



Translation of Chinese Texts into English: Challenges and Techniques

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Abstract:

This paper aims at analyzing the challenges, and techniques of Chinese to English translation. The content analysis method is used to examine the available online resources. The main research question was “what are the challenges faced by the translators while translating Chinese texts and what are the available techniques to produce a quality translation? More than 20 topic-related papers were collected through online sources and then these papers were minutely examined to answer the research question. By means of content analysis of the documents, it was found that the main challenge in Chinese- English translation is that Chinese differs from the English Language in many aspects, including word formation, syntax, morphology, and word order of sentences. The cultural differences between China and the English-speaking world are quite large. Use of different Chinese dialects, word segmentation in Chinese, lexical gaps, untranslatability of culture-specific and technical terminology, use of four-word phrases and idioms, xiehouyu, etc in Chinese, are some other troublesome challenges affecting the quality of translation. Procedures and techniques given by Vinay and Darbelnet like borrowing, calque, literal translation, transposition, equivalence, modulation, and adaptation are applicable in language pair Chinese-English as well. Other techniques like amplification, omission, repetition, conversion, inversion, negation, compensation, explicitation, implicitation, generalization, particularization, reinforcement, condensation are useful in the translation of Chinese texts.

Key Words: Chinese, English, translation, text, challenges, techniques,

Introduction

The translation is an important aspect of intercultural communication as it conveys meanings between different languages and cultures. Today, Translation is affecting almost all the aspects of our day-to-day life. It also facilitates communication among the people of the entire world. Translators have made significant contributions over the centuries in spreading ideas and information to a larger audience even beyond the national boundaries, in the shaping of cultures, and in uniting the world. The translation process from Chinese into English is full of numerous challenges. Linguistic difference between Chinese and English languages, several dialects of Chinese, requirements in terms of domain-specific knowledge, which is often of encyclopedic nature as a translator is expected to translate a wide variety of texts, knowledge of cultural nuances of China and English speaking world, maintaining the faithfulness to the message of the source text and on the other hand, maintaining smoothness and elegance in target language text are the few challenges generally faced by a Chinese translator.

The ideal situation for a translator is that he/she should translate into his/her mother tongue. Further to this, Translation knowledge, skills and resources have been stressed in various Chinese translation theories

in the past three decades. The overall translation is a complex activity hence translators must possess the requisite skill set, specialized knowledge, expertise, and the ability to access various resources.

English and Chinese belong to two different language families, i.e., Indo-European and Sino-Tibetan language families. Chinese to English Translation is more difficult than between any two European languages. There are wide differences in the mode of expression, grammar, syntax, and meaning system of the two languages.

One of the major problems in Chinese to English translation is manifested in the form of Chinglish. Chinglish is slang used for spoken or written English language that is influenced by the Chinese language. This problem arises due to numerous reasons such as lack of cultural sensitivity for the target language, too much dependence on Machine Translation (MT) without editing by a translator, lack of domain-specific knowledge, and ignorance of professional skills and responsibility, no awareness about the theories of translation and negative transfer of the mother tongue, etc.

The aim of this paper is to analyze the challenges and problems faced in Chinese to English Translation and to discuss the principles and techniques related to this field.

1. Differences in Chinese and English language:

Chinese and English are the most widely spoken languages in the world. There is a vast gap between these two languages due to differences in the thinking mode of Chinese and English-speaking people. Different modes of thinking are embodied in language. Two different language families i.e. Indo-European and Sino-Tibetan give rise to differences in mode of expression, grammar, syntax, meaning system, etc.

Chinese does not have an alphabet but uses a logographic system for its written language. There is a vast gap between the grammar of Chinese and English language. In Chinese, there is no letter case, tense, plural forms, etc., and grammar rules are different from English. There is also a difference between Chinese and English Text patterns. English text structures are formed in the linear form whereas Chinese text is presented in a spiral pattern. All these factors pose a challenge to a novice translator and require long training, practice, and experience to become a professional translator.

