

Aesthetic Representation in English to Chinese Translation of Business Letter

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Abstract

With the increasing frequency of commercial activities and international contacts, Business English has become imperative medium for international communication. Business letter, as an important branch of business English, plays a crucial role in international trade. This paper introduces the definition of translation and aesthetics, aesthetic representation, discusses business letter and its language characteristics, makes an analysis of word, sentence and discourse translation of English business letter from the perspective of aesthetic representation. It aims to provide a new perspective for the translation of business letter.

Key words: Translation and aesthetics; Aesthetic representation; Business letter

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INTRODUCTION

Practical Translation Aesthetics (1993) written by Fu Zhongxuan was regarded as the first translation and aesthetics monograph published independently in China. It opened up the discussion of contemporary translation aesthetics in China. Since then, Chinese translators such as

Wang Hongyin, Xu Yuanchong, Xi Yongji, Mao Ronggui and Liu Miqing have put forward many principles of translation aesthetics (Jiao, 2010, p.104). Among them, *Introduction to Translation and Aesthetics* written by Liu Miqing and *Translation Studies: An Aesthetic Perspective* he co-authored with Zhang Yan systematically expound the aesthetic subject in translation, the aesthetic object in translation and the aesthetic representation of translation, which provides a new theoretical perspective for the later discussion of literary translation. Guided by Liu Miqing's aesthetic representation theory (Liu, & Zhang, 2011), this paper studies the aesthetic representation in the translation of English business letters, and analyses how the translated version represents the aesthetic feeling of the original text from the aspects of vocabulary, sentence and discourse. It is hoped that this paper can provide some references for the practice and research of English translation of business letter.

1. THEORETICAL FOUNDATIONS

To proceed the study, it is necessary to comprehend the main concepts about translation and aesthetics and aesthetic representation.

1.1 Translation and Aesthetics

Translation and Aesthetics is the aesthetic model of translation studies. It intends to describe the basic theory, operational principles and development strategies of translatology, and pays attention not only to the key role of aesthetic perception in translation, but also to the guiding role of aesthetic understanding in translation (Liu, & Zhang, 2011). According to Liu Miqing's translation and aesthetics theory, the aesthetic object in translation refers to the original text which has aesthetic value. It is translated and processed by the translator (Liu, 2005, p.86). The aesthetic subject in translation is the person who carries out aesthetic activities on the aesthetic object, that is, the translator (Liu, 2005, p.168). In translation

and aesthetics, aesthetic subject and aesthetic object are inseparable, and there is a dialectical relationship between them. Only when they are placed in a unified and interdependent relationship, can aesthetic representation of translation be completed.

1.2 Aesthetic Representation

Representation is to convert the source language to target language, which is the last process in the aesthetic experience of translation (Liu, 2005, p.217). It does not purposely pursue the complete equivalence of the form and structure of the original text, but stands at the angle of the target language's readers and conveys to them the aesthetic feeling transmitted by the author of the original text through various means, so that they can get the same aesthetic feeling as the readers of the original text (Xiao, 2016, p.72). Therefore, aesthetic representation of translation is the same as that of other arts, the essence of which is to materialize the aesthetic experience of the subject after processing the source language, otherwise it can not realize the aesthetic perception of the target readers.

2. BUSINESS LETTER AND ITS LANGUAGE CHARACTERISTICS

As a means of communication, English business letter has many different language characteristics compared with other styles of English. This part introduces the concept of business letter and its language characteristics.

2.1 Business Letter

Business letter is a kind of social practice which takes language as a means, daily business activities as a reflection object, and letters as a carrier of information exchange to promote business development (Dong, 2011, p.100). In the increasingly fierce business competition, business English letters play an important role in international business communication with the rapid development of e-commerce services and technology.

The functions of business English letters are mainly embodied in obtaining or transmitting information, dealing with related matters in business communication, contacting and communicating feelings. From the formal degree of style and the importance of content, business letters can be divided into two categories: formal letters and informal letters (Dong, X. B. 2011, p.100). Formal letters are usually subject-marked and stamped with unit seals. They are long and complete in length and are mainly used for communicating and dealing with substantive business matters. While informal letters are used to deal with general or ceremonial matters without the need to indicate the subject and stamp the unit seal.

2.2 Language Characteristics of Business Letter

This part discusses the language characteristics of business letter. Section one analyses lexical features of

business correspondence. Section two and three deal with the syntactic and discourse characteristics of business letter.

