



## Comparison of Two Chinese Translations of the Gettysburg Address

ZHAN Lili<sup>[a],\*</sup>; CHEN Haiqing<sup>[a]</sup>

<sup>[a]</sup> Department of Foreign Languages, Dalian University of Technology, Dalian, China.

\*Corresponding author.

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### Abstract

Translation is seen as a process in which the translator is trying to re-contextualize the source text (ST) to make the translation adaptable to the target culture and target language norms. As one of far-reaching speeches, the Gettysburg Address has been translated into many languages, including Chinese. This paper makes an attempt to illustrate the procedure of translation through a comparison between two Chinese versions of the Gettysburg Address. The paper first makes a general description of the organization and language features of ST, and then a detailed analysis has been conducted alongside the comparison in order to unveil the process of translation. Through the comparative study, both strengths and weaknesses of two Chinese versions have been analyzed and revisions are made when necessary.

**Key words:** Gettysburg address; Translation; Source text; Target text

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### INTRODUCTION

The Gettysburg Address was delivered by Abraham Lincoln during the American Civil War on November 19, 1863 at the dedication of the Soldiers' National Cemetery in Gettysburg, Pennsylvania. Considered as one of the greatest speeches in American history, the

Gettysburg Address commemorates the Federal soldiers who lost their lives at the battle of Gettysburg where they routed the Confederate troops and turned the situation of the Civil War to their own advantage. Although this speech only consists of about ten sentences, it has been dearly cherished by readers of many countries. The speech has been cast in gold and preserved in Oxford University. On August 20, 1984, the speech was listed by the Committee for Humanities Advancement of the U.S.A. as one of the required readings for junior and senior high school students. All of these have shown that the enduring charm of the speech can neither be denied nor resisted.

This paper is going to make a comparative study of two influential Chinese versions by Shi Youshan (2001) and Zhang Peiji (2009). Shi Youshan specializes in translation and was invited as a visiting scholar to teach Chinese in Columbia University. She has put 100 famous speeches into Chinese which includes the translation of the Gettysburg Address (p. 202-203) among the others. Zhang Peiji whose name has been listed in the *Famous Chinese Translators*, is an influential figure in Chinese translation field. His book *A Course in English-Chinese Translation*, from which the translation of the Gettysburg Address is taken (2009, p. 282), has been used as textbook for English majors in China since the 1980s.

### ANALYSIS OF THE SOURCE TEXT

It's a prerequisite for the translator to examine the Source Text (ST) thoroughly to re-encode and re-represent it in the target language. The translator first has to be a reader of ST, but he is not a common reader in that "the ordinary reader can involve his or her own beliefs and values in the creative reading process whereas the translator has to be more guarded" (Hatim & Mason, 2001, p. 224). Accordingly, the paper is going to start from the first phase of translation--analyzing ST as most translators do.

The Gettysburg Address is organized chronologically: from past to present, from present to the far future. At first, Lincoln recalls the political principles on which the nation was founded--liberty and equality. Then he warns that these principles were now being threatened by the Civil War, and explains the reason that they were gathered together was to honor those who had given their lives for the protection of these principles. After paying homage to the dead, Lincoln stresses the task remaining, that is, devoting to the unfinished noble cause left by the honored dead. It can be seen that throughout the whole speech Lincoln has been highlighting the political philosophy that the equality of men must be preserved, and that their rights must be protected. He foregrounds the central theme through "the use of more repetition, restatement, and reinforcement" (Ross, 1980, p. 134), for example, the repeated emphasis on the significance of liberty and equality.

Language endows the speech with power and force. It is generally believed that a carefully crafted speech permits "a careful choice of language for precision of meaning and simplicity, concreteness and beauty of expression, in brief, it permits maximum accuracy in wording" (Capp, 1977, p. 175). In this speech, Lincoln's classic words "the government of the people, by the people and for the people" among others have spread most widely around the world.

## COMPARISON OF TWO CHINESE VERSIONS OF THE GETTYSBURG ADDRESS

Hatim & Mason (2001) state that "translating is a communicative process which takes place within a social context" (p. 3). The value of ST, to some extent, is determined by the socio-cultural context in which it occurs. In other words, ST manifests the influence of the source culture. However, the translator has to sever the organic relationship between ST and the source culture and plants ST in a different culture--the target culture. But it does not mean that the translator is free of the constraint of the source culture; instead s/he is subject to double restraints, i.e. the source and target cultures. What the translator is supposed to do is not only to convey the intended meaning of ST in another language, but more crucially is to cater the translated version to the target culture. Thus in a more general sense, the acceptability of the translated version lies in the degree of conformity with target cultural norms.