2. Challenges in Chinese to English Translation

Chinese is one of the most difficult languages in the world. It is entirely different from English; hence a Chinese translator faces many challenges in the translation process and requires extensive experience to render the accurate translation. If the translator is not well qualified and experienced the complexities of the Chinese language can cause misinterpretations and inaccuracies while translating Chinese documents into English. Some of the main challenges in Chinese to English translation are enumerated below:

2.1 Many different dialects

Ed Langey said that although linguists recognize seven different Chinese dialects, there are also many local dialects, which may cause difficulties for translators. In order to translate these materials accurately and reliably, translators need to have specific knowledge of these dialects. Different dialects often influence the choice and meaning of vocabulary and should be considered in translation work.

2.2 Using Chinese characters instead of letters in written Chinese

Each character represents a word or concept and is often used for a variety of purposes, making accurate translation dependent on context and connotation and the literal meaning of written characters. Accurate translation depends on a broad understanding of traditional and simplified characters, the context of the document, and the connotation of the choice of words in the material to be translated.

2.3 Chinese sentence structure is very different from English

For example, in English, the verb tense indicates when the event occurred. But this is not the case in Chinese. Adverbs and contextual materials are used for this purpose. Therefore, when translating materials from Chinese to English, it is difficult to determine the correct tense of a sentence. Therefore, correctly conveying different tenses is crucial in Chinese-English translation.

2.4 Word segmentation in Chinese text,

Mandarin orthography is essentially a syllabary, there are no delimiters between characters to indicate clear word boundaries, and the definition of a “word” in Chinese is debatable. It creates a problem for a translator in judging the combination of the characters. Long modifiers are used in Chinese text which makes the sentence long and complex to decode. Unless the translator is well familiar with the advanced grammar like, phrases and clauses, it becomes difficult to comprehend the original Chinese text.

Guo (2008) points out other differences in grammatical rules between Chinese and English which create confusion and mistranslation, such as a singular and plural noun, subject-verb agreement, verb tense, articles, prepositions, and the order of first and last names. Among these problems, mistranslation between subject and verb is the most common issue. For instance, in Chinese, “I love you” and “she loves you” would just use the same verb form “love.”

2.5 Morphological effect of the Chinese language upon Translation

According to Lu Dianyong the nature of the Chinese language is such that while translating we can't always get an appropriate Chinese character corresponding to each English word of the same part of speech. If you try to replace each English word in a sentence with one or two Chinese Characters supposed to be of the same part of speech, the sentence will be unintelligible to the Chinese reader. Hence literal translation is criticized. We don't care whether the individual Chinese characters used are consistent with the English words in their part of speech or in their word order.

For example, in the translation of the sentence

“It is impossible to live in society and be independent of society”. The first draft of translation might be literal translation like the following:

这是不可能的，生活于社会而独立于社会。Zhè shì bù kěnéng de, shēnghuó yú shèhuì ér dúlì yú shèhuì.

How unnatural in Chinese the sentence sounds! It may be improved like this:

生活于社会而独立于社会是不可能的。Shēnghuó yú shèhuì ér dúlì yú shèhuì shì bù kěnéng de.

This is the way in which most people will translate the sentence. But the translation may still be modified to make it more expressive and impressive in Chinese:

生于社会，不能脱离社会。Shēng yú shèhuì, bùnéng tuōlí shèhuì (or ...不能超乎社会。) Bùnéng chāo píng shèhuì. Here the sentence construction is different from that of the original sentence, but it conveys the exact thought in English and sounds attractive in Chinese. (186)

2.5 Word/sentence order

As per Tian Chuanmao, all-natural human languages follow words in a certain order to express complete coherent thoughts, but the order of words/sentences may vary from language to language. In a language, a particular sequence of words is usually smooth, natural, and idiomatic, but in another language, they may be odd, vague, or meaningless. A good translation should take into account the use and convention of the language. In terms of attributives and adverbials, if they are single words or short modifiers, the Chinese tend to put them before the object of modification. However, in English, they can be placed after the modified object.

For example:

Original Chinese version: 我们在教室里学习翻译。Women zai jiao shi li xuexi fanyi.

Word for word translation: We in the classroom are studying translation.

Acceptable English translation: We are studying translation in the classroom. /

In the classroom, we are studying translation.