2.2.1 Lexical Characteristics of Business Letter

Technical term, abbreviation, accurate words, and polite expressions are often applied in English business letter. Technical term involves some scientific fields, which has a high degree of professionalism (Dong, 2011, p.97). Its precise meaning is not easy to be misunderstood. Generally speaking, too formal and professional terms should be avoided as much as possible, but when it comes to commodity names, laws, transportation and other matters, the use of professional terms is necessary. For some business terms, their exact meanings can not be comprehended by workers outside the business fields. For example, order means “命令”, but in business English, it means “订单”. Advice is translated into “建议”, but in the translation of cargo shipment letter, shipping advice can not be translated into “运输建议”, but translated into “已转船通知”. Quote means “引用” in everyday English, while in business letter it means “报价”. Abbreviation refers to contracted forms of words or phrases in business correspondence for illustrating terms or clauses about business trade (Lin, 2014, p.24). There are four types of abbreviations in business letter: the first one is the abbreviation of business terms, such as, CFR (Cost and Freight), D/P (Document against Payment); the second one is the abbreviation of bill, like B/L (Bill of Lading), L/C (Letter of Credit); the third one is related to the contracted name of corporations, like ICC (International Chamber of Commerce); the last one refers to abbreviation of measurement unit, for example PC (Piece). (Dong, 2011, p.97) Accurate words are characterized by conformity to fact or truth, which is strictly correct (Huang, 2011, p.44). In business letters, it makes sense to make information concrete and exact. The writer of business letter is not allowed to use vague words because those words may express more than one meanings or deliver inaccurate information. For example, words like “tomorrow”, “today”, “high” or “low” do not provide readers with the exact information. Polite expressions show regards for others in manners, speech, behavior, etc. In business occasions, being polite to others is conducive to maintain a harmonious relationship with the buyers and sellers. So words like “please”, “appreciate”, “wish” are frequently used.

2.2.2 Syntactic Characteristics of Business Letter

Obviously, Business letters are written in a more fixed way than literary texts. So there are many conventional sentence structures, which can make the text more formal (Sun, 2002, p.34). Simple sentences are short in word numbers, but clear in expressing its meaning (Xu, 2008, p.27). When constructing sentences, writers need to make them fit the thought that he or she wants to express. If there are two sentences with equal importance, one is simple and the other is compound, it is better to place the

simple one as independent clause for it can attract reader's eyes and make it noticeable for them. (Xu, 2008, p.27) For business letters, not only words, but also sentences should be accurate and unambiguous. A letter written in ambiguous expressions causes misunderstandings and trade losses. Clear expression requires correct and concise words and sentence structures. Business letter is also courteous in its content. It requires politeness, sincerity and enthusiasm in language and consideration of other's feelings in expression (Gao, & Liu, 2014, p.27) Polite formula represents not only in informing sentences, expressing thanks, but also in indicating future actions and expressing wishes.

2.2.3 Discourse Characteristics of Business Letter

Business letter have its own fixed formats, which consists of letterhead, date, inside address, salutation, body of the letter, complimentary close and signature in discourse. (Xie, 2007, p.60) The paragraphs of business letter are generally short, because business correspondence is a kind of practical style, which mainly expresses ideas and does not need too much decoration like literary style. A short paragraph can make one understand its content quickly so as to enhance his work efficiency. Therefore, business letters are usually segmented according to the central idea expressed by the addresser, and each paragraph of the text will not be too long, especially at the beginning and the end. (Xie, 2007, p.60) Unlike other styles in business English, business letter is often written in accordance with the purpose of its writing. (Gao, & Liu, 2014, p.28) From the purpose of business letters, business letters can be divided into negotiation letters, inquiry letters, reply letters, request letters, notification letters and contact letters. On the other hand, from the specific function of business letters, it consists of order letter, appointment letter, congratulations letter, thank-you letter, introduction letter, invitation letter, apology letter, etc.

3. AESTHETICS REPRESENTATION IN ENGLISH TO CHINESE TRANSLATION OF BUSINESS LETTER

Translation Studies: An Aesthetic Perspective written by Liu Miqing and Zhang Yan carves out a way for exploring the translation of business letters from the perspective of aesthetics. In aesthetics representation, there are many explanations about translation which can be used to guide the translation of business letter and appreciate the translated text.

3.1 Aesthetics Representation in Lexical Translation

3.1.1 Convention in Technical Terms

Convention in aesthetics representation refers to distinguishing label which means that special reference labels must be given to specific things. (Liu & Zhang,

2011, p.210) There are a large number of fixed phrases and collocations in business letter, and its translation often has the target meaning. On the level of diction, technical terms are subject to convention, for each term has a specific meaning related to it. For example, "inquiry" is translated to "询盘" in business letter, but translated to "调查" in daily life. "询盘" refers to the expression that the buyer or seller inquires the other party about the conditions of the transaction in order to purchase or sell a commodity, while "调查" is the act or instance of seeking truth, information, or knowledge about something. So "询盘" is a more professional and conventional expression. Meanwhile, "dumping" denotes "商品倾销" in business negotiation, and "倾倒" in daily life. To explain, "商品倾销" means enterprises sell their own goods in foreign markets at below normal prices, but "倾倒" denotes the act or practice of dumping something. So dumping here is translated to "商品倾销". These two examples demonstrate that the translated technical terms are conventionalized in its word, that is, a word corresponds to a clear meaning.