In the following part, the two Chinese versions of the Gettysburg Address are compared to show how the translators try to accommodate the translated version to the target culture.

**ST:** Fourscore and seven years ago our fathers brought forth upon this continent a new nation, conceived in liberty, and dedicated to the proposition that all men are created equal.

**Shi's version:** 八十七年前我們的先輩在這個大陸上建立起一個嶄新的國家。這個國家以自由為理想，以致力於實現人人享有天賦的平等權利為目標。

**Zhang's version:** 八十七年前，我們的先輩們在這個大陸上創立了一個新國家，它孕育于自由之中，奉行一切人生來平等的原則。

"Fathers" here refer to those who made great contributions but have been dead. It should be noted that the suffix together with "father" as a whole amounts to 先輩 in Chinese. "Continent" basically denotes a mass of land surrounded by sea. But 大陸 in Chinese does not carry any connotation, that is to say, it would not arouse any reactions or feelings from the Chinese receptors while 大地/土地 sounds more intimate to Chinese since they live by what they obtain from 大地/土地. Thus from the perspective of the target culture, the country established on 大地/土地 seems more dear to Chinese than that on 大陸 though the denotation remains the same. The translation of "brought forth" is determined by its collocation with "a nation". The dictionary meaning of "brought forth" in Chinese is 建立/創立, but in this excerpt it is followed by "a new nation" so it's more appropriate to translate it into 締造 which indicates the hardship of establishing a new country. The meaning of "new" should be arrived without controversy, but Chinese seem to be more accustomed to disyllabic words and thus Shi's translation "嶄新" is preferred. According to end-weight principle, the focus of this fragment of ST is supposed to fall on the latter part that states fundamental American beliefs are endowed by God. Shi conveys such a belief by stressing 天賦. Besides, 理想 and 目標 in her translation point out the direction in which the nation develops and at the same time, avoids repetition. This fragment of ST is suggested to be represented as: 八十七年前，我們的先輩在這片土地上締造了一個嶄新的國家。這個國家以自由為理想，以致力於實現人人享有天賦的平等權利為目標。

**ST:** Now we are engaged in a great civil war, testing whether that nation, or any nation so conceived and so dedicated, can long endure.

**Shi's version:** 目前我們正在進行一場偉大的國內戰爭。我們的國家或任何一個有著同樣理想與目標的國家能否長久存在，這次戰爭就是一場考驗。

**Zhang's version:** 現在我們正從事一場偉大的內戰，以考驗這個國家，或者說以考驗任何一個孕育于自由而奉行上述原則有著同樣理想與目標的國家能否長久存在，這次戰爭就是一場考驗。

The two versions show difference in processing the present participle "testing" and the clause after it. Shi treats them as qualifier of the Civil War whereas Zhang regards them as a purposive adverbial. In fact, "testing whether..." plays the same role as the attributive clause "which tests...". Hence just as Shi has shown, it qualifies the war. Shi breaks the original long and complex sentence into two shorter sentences in TT and stresses the role of the war as a test by keeping it as new information: "...這場戰爭就是一場考驗". Her treatment of ST more

corresponds to the Chinese language norms. The other reason that Shi's version is preferred resides in her consideration of cohesiveness and coherence with the former sentence achieved by the lexical repetition of 理想 and 目標.

**ST:** We are met on a great battlefield of that war. We have come to dedicate a portion of that field as a final resting-place for those who here gave their lives that that nation might live. It is altogether fitting and proper that we should do this.

**Shi's version:** 現在我們在這場戰爭的一個偉大戰場上聚會在一起。我們來到這裡將這戰場上的一小塊土地奉獻給那些為國家生存而英勇捐軀的人們作為他們最後安息之地。我們這樣做是完全恰當的，應該的。

**Zhang's version:** 我們在這場戰爭的一個偉大戰場上集會。烈士們為使這個國家能夠生存下去而獻出了自己的生命，我們在此集會是為了把這個戰場的一部分奉獻給他們作為最後安息之所。我們這樣做是完全應該而且非常恰當的。

Shi's translation of "we are met on a great battlefield of that war..." appears a little wordy. As with the following sentence, Shi employs a long and complex sentence, which might be hard for the audience to process. In contrast, Zhang adjusts the order by pre-posing the attributive clause "those who here gave their lives..." to the initial position of the sentence. In this way, the pre-posed clause justifies the assembly and connects the previous sentence and the sentences that follow; furthermore the addition of 我們在此集會 helps to achieve cohesive effect.

