

Original Paper

A Report on the Translation Practice of *the Colonial Period of
American History* in the Perspective of Thick
Translation—Exploration of Annotation in the Translation of
Historical Texts

Han Chang¹

¹ School of Foreign Languages, Hebei University of Technology, Tianjin, China

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Abstract

Based on the author's translation practice of the colonial period of American history as a case study, this paper aims to resolve the problem of translating foreign historical texts that are obscure. Guided by in-depth translation, it explores what can be done from the perspective of annotation to make the information in translation be more complete, more accurate, and more readable.

Keywords

Thick Translation, Annotation, Historical Texts

1. Introduction

The purpose of translation is to enable the readers to fully understand the original text, and even to appreciate its ideological content and stylistic features. To achieve this goal, the translator's primary consideration is whether the target readers can understand the whole content of the text as well as the original readers. Hence, in the process of translation, it is necessary to "convey the content primarily" and to ensure the "readability" and "accuracy" of the translation. When translating Chapter XXI and XXII of *The colonial period of American history*, I wanted to explore how to improve my translation because of its textual characteristics and the large amount of historical and cultural knowledge involved. After reviewing materials and continuous practice, the translation was revised using thick translation as a guide with annotation, which could make the information in the translation more complete, more accurate and more readable.

2. Textual Features of *the Colonial Period of American History*

The contents of Chapter XXI and XXII focus on religion, politics, and early colonial life in Massachusetts, covering a great deal of historical and cultural background knowledge and involving a variety of types of vocabulary.

From the perspective of lexical level, the source text contains a large number of vocabulary and cultural words rich in the characteristics of the source language. For example, religious and political words such as “the Independents”, “the Grand Remonstrance”, “Lecture Day”. Some famous historical figures, such as Winthrop, Lady Arbella Johnson, Sir Richard Saltonstall. There are also a number of familiar words with totally different meanings, such as “the elders”, “delinquent” and “son”.

From the perspective of sentences, there are myriad of long and difficult sentences with complex structures with extensive use of non-subject sentences, Parallelism sentences and other sentence types. In addition, the differences in expression between Chinese and English, the vague logical relationship between the sentences in the text, both of them require the translator to carefully figure out and understand, which reflects the objectivity and rigor of historical texts. For example: “Among the representatives of the gentry were Winthrop him-elf, lord of the manor of Groton; Lady Arbella Johnson and her sister, Susan, sisters of the Earl of Lincoln...”.

3. Thick Translation

American philosopher Kwame Anthony Appiah proposed the conception of ‘Thick Translation’ in 1993. The invention of this term is inspired by “thick description” of the ethnographer Clifford Geertz, who emphasizes that “thick description” should be applied in “observing, understanding, interpreting, describing, and ‘inscribing’ another cultural in writing” (Geertz, 1973, p. 19). The core of thick translation is to place the source text in a rich cultural context by means of annotation and commentary to preserve the cultural characteristics of the source language regardless of the literal meaning of a text. He said that translation that seeks with its annotations and its accompanying glosses to locate the text in a rich cultural and linguistic context, was eminently worth doing. he had called this “thick translation”. He proposes three theoretical points for thick translation: focus on intention, emphasize on context and respect for difference.

Firstly, Appiah states that utterances are the products of actions, which like all actions, are undertaken for reasons. When a speaker communicates a belief by way of the utterance of a sentence, she does so by getting her hearers to recognize both that this is the belief she intends them to have and that she intends them to have that belief in part because they recognize that primary intention. This is the heart of utterance-meaning. While each utterance of a sentence will be surrounded and motivated by more than its literal intentions. If you cannot conventionally communicate a certain literal intention in language A and you can in language B, then the translator cannot produce a literal translation. Secondly, emphasizing on the context. Thick translation is context-dependent, that is identifying specific reader types and focusing on contextualization which can be achieved through annotations and notes. (Venuti,

2000, p. 421) Thirdly, respecting for differences. Translation should be based on an awareness of cultural differences, so that the readers respect and deeply understand other culture.

Theo Hermans firstly put thick translation into the application of translation practice who first combined translation with understanding the culture of the other. He argued that Appiah's conception of "Thick Translation" could guide translation practice.

