

# Pragmatic Explication in Translation of *The War of Independence*

HUANG Sumin

University of Shanghai for Science and Technology, Shanghai, China

This paper is an attempt to share the experience of employment of pragmatic explication in translating *The War of Independence*. Due to the unique pragmatic implication in the source language, explication is inevitable during translation. The techniques are literal translation + annotation, amplification, figurative translation, and addition of full name, which are complementary in the translation.

**Keywords:** pragmatic explication, mythology, Bible

## Introduction

*The War of Independence* was the last work of U.S. historian and writer Claude Van Tyne who won the 1930 Pulitzer Award for it. As a great writer with profound historic knowledge, he objectively presents the readers a panorama of the historical states of 1870s in North America, rivalry between Britain and its American colony at that time, and the cause and the development of the war of independence.

When luckily attaining the translation project of the book, the author consulted mass information, spent a whole year on it, and tried my best to represent the author's vivid description of the times. Attributing to the profound literacy of the author, there are various idioms, illusions, historical figures, and other literal semiotic symbols in the book. These semiotic symbols, if literally translated into Chinese, might confuse the target readers due to the distinct difference between the Chinese and western culture. As a result, pragmatic explication in translation is widely employed, and the paper is a probe on the pragmatic explication in translation.

## An Overview of Explication

The concept of explication was firstly advocated by Vinay and Darbelnet in 1958. Explication is a translation strategy to manifest the hidden information of the source language in the target language. Great importance has been attached to the strategy in the recent decades. Some researchers even hold that explication is the necessary bond between the source language and the target language, as well as the inevitable access from the source language to the target language (Zhang, 2010). According to Kinga Klaudy, explication can be classified into four types, i.e., content explication, linguistic explication, contextual explication, and pragmatic explication. Content explication involves adding explicit information to the translation that is implicit or less explicit in the source text. The purpose is to ensure that the intended meaning is fully conveyed in the target language. Linguistic explication refers to the use of more explicit or detailed linguistic

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HUANG Sumin, M.A., lecturer, Foreign Languages Department, University of Shanghai for Science and Technology, Shanghai, China.

expressions in the translation compared to the source text. This can include using additional words, phrases, or syntactic structures to make the meaning clearer in the target language. Contextual explicitation involves providing additional contextual information in the translation that helps the target readership better understand the text. This can include explanations of cultural references, clarifications of ambiguous terms, or providing background information. Pragmatic explicitation focuses on adapting the translation to the target readership's pragmatic expectations and norms. It involves making the translation more explicit in terms of politeness, register, or other pragmatic aspects to ensure effective communication in the target language. In other words, pragmatic explicitation is caused by the difference between the source language and the target language; therefore, flexible use of various means such as amplification, annotation, and deletion of words ought to be employed to realize to expand the text from an implicit to an explicit one. In "*Pragmatic Explicitation and the Specific Approches in Literature Translation*", Zhang Rugui (2010, pp. 100-104) defined pragmatic explicitation in this way: “译者在译文中采取一定的策略，将原文朦胧晦涩的部分解释得更加清楚，以弥补两种语言之间文化上的鸿沟，这样的策略就是语用显化” (pragmatic explicitation is such a strategy that clarifies the implicit and obscure parts in the source language, so as to bridge the gap between two cultures).

### Unique Pragmatic Implication in the Source Language

Every nation has its unique culture. The cultures of the western nations originate from ancient Greek myth, so they differ slightly; on the other hand, the eastern culture is based on Confucianism, Taoism, and Buddhism, which is greatly different from the western one. *The War of Independence* contains abundant cultural information, provided with pragmatic meaning which is new to Chinese. During translation, the translator ought to faithfully represent the pragmatic meaning in the source language; therefore, pragmatic explicitation becomes essential. To sum up, there are four cases to involve pragmatic explicitation.

