

A Comparative Study Between the Views of Lu Xun and Lawrence Venuti on Foreignization Translation

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Lu Xun and Lawrence Venuti, the representatives of Chinese and Western foreignizing translation respectively, advocated the preservation of exotic expression and style in translation. This paper expounds their views on foreignizing translation and analyzes some similarities through comparative study. In the choice of original text ("what to translate"), Lu Xun and Lawrence Venuti tended to choose literary that can reflect their political demands. In the choice of language form ("how to translate"), both of them objected to coherence and advocated the exotic style in translation. In their choice of target reader ("whom to translate"), both tended to translate to well-educated elite groups. In addition, due to their different times and regions, there are differences in their theoretical sources, political purposes, and social functions of translation. However, they both established the balance awareness in cultural exchanges and made efforts to promote cultural progress.

Keywords: foreignizing translation, Lu Xun, Lawrence Venuti, comparative study

Introduction

Since the end of last century, foreignizing translation put forward by Lawrence Venuti has been one of the focuses of translation studies at home and abroad attracts many scholars. However, 60 years before Lawrence Venuti's proposition, Lu Xun, a famous writer and ideologist in China, had discussed some similar views including of "foreign style", "fidelity rather than coherence" and even highly disputed "word-for-word translation", which reflected foreignizing translation and have received some attention in recent years.

Although Lu Xun and Lawrence Venuti proposed similar translation thoughts, there existed some differences due to different social and cultural background, translation motivation, and other factors. This paper will make a comparative study of the views of Lu Xun and Lawrence Venuti on foreignizing translation, and discuss the social function of translation in the specific historical period.

Views of Lu Xun and Lawrence Venuti on Foreignization Translation

Lu Xun's Translation Thoughts

Lu Xun is the great writer, ideologist in China. He is also a distinguished translator who devoted his life to introduce and translate foreign literature to domestic readers. In his whole life, he translated more than 200 literary works by more than 100 writers from 14 countries, with a total number of about three million words,

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even exceeding that he wrote in his native language. At the same time, Lu Xun also made great contributions to the inheritance and development of traditional Chinese translation theories.

In his early translations, Lu Xun was deeply influenced by the popular trend of free translation advocated by Lin Shu and Yan Fu in the late Qing Dynasty. From his first translation *The Soul of Sparta* in 1903 to his later translation of some scientific novels including *De la Terre à la lune (Journey to Moon)* and *Voyage au centre de la Terre (Journey to the Center of the Earth)*, he always used the methods of creation and deletion, which was quite different from the attitude of fidelity to the original text in his later period. In 1909, *Foreign Stories* translated by Lu Xun and his younger brother Zhou Zuoren was published, when his translation thoughts were greatly changed. Dissatisfied with too much mistakes in translation of Lin Shu, Lu Xun turned to the method of literal translation, advocating that the random deletion was an infidelity to the original text. Most of texts they selected in *Foreign Stories* were the literary works of little attention from ethnic minorities in Northern and Eastern Europe. Meanwhile, they adopted the transliteration method when translating the names of characters and places. Some foreign allusions and quotations were retained for annotated rather than directly deleted (Wang, 2011). The language style of this book was also Europeanized. From then on, he established his views on foreignization in translation. But this advanced translation concept did not attract enough attention and recognized. As Feng Zhi wrote, “We have to say that Lu Xun was the first swallow to introduce European literature with a progressive and serious attitude. Unfortunately, this swallow came too early, when China was still winter frozen” (Feng, 1999, p. 299). Although the poor sale of *Foreign Stories*, Lu Xun insisted on literal translation or even word-for-word translation, which showed his determination to faithfully introduce and translate the foreign literature.

In 1929, Liang Shiqiu published an article criticizing Lu Xun’s translation as incomprehensible. Lu Xun immediately responded with another article, triggering a debate between “fidelity” and “coherence”. However, some scholars have held biased attitude towards his translation thoughts for a long time. In fact, Lu Xun did not support word-for-word translation, but regarded it as a necessary means of translation. He once wrote, “I hope there will be more excellent translators in China. If not, I will support word-for-word translation for now” (Lu, 2005b, p. 554), which showed that he had no choice at that time. As for the view of “fidelity rather than coherence”, he did not mean to put “fidelity” and “coherence” in complete opposition. On the contrary, he stressed that both should be taken into account, but tolerated some incoherent sentences when it was hard to choose. Lu Xun once put forward that translation should consider two aspects: One is to make it easy to understand; the other is to preserve the style of the original text. Both standards became the core concepts of his translation thoughts, which reflected his desire to achieve accurate and coherent translation. Although his translation has always been controversial because of foreign language style, his commitment to foreignizing translation was prospective and has made great historical contributions to the improvement of Chinese language and the enrichment of national culture.