**ST:** But in a large sense we cannot dedicate, we cannot consecrate, we cannot hallow this ground.

**Shi's version:** 然而，從深一層的意義上說來，我們沒有能力奉獻這塊土地，沒有能力使這塊土地變得更加為神聖。

**Zhang's version:** 但是，從更廣泛的意義來說，這塊土地我們不能夠奉獻，我們不能夠聖化，我們不能夠神化。

In such phrases as "a larger issue/view/picture", "large" equates "more general", so "in a large sense" means "in a more general sense" (Longman Dictionary, 2001, p. 790). Lincoln uses three negative parallel clauses "we cannot...we cannot...we cannot..." to highlight the great achievements of those dead. Zhang follows the original structure, but he simply adopts the dictionary meaning of "consecrate" (聖化) and "hallow" (神化) which in fact seldom appear in Chinese on account of the different beliefs of American and Chinese people. In contrast, Shi keeps the first and combines the other two into one since "consecrate" and "hallow" are close in meaning. Another point is that the ST conveys the meaning in a progressive way. From this perspective, Shi has made an appropriate choice in breaking away from formal constraints so as to retain the original meaning, and the replacement of 這塊土地 with 之 not only avoids repetition but enhances coherence.

**ST:** The brave men, living and dead, who struggled here, have consecrated it far above our poor power to add or detract.

**Shi's version:** 因為在這裡進行過鬥爭的，活著和已經死去的勇士們，已經使這塊土地變得這樣聖潔，我們的微力已不足已對它有所揚抑了。

**Zhang's version:** 曾在這裡戰鬥過的勇士們，活著的和去世的，已經把這塊土地神聖化了，這遠不是我們微薄的力量所能增減的。

Chinese is known as a paratactic language, that is to say, in Chinese the neighboring sentences are usually linked through implied meanings. In contrast, English is a hypotactic language in which connectives appear in a large number to connect sentences. In this fragment of TT, Shi signifies the cause-effect relationship by adding the conjunction--因為, which helps facilitate the audience's understanding of the logical development. However, the rendering of "poor power" into 微力 is prone to misunderstanding in that it may be taken as 威力 by the audience for their same pronunciation in Chinese. Although the audience may eliminate the latter from the local context, they cannot go back and forth to re-process the speech since the actual delivery does not permit second thoughts. 揚抑 usually refers to the fluctuations of one's voice; it cannot collocate with 聖潔. In Zhang's version, "dead" is translated into 去世的. In Chinese this word is only applied to those adults who die from diseases or die naturally. As with those who have lost their lives in the war, Chinese tend to use "犧牲". Through the above analysis, the following revised translation is reached: 因為曾經在這裡浴血奮戰的活著的和犧牲了的勇士們，已經使它神聖至極，這非我們盡這點微薄的力量所能增減。

**ST:** The world will little note nor long remember what we say here, but it can never forget what they did here.

**Shi's version:** 我們今天在這裡說的話，世人不會注意，也不會記住，但是這些英雄的業績，人們將永志不忘。

**Zhang's version:** 全世界將很少注意到，也不會長期地記起我們今天在這裡所說的話，但全世界永遠不會忘記勇士們在這裡所做過的事。

This part highlights the significance of brave men's struggle and the contributions by contrasting "what we say here" against "what they did here". Shi stresses the contrast by putting them at the initial position of TT, in this way, transforming them from object in ST into subject in TT and making them marked themes which are given prominence in the information flow. As Baker (2000) holds, marked themes carry more meaning. Besides, Shi's addition of the time adverbial "今天" links this sentence with the former one which recalls the brave men's struggle in the past and thus forms another contrast between the present and the past. But 說的話 does not fit into the formal style, and 講話 would be better. Shi leaves out the translation of "long" and the plural meaning of "they". "Long" shows up in Zhang's translation; yet the collocation between 長期地 and 記起 does not conform to Chinese language norms since 長期 shows a period of time while 記起 is an momentary action. It's true that the

basic meaning of “the world” is 世界, but the predicators “note” and “remember” require the subject to be human. Therefore, it’s more appropriate to translate “the world” into 世人/人們. The suggested translation is represented as: 我們今天在這裡的講話, 世人不會注意, 也不會永遠記得, 但是這些英雄們的業績, 人們將永志不忘。

**ST:** It is for us, the living, rather, to be dedicated here to the unfinished work which they who fought here have thus far so nobly advanced.

