
Original Paper

Literary Translation in the Light of Literal Translation and Free Translation--A Case Study of *The Peanut* By Zhang Peiji

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Abstract

Historically speaking, translation approaches, such as literal translation and free translation, have always been the focal point of different translation theorists. Such translation methods are frequently used in various kinds of texts. It is obviously seen that such methods are one of the translation criteria they have always been following. The paper, under the guidance of the most common concept of literal translation and free translation approaches, makes analysis of them in the literary text such as *The Peanut*. In this text rendered into English, the translator has made use of three different translation approaches such as literal translation, free translation and literal plus free translation. Such endeavors distinguish the advantage and disadvantage of these translation approaches, accurately and smoothly reproduce the original meaning, and eventually help the target readers promote the understanding of original language effectively.

Keywords: *The Peanut*, literary translation, literal translation, free translation, translation approaches

1. Literal Translation and Free Translation

What is translation? As for the translation itself, according to Nida, Eugen A, an eminent American professor of translation theory, translation refers to the original recurrence in the receptor language, the closest natural equivalent of the source language statement, first in terms of the content and secondly in terms of the form (Nida, 1969). Translation is, so to speak, a two-way language activity that the culture and thought presented by a language should be completely and correctly reoffered in another target language, in order to finish the information conversion of two different languages. Translation is an art comprised of the attempt to replace a given message and/or statement in one language with the same message and/or statement in another language (Peter, 1988, p. 7). Translation, as a bilingual event, is of great importance as "we need not to escape the fact that much of what is beautiful and mysterious in our language has partially either reinvented by the process of translation or been extracted out of abstruseness by translation" (Schleiermacher, 1992, p. 165). Therefore, translation is a process of culture and language exchange between different language contexts. It is performed in a way that the written text or words in one language system should be reoccurred in another language. Such efforts are to empower the target readers and give them confidence in understanding the contents the original author tries to convey and feeling what the original readers feel in the comprehension of the original. This provides a room of emotional and mental exchanges for the readers possessing two different languages. Therefore, the translator plays an important role in bridging a communicative gap between them in that the readers are the ultimate goal to serve. This requires translators master impressive knowledge and skills of not only the source language but also the target language so much so that the different language transference may be realized. Here comes the two fundamental methods of translation---the literal translation and the free translation.

As is known to all, the literal translation and the free translation have been the two major concerns among the translators since time immemorial. The differences between word for word and sense for sense translation, derived from the Roman system, has all along the way become a topic for discussion in one way or another right up to the nowadays (Bassnett, 1988, p. 39). On the basis of different cultural backgrounds, the opinions and the explanation about such two kinds of translation approaches vary. However, there is one point that is mutually recognized, namely, literal translation for form and

free translation for content (Xu & Zhang, 1995). No matter what the translators call for these two kinds of translation method, the core meaning of them remains the same, which is to narrow the gap between the foreign language and the indigenous one.

1.1 The Literal Translation

The literal translation, generally speaking, is about the reappearance of the original language in the context of the target language in terms of its content and form. It is a very crucial translation method because the interlinear translation of the Scriptures is the best and ideal example of all translation (Benjamin, 1969, p. 82). According to a famous Chinese scholar, the reason why literal translation is applied is that it can assist the translators easily accomplish the three intentions: 1. Being loyal to the original, 2. Remirror the scene and taste of the foreign country involved and 3. Putting forward new ways of expression (Liu, 1991, p. 59). When a text is about to be rendered into another text in a different language, the translator may need to pursue the grammatical and lexical equivalence in the target text. The grammatical constructions of the source language are converted to their closest equivalents of the target language, but the semantic words are individually translated out of the context for another time (Peter, 1988, p. 46). Hence, there are two elements taken into consideration for the literal translation, which refers to the form and the content. For one thing, the translator may need to be lexically faithful to the original text. For another, the translator may go to be consistent with the form allowed by the source text. Faithfulness to the content and consistency of the form require the translator to avoid losing all the elements of the original, and to reshew its intactness. But it doesn't mean that it is the principle we must follow. Sometimes flexible changes in words and sentence orders are also preferred. This may help the readers have full understanding of the original text and improve their awareness of foreign culture and thought.