The ancient Greek mythology is crowned as the earliest literature form in Europe, while Bible was the gems of wisdom in Ancient Hebrew history, as well as the common classic of Christianity and Judaism. Today, ancient Greek mythology and Bible have been the cultural foundation in the western world, exerting great impact on the religion, philosophy, ideology, custom, natural science, literature, and art in the western world, even among all the mankind. Almost every important literature classic involves plots and figures in Greek mythology and the Bible; *The War of Independence* is no exception. For example,

#### The Names of Men, Gods, and Beasts in Greek Mythology and the Bible

1. A Tory judge, with a great wig, and looking like an oiled and curled *Assyrian bull*, was designated as a good type of these patricians who upheld despotic power. (p. 26, Chapter 2)
2. The Lord, it was said, had sent a *Delilah* to sheer away the strength of the British Samson. (p. 262, Chapter 13)
3. ...A return of American prisoners, 26 officers, 237 privates, was signed by Joseph Loring, husband of General Howe's "*Delilah*". (p. 431, Chapter 20)
4. "Watch with *Argus* eyes the passes of the Hudson", cried a warning voice. (p. 412, Chapter 20)
5. Stormont retorted, "The eyes of *Argus* would not be too much for us". (p. 489, Chapter 23)

In the above examples, Assyrian Bull, Samson, Dalilah, and Argus are familiar names in the English culture, yet new to the Chinese readers. Therefore, explicitation becomes inevitable.

### Pragmatic Meanings of Allusions From Mythology and Bible

The permeation of Greek mythology and Bible in the literature is not only reflected in the names, but also in allusions and idioms. A good work usually employs the citation of classics, which are common writing techniques in western works. The book is loaded with classics attributed to the profound knowledge and superb writing technique of the author. Examples are listed below:

6. Not even Burke or Pitt would listen patiently to proposals to revise the “*ark of the covenant*”, the finished product of centuries of human wisdom. On that hung all the law and the prophets. (p. 161, Chapter 8)

7. They were compared to the lame at *the pool of Bethesda*, longing for the troubling of the water... (p. 182, Chapter 9)

8. He (George III) was shortly a “brutish tyrant”, a “frantic potentate in breeches”, as unfitted to rule as “*Phaeton to drive the chariot of the sun*”. (p. 330, Chapter 16)

### Idioms Originate From Different Cultural Tradition and Custom

Every culture has its different tradition and custom, which appear as idioms or proverbs.

9. In these *dire straits*, there was amazing adherence to legal forms, bordering, it would seem, on sheer stupidity. (p. 82, Chapter 4)

10. In London, the *chimney-corner warriors* poring over maps with inked mountains and penciled woods, easily and valiantly criticized Carlton. (p. 375, Chapter 18)

The target language, if translated literally, it will be “translatonese”, which falls out of the aesthetic expectation of the Chinese and cause misunderstanding.

### Historic Figures Unfamiliar to the Target Readers or Without Whole Name

A household name in a culture might be new in another culture. Without the whole name, target readers cannot even find its origin. For example,

11. It was like seeing Caesar stabbed in the Senate House, or seeing *Oliver* taking the mace from the table. (p. 363, Chapter 17)

12. A few good and great men vouched for his integrity, and continued for a time to defend his reputation against the rancorous *Lees* and the over suspicious Adams. (p. 479, Chapter 22)

Caesar in Example 11 might be literally translated into “凯撒”, who is also well known among Chinese readers, while “Oliver”, if literally translated into “奥利弗”, may be confusing. In Example 12, Lees must be an important figure of North America during the war of independence, the rival of Silas Deane. However, there are several “Lees” in the book, and literal version “李氏兄弟” will be ambiguous for there are no clear clues in the book.

## Employment of Pragmatic Explication

More than code switching, translation involves culture switching. The translator needs to process the information, so as to faithfully represent the original information, and meanwhile, conform to the aesthetic requirement of the target readers. Due to the large discrepancy between the western and eastern culture, pragmatic explication becomes inevitable. The practical means of pragmatic explication includes:

### Literal Translation + Annotation

If Delilah in Example 2 is transliterated into “黛利拉” without any annotation, her relationship with Samson and their story are unlikely known to the target readers, who will not understand the Samson-Delilah-like

relationship between William Howe and his mistress or know how the power of William Howe was undermined. So, the author employs literal translation + annotation:

有人说，上帝派黛利拉夺走英国历史参孙的神力。

注释：力士参孙是《圣经》中的人物。黛利拉是力士参孙的情妇，她探知力士参孙力大无穷，却出卖了他，导致力士参孙失去神力，被剜了双眼，锁上铜链。现在，黛利拉指对丈夫不忠或被人收买谋害亲夫的女人。

The derivation of Samson and Delilah and their relationship are explained in detail in the annotation to enable the readers to better understand the relation between William Howe and his mistress, therefore learn the cause of Howe's failure.