According to English grammar, the sentence "We in the classroom are studying translation." is unacceptable. Even if we render the original text as "we are, in the classroom, studying translation" this is also unacceptable.

2.6 Ellipsis

Grammatical omission is one of the commonalities of all human languages. However, Ellipsis is different in different languages. What can be omitted in one language cannot be omitted in another language. For example, in English, if a noun or verb appears repeatedly, it can be omitted in the following text. But in Chinese, the repetition of the same word in early and later texts is natural, legitimate, and habitual.

2.7 Meaning

The meaning of human language is a complex system. In terms of inter-lingual and intercultural communication, words in one language may not have exact equivalent or have different associations from those seemingly corresponding words in another language, which poses a challenge to translation.

2.8 Lexical Gap

Some words and concepts are unique in one language or culture, but not in other languages or cultures. This means that there are no words available in the target language for the translator to translate the words. For example, in China, we have such a cultural word 太极 (Taiji, great ultimate), 阴 (yin, an inactive force that comes from the activity which reaches the climax), 阳 (Yang, a force from the dynamics of the great ultimate brought into Action)

2.9 Word association

Peter Newmark (1990: 100) pointed out: "No word is an island entire to itself." Words are not only dictionary-defined, but also related to their users, the social environment, and the source from which they are produced. Usually, in two languages, two words have the same literal meaning, that is, conceptual meaning, but the relationship between them is different. For example, "dog" is neutral in English cultures, such as "lucky dog", "love me, love my dog", "top dog", "Every dog has his day", "dog -tired". However, in Chinese culture, 狗 (Gou, dog) is a derogatory term, always linked with dirty things, disgusting and unfavourable, such as 狗杂种 (gou-za-zhong bastards) and 狗屁 (goupi horse shit).

2.10 Sound and form

Chinese and English have completely different systems of spelling and pronunciation. If any meaning is included in the sound or form of the source language or present as an important feature, it is almost impossible to save it in the target language. Sound and form have special meaning in poetry, advertising language, and rhetoric.

2.11 Chinglish:

Chinglish is slang used for spoken or written English language that is influenced by the Chinese language. Brazil, Shihua said, Chinglish refers to the ungrammatical and incomprehensible translation of Chinese into English. Chinglish is the negative transfer of the mother tongue, which is caused by the difference of thinking patterns between Chinese and English. Chinglish occurs when a mistranslation of English arises from the Chinese way of thinking. Lack of cultural understanding also generates Chinglish. Guo (2008) believes that the difference in grammar rules between Chinese and English is another major cause of Chinglish. Subject-verb mistranslation is the most common mistake. When translators are educated and experienced in both the cultures and languages, the problems Chinglish can be reduced and resolved. (16)

2.12 Cultural Differences and Translation

Culture is an extremely complex concept and a huge subject. Language is traditional and governed by rules that all members of society recognize and abide by it. Language reflects the rest of culture, supports them, spreads them, and helps to develop others. It is no exaggeration to say that language is the lifeblood of culture, and culture is the trajectory of language formation and development. The words used in Chinese to address people are closely related to the social life of the Chinese. In China, to address by title is considered to be polite like addressing elder, superior or important person by title, such as Teacher Yang, President Li, etc. These honorific words are very troublesome for English speakers because Teacher Yang sounds awkward.

Chinese *chengyu* (成语), which approximate English idioms, are the gems of the rich Chinese cultural heritage. A large number of **measure words** also make Chinese vocabulary very image able; for example, 一支笔 (a pen), Their English translations can very accurately convey the meaning and the quantity of the objects described, but can never be successful in replicating the richness of the Chinese measure words. (Hongwei Chen, 1999)

Buden and Nowotny (2009) pointed out that translation is not only applicable to the vocabulary of different languages, but also to the transition from one culture to another. Sun (2003) points out that translators must pay attention to the expectations of the target culture. Consumption of dog meat is acceptable in some Asian cultures, but the practice is considered strange and culturally unacceptable in the United States.

3. Translation techniques

Translation techniques refer to the specific manipulation of text in the process of translation (Chesterman, 2005:26). Many