Lawrence Venuti’s Translation Thoughts

Lawrence Venuti, an Italian-American scholar, is a famous contemporary translation theorist and translator. Starting with his article “The Translator’s Invisibility” in *Criticism* in 1986, he was on the opposite side of the dominant scholars who support domesticating translation at that time, because he regarded domesticating translation as a tool of cultural conquest. Lawrence Venuti paid attention to the cultural identity construction of source language and emphasized the translator’s subjectivity. Furthermore, he advocated

strengthening the dualistic opposition between domestication and foreignization, and challenged Anglo-American culture mainstream through foreignizing translation. He once used the word “resistant translation” (Venuti, 1992, p. 12) to resist the cultural value mainstream in the target language and oppose the coherence pursued for domestication. Lawrence Venuti believed that domestication led to the translators’ efforts being covered by coherent translation and the differences between different cultures being weakened, which was a kind of “cultural hegemony” (Luo, 2017, p. 137).

Lawrence Venuti developed his theories around the term “foreignization” in his first monography, believing that foreignizing translation aimed to reveal the difference between original text and target text, which can only be preserved by breaking the existing cultural norms in target language. By using the foreignization strategy, translators and target language readers were able to get rid of the influence from the dominant culture and fight back against the cultural hegemony of translation. Meanwhile, translators could preserve the original style through foreignization and change the marginal position of translation in the target language system. In addition, he also put forward his own views in the field of translation ethics theory—ethics of difference, which absorbed the postcolonial and deconstructive thoughts. The concept of foreignization was gradually developed from a translation strategy into a moral issue—whether to respect the culture of source language (Liu, 2019).

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Similarities

In *The Scandals of Translation: Towards an Ethics of Differences* published in 1998, Lawrence Venuti employed a chapter to expound Lu Xun’s translation thoughts, which showed his recognition and respect to Lu Xun. There are some similarities in their views on foreignizing translation, which can be summarized as the following three aspects—the choices of original text, the choices of language form, and the choices of target reader.

First of all, Lu Xun and Lawrence Venuti both paid attention to the choice of original text with strong political orientations and take political demands into full consideration. Lu Xun’s purpose in translating books was not only to introduce foreign language and culture, but also to awaken people’s revolutionary consciousness. Therefore, most of his selections were the literature of little attention from ethnic minorities in Northern and Eastern Europe as well as some theoretical and literary works of the Soviet Union, such as *Dead Souls* and *Destruction*. He tried to use the similar experiences of these nations to inspire the spirit and arouse the empathy of Chinese people, which was also reflected in Lawrence Venuti’s translation thoughts. Translation was used to achieve his “political agenda” by Lawrence Venuti. According to him, “foreignizing translation in English can be a form of resistance against ethnocentrism and racism, cultural narcissism and imperialism, in the interests of democratic geopolitical relations” (Venuti, 2008, p. 16). His views on foreignizing translation emphasized not only the choice of the target language form, but also the choice of original text, which was regarded as a “very selective, densely motivated” choice (Venuti, 2000, p. 468), but has been ignored by many scholars. Lawrence Venuti also mentioned the translation of Lu Xun and Zhou Zuoren in his book as “they saw literary translation as a means of altering China’s subordinate position in geopolitical relations” (Venuti, 1998, p. 184), which showed that they have similar ideas in the choice of original text.

Secondly, in terms of the choice of language style, both Lu Xun and Lawrence Venuti objected to coherence and believed that the translated language should be exotic. According to Lu Xun, although the translation was difficult to understand, it could convey the artistic conception of the original text. Similarly, Lawrence Venuti was also opposed to coherent translation and believed that domesticating translation, as the invasion of strong culture to weak culture, would eliminate differences and that texts would be rewritten by mainstream culture to conform to the linguistic and cultural norms of the dominant Anglo-American culture. This kind of cultural invasion is act of imperialism, which is why he advocated making translators “visible”. Compared with the translated text that reads like written directly in target language, both of them preferred those reads like went through the process of translation.

