

Translation Strategies for Lin Yutang's Humorous Discourse: A Domestication and Foreignization Perspective

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Abstract: Lin Yutang is an outstanding representative in the development of Chinese literature in the 20th century. He has made great efforts to promote Chinese culture to the world, and has become a bridge between Chinese and Western cultures. His works have a strong sense of humor, which is deeply loved by readers. The introduction of Western ideas into his works makes the translation work more difficult. Humor translation is an interdisciplinary field that integrates linguistics, cultural studies and translation theory^[20]. This paper focuses on the analysis of Lin Yutang's works, and takes the theory of domestication and foreignization as the theoretical basis^[17], and also draws on the theory of dynamic equivalence^[10] and the Skopos theory^[14]. It is found that in the process of translating Lin Yutang's works, whether it is the version translated by himself or others, domestication is the main method, but sometimes foreignization is also used, which can not only retain the sense of humor in the original text, but also make Western readers feel more comfortable. However, excessive domestication will inevitably lead to the loss of cultural connotations. This paper summarizes the problems existing in the translation of Lin Yutang's works through analysis, and puts forward suggestions for the smooth progress of literary translation in the context of Chinese culture going global.

Keywords: Lin Yutang; Humorous Discourse; Domestication; Foreignization; Cross-cultural Translation; Essay Translation

1. Features and Linguistic Style of Lin Yutang's Humorous Discourse

1.1 The Substance of Lin Yutang's Conception of Humor

Lin Yutang is widely recognized as one of the most prominent scholars in the field of humor

theory in the 20th century. In 1924, he translated "humor" as "youmo" in the Morning Post supplement^[15], and explained the connotation of this word in the article. In his view, humor is not only to make people laugh, but also to reflect people's personality, hobbies and life attitude, and to have a certain understanding of culture and aesthetics. For Lin, humor was not slapstick or clowning, but a life attitude and aesthetic experience rooted in qingqu (aesthetic sensibility), which aligns with Bergson's theory of laughter as a social corrective, which he describes as laughter that "corrects men's manners" ^[2]. The theory of humor he put forward mainly includes three aspects: one is humanistic care, to sympathize with people in difficult situations, and to resist oppression; the other is to pursue a higher aesthetic level, to write warm prose, to be serious in the article, and to make people laugh; the third is to criticize culture, to point out the problems existing in culture, and to safeguard the dignity of individuals. Zhang's seminal study identifies humanistic care as the core of Lin Yutang's humor philosophy^[19]. Lin elaborated on this three-dimensional humor conception in his later collection *A Life of Humor*^[6]. Qian notes that Lin's unique humor style stems from his profound integration of Chinese and Western cultural traditions^[11]. Based on his understanding of humor, Lin Yutang translated the ancient Chinese works with humor, not only literal equivalence, but also paid attention to the life philosophy and cultural connotation behind the text, and grasped the essence of the original text.

1.2 Linguistic Features of Humor in Lin Yutang's Essays

1.2.1 Fusion of the elevated and the colloquial
Lin Yutang's humorous essays are written in a combination of classical Chinese and vernacular Chinese, which is extremely fluid. In his works, classical allusions are integrated into colloquial narration, and classical diction is deliberately used to form a strong sense of incongruity,

which is full of humor. This integration is reflected in syntax and vocabulary, which is reflected in the tension between classical expression and vernacular prose, and there is a certain conflict between solemnity and playfulness. In his works, he severely criticized the bureaucratic system of China, used classical diction to frame absurd content, and used humor to satirize society. The translation of this effect is very difficult, because there is no such contrast between classical and modern Chinese in English, and translators can only use style changes to describe the original text.

1.2.2 Subtle irony and gentle criticism

Lin Yutang used analogy, metaphor and other ways to attack from the side, and his works were not directly attacked, but he criticized with a mild tone. The irony is not obvious, but it can be seen that it points to the shortcomings of human beings or social phenomena. Unlike Qian Zhongshu's sharp and acerbic satire^[12], Lin's humor is characterized by gentleness and tolerance. Lu Xun criticized his approach for being too mild, believing that it would weaken the importance of direct confrontation, but his approach was recognized by readers of many countries. Western readers can feel the author's critical attitude and will not feel alienated, which is a difficult task for translators. If the translation is too explicit, the tension of humor will be weakened; if it is too implicit, the audience will not feel the author's critical attitude.

1.2.3 Cross-cultural comparative humor

In his comical argumentation, Lin Yutang repeatedly used cross-cultural comparison as an important structural device, set Chinese philosophy of life against Western rationalism and pragmatism, and pointed out the merits and shortcomings of the two, without showing respect to any side. He did not belong to either civilization, but maintained a neutral point of view and created a strong sense of humor in the process of cross-cultural communication. This approach has achieved good results in his English works, where Western readers can grasp the cultural connotation of the two cultures at the same time. However, in the process of translating Chinese into English, the translator is faced with the problem of tonal and cultural adjustment, which requires the translator to analyze the familiarity of the target audience with Chinese culture, and to decide whether to explain or replace it.