1.2 The Free Translation

The free translation, as an approach for language reproducing, contains the original content and style rather than the original form and structure. This kind of translation method requires the language reproducers to take in the original meanings of the source language and output them in the object language context (Feng, n.d., p. 37). Translator may bear in mind that he needs to adhere to the contextual faithfulness of the source language no matter what translation methods he may choose. In this context, there is another translation approach offered to the translators, which stands for the free translation. It refers to the sense reoccurrence of the source text in the target language without the adherence to the source language grammatical and syntactical system. The top priority of a translator is to grasp the basic concept and key information behind the source language (Xu, 1996). As the translation theorist Peter Newmark says, "free translation reshapes the matter without the consideration of any other elements involved in the translation, or redescribes the contextual meanings out of the form of the original language" (Peter, 1988, p. 46). It is all about the paraphrase of the original, a free information exchange process that undue consistency with the original form and may not be quite accepted. It puts aside the syntactic and semantic distinct in the source language, and focuses on the original meaning and the coherence and smoothness of the target text. According to Nida, translation stands for translating meaning. Due to the various manifestation of multiple cultures and languages around the world, there exists no an exact way of replication of two kinds of different languages. That is to say, the nature of translation is to explain and express the meaning of the source text.

2. Literary Translation

Literature, in broad terms, refers to any activities of writing books, articles and novels. In a narrow sense, it is the literal presentation of those considered to have poetic and aesthetic thought and value. And it is always written in a manner that differs from the usage of common language. Translation, basically speaking, reproduces such kind of messages in another written language. This behavior is the recreation of intellectual and artistic messages. It is a quite complicated process instead of a linear and simple one, which includes some creative merits such as positive and constructive comprehension of the original (Ma, 2000). The literary creation is a kind of art of language, and its artistic merits reflect not only in the lexical items, but also in the aesthetic ability (Zhang, 2005). Literature, is the art of language. If so, literary translation is about to befriend with words, and eventually it is the art of the word conversion (Xu, 2021). The literary translation, unlike the word-to-word translation that

symbolizes the word correspondence, has more demands on the absorption and the recreation of the information of language and its beauty (Zhu, 2006). Therefore, such kind of translation, to some extent, is the reproduction of the artistic beauty of the literary materials. However, it doesn't mean that the translator may need to give up doing the literal translation when dealing with the literary texts. We may argue that a professional and prominent literary translator should remain committed to the foreignness of the source text, which means he need to maintain the true naturality of it and keep the target text away from the translationese (Xu, 2021). The natural beauty of the original may be retained and readability and smoothness of the target text may be represented at the sight of the readers. In order to meet that goal, it is so important that the translator may try to strike the balance between the contextual elements and the grammatical form of the source text.

3. A Case Study on *The Peanut*

The Peanut is one of the famous proeses translated and compiled in SELECTED MODERN CHINESE ESSAYS, an annotated bilingual edition by Zhang Peiji, a famous Chinese translator making tremendous contributions to the course of China translation. It is a narrative prose that presents us a story about the goodness of peanut through character dialogue. Its words are quite simple. On the other hand, it carries four different types of functions, which includes the informative, aesthetic, emotive and imperative ones. The informative one makes a short description of author childhood. The aesthetic one brings about the plain and simple conversation with strong sense of artistic appeal. The emotive one discloses an indifferent attitude towards fame and vanity in his old society. The imperative one instills into us the truth of being a useful man but seeking not to be great and attractive (Li, 1997, p. 38). This essay would be one of the best essays rendered in this book.

3.1 The Application of Literal and Free Translation in *The Peanut*

As is mentioned above, the literary translation is always one of the important types of translation text. It is a common knowledge that the foreignness of the source text should be maintained and the translationese should be avoided in the process of the literary translation. In addition to reproducing the source contents to the target readers, the translation plays an important role in helping create the new modern language for them (Qu, 1984, p. 266). This means that translator may be required to sustain the life of the source language by taking the literal translation approach. Given that the literal translation may contain the possibility of conveying messages that are ambiguous and obscure in target language, translator may take other approaches into consideration, such as the free translation, so that the best results of the target text would be achieved. The translator, who acquires great knowledge about the source language and the target language as well as their mutual communication in lexical and grammatical terms, may need to do his or her best to look for the best translation strategy all the time.

