。

（莫言《红高粱家族》）

ST: Back home, as she was being lifted into the sedan chair, Great-Grandma had exhorted her not to get drawn into any banter with the bearers. Sedan bearers and musicians are <u>low-class rowdies</u> capable of anything, no matter how depraved.

Analysis: In this example, the expression "下九流" is a Chinese idiom and its equivalent is vacant in the target language. If the translator translates "下九流" literally, it may confuse the target readers. Therefore, under this circumstance, the translator is expected to express the implicated meaning directly and clearly, even though it may discard the source schema. "下九流" refers to those with low social status or those undertaking some inferior professions. Hence, Goldblatt translated "下九流" to "low-class rowdies" to directly explain the accurate meaning to the target readers in an attempt to avoid ambiguity. By paraphrase, Goldblatt enables them to enjoy the original text in an easier way.

2.4 Annotation

Annotation means transplanting the original cultural term and at the same time giving some explanation in distinct forms. In terms of annotation, various forms abound. Italics, dash, brackets and underline are all quite universal. Annotation evades the loss of the original text via introducing the foreign culture in detail or at length. However, the method is not expected to be employed on a large scale as a translation with a multitude of footnotes or brackets will definitely bore the target readers and spoil the readability. Therefore, we need to use the annotation discreetly.

Example 7

TT: 北斗勺子星——北斗主死，南斗簸箕星——南斗司生，八角玻璃井——缺了一块砖。

（莫言《红高粱家族》）

ST: The sapphire-blue sky was deep and boundless, green-tinted stars shone brightly in the sky: the ladle of <u>Ursa Major (signifying death)</u>, the basket of <u>Sagittarius (representing life)</u>.

Analysis: There are many methods to make the annotation including underline, italics, brackets and so forth. In this example, Goldblatt uses the brackets to explain the real meaning of these two stars.Ursa Major is a constellation in the northern sky, whose associated mythology likely dates back to prehistory, signifying death. Conversely, Sagittarius is one of the constellations of the zodiac and represents life. The annotations give astrological meaning in the ancient Chinese culture and enable the target readers to appreciate the original text to the largest extent.

Example 8

TT: 焦灼的<u>牛郎</u>要上吊，忧愁的<u>织女</u>要跳河，都在头上悬挂着。

（莫言《红高粱家族》）

ST: The anxious <u>Herd Boy(Altair)</u>, about to hang himself; the mournful <u>Weaving Girl(Vega)</u>, about to drown herself.

Analysis: In this example, "牛郎" and "织女" are both unique images in Chinese culture. "牛郎织女", usually translated as The Cowherd and the Weaving Girl, is a legend and love story between The Cowherd and the Weaving Girl. The Cowherd and the Weaving Girl originates from two stars: Altair and Vega. The love between The Cowherd and the Weaving Girl is prohibited by "王母娘娘", the Queen of the Heaven, and they are separated by the Emperor of Heaven. Though separated by the Silver River, their everlasting love has moved the magpies in the sky and millions of these little birds forge a magnificent bridge to enable the two lovers to reunite once in a year on the 7th day of the 7th lunar month. In this tale, the Weaving Girl is symbolized as the star Vega and The Cowherd as the star Altair. Goldblatt uses the brackets to explain the symbol of their names in a way that the target readers can also understand the real meaning of the names. If the translator transformed their names literally without any explanation, the target readers would get so puzzled about the origin of their name that they might not be able to enjoy the original text as the source readers.

To sum up, translation compensation is in a marginal position and falling behind compared to other translation theories. A great number of problems are expected to be ironed out. Research on translation compensation strategies is especially of great academic value. The study on compensation strategy in China is quite delightful but problems and misunderstandings still abound. We are required to make a further exploration of these strategies so as to form an in-depth and panoramic understanding

about the translation compensation theory. For example, what is the most universal compensation strategy? Also, we need to figure out the reason for using the translation compensation strategies. More importantly, scholars are supposed to broaden their horizons and build a complete and systematic theory system in an attempt to guide the practice.

CONCLUSION

It has to be noted that amplification, annotation, paraphrase and substitution are quite universal in literary translation and employing them appropriately helps the target readers to enjoy the original text to the largest extent. But this does not mean that we could apply these methods mechanically without prudent thinking. The author merely analyzes several ubiquitous compensation strategies in literary works based upon the experiences of

some previous scholars. Compensation is a strategy to minimize semantic loss and bridge cultural gap, and we have to realize that it is not omnipotent. In most situations, we are forced to use compensation due to the translation loss. The translators may choose to employ compensation strategies unconsciously in translation because of their translation experience and comprehension ability. Theory comes from practice, and at the same time

is tested by practice. Practice is the only standard to test the theory and if both of them are contradictory, scholars are required to modify the theory rather than the practice. Hence, translators are expected to sum up their translating experiences via practice and use the compensation strategies in a more flexible way to create the translation with high standard.

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