2. Core Challenges in Translating Humorous Discourse

2.1 Untranslatability Arising from Cultural Default and Cultural Difference

Humor is inevitably related to culture, and the existence of cultural differences will make it difficult to translate. Mao and Fan argue that the translatability of humor depends on the degree of cultural overlap between source and target languages^[9]. Lin Yutang's essays are rich in historical anecdotes, literary allusions and customs, which are all cultural blind spots for English readers. Supplementing the cultural background for readers, or selecting the corresponding cultural image according to the target language, is a problem that translators must solve.

2.2 The Difficulty of Reproducing Linguistic-Form Humor

In the process of translation, attention needs to be paid to the differences between Chinese and English in terms of syntax, phonetics and vocabulary; pursuing formal equivalence alone proves insufficient, and pragmatic compensation becomes essential^[10].

2.3 Conflict Between Humorous Effect and the Principle of Fidelity

The traditional translation theory requires that the translated text should be consistent with the source text in semantics, but the translation of humor is different. The two aspects of fidelity and humor can not be guaranteed at the same time. In the process of translating humor into the target language, we need to make changes to the source text, which is difficult to meet the requirements of fidelity. Lin Yutang's self-translation practice is very instructive. He believes that the humor effect is more important than semantic accuracy, and he often chooses free translation and creative reconstruction. This is a purposeful translation method, which is consistent with the Skopos theory's principle of target-text functional primacy^[14].

3. Principal Translation Strategies for Lin Yutang's Humorous Discourse

3.1 Domestication as the Dominant Strategy, with Selective Foreignization

In the process of translating Lin Yutang's humorous works into English, he did not adopt

indiscriminate domestication, nor did he pursue radical foreignization; rather, he deeply felt that the most fundamental function of humor was to make readers laugh, and if cultural barriers could not be eliminated, the translation would be a failure. As Venuti argued, domestication produces fluent, reader-friendly texts that minimize cultural barriers for target audiences^[17]. In the process of translating classical humorous anecdotes, he used many metaphors that Westerners were familiar with to replace Chinese cultural allusions, so that the humor in the original text could not be weakened, but he did not blindly pursue localization. When analyzing the humor mode of Chinese Daoism and Chan, he used the method of foreignization to retain the cultural differences, so that Western readers could feel the uniqueness of Eastern culture in the process of reading, and his translation had strong Eastern characteristics.

3.2 Free Translation as a Priority: Preserving Comic Spirit Rather Than Literal Meaning

Free translation is also a prominent feature of Lin Yutang's translation. When there is a conflict between humor and literal content, he chooses to abandon the form and pursue a good translation effect, and does not pursue the formal equivalence, but pursues the dynamic equivalence. This is the most prominent feature of his humorous language.

When the humor is based on the unique syntactic structure of Chinese, it is difficult to achieve the same effect in English, and it can only be rewritten. Classical language can be translated into English euphemism, homophonic puns can be translated into semantic puns, the language surface changes, but the comic tension does not change.

3.3 Compensatory Translation for Culturally Loaded Humor

In the process of translating Chinese humor into English, Lin Yutang emphasized the importance of cultural context and used compensatory translation to make up for the loss of cultural information in the target language, a core technique derived from Nida's dynamic equivalence theory^[10]. If it is difficult to achieve the same comical effect, it can be compensated in other ways to ensure the integrity of the reading experience.

This strategy has more than one form. In the process of writing, the target audience is

identified, and cultural explanations are given in parentheses or footnotes. In the case of relatively plain source text, English humorous expressions are inserted to make up for the loss. In some cases, the source culture is more demanding, and the humorous language should be rewritten to enhance universality and accessibility.

3.4 Adaptive Handling of Puns and Witty Remarks

In the process of translation, the most difficult problem to solve is how to translate the linguistic-form humor. Based on Raskin's semantic script theory of humor, which systematically explains the generative mechanism of verbal humor^[13], Lin Yutang summarized three practical strategies for translating untranslatable Chinese puns: first, semantic transformation to retain the core comic logic; second, effect compensation by drawing on English humorous resources; third, explanatory annotation to supplement the lost linguistic and cultural information.

He has a deep understanding of English humor, can make witty remarks in English, and can also use the resources of the target language to create new remarks.

4. Case Analysis

4.1 Translation of Culturally Allusive Humor

Case 1: Su Dongpo's humorous image in *The Importance of Living*. Lin Yutang uses a large number of Su Dongpo's anecdotes in the book, and Su Dongpo's image is the most perfect in the eyes of Chinese literati. Lin Yutang did not explain Su Dongpo's cultural identity in English, but described his image through narrative.