There are 22 Chinese sentences in the original text. While, when translated into English, 24 sentences are presented in the target text, most of which are reproduced literally. According to the statistics, there are 15 sentences translated in an interlinear way (L), 4 ones in a sense-for-sense approach (F), and 5 ones in a combined method (L+F). All of them account for 62%, 17% and 21% respectively. From all the data below, it is crystal clear that Mr. Zhang would like to make good use of the literal translation approach in the process of rendering the essay *The Peanut*. Under the instruction of the translation approach of this kind, many samples in the target text can be examined. However, both the free translation and free-plus-literal one are relatively infrequent in the target language. Therefore, we can come to a conclusion that the literal translation is the most common seen approach in rendering this essay.

Table 1. Quantity and Percentage of Translation Methods in *The Peanut*

	Numbers	Percentage
Literal Translation	15	62%
Free Translation	4	17%
Free Plus Literal Translation	5	21%
Total Number	24	100%

From the table above, different translation approaches are put into practice and the following analysis of them will be given in the bilingual sample presentation. In such way can we understand how the approaches are applied and how the translator unleashes the potential of beauty and power of the original language.

3.1.1 Literal Translation

Sample 1. 我们屋后有半亩隙地。

At the back of our house there was half a mu of vacant land.

Sample 2. 母亲说：“让它荒芜着怪可惜，既然你们那么爱吃花生，就辟来做花生园吧。”

“It’s a pity to let it go to waste like that,” Mother said. “Since you all enjoy eating peanuts, let us open it up and make it a peanut garden.”

Sample 3. 妈妈说：“今晚我们可以做一个收获节，也请你们爹爹来尝尝我们的新花生。”

“Let us have a party tonight to celebrate,” Mother suggested, “and ask Father to come for a taste of our fresh peanuts.”

Sample 4. 母亲把花生做成好几样食品，还吩咐这节期要在园里的茅亭举行。

Mother cooked the peanuts in different styles and told us to go to the thatched pavilion in the garden for the celebration.

From the samples mentioned above, there is the word for word translation approach used in the target language. It is the most suitable way for the translator to exert himself in making the foreign readers understand the core culture of the Chinese nation. For the sample one and sample four, it is easy for the translator to render the Chinese version into the English one because the original language is semantically and syntactically presented on sight. The sample one is a short sentence written in Chinese with basic members of a sentence, while the sample four is a compound sentence with the same subject to take the lead in telling this story. For the sample two and three, they are both the direct speech. In the sample two, the noun “Mother” was transferred to the middle of the sentence in the target language in that translator wants to connect these three clauses to show the readers the explicit logic relations between different parts of a sentence. The Direct translation may be preferable in such kind of sentence because it is contextually individual and semantically complete. The Confusion as to what it means for the readers can be avoided in the target language. Such kind of example of literary text may go to the option of the literal translation.

3.1.2 Free Translation

Sample 5. 我们几姊弟和几个小丫头都很喜欢。

At that my brother, sister and I were all delighted and so were the young housemaids.

Sample 6. 这小小的豆不像那好看的苹果、桃子、石榴，把它们底果实悬在枝上，鲜红嫩绿的颜色，令人一望而发生羡慕的心。它只把果子埋在地底，

Unlike apples, peaches or pomegranates that display their fruits up in the air, attracting you with their beautiful colors, peanut buries its fruit in the earth.

Sample 7. 等到成熟，才容人把它挖出来。你们偶然看见一棵花生瑟缩地长在地上，不能立刻辨出它有没有果实，非得等到你接触它才能知道。

It does not show itself until you dig it out when it is ripe and, unless you dip it out, you can’t tell whether it bears fruit or not just by its frail stems above ground.”