**Shi’s version:** 我們後來者應該做的, 是獻身于英雄們曾在此為之奮鬥, 努力推進, 但尚未竟的工作。

**Zhang’s version:** 毋寧說, 倒是我們這些還活著的人, 應該在這裡把自己奉獻于勇士們已經如此崇高地向前推進但尚未完成的事業。

The major difference of two versions is seen in translating “who fought here...”. Zhang keeps the original order, but the modifier in front of 事業 turns out to be quite long. Shi reorganizes ST into a sequence of four-character phrases; in doing so, the force of the speech has been kept with meaning intact. However, her literal translation of “work” into 工作 does not fit into the context, at this point, Zhang’s translation fits. Thus the following revised version is proposed: 我們後來者應該做的就是獻身于英雄們曾在此為之奮鬥, 努力推進但尚未竟的事業。

**ST:** It is rather for us to be here dedicated to the great task remaining before us — that from these honored dead we take increased devotion to that cause for which they gave the last full measure of devotion, that we here highly resolve that these dead shall not have died in vain, that this nation, under God, shall have a new birth of freedom, and that government of the people, by the people, and for the people, shall not perish from the earth.

**Shi’s version:** 我們應該做的是獻身於他們遺留給我們的偉大任務。我們的先烈已將自己的全部精誠付與我們的事業, 我們應從他們的榜樣中汲取更多的精神力量, 決心使他們的鮮血不至白流。我們應竭誠使我國在上帝的護佑下, 自由得到新的生命; 使我們這個民有、民治、民享的政府永存於世。

**Zhang’s version:** 倒是我們應該在這裡把自己奉獻於仍然留在我們面前的偉大任務, 以便使我們從這些光榮的死者身上汲取更多的獻身精神, 來完成他們已經完全徹底為之獻身的事業; 以便使我們在這裡下定最大的決心, 不讓這些死者白白犧牲; 以便使國家在上帝福佑下得到自由的新生, 並且使這個民有、民治、民享的政府永存於世。

The parallel structure pushes the whole speech to the climax. The translation of this part determines, to some extent, whether the whole translation would be successful. This sentence, as a whole, is parallel to the previous sentence “It is rather for us to be here dedicated to the...”. To correspond with the translation of the previous sentence, this sentence is better to be put into 我們應該做的是獻身於..... In the meanwhile, this sentence contains a “that” parallel structure which clarifies the

remaining great task. Zhang uses parallel structure in his translation, however, treats “that” clauses as “so that”. In fact, “that” clauses should be regarded as appositive of the remaining great task just as Shi has done. But Shi’s version does not go far enough to keep the force of the “that” parallel structure in that she has just used two of them “我們應.....我們應竭誠.....”. The translation is revised as: 我們應該做的是獻身於留在我們面前的偉大任務: 我們應從光榮的先烈身上汲取更多的奉獻精神, 完成他們為之徹底獻身的事業; 我們應下定決心不讓他們的鮮血白流; 我們應使我們的國家在上帝的庇佑下, 獲得自由的新生; 我們應使這個民有、民治、民享的政府永存於世。

## CONCLUSION

It is said that an ideal TT should achieve the effect on the target receivers as equivalent as ST on the source receivers. But translation involves two different languages and two different underlying cultures which in turn cover different values and beliefs. For example, Americans admire Lincoln for his great contribution while Chinese may not possess such strong feelings. In American culture, liberty and equality is highly valued whereas Chinese culture more stresses collectivism. As a result, a translator has to act like a negotiator to coordinate all the differences. In this paper, a basic procedure of translation is presented: analysis of ST, preliminary TT, and repeated revision of TT.

In the comparative study of two Chinese versions of the Gettysburg Address, analyses of ST and TT are integrated in examining their language features and their organizations (e.g. marked theme, cohesion, coherence). And both strengths and weaknesses in these two Chinese versions have been analyzed and revisions have been made when necessary.

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