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On the Compensation Strategies for Museum Texts: A Case Study of the Archaeological Excavations at the Royal Cemetery of Haihunhou Kingdom in the Han Dynasty

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Abstract

As a momentous material for carrying and promoting culture, museum texts contain not only abundant information but also profound cultural implication. Along with the development of modern linguistics theories and their related disciplines, modern translation compensation research is also constantly gaining momentum. Through analyzing the translation of archaeological exhibitions of the Han Dynasty in Nanchang, this paper deals with the characteristics of the museum texts and its translation compensation strategies with a view to providing a new research approach for the future translation practice of museum texts.

Key words: Translation compensation theory; Museum texts; Compensation strategies

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INTRODUCTION

As an important platform for carrying history and disseminating culture, the museum is a cultural card for a region, a country, and a nation. Museum texts are a vital

communication means of museum cultural information. As an inter-lingual communication, translation is not only a simple process of character conversion between the two languages, but also includes the integration of the two different cultures. As the collections of cultural relics or exhibits are limited by time and space, the way of transmission is hence confined and the effectiveness of communication will be greatly reduced. The English translation of museum texts is of utmost importance in cultural promotion. As a result, how to correctly and effectively disseminate cultural information is a huge test faced by translators.

The five-year archaeological excavation of the Archaeological Excavations at the Royal Cemetery of Haihunhou Kingdom in Nanchang City unveiled the mystery of Liu He, an imperial lord over 2,000 years ago, and reproduced a picture of the history of the Western Han Dynasty that was gorgeous colored, highlighting the unique culture of the Gan. This archaeological exhibition in Nanchang is a valuable legacy left by the ancients and highlights the cultural heritage of Jiangxi. It is also a new card for the Jiangxi Provincial Museum and Jiangxi Culture.

Because there are different cultural constructions between English and Chinese, some translation obstacles are difficult to overcome in the actual translation of museum texts. Therefore, it would be more discreet for translators to adopt the compensation methods. When the words or sentences are difficult to interpret directly in the process of translation and conversion, the translator need to resort to other language expression methods and try their best to make up for distortions and defects in translation language effects, and that is translation compensation. This thesis takes the English translation of the Archaeological Excavations at the Royal Cemetery of Haihunhou Kingdom in Nanchang as the research object, and tries to analyze the features of the museum text and translation compensation strategies from the perspective of translation compensation theory.

1. LITERATURE REVIEW

Modern translation compensation research is based on the theory of modern linguistics and its related disciplines, gradually emerging from the perspective of traditional translation theories. As early as the 1960s and 1970s, terms such as “compensation,” “compensation for,” “compensatory” etc., began to make their debut in translation study circle. Nida (1964) expounded the generality of the loss of written style and written language, and explored translation compensation as a means to make up for the loss of meaning. In 1969, the use of appropriate idioms in the target texts was advocated in order to cope with translation losses. In 1993, based on the functional equivalence theory, Nida further elaborated the issue of compensation and considered compensation to be based on functional equivalence. British scholars Hatim and Mason (1990) proposed that translation is a kind of communicative discourse, and translators’ translation process in social life creates new communicative behaviors in previously existing communicative acts. They think that translation compensation is to use some means to make up for the unavoidable communicative losses in translation. Newmark (2001) classifies compensation methods into text types and their main functions, and points out that text types and functions determine the type of compensation on the basis of textual functions. In his opinion, different types of texts require different compensation strategies.

In China, attention has been paid to the compensation theory since its introduction. Wang Enmian (1988) pointed out that compensation occurs in the process of translator’s translation to prevent or remedy the semantic loss caused by language transformation, and defines compensation as “supplementation language form to complement the semantic loss caused by converting the source language form.” Sun Yingchun (1996) discussed the necessity of compensation from the perspective of literature, art and aesthetics, and proposed that translators should reduce the loss of translation during translation process, especially the loss of phonological and rhetorical devices. Ma Hongjun (2000) analyzed the typical examples in the English version of *A Dream of Red Mansions* and explained that translators’ compensation strategies are not uniform and fixed. He indicated that these compensation methods are dependent on the choices made by the translators themselves. Xia Tingde (2006) summarized and developed the results of the previous studies, then published a monograph *A Study on Translation Compensation* and conducted a comprehensive and systematic discussion on compensation issues.