3.1.2 Politeness in Polite Expressions

Politeness is a unique aesthetic feature of business letters, which is the most basic and effective way to achieve successful cooperation and establish a long-term trading partnership with each other. Polite words such as "please" is converted to "请" in Chinese which is widely used in Chinese daily life, especially when disturbing others or asking for help. "Glad" is translated to "乐意", and this word "乐意" is proper in expressing your positive attitude to help others or willing to deliver a good piece of information to them. "Welcome" is equal to "欢迎". In Chinese, people use "欢迎" to show their hospitality to their friends or guests, or give some respects to a speaker in conference. "Wish" means "希望" in Chinese. In business letter, "希望" is used by traders to put forward suggestions, seeking permission from the other party. In a word, these words "请", "乐意", "欢迎", "希望" are all reduced to polite expressions, and represent politeness in aesthetic representation.

3.1.3 Precision in Abbreviations

Words and sentences must be accurate, and it is the basic aspect of "choose the fittest, choose the best", the essential thought of translation and aesthetics (Liu, M. Q., & Zhang Y. 2011, p.21). In English business letter, there are many abbreviations like CFR (Cost and Freight), D/P (Document against Payment), L/C (Letter of Credit), etc. In the translation of English to Chinese, CFR is represented by "成本加运费". The word "成本加运费" precisely shows delivery on the port of shipment which requires the seller pays for the cost of transporting the goods to the designated port of destination and the risk of the goods is transferred at the time of delivery on board. D/P is translated to "付款交单" in Chinese, "付款交单" means the collecting bank must pay the importer's

money before it can deliver the commercial documents to the importer. L/C is identified with “信用证”, In China, it refers to a written document issued by a bank at the request of the importer to ensure that the exporter is liable for payment of the goods. All of these abbreviations have a corresponding Chinese meaning, which demonstrate precision in aesthetic representation.

3.2 Aesthetics Representation in Sentence Translation

3.2.1 Convention in Conventional Sentence Structures

In the translation of business letters, the use of fixed expressions or formulas is an effective translation strategy, and the target language-oriented translation method will make the translation more appropriate. (Zeng, 2019, p.54) Convention functions not only in the aspect of word but also in sentence and discourse. There are many prescriptive sentence frameworks in business letters to illustrate this point.

Example 1

ST: *enclosing your quotation*

TT: 随函附上报价单 (Sun, 2002, p.34)

ST: *Through the courtesy of /We are indebted to your Commercial Counselor.*

TT: 承蒙贵国商务参赞告知。(Zeng, 2019, p.54)

In the first example, The expression “随函附上报价单” is most commonly used in Chinese business letter. In the second one, “Through the courtesy of ”is translated to “承蒙” in Chinese, and “your” is translated to “贵”. These are the existing expressions in the target language, so the translation becomes appropriate and meets the expectations of the readers.

3.2.2 Concision in Simple Sentences

Concision requires that business letter should be brief and meet the main point, that is, to express things in the shortest possible words without losing any information. Generally speaking, in order to be concise, writers should try to avoid redundancy. So simple sentences are often used in business letter, and this characteristic corresponds to concision in aesthetic representation.

Example 2

ST: *It is necessary for all of us not to miss the opportunity to think over in a careful manner each and every suggestion that is offered us.*

TT: 我们必须珍惜提出每一个建议的机会 (Dong, 2011, p.94)

Since a letter written with wordiness or redundancy will not be welcomed in the business circle, so in translation, modified words that can not express real meaning should be omitted as far as possible. In this sentence, “*it is necessary*” and “*think over in a careful manner*” fail to express practical meaning, so they are omitted in translation. The Chinese translation accurately expresses the original meaning and conforms to the concision in aesthetic representation.

3.2.3 Politeness in Polite Formulas

Whether on the lexical level or syntactic level, politeness in aesthetics representation plays a vital role in business correspondence. Business letters constructed by polite phrases can bring a sense of comfort to the readers, and smooth the business transaction.

Example 3

ST: *We acknowledge receipt of your letter dated the 3rd this month enclosing the reprography of the insurance policy; we are regret for your loss.*

TT: 本月3日来函和保险单印件已经收到, 我们对贵公司所遭受的损失深表同情。(Shi, 2009, p.164)

This is a letter in consultation with the company that has suffered losses regarding the delivery date. In this sentence, “我们对贵公司所遭受的损失深表同情” fully expresses sympathy and concern for the other party’s loss. It’s also a sign of courtesy.

