

An Analysis of Rhetorical Equivalence on English-Chinese Translation of Martin Luther King's I Have a Dream

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Abstract: The paper takes the rhetorical equivalence in the English-Chinese translation (Xu Lizhong, 2001) of Martin Luther King's I Have a Dream as the research object, aiming to figure out the characteristics of rhetorical equivalence when dealing with corresponding expressions in the two languages. The author of the speech, Martin Luther King, is well known for his efforts in striving for the "true" freedom of African Americans. The famous speech made in 1963 in Washington during a peace demonstration named I Have a Dream is famous for its spiritual power in the language he used, which is in particular embodied in the figures of speech among lines. The paper will hereby illustrate the language in the ST (hereafter referred to as source text.) and its equivalence in the TT (hereafter referred to as target text.) in terms of expressions with figures of speech.

1. Introduction

Jakobson is thought to be one of the first to propose "equivalence" in translation, who regards equivalence as the fact that "translation from one language into another substitutes message in one language not for separate code-units but for entire message in some other language" (Roman Jakobson, 1959)^[1]. Further, he divided equivalence into three categories, which are intralingual equivalence, interlingual equivalence and intersemiotic equivalence^[2].

Nida proposed the term "formal equivalence" as a target language item which represents the closest decontextualized counterpart to a word or phrase. He also postulates dynamic equivalence as "in terms of the degree to which the receptors of the message in the receptor language respond to it in substantially the same manner as the receptors in the source language" (Eugene A. Nida, 1969). Later, he uses "functional equivalence" to substitute this term to avoid misunderstanding of the term "dynamic", which is "mistaken by some persons for something in the sense of impact" (Eugene A. Nida, 1993)^[3].

2. Rhetoric and Equivalence

Rhetoric is primarily concerned with oral discourse (Xiuguo, Z., 2005)^[4]. Aristotle argues that "rhetoric may be defined as the faculty of observing in any given case the available means of persuasion". Campbell maintains that rhetoric is "the grand art of communication, not of ideas only, but of sentiments, passions, dispositions and purposes" (George Campbell, 1963). Farrell defines

rhetoric as “an acquired competency, a manner of thinking that invents possibilities for persuasion, conviction, action, and judgment” (Thomas B. Farrell, 1993)^[5]. In a nutshell, rhetoric can be understood as the management of symbols to coordinate social actions.

An important part of translation theory and practice is to reproduce the stylistic characteristics of the ST especially in some literary texts. There are some translation scholars who concern the form or style in translation. In text typology, Tytler proposes that “the style and manner of writing should be of the same character as that of the original” (Alexander Fraser Tytler, 1790)^[6]. Yan Fu also highlights the point in his criteria of translation as “faithfulness, expressiveness and elegance.”

The expression issue in translation is closely related to rhetoric in that both concern how to use languages appropriately. Translation is a kind of creative work where style should not be absent in TT delivery. In general, it concerns how to ensure the adaptation of the TT in language transformation (Miqing, L., 1986)^[7]. The rhetorical equivalence is hereby playing an essential role in TT and should not be understated.

3. Translation of Rhetorical Expressions and Illustration

In *I Have a Dream*, there are influx of expressions with rhetorical features. How to cope with them in translation is of vital significance. The translated text of the speech that is chosen is the version by Xu Lizhong (Central Compilation & Translation Press, 2001)^[8].

Five score years ago, a great American, in whose symbolic shadow we stand today, signed the Emancipation Proclamation.

There appear two rhetorical devices: allusion and antonomasia. The former one, through quoting the historical event, attempts to get closer with the audience by using the familiar event and the translator uses literal translation but it requires the background knowledge of the reader. The latter one aims at making the expression “five score” which means one hundred, a much more common daily word, easier to understand.

I am not unmindful that some of you have come here out of great trials and tribulations...Some of you have come from areas where your quest for freedom left you battered by the storms of persecution and staggered by the winds of police brutality. You have been the veterans of creative suffering.