2. ON THE COMPENSATION STRATEGIES FOR MUSEUM TEXTS

While the museum text conveys textual information, it is also necessary to consider the effect of the transmission.

There are many proper nouns in the museum text which covers rich cultural information and sometimes contains various rhetorical devices. Therefore, the translator must carefully consider and highlight the main content of the text information. It is also necessary to pay due heed to the effect of transmission and trigger the cultural resonance of readers. Because there are many historical, cultural, and linguistic differences between Chinese and English museum texts, the loss of translation in semantic communication, pragmatic functions, and cultural connotation are inevitable. As a bridge for cross-cultural communication, translation also carries cultural connotations in addition to basic textual information, and there may be untranslatable phenomena due to cultural differences or language traits in translation. However, according to translation compensation research by Xia Tingde, compensation exists in all texts, and certain compensation measures can be taken to reduce or compensate for these translation losses. The museum text is no exception. This paper tries to explore the appropriate translation strategies for translation of museum texts under the guidance of translation compensation theory.

2.1 Cultural Compensation

Because the characteristics of English and Chinese languages are different, and the customs and expressions that tourists touch are various in the cross-cultural communication behavior of the translation of museum texts, cultural defaults are bound to occur in the process of translation. It is necessary to make some cultural compensation for these cultural defaults, and they usually appear in the form of annotations.

Source Text 1:

考古人员在内外棺之间发现的90多块重达一斤的金饼。

Target Text 1:

Archaeologists found more than 90 gold plates between inner and outer coffins, each weighing one jin of the Han Dynasty (now 250g).

Analysis: *Jin* is a common measure unit of ancient China. In the Han Dynasty, a *jin* was equivalent to about 250 grams. And it is totally different concept of the weight nowadays, which a *jin* in the Han Dynasty equals to a half of *jin* at present. For foreign tourists, the concept seems to be a far distance. Therefore, translators supplement the meaning of *jin* in translation so that foreign tourists can understand it better.

Source Text 2:

青铜鎛 青铜釜 青铜盃

Target Text 2:

Bronze Xuan (metering instrument)
Bronze Fang (square kettle)
Bronze He (wine vessel)

Analysis: In the Han Dynasty, according to the different shapes and purposes, containers were termed

differently as pot, ding, xuan, fang, he, gui, zun, basin and so on. The author observes that there are more than twenty kinds of bronze vessels in the archaeological exhibition of the Royal Cemetery of Haihunhou Kingdom in Nanchang City. If these bronze wares of different styles were translated literally, cultural loss would be inevitable, and foreign tourists might have been puzzled. Therefore, when translating texts of some unsophisticated cultural relics, certain cultural compensations are in need, such as annotating their uses or shapes (like these examples above mentioned).

Source Text 3:

西汉太始二年，汉武帝以“西登陇首，获白麟以饗宗室，务注水出天马，泰山见黄金，宜改故名。今更黄金为麟趾马蹄以协瑞焉。”

Target Text 3:

In the second year of Taishi era of the Western Han Dynasty (95 BC), Emperor Wu of Han “obtained the white qilin to award the imperial clan when scaling the Longshou mountain; discovered gold on Mount Tai after crossing the accumulated water and encountering the holy horse (an auspicious beast in Chinese mythology). It is suggested that the name of gold should be changed. To bestow an auspicious connotation on the gold coins, the Emperor decreed to mold them into the shapes of horseshoes or toes of Qilin.”