From such samples above, they are long sentences with different clauses separated by commas except the sample 5. Sample 6 and sample 7 are supposed to be a large cluster in Chinese because the sample 6 talks about such fruits as apples, peaches or pomegranates and the sample 7 focuses on the peanuts. The former one displays the beauty and appeal of those attractive fruits, while the latter one put emphasis on the important nature of peanut, which creates a contrast between the less important thing and the more important thing. Therefore, a combination of these two clusters paves the way for the translator to

apply the free translation in this essay. The logic behind different clauses is implicit and the relation between each semantic clusters is intertwined with different clauses. For example, in the sample 6, the reason why those beautiful fruits are very attractive is that they are brightly colored. For the sample 7, “wa chu lai” and “ni jie chu ta” are two different clauses with the same meaning but in different forms. If we use the literal translation approach in this sentence, the readers may not be able to understand the meaning behind. In order to make the implicit explicit, the translator opts to help the readers have better understanding of the source text and walk into the heart of character. Cohesion is a matter of relating the parts of a text to one another and is achieved mainly by means of connectives that act as transitions between parts of a text, reference links, markers of foregrounding and backgrounding, and planting of message which is critical to understand or accept the later parts of a text. (Nida, 1993, 94) This may be the effect of the free translation that give hands to the translator who wants the reunion of the author and the target readers. Such method may help the target readers go into the heart of the author, and have better understanding of what the author writes.

3.1.3 Free Plus Literal Translation

Sample 8. 那晚上的天色不大好，可是爹爹也到来，实在很难得！

The weather was not very good that night but, to our delight, Father came all the same.

Sample 9. 我说：“无论何等人都可以用贱价买它来吃；都喜欢吃它。”

“It is inexpensive.” I said, “Almost everyone can afford it and everyone enjoys eating it.

Sample 10. 我们谈到夜阑才散，所有花生食品虽然没有了。

We stayed up late that night, eating all the peanuts Mother had cooked for us.

For these samples, each of them may show the translator the explicit grammatical structure and strong personal emotion of the character as well as the author. In the sample 8, as we can see, there is some changes in the words order in the English version compared to that of the Chinese one. Because the word such as “shi zai hen nan de” is the comment on the two former clauses happened in this source language, which is not supposed to be rendered into English. If so, the English version would be short and imbalanced. In order to replicate the same contextual effect in the target language, the translator use the free translation in this clause to express the character feelings in such environment. And other parts of this sentence remain semantic equivalence in the target language, so the literal translation method is preferred. For other samples, they are both semantically easy to understand. For the sample 9, the translator may want to render the “jian jia” first and leave out the word “lai chi” rather than repeat it in the target language. For the sample 10, “hua sheng shi pin sui ran mei le” is rendered into “eating all the peanuts Mother had cooked for us”, which represents the semantic relations between the two clauses in this sample sentence. Therefore, the combination of the literal translation and the free translation may be suitable in these cases to showcase the beauty of the source language. The translation needs to reproduce the same situation as in the original text with different wording implied and bring equivalence and acceptability to the target readers.

4. Conclusion

The essence of translation is to convey the truth of the source language and make the target readers understood. With the spirit of reproducing the original information, the translator may opt for three kinds of translation approaches which are mentioned in this article. On the other hand, the literary translation is characterized by the recreation of aesthetic and natural values. The foreignness and naturalness of the source language should be paid attention to in the process of reproduction. The target readers in foreign language culture are expected to receive the close correspondence as the source readers do in the original. There are both advantages and disadvantages between the literal translation and the free translation. It doesn't mean one is better than the other. When it comes to the literary translation, the literal translation may be preferred in the content with clear and simple intertextual relationship, while the free translation may be the best option in the situation where implicit context is usually found. If such situations are both met in the source text, the translators may take it into consideration that he integrates the literal translation with the free translation. Therefore, when translating the literary texts, the translator may need to focus on the comprehension of the source

language and flexibly apply these two kinds of translation methods so that the meaning between the lines can be replicated in the target text and readers can feel what the author feels and experience what he experiences.

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