3.3 Aesthetics Representation in Discourse Translation

3.3.1 Concision in Short Paragraphs

Unlike other styles of English, business letter prefers to use short paragraphs, which indicates concision in aesthetics representation, and it is another feature of business correspondence.

Example 4

Dear Sirs,

We are in receipt of your telegram on May 6th, from which we are disappointed to hear that our price for shirts is too high for you to work on.

Please note that we have quoted our most favorable price and are unable to entertain any counter offer.

With regard to shirt, we advise you that the few lots we have at present are under offer elsewhere. If, however, you were to make us a suitable offer, there is a possibility of our supplying them. As you know, of late, it has been a heavy demand for these commodities and this has resulted in increased prices. You may, however, take advantage of the strengthening market if you send an immediate reply.

Yours Faithfully,

Tony Smith

Chief Seller

敬启者:

五月六日电悉, 很遗憾贵方不能接受我方衬衫价格。

该报价为最优惠价, 恕不能还价。

本公司正在给别处报盘一批衬衫, 若贵公司能以适当买价, 本公司乐意出售。近来该类产品需求量大, 令价格上涨。请贵公司把握机会, 尽早回复。(Dong, 2011, p.94)

销售部经理
托尼史密斯谨上

It can be seen from the above, English business letter consists of three sections. The first paragraph is composed

of thirty words and the second paragraph includes eighteen words. These two paragraphs show their attitude towards buyer's letter. The last paragraph contains seventy-three words and it explains the reason why the seller can't accept the offer and expresses his expectation to cooperate with the buyer. However, to indicate the meaning of the English business letter, the translated Chinese one is also composed of three parts, but each part has fewer words than English business letter. The first paragraph contains twenty-three words, the second one includes fifteen words, and the third one contains sixty-six words. So the translated passage is more concise and clear.

3.3.2 Politeness in Polite Discourses

As politeness is a unique aesthetic feature of business letter, so even in discourse, politeness is also the main tone of business letters. For example,

Gentlemen,

We are in receipt of your telegram on June 6th, from which we understand that you have booked our order for 2,000 dozens of sweaters.

In reply, we have the pleasure of informing you that the confirmed, irrevocable Letter of Credit No.7634, amounting to \$17,000, has been opened this morning through the Commercial Bank, Tokyo. Upon receipt of the same, please arrange shipment of the goods booked by us with the least possible delay. We are informed that s.s. (abbreviation form of steamship) Wuxi is scheduled to sail from your city to our port on June 28th. We wish that the shipment will be carried by that steamer.

Should this trial order prove satisfactory to our customers, we can assure you that repeat orders in increased quantities will be placed.

Your close cooperation in this respect will be highly appreciated. In the meantime we look forward to your ship advice.

Yours sincerely,

敬启者，

六月六日电悉，贵方已接受我方订货，购买2000打毛衣。

我们荣幸告知：第7634号保兑的、不可撤销信用证，金额为17000美元，已于今晨通过东京商业银行开出。收到后，请将我们所订的货从速安排装运。另据悉“无锡”号轮定于六月二十八日从你处开往我港，我们希望由该轮装运这批货物。

如若此次试订使我方客户满意，我们保证继续大量订购。

我们对贵公司在这方面的密切合作深表感谢。同时盼望贵方的装运通知。(Li, 2010, p.185)

敬上

In the translated letter, many polite expressions combined form a polite business letter. For instance, in English business letter, "you" is translated to "贵方", and "our" is translated to "我方". Such a statement has

raised the status of the other party and expressed respect for them. "We wish" means "我们希望", which shows the buyer's request in a euphemistic way. In addition, "Your close cooperation in this respect will be highly appreciated" corresponds to "我们对贵公司在这方面的密切合作深表感谢". This translated sentence expresses gratitude to the partner for their further cooperation. All of these polite formulas constitute such a polite business letter.

CONCLUSION

In recent years, more and more translators have begun to explore literary styles from the perspective of translation aesthetics, while Liu Miqing pointed out that practical style, like other literary styles, also has aesthetic value. This paper makes an analysis of the lexical, syntactic and textual features of English business letters. Under the guidance of Liu Miqing's translation and aesthetics theory, this paper combines the three levels of English translation of business letters with aesthetic representation, and it is found that the translation of English business letters from aspects of words, sentences and texts conforms to the theory of representation strategies of translation and aesthetics. So it can be concluded that aesthetic representation of translation plays a guiding role in the translation of business English letters and provides a new perspective for the translation of business letters in the future.

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