The Dialectical Unity of Creative Treason and Faithfulness: Take Zhang Peiji’s “Selected Modern Chinese Prose Writings” as an Example

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Abstract: In translation, creative treason and fidelity are mutually restricted and dialectically unified. Faithfulness is the most basic principle of translation, but the word for word translation will make the translation unfaithful. At this time, creative treason translation can better realize faithfulness. In translation practice, the translator achieves the harmonious unity of faithfulness and creative rebellion, which can better convey the meaning and charm of the original text to readers. “Selected Modern Chinese Prose Writings” is one of Zhang Peiji’s masterpieces, and is also a representative of excellent prose translation. This article uses examples in it to illustrate the dialectical unity of creative treason and faithfulness in translation.

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In the practice of translation, we can find that the word for word translation cannot convey the meaning of the original text to the reader, and at the same time, the mechanical pursuit of linguistic consistency makes the translation lack of beauty and can not meet the aesthetic requirements of the reader, which is unfaithful to the original author. The above question lets the people discover the creative treason has its existence necessity and inevitability. This paper holds that absolute faithfulness leads to treason, while creative treason opens the door to faithfulness. Therefore, creative treason is a kind of strategy for the translator to faithfully convey the original text, that is to say, creative treason seems to be “unfaithful”, but in fact it serves to serve faithfulness. The two are dialectically unified and work together in a harmonious translation.
1. Faithfulness -- the Basic Standard of Translation

Faithfulness is the basic principle of translation, and it is also the goal that Chinese and foreign translators have been pursuing. Many translation theories and translation methods put the standard of faithfulness in the first place, such as Yan Fu’s translation standard of “faithfulness, expressiveness and elegance”. The translator acts as a bridge connecting the original text and target readers. It is the basic duty of the translator to be faithful to the original text. In order to help people of different languages to understand the connotation of the original text as much as possible, and experience the original text’s thoughts and feelings, the translator needs to be based on the original text and uses creative ways to arouse readers’ inner resonance. It is a basic requirement for the translator to ensure that the translation is faithful to the original, and the faithfulness-oriented translation standards will never be out of date.

2. Creative Treason

This article mainly analyzes creative treason translation at the language level, that is, the translator adopts appropriate translation strategies within a certain range of freedom, and convey the original connotation through the corresponding language form. The “treason” here does not refer to negative extreme treason, let alone a mistranslation that completely deviates from the original. The relationship between linguistic signs and meaning is not a fixed relationship. The generation of meaning depends on many factors, which makes it theoretically impossible for the traditional approach of translating to seek simple correspondence of language forms. The creative treason translation is actually a manifestation of the translator’s subjective initiative. creative treason translation is to regenerate the meaning of the original text in another language in a new cultural context and receptive space, then to achieve another level of faithfulness.

3. The Dialectical Unity of Creative Treason and Faithfulness

Absolute faithfulness to the original text will put a heavy shackle on the translator and limit the display of his subjective initiative, so that the translator can only translate word by word, and cannot truly convey the meaning of the original text. This excessive pursuit of linguistic faithfulness runs counter to the original intention of translation. Cha Mingjian believes that although the translator seeks to reproduce the original text subjectively, it is impossible to achieve it objectively. Creative treason seems to be an act of rebellion, but in fact it is to achieve faithfulness to the original text. Creative treason and faithfulness are not always opposites,
they are a dialectical unity and interdependent relationship. Translators can appropriately and skillfully use seemingly unfaithful methods to creatively translate the original text. Therefore, we need to weigh the relationship between creative treason and faithfulness, and make changes when necessary to produce a harmonious translation.

(1) Creative treason is based on faithfulness
Creative treason is conditional, not arbitrary and extreme treason. In the practice of translation, translators are constrained by many factors, such as linguistic and cultural context, translation norms and professional ethics, the most fundamental of which is the principle of “faithfulness”, so creative rebellion is based on this principle. All the translator’s creative treason translation acts are governed by the principle of faithfulness, on the basis of which the translator makes flexible treatment to the untranslatable source text in order to achieve faithful translation in essence. On the basis of faithfulness, treason can be regarded as creative treason in the sense that the translation can convey the meaning and verve of the original text.

他也说我一天不写文章第二天就没有饭吃。 (Ba Jin, Friends)

He also says that I would have nothing to live on once I should lay down my pen.

The translator did not literally translate “没有饭吃”, but translate it to “have nothing to live on”. Chinese readers will know clearly what the author wants to express is: if he doesn’t write the article, he has no financial resources. But like a literal translation “have no rice to eat” will definitely cause misunderstandings by English readers. In order to enhance the faithfulness of the translation, the translator must perform creative treason translation on the basis of grasping the meaning of the original text.

(2) Creative treason is a way to achieve faithfulness
It is not a denial of the principle of faithfulness to recognize creative treason and the translator’s active creativity in translation practice. In the process of translation, the translator will always encounter content that can not be translated directly. Rigid translation will only make the translation difficult to understand and will deviate from the aesthetic feeling and connotation of the original text. In order to be more faithful to the original text, we need to adopt the creative treason translation method. Creative treason serves faithfulness, which is a way to achieve faithfulness, and it is fundamentally different from the excessive pursuit of absolute similarity in literal, linguistic form and style.

可是要想结婚,第一要有钱,第二要有闲,第三要有职,这潘驴的五个条件,却
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也不容易办到。 (Yu Dafu, Talking about Marriage)

But, to get married, you need to have five prerequisites, namely, money, leisure, employment, good looks and potentness, of which all are not always available.

“潘驴” in Chinese refers to the fourth and fifth conditions, and the translator paraphrases it into “good looks” and “potentness”. If “潘驴” is translated into “Pan Lv” faithfully, English readers will be puzzled. Overall, the translator moves “five prerequisites” to the front, and then uses “namely” to elicit the following five prerequisites, making the translation more concise and clearer. The last “of which all are not always available.” serves as a summary, and the added “of which” makes the logical relationship between sentences clearer. This shows that creative treason is a way to achieve faithfulness.

In general, the faithfulness of the translator is relative, which just shows the rationality of creative treason. The fundamental nature of translation determines that the translator must faithfully convey the connotation of the original text. However, in this process, given the differences in the language and cultural environment of the two countries, the translator cannot fully replicate the style of the original author. The translator’s understanding of the original text, the choice of translation methods, the interpretation of text information, and the expression of style all prove the necessity and inevitability of the objective existence of creative treason. Translators are constantly seeking the most appropriate way of expression, just trying to faithfully convey the expression of the original content with their own creative methods. Therefore, creative treason is a way to achieve loyalty.

4. Conclusion

In the practice of translation, we can not advocate absolute faithfulness to the original text, nor can we allow extreme treason, while proper “creative treason” is a means and strategy to achieve the goal of “faithfulness”. We should also note that creative treason is always subject to the criterion of faithfulness. We should neither overstate the creative treason nor overemphasize the restrictive factors of initiative. In the practice of translation, the translator should try his best to coordinate the contradiction between creative treason and faithfulness and carry out creative treason translation in a certain space, so that the two can be organically integrated to achieve the essential faithfulness.
Works Cited