When Su Dongpo was exiled many times, he was calm and composed. Lin Yutang translated his works with a strong domestic flavor, regarded Su Dongpo as a "philosopher in exile", and compared him with Greek philosophers. Western readers can feel the philosophical resonance between the two cultures, and Su Dongpo's humorous allusion can be understood by readers all over the world.

The use of domestication strategy leads to the weakening of Su Dongpo's cultural identity, which is a typical Chinese cultural symbol. Western readers only see a figure of Eastern Stoicism, not a poet who has been rooted in Song Dynasty culture for a long time. This case shows that there are some contradictions between the two strategies.

4.2 Tonal Adjustment in the Translation of Satirical Humor

Case 2: Criticism of bureaucratic habits in English translation of *My Country and My People*. In the book *My Country and My People*, Lin Yutang uses humor to satirize the bureaucratic habits of the bureaucratic class in China, and his subtle irony is not easy to detect^[4]. Comparing the original Chinese version with Lin's English translation reveals his deliberate adjustment of satirical intensity^[7].

In the process of translation, Lin Yutang deeply analyzed the characteristics of the audience and made a reasonable adjustment to the irony, so that the English audience could feel the sharpness of the irony, and did not feel the uniqueness of Eastern humor, which made the irony more prominent.

Lin maintained a sharp tone in the process of writing, but he did not use caustic language. He maintained a balance between the two languages, showing that he had a good grasp of the humorous culture of the two languages, and the accuracy of tonal adjustment was the key to his success in translating irony.

4.3 Translation of Everyday Banter and Witty Remarks

Case 3: Handling the Witty Remarks about Sleep Philosophy

The Importance of Living is a philosophical essay collection that describes the content of daily life in a humorous way, and the content is full of weight. The translator should strive to reproduce this quality in the process of translation, which is a difficult task.

Lin Yutang did not track the source text, but used his own English comic sense to respond. He preferred to use English understatement, which seemed to be a flat statement, but in fact had a strong feeling, which was consistent with the understatement of Chinese humor. The Chinese version of *The Importance of Living* contains more colloquial expressions that are difficult to translate directly^[8]. His rendering of the afternoon nap passage is a typical example. "Chinese people have a good sense of sleep" is self-deprecating and self-congratulatory, and the humorous mechanism of the original text is reactivated in an English frame.

4.4 Cross-Cultural Reproduction of Gentle-Critical Humor

Case 4: Gentle Mockery of Western Rationalism

In the book *The Importance of Living*^[5], Lin Yutang repeatedly contrasts the Chinese with the Westerners, pointing out that the Chinese pursue calmness, while the Westerners pursue efficiency. This sharp contrast is enough to show the author's dissatisfaction with Western society, but he uses humor to attack Western society in this way, which is full of risks, and Westerners have a strong sense of defense, which is enough to provoke sharp attacks from them. In the process of writing, the author uses self-deprecation to ease the tension, openly points out the shortcomings of Chinese culture, and criticizes the Western society from the root, which is enough to show that he is in an equal position with Westerners, not in a condescending attitude.

5. Conclusion

In this paper, the framework of domestication and foreignization is taken as the theoretical basis to analyze the translation of humorous discourse in Lin Yutang's English works, and to sort out the typical cases, strategies and theoretical significance. In his translation, Lin Yutang gives priority to domestication strategy, supplemented by foreignization strategy, and tries to maintain style consistency and achieve cultural transplantation, which can not only enhance the humorous effect, but also convey cultural information.

Lin Yutang's translation practice has set an example for the cross-cultural dissemination of Chinese humor. He has a deep understanding of the aesthetic habits of the target audience and emphasizes the importance of "form" and "spirit" in translation, which has a strong reference value for the translation of humorous discourse in the contemporary era. At the same time, we should also realize that domestication strategies will lead to the loss of cultural information, which requires translators to use this strategy prudently. As Vandaele points out, excessive domestication risks reducing Chinese humor to a deculturalized universal form that loses its unique philosophical depth^[16]. Qian's research confirms that Lin's humorous prose achieved unprecedented success in the West precisely because of its balanced use of domestication and foreignization^[3]. Wang's analysis of Lin's cultural choices shows that his translation strategy was never passive accommodation but active cultural dialogue^[18].

China has been implementing the cultural export

strategy for many years, and the importance of cross-cultural translation of humorous language is becoming more and more prominent. Lin Yutang's research results show that humorous translation is not merely a linguistic act, but also an important manifestation of cross-cultural wisdom. Translators should have a deep understanding of the connotation of humor, not just to pursue the surface, and to stimulate the resonance of the target audience in the translation process, so that Chinese humor can be more and more widely spread.

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