Thirdly, in terms of the choice of target reader, both of them tended to translate to well-educated elite. Lu Xun divided the public into three groups. The first group is the educated elite, the second group is the basic literate, and the third group is illiterate, outside the scope of “readers”. He advocated that the target reader of the translation is mainly the first group, and that the translation for this group could focus on accuracy over coherence. The advanced western thoughts and culture were first transmitted to them by translators through translation, and then spread to Chinese people, so as to promote language reform and even social reform. Lawrence Venuti also held such a view. He agreed with Schleiermacher that “educated elite controls the formation of a national culture by refining its language through foreignizing translations” (Venuti, 2008, p. 86). Hence, foreignizing translation was also called “minoritizing translation” by him.

Differences

Although Lu Xun and Lawrence Venuti have similar basic views on foreignizing translation, there are still some differences. The first point is the theoretical source of their translation thoughts, causing controversy among scholars. Lawrence Venuti believed that Lu Xun’s theory originated from Schleiermacher in Germany—just as he did. However, after extensive research by some scholars, Lu Xun’s translation theories proved to be derived from the translations of Chinese Buddhist scriptures dating back 2,000 years, rather than western imitations (Luo, 2017). It was recorded that Lu Xun read hundreds of Buddhist scriptures and was inspired by their translations, which laid a foundation for the formation of his later foreignization theory.

In addition, due to their different times and backgrounds, they have different political goals and different social functions of translation, which is the most important and fundamental difference between them. French writer Victor Hugo mentioned that translation was often regarded as a form of violence because of the impact on the literature of the target culture. However, on the other hand, translation is sometimes deliberately transformed into a violent act by translators in order to achieve specific political goals, when translation became a subversive force to coordinate and promote some political activities (H. Z. Wang, 2007). In the special historical period, the important social function of translation is particularly prominent. After the heated debate between classical Chinese writing and vernacular Chinese writing, translation in vernacular Chinese has been widely accepted and approved. As a result, new disputes arose, such as translation standards (fidelity or coherence), sources of original text (mainstream literature or non-mainstream literature), translation methods (literal translation or free translation), to name but a few. A large number of patriotic intellectuals including of Lu Xun had the same fundamental purpose, hoping to influence Chinese characters, literature, and thoughts and even promote the revolutionary process and social development of China through translation activity and its social functions. Shouldering such important tasks, those disputes about translation are just the throes of

history—as Lu Xun also understood. Therefore, he insisted on “fidelity rather than coherence”, which became his “law of art” and also his “slogan of battle” (Zheng, 2003, p. 80). Lu Xun deemed that Chinese language and grammar were not integrated and accurate enough, which would lead to a lack of clear thinking. Hence, he advocated the introduction of a large number of language expression habits from western countries, so as to enrich Chinese language and bring cultural and even social changes through language innovation.

Lu Xun hoped that translation would perform the social function of absorbing the advantages of strong culture to promote national progress. Lawrence Venuti, however, who himself was in the strong cultural environment, hoped to resist cultural hegemony and aggression through the “strategic cultural intervention” (Venuti, 2008, p. 16) of foreignizing translation, so as to shock the mainstream cultural narcissism and reshape the prototypes of both the source cultures and American culture (D. F. Wang, 2007). According to Wang Dongfeng, despite their different cultural status, the same balance awareness reflected the thirst of intellectuals for equal geopolitical relations. It can be said that although Lu Xun and Lawrence Venuti’s views on foreignizing translation played completely different social functions, they finally reached the same destination.

Conclusion

Through the above comparative analysis, it can be concluded that Lu Xun and Lawrence Venuti have many similarities in the thoughts of foreignizing translation, including the choice of the original text, the choice of language form, the choice of target readers, and so on. On the other side, due to different times and backgrounds, their theoretical sources and political purposes are not the same; translation of them performed different social functions as a result. However, both of them undertook social responsibilities as intellectuals with courage to challenge the mainstream view of translation and made great efforts for the equal culture exchange.

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