Analysis: This paragraph introduces the origin of gold qilin hooves and gold ingots in the Western Han Dynasty. And “the second of Tai Shi Reign” is the ancient chronology of China, labeling reign title and the tenure year of the emperor, which foreign tourists may not be able to understand because of lack of this cultural knowledge. They may ask question like “What does ‘year’ mean?” So the year of BC95 corresponding to the “the second of Tai Shi Reign” is added in parentheses, making this concept clear to foreign tourists. In addition, the “holy horse” appearing in the sentence does not exist in the West as well. Therefore, the translator also makes an explanation. It is a mythological animal in Chinese mythology, which deepens the cultural image and enriches the imagination of foreign tourists.

2.2 Grammatical Compensation

Grammatically, there are also significant differences between the English and Chinese. English stresses on hypotaxis, its grammar being explicit, while Chinese favors parataxis and its grammar is implicit. In the face of the same communication content, there are certain grammatical differences in two different language expressions and such communicative content conversion will inevitably lead to grammatical compensation. From grammatical view, the translation of museum texts into English is a process of transforming loose Chinese sentence groups into ordered and complex English sentence groups. Translators need to use more syntactic measures to compensate for omission of connected words, pronouns and implied logic in Chinese which indicates the

grammatical tense and posture of the relationship.

Source Text 4:

2011年以来，江西省文物考古研究所等单位在海昏侯国遗址发掘面积1万余平方米，揭露出了完整的鄱墩山海昏侯墓园及众多遗存，出土文物1万余件。

Target Text 4:

Since 2011, Jiangxi Institute of Cultural Relics and Archaeology and other units have dug more than 10000m² in Haihunhou Historic Site, from which a complete Guodun Mountain Haihunhou Tombs and numerous relics were revealed, and over 10000 pieces of cultural relics were unearthed.

Analysis: This sentence comes from the preface to the archaeological exhibition of the Haihunhou, and the study of the archaeological site of the Haihunhou was carried out since 2011. Therefore, the translation puts forward the logical relationship of time in the first sentence, and uses the form of “have+ base form” to adapt the past tense to compensate for the original text. In addition, translators take the initiative to be passive and use the common passive voice in English to compensate for the performer which is abbreviated in the source text.

Source Text 5:

一个贪婪的盗墓贼，打破了小村的宁静；一个及时的报警电话，揭开了2000年前侯国的神秘面纱。

Target Text 5:

Several grave robbers broke the peace of this small village; and a timely emergency call disclosed the mystery of Haihun Principality, tracking back to 2,000 years ago.

Analysis: The words “了” and “过” are commonly used to express the perfect tense in Chinese. According to the temporal logic, the translator first compensates the in-existent past tense in Chinese by “broke” and “closed,” and then uses “tracking back” to compensate for the implied meaning of the original text so that the entire sentence is harmonized in tense and voice.

Source Text 6:

乐车为两辆，一辆为配有实用乐器——罇于和青铜铙的“金车”，一辆为配有建鼓的“鼓车”。

Target Text 6:

There are two Yue chariots, and both are model chariots, representing the guide chariots within the tomb occupant’s procession. One is a “gold chariot” equipped with chunyu, a practical musical instrument and four pieces of bronze nao (round percussion instrument). The other is a “drum chariot”.

Analysis: This sentence is from the introduction to the Yue chariots. In addition to the cultural compensation for the introduction to the cultural relics about the form and purpose of Chunyu and Nao, the common English expression “there be” is applied to compensate for the beingless Chinese subject form.

2.3 Aesthetic compensation

Aesthetic compensation is often used for the lack of aesthetics between the original text and the target text.

For example, the language form is symmetry and neatness in Chinese, and when translated into English, the same aesthetic sensation as Chinese is often not obtained. Therefore, the translator should appropriately make aesthetic compensation for it.

Source Text 7:

面积最大、保存最完好、结构最完整、功能布局最清晰、拥有最完备祭祀体系的西汉列侯墓园。

Target Text 7:

Haihunhou cemetery is the best-preserved royal tombs ever discovered of the Western Han Dynasty, with the largest area, the most complete structure, the clearest layout, and the most integrated funeral system.

Analysis: The Royal Cemetery of Haihunhou Kingdom in Nanchang took the five “most”, and the translator retained its form as the rhetoric of the original text. And when read the text is also punchy and catchy.