Early research on thick translation in China (2004-2014) focused on the English translation of the Chinese classics and theoretical introduction to thick translation. Then thick translation was combined with law, historical, media texts for application in practice. From 2015 to the present, there has been a new rise of research on the application of thick translation in practice, combining it with martial arts, gastronomy, business English texts, foreign translations of minority cultures, Chinese translations of foreign literary works, medical texts, and translations of intangible cultural heritage. The applications of English translation of historical texts are more than of Chinese translation of historical texts. In the applications of English translation of historical texts, the main emphasis is on the importance of respecting differences in thick translation, respecting Chinese culture, and learning to retain words with traditional Chinese culture in the translation, with the purpose of promoting Chinese culture and increasing the spread of Chinese culture. In the applications of Chinese translation of historical texts, the key point is on the importance of context must not be neglected in the translation.

4. Annotation

4.1 Purpose of Annotation

In "Interpretation and Annotation in Translation", Fang Mengzhi points out that the main purpose of annotation is to solve confusion, supplement and explain the translation method. (Fang Mengzhi, 1993) In historical texts, some partial information is lost in the translation due to cultural differences and the lack of certain historical and cultural literacy of translator, so some translation methods are needed to compensate for such translations. Chinese scholars Ma Hongjun and Xia Tingde have summarised their respective translation compensation methods on the basis of their predecessors. Ma Hongjun's proposed translation compensation means are specific to the location of compensation, while Xia Tingde's summary of eight compensation means is more comprehensive.

Ma Hongjun proposed explicit and implicit compensation. Explicit compensation refers to explicit annotations such as endnotes, footnotes, in-text annotation, and prefaces and appendices to translations. The second discrete compensation among the eight means of compensation proposed by Xia Tingde is related to annotations, including in-text and out-of-text annotations. (Tan Yanan, 2017) Therefore, annotation is an important means for translators to compensate for the information in the translation process.

4.2 Annotation in the Perspective of Thick Translation

In recent years, there have been many fruitful research results on the combination of thick translation and annotation. Since thick translation was introduced into China in 2004, the research on annotation

has gradually shifted from the previous research from the perspective of functional equivalence and Skopos theory to by the perspective of thick translation. Cao Minglun proposed explicit thick translation and implicit thick translation in 2014. He believed that explicit thick translation is adding annotations outside the text, and implicit thick translation is adding words within the text. Based on this, annotation in the perspective of thick translation can be divided into explicit and implicit annotation. Explicit annotation includes the addition of footnotes and in-text annotation, while implicit annotation is the addition of information directly into the translation without taking any annotation symbols.

Appiah's "Thick translation" explains the reasons for adding annotations to translations and provides a solid theoretical framework for the application of annotation which puts thick translation into practice. Annotation is the most effective way to "polish" translation. With annotation, the translator can reconcile the author's intentions with the reader's expectations, whatever the text, especially in historical texts. Furthermore, it brings a greater breadth and depth of cultural information about the source language. In the following, the author will further explain explicit and implicit annotation in the context of textual examples.

5. Case Study

5.1 Explicit Annotation

Explicit annotation include footnotes and in-text annotation. Footnotes can be attached to the bottom of a text page to explain something. Most of the background knowledge involved is explained to the reader by adding footnotes. In-text annotation is different from the above-mentioned footnote as it is adopted when the length of the note is relatively short. In-text annotation is for explaining the previous abstract words or phrases. The compensatory content is placed inside the translation through in-text annotation, marking the compensatory element inserted inside the translation by means of punctuation, such as brackets and dashes, to make it clear that the marked or bracketed part was added by the translator. In the following case studies, some examples contain both explicit and implicit annotation, and the author analyses the explicit and implicit annotation respectively.

Example 1: Williams denied the validity of the Massachusetts Bay charter and the right of the colony to hold its lands by grant from the crown.

Original translation: 威廉姆斯否认马萨诸塞州宪章的有效性以及王室赠与马萨诸塞州土地的合法性。

Adaptation: 威廉姆斯否认马萨诸塞州特许状¹的有效性以及英格兰王室赠与马萨诸塞州土地的合法性。

¹1606年, 英格兰国王詹姆斯一世授予普利茅斯公司一份特许状允许其在北纬38°至45°之间定居。1620年, “五月花号”号船将大约100名朝圣分离主义者带到了现在的马萨诸塞州, 普利茅斯殖民地在那里扎根。

In the 16th century, the British Empire used three main types of colonies as it sought to expand its territory to distant parts of the earth. These three types were royal colonies, proprietary colonies, and

corporate colonies. A charter colony by definition is a “colony...chartered to an individual, trading company, etc., by the British crown.” Although charter colonies were not the most prevalent of the three types of colonies in crown.” Although charter colonies were not the most prevalent of the three types of colonies in the British Empire, they were by no means insignificant. The King may revoke the grant and make the colony Crown-administered. A charter colony is “a colony granted by the King of England to a person, trading company, etc.”. The word “charter” comes directly from the Old French word charter; originally from the Latin word charter which means “纸”, the root word chart(paper)+er(verb suffix) - to write on paper-to act in line with a contract. And later this word derived from the word “charter, charters The word “charter” is the same as the verb “to write”. As to whether “charter” should be translated as “宪章” 还是 “特许状”, according to thick translation, the translation should emphasize the context. Therefore, taking into account the context and historical facts, there should be translated as “特许状”. The footnote of the explicit commentary is chosen because of the information added.

Example 2: The lady Deborah Moody, “a wise and anciently religious woman, who being taken with the error of denying baptism of infants was dealt with by the elders and admonished by the Salem church.”

Original translation: 黛博拉·穆迪 (Deborah Moody) 女士是 “一位睿智并且信奉古老宗教的女性, 她因不接受婴儿洗礼而受到长老会的惩罚及塞勒姆教会的训诫。”

Adaptation: 黛博拉·穆迪 (Deborah Moody) 女士是 “一位睿智并且信奉古老宗教的女性, 她因不认可婴儿洗礼¹ 这一宗教习俗而受到长老会的惩罚及塞勒姆教会 (她是其中一员) 的训诫。”

¹ 黛博拉·穆迪在其丈夫亨利·穆迪死后成为再洗礼派——人在婴儿时期的洗礼, 是受命于他人的驱使, 不能表达自身的意愿, 应当在人成年后, 有了自由思想意识时, 再次进行洗礼, 这样才真正的净化自身灵魂, 救赎原罪。长老会的洗礼一般是通过洒水, 他们将婴儿洗礼视为新约的立约标志, 类似于旧约中的割礼。这句话是她的好友温斯洛普 (Winthrop) 对她的评价。

The term “baptism of infants” is a cultural term with religious significance. In accordance with thick translation, the translation should preserve the differences between the source language and the target language, so a footnote is needed here to explain its content. Baptism of infants has a lot information and it may not be appropriate to add directly, so a footnote is occurred. Deborah Moody arrived in the Massachusetts Bay Colony in April 1640. She purchased land outside of Boston and became a member of the Salem Church. The in-text annotation makes the translation more concise by directly marking “她是其中一员” in parentheses.

Example 3: Delinquents were first advised, then censored by vote of the entire church, and if these methods proved ineffective were excommunicated, that is, barred from communion.

Original translation: 教会首先会对罪犯进行劝导, 之后他将接受所有教会成员的监督审查。如果这些办法都不能纠正其行为, 教会将其逐出, 这也意味着禁止他领受圣餐。

Adaptation: 教会首先会对罪犯 (犯戒律的人), 进行劝导, 之后他将接受所有教会成员的监督审查。如果这些办法都不能纠正其行为, 教会将其逐出, 这也意味着禁止他领受圣餐——这是基督教

会的仪式，人们吃面包和喝酒，以纪念基督与门徒的最后一顿饭。

This sentence is found in the original paragraph which introduces church membership, where the whole paragraph describes the joining and excommunication of church members. Delinquent means “罪犯，违法者”，but according to the thick translation, in the context of the source text, the author thinks it is important to add that who are “罪犯” that is “犯戒律的人”. The author believes that it is important to add the Therefore, the in-text annotation is chosen, and brackets are added after the translation to supplement the content of the annotation. The word “communion” is a traditional Christian rite, according to thick translation, words with cultural characteristics should be clearly explained in their specific meaning. Therefore, using a dash in the translation is more convenient for the reader than adding a footnote at the end of the page; which will arouse the reader’s interest and enable him to better understand the original text.

5.2 Implicit Annotation

Implicit annotation means that additional information is integrated directly into the translation without the use of commentary symbols, such as footnotes, in-text annotation. When there is little information to be added to the translation, implicit annotation is generally used to make the translation more aesthetical.