In this part, there are four figures all together: alliteration, understatement, metaphor and irony. “I am not unmindful” represents the figure of understatement, which refers to “a figure of speech in which an idea is deliberately expressed too weakly” (Xiuguo, Z., 2005). And the structure has been preserved by the translator. “Trials and tribulations” use the figure of alliteration, which refers to “the repetition of initial consonant in a sequence of words” (Xiuguo, Z., 2005). Owing to the different features of pronunciation between Chinese and English, it is not easy to find two exact equivalent words which have the same meaning and the same characteristic in pronunciation. The translation fails to fulfill the figure here. The phrases “veterans” and “creative suffering” represent the figure of irony. The translator here uses the method of free translation to present the connotation of the figure.

4. Rhetorical function and its presentation in the target text

As what has been demonstrated above, the rhetorical devices play an essential role in a text and *I Have a Dream* can be seen as an example. In general, the rhetorical devices can be classified into four types: phonetic figures, syntactic figures semantic figures and logical figures, which will be illustrated as follows.

4.1 Phonetic Figures of Speech

Phonetic figures of speech deal with figures of speech which have something to do with

pronunciation. Alliteration and pun are two usual phonetic figures, and the former is frequently seen in *I Have a Dream*. In equivalent aspect, this sort of figures is difficult to translate if both form and meaning are required, which is similar to the translation of poetry. For instance, “trials and tribulations” in this speech are not translated in the way that alliteration is concerned with.

4.2 Syntactic Figures of Speech

Syntactic figures of speech are involving sentence structure and the issues against syntactic features in rhetoric, which includes repetition, parallelism, antithesis, rhetorical question, etc. In this speech, it is not rare to be seen. There are many parts using parallelism like “I have a dream that...” and repetition like “let freedom ring”. The rhetorical effect of syntactic figures is significant and impressive. In TT, syntactic figures of speech are mostly well presented as it is comparatively easier and more flexible for the translator to decide what sentences and phrases to choose from and how to convey the same or similar rhetorical effect in the TT.

4.3 Semantic Figures of Speech

Semantic figures of speech are concerned with specific words and their meaning, involving simile, metaphor, synecdoche, transferred epithet, etc., which lay more stress on the vividness of language so that the requirement for the translator is tough to achieve. In *I Have a Dream*, there are many sentences that use semantic figures and even combined ones in the same sentence. Some are delivered with the rhetorical feature as closely as the ST, for example, metaphor and simile while others like transferred epithet and synesthesia are not, which require higher similarity of the contextual meaning in different cultures.

4.4 Logical Figures of Speech

Logical figures of speech, though not frequently used, cannot be neglected. This kind of figure usually has its contextual connotation or can be described as culture specific. Therefore, it is hard to find a similar usage in the TT, especially in languages which are rather distinctive. Figures like allusion, irony and oxymoron are more frequently used in the speech. However, due to different cultural backgrounds, the difficulty of generating an expression with exactly the same logical features prevents the translator from achieving equivalent translation in the way that the meaning and form or stylistic feature of the ST are preserved simultaneously.

5. Conclusion

In *I Have a Dream*, many rhetorical devices are used, which raises problem for the translators. The use of these rhetorical figures, on the one hand, make the text more vivid and full of interest, which can draw the attention of readers or listeners. On the other hand, they also create challenges and difficulties for the translators to reconstruct the structures that the original text aims to convey with the same manner. The situation beneath these difficulties in translating sentences with rhetorical features, however, obscures a larger picture. Equivalence, the term studied, evaluated and criticized for decades still has its significance in dealing with fundamental problems in translation. Meanwhile, the form of rhetoric embodied in sentences not only requires the translation theorist to put forward more practical and available theories to provide solutions in a more appropriate and realistic way.

In a nutshell, rhetorical equivalence is hard to achieve. But this is not the end. We should consider the underlying factors causing the challenges and try to overcome them. Through analysis of the speech from the perspective of rhetorical equivalence in translation, several factors could be found

accordingly, which are summed up as follows.

First and foremost, the problem lies in the ST and its corresponding culture in which it comes into being. The culture determines its language in many ways so that there might be many culture-specific customs and languages are thereby influenced. Secondly, the qualification of the translator is also a significant factor when it comes to this issue. As is often the case, the translator should always consider the readability of the TT referring to the most potential readers of the work. In the final analysis, stylistic feature like rhetoric should be taken into consideration in translation to make it equivalent to the original text not only in sense but also in aesthetics.

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