Source Text 8:

南昌海昏侯墓的劫与幸

Target Text 8:

Weal and Woe of Haihunhou Cemetery

Analysis: “The weal and woe” are two opposite levels in the expression of meaning. When dealing with this heading, the translator not only considers the semantic level, but also pays attention to the formal correspondence by using the “weal and woe”, two words with identical initials to give a form of beauty.

Source Text 9:

中国汉代贵族有“事死如事生”的丧葬观念，死者生前享受的东西都要带到墓中去，造成了汉代墓葬形制的宅第化与陪葬品的生活化现象。

Target Text 9:

As for aristocrat’s funeral practices in the Han Dynasty, they attached the same importance to after-life as the current life. What they enjoyed in this life should be placed in tombs after death, making Han mausoleum as dwelling house and sacrifices as real-life objects.

Analysis: When dealing with the phrase “事死如事生”，the translator noticed the repetition of “事，” but when translating, the position of aesthetic compensation was shifted, and the simple “death” and “life” were not used. On behalf of “life and death,” the translator uses the “after-life” and “current life”，repeating the word “life”. Under the premise of accurate communication, it reproduces the tension beauty of the Chinese language.

3. THE DEFICIENCIES OF TRANSLATION COMPENSATION THEORY IN THE APPLICATION OF MUSEUM TEXTS

Although the theory of translation compensation plays a certain guiding role in the translation of museum

texts, it also has several deficiencies, such as the over-compensation caused by exceeding informativeness or the under-translation caused by little information of the original text.

Source Text 10:

乐器库的钟虞

Target Text 10:

Ju (straight column hung along both sides of the chime) in Musical Instrument Storeroom

Analysis: The translation of Ju in the musical instrument storeroom here is unlike translation of other cultural relics. The translator does not explain the purpose or shape of the skeleton but describes the position of it (which is the object that hangs directly on both sides of the chime). Combining the physical objects, it may also be difficult for tourists to understand how the Ju hangs directly on both sides of the bell and which role it plays, a decorative or other role. Therefore, a certain amount of under-compensation is actually existent here, and more specific and substantive information on the Ju should be appropriately added or changed.

Source Text 11:

出土大型真车5辆，马匹20匹，反映了西汉列侯车舆制度，在中国南方地区尚属首次发现。

Target Text 11:

In Haihunhou cemetery, one sacrifice pit with real-life horses and chariots was found, from which unearthed 5 large real chariots and 20 horses, i.e. 4 horses for one chariot, demonstrating the carriage system of Han royals. This is the first of such finds in South China.

Analysis: In this case, the number of real horses and chariots buried in the archaeological discovery of the Haihunhou was introduced. The translation added “ie 4 horses for one chariot” to convey the meaning that each vehicle was equipped with 4 horses, but it seems that the extra-translation is slightly redundant here and a certain compensation of over informativeness is resulted.

CONCLUSION

The educational and cultural functions determine the importance of translation of museum texts. As one of the windows of foreign exchanges, museums and museum texts are new cards for the culture of the new era. The English translation of the Archaeological Exhibition at the Royal Cemetery of Haihunhou Kingdom in Nanchang is an outgrowth of the Gan culture, and it is also the way for Jiangxi culture to go out. Through the study of compensation strategies for this English translation material, the author found that the use of grammar compensation tools in the museum text is the most frequent, followed by cultural compensation due to cultural differences, and aesthetic compensation due

to the practicality and simplicity of the museum text, the frequency is the lowest. In addition, translation compensation also has certain deficiencies in the translation of museum texts. It requires translators to exert their subjective initiative to the greatest extent possible, and grasp the “degree” of compensation, carefully consider the appropriateness of translation, and adopt correct and appropriate translation compensation strategies. In the end, the author hopes that when translating texts of other museums into English, more translators can take translation compensation in the research scope, and adopt different translation compensation strategies according to the actual situation under the guidance of translation compensation theory.

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