Likewise, Example 7 can be translated into:

对手将他们比作毕士大池边的瘸子，巴不得池水被搅浑。

注释：毕士大池是《圣经》中位于耶路撒冷的池子。传说天使按时搅动水池，水动之后，先下水的人无论患什么疾病都能得到医治。

And Example 8 into:

他根本不配统治一个国家，就像法厄同驾驭不了太阳车。

注释：法厄同是古希腊神话中太阳神赫利俄斯之子，由于强行驾驶父亲的太阳车，最后被活活烧死。

The strategy can also be employed in Examples 4 and 6. The advantage of literal translation + annotation is preservation of the original flavor in the source culture, exposure of the readers to alien culture, and better conveyance of the pragmatic meaning in the source language to the target readers. The disadvantage is too much annotation to reduce the readability of the translation and the interest of the readers.

### **Amplification**

Chinese readers would rarely know the cultural origin and image of “亚述牛” (literally translated from Assyrian bull). Assyrian bull was named Lamassu, the human-headed, winged bull image in Assyrian Empire in Tigris and Euphrates. Example 1 borrows the curly hair of Assyrian bull to mock the image of a Tory judge. Therefore, the words like “人首” and “夸张” are added during translation, so that the pragmatic meaning of the sentence is explicitated and the image of the Tory judge is vividly represented before the readers:

其中有一个喜欢戴着人首翼牛般夸张的油卷发的托利党法官，被视为手握专制权的贵族代表。

In effect, amplification is one of the means of cultural integration, i.e., the integration of cultural expression in source language and in target language. The advantage of amplification is conveying the major cultural information in the source language without undermining the readability of translation.

### **Figurative Translation**

As mentioned above, literal translation + annotation is employed in translating Delilah in Example 2. However, the same name in Example 3 is figuratively translated into “红颜知己”, so as to achieve complementation. “Dire straights” in Example 9 comes from the *Marine Times*. With the earliest meaning dangerous straight, it now figuratively means plight. Here “dire straights” is translated into “涸辙之鲋”, which is different in background and derivation but equal in result. From “涸辙之鲋” Chinese readers can readily feel the dilemma of the British army. “Poring over maps with inked mountains and penciled woods” (examine the landform on the map) in Example 10 is explicitated into a Chinese idiom “纸上谈兵”, which properly reflects the fact that some people “pointed at the battles in the cozy walled house”. The implication of the Chinese idiom, containing sarcasm, coincides with “poring over maps with inked mountains and penciled woods”. Figurative

translation conforms to the aesthetic view of the target readers, and thus is easily accepted by them, while the disadvantages are sacrifice of the cultural form of the source text, weakening the target readers' participation of the original text, and therefore prevent them from better experiencing the alien culture.

### **Addition of the Full Name After Consultation**

Caesar in Example 11 can be directly translated into “凯撒”, for it is already a household name. However, “Oliver” is a different case. According to the context, it must be an influential figure like Caesar, other than Thomas Oliver or Peter Oliver mentioned above. After consulting the history, it is known that the “Oliver” who took the mace from the table must be Lord Protector Oliver Cromwell. So, Example 11 must be translated into:

就像目睹恺撒在元老院遇刺，或目睹奥利弗·克伦威尔从桌上拿走权杖。

Who are the Lees in Example 12? There are Charles Lee, Richard Henry Lee, and Arthur Lee in the book. Do the Lees refer to any two of them or all of the three? Without explicitation, the readers can hardly clarify the complicated relationship here. After consultation of the history, Richard Henry Lee and Arthur Lee were brothers who were in conflict with Silas Deane, so Lees here must be referring to them. The sentence can be translated as follows:

一些正直、富有同情心的人为赛拉斯·迪恩的清白辩护，面对理查德·亨利·李和阿瑟·李的恶意及约翰·亚当斯的过度猜疑，他们据理力争，维护西拉·迪恩的名誉。

### **Conclusion**

Pragmatic explicitation enables the target readers to better understand the cultural information in the source language. The techniques include annotation, amplification, literal translation, and addition of the full name. All of the techniques have their advantages and disadvantages, and the employment of each depends on the specific needs. In brief, diversified explicitation techniques help better convey the essence of the source text and promote the communication between different languages and cultures.

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