

The Importance of Extensive Reading from the Perspective of Translational Writing Studies

Jiang Ying

School of International Business and Tourism, Suzhou Vocational Institute of Industrial Technology, Suzhou, Jiangsu, China

Abstract: Translational writing theory emphasizes the ability to translate from source text to target text, the creative capacity in target language writing, and advocates for activating translators' autonomous learning. Extensive reading is a crucial approach to improving translators' linguistic competence, enabling them to acquire the most suitable words or phrases during translation while broadening their knowledge spectrum.

Keywords: Translational Writing; Creation; Extensive Reading

1. Introduction

Most translation teaching still adopts traditional methods, specifically the product-oriented approach (where students complete exercises, and instructors compare and evaluate them against a standard translation). The main characteristic of this teaching model is that the teacher occupies the central position, while students passively listen to the teacher's comments and accept the standard translation. Zhang Chunbai and Wu Bo refer to this as "product-oriented translation teaching" (Zhang Chunbai & Wu Bo, 2011). Many instructors focus on teaching translation techniques, and beginning translation students strive to understand and master these techniques, mistakenly believing that mastering these skills alone will make translation effortless. However, producing translations that achieve "faithfulness, expressiveness, and elegance" requires extensive reading and active translation practice—there are no shortcuts.

2. Theoretical Significance of Translational Writing Studies

Translation and writing share many similarities. First, both writing and translation must be based on extensive reading. The role of reading in writing is undeniable, and its importance in translation should not be overlooked. Shi

Zhikang (Shi Zhikang, 2008), when discussing his translation of the prose "A Scene on the Red Sea," mentioned that a vast "memory bank of English literary classics" provided him with many classical expressions. Second, both writing and translation are highly practical and cannot be reduced to empty talk. In addition to diligent practice, writers must engage in extensive reading. Third, the criteria for evaluating translations and writing are similar: good translations and good writing should share the qualities of excellent works. Appreciating a good translation is like appreciating good writing—it can be enjoyed independently as a new creation. For a translation to be readable, it must break free from the formal constraints of the source text and roam freely in the semantic ocean of the original. At this point, translation resembles creation—a form of creation under specific conditions. Viewing translation as creation involves striving to break free from the shackles of imitation. "Following the heart's desires without overstepping boundaries" emphasizes "following the heart's desires." Translation as creation should be genuine creation, not translation with visible traces of translation. Translational writing studies is a new translation theory built on this concept. Its purpose is to guide translation writing practice, enhance translators' translation-writing abilities, and improve their translation writing proficiency (Yang Shizhuo, 2012).

Translational writing studies emphasizes both the ability to translate from source text to target text and the creative capacity in the target language, focusing on the comprehensive improvement of translators' abilities. It advocates for activating translators' autonomy and breaking away from the spoon-feeding teaching model dominated by translation techniques.

3. The Importance of Extensive Reading for Translational Writing

Reading is the primary condition for translational writing. Unlike ordinary writing, which draws material mainly from real life, translational writing derives its material primarily from indirect experience, which is acquired through reading. Whether translating from Chinese to English or vice versa, extensive reading is crucial. Veteran translator Liu Shicong pointed out: “Read English classics, read works of various genres and themes written by native English speakers. Through reading, experience the characteristics of English that differ from Chinese—micro aspects such as word choice, collocation, sentence structure, and rhetoric; macro aspects such as rhythm, style, and charm. Reading is the prerequisite and foundation for learning and improving English-Chinese translation. Without the language sense cultivated through reading, it is natural to feel uncertain when doing English-Chinese translation. Therefore, reading is the first important task.” (Liu Shicong & Ren Shukun, 2009)

3.1 Extensive Reading as the Main Way to Improve Translators’ Language Skills

The development of language skills relies on repeated exposure to and practice with the language. “Exposure” here refers to extensive reading. Reading expands vocabulary, analyzes sentence patterns, observes rhetorical methods, discovers stylistic features, and broadens knowledge—all of which are significant for writing. Translation theorists throughout history have emphasized the importance of reading in translation. Translational writing studies divides the translation process into perception, conceptualization, expression, and revision. Perception involves understanding and reading, cultivating the translator’s comprehension, logical thinking, and knowledge acquisition abilities—all of which greatly influence translation competence. Since ancient times, China has recognized the importance of reading for writing, as evidenced by sayings like “After reading three hundred Tang poems, one can at least recite poetry even if not compose it” (Sun Zhu) and “Having read ten thousand books, one writes as if with divine aid” (Du Fu), both highlighting the positive role of reading in writing.

3.2 Extensive Reading Helps Translators Find the Most Suitable Words or Phrases During

Translation

In translational writing, the process of perception mainly involves reading, which is a necessary condition for the smooth and qualified completion of translation activities. Only through extensive reading can one build a “database of authentic English” in their mind. Both Shi Zhikang and Ma Hongjun have mentioned the unexpected gains reading brought to their translation. “To excel in Chinese-English translation, a solid foundation in English is needed, along with the usual learning and accumulation of authentic and elegant English. Truly mastering ‘authentic English’ and ‘elegant English’ requires extensive reading of English literary works, especially classics, to build a database of ‘authentic English’ and ‘elegant English’ in one’s mind.” (Shi Zhikang, 2008) Extensive reading allows translators to easily find authentic corresponding words during translation.

3.3 Extensive Reading Helps Translators Broaden Their Knowledge

A good translator should have broad knowledge and be well-versed in various fields. “There is no pure literature; the content of any literary work is all-encompassing, which requires us translators to possess multifaceted knowledge.” (Dong Leshan, 1987) Often, the language problems students encounter when doing English-Chinese translation are not due to a lack of understanding of vocabulary or grammar but rather their narrow knowledge base, which prevents them from comprehending the implied meanings. To broaden students’ knowledge and expand their comprehensive understanding, extensive and wide-ranging reading is the primary approach.

4. Conclusion

People often think that being a writer is difficult—writing requires life experience, thought, skill, and genius—but translation seems to require only a dictionary, something everyone can do. However, qualified translation is also a form of creation, one that is more complex and demanding than writing. Thus, translation is writing and even higher than writing in terms of creative practice. “The sky is vast for birds to fly; the sea is wide for fish to leap.” The level of this creation and the quality of the translation largely depend on the translator’s breadth of knowledge and knowledge reserve. Therefore, extensive

reading is key.

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