Example 4: Williams denied the validity of the Massachusetts Bay charter and the right of the colony to hold its lands by grant from the crown.

Original translation: 威廉姆斯否认马萨诸塞州宪章的有效性以及王室赠与马萨诸塞州土地的合法性。

Adaptation: 威廉姆斯否认马萨诸塞州特许状¹的有效性以及英格兰王室赠与马萨诸塞州土地的合法性。

¹1606年，英格兰国王詹姆斯一世授予普利茅斯公司一份特许状允许其在北纬38°至45°之间定居。1620年，“五月花号”号船将大约100名朝圣分离主义者带到了现在的马萨诸塞州，普利茅斯殖民地在那里扎根。

The word “crown” means “王国”，“王冠”，but in this sentence, according to thick translation, the translation needs to pay attention to the context. “crown” in this case should be translated as the 英格兰王室. In 1707, England was united with Scotland to form the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland. Before that, “England” referred exclusively to “英格兰”. So “crown” should be translated as “英格兰王室” “rather than “英国王室”. According to its context, the United States was a colony of England in the 17th century, so “the crown” should be translated as “英格兰王室”，whose content is simple and can be integrated into the translation by implicit annotation.

Example 5: These went upon two other designs; some to satisfy their own curiosity in point of conscience, others (which was more general) to transport the Gospel to those heathen that never heard thereof.”

Original translation: 这些都是出于另两种目的：有些是为了满足人们对良知的好奇心，更普遍的是为了那些从未听闻圣经的异教徒布道。

Adaptation: 而这里建立的种植园是出于另两种目的: 有些是为了满足人们对良知的好奇心, 更普遍的是为了那些从未听闻福音书即圣经的异教徒布道。

“Gospel” is a word with a culturally specific foreign meaning in its source language, meaning “福音书”. In Christianity, the word “Gospel” refers to the Bible, which is a document, epistle and book focusing on the life and resurrection of Jesus. However, according to thick translation, the translator should respect the different cultures and not omit the translation directly as “圣经” but retain the original meaning “福音书”. Therefore, it is sufficient to add briefly to the conception of “福音书” by implicit commentary.

Example 6: Sir Richard Saltonstall, son of a lord mayor of London, whose son remained in the colony, the progenitor of a line of important men.

Original translation: 理查德·索尔顿斯托尔爵士 (Sir Richard Saltonstall) 是伦敦市长的儿子, 他的儿子是一系列殖民地重要人物的先辈。

Adaptation: 理查德·索尔顿斯托尔爵士 (Sir Richard Saltonstall) 是伦敦市长理查德·索尔顿斯托尔 (Richard Saltonstall) 的侄子, 他的男性后代是一系列殖民地重要人物的先辈。

When the author first translated the text, neither did I consider who was the Mayor of London, nor did I meet the need to check the lineage between the Mayor of London and Sir Richard Saltonstall. According to thick translation, with emphasis on context, the original text need to be translated in the historical era of the time. The historical facts reveals that Sir Richard Saltonstall was the nephew of the Mayor of London, Richard Saltonstall. Therefore, implicit annotation is used to add who the Mayor of London was. Sir Richard Saltonstall stayed in Massachusetts for a short time, but his descendants (Henry and another son) played an important role in New England history, so the second “son” is translated as “男性后代”。

The application of explicit annotation is more than implicit annotation. Explicit annotation is to separate the annotation from the translation, which is concise and more beautiful in form, and is suitable for translations that require more information compensation content. Implicit annotation is to integrate the content of the annotation into the translation, which is convenient for readers to read. But implicit annotation is suitable for translations with less information compensation.

6. Conclusion

This author draws the following conclusions. First, translation of historical texts requires translators to have extensive knowledge of bilingual historical and cultural backgrounds. Therefore, when translating historical texts, it is necessary to consult a large number of sources and check historical facts in order to obtain the most accurate translation. Second, the choice of annotation type depends on the source text and the translator’s disposal of translation.

However, it is worth considering what principles should be followed in the annotation of translations and how to grasp the “degree” of annotation-this is a question that the author should continue to explore. The selection of examples of annotation in this article is not representative of all annotation

types in historical texts translation, but it is hoped that this paper will make other translators be aware of the need for annotation in translation and use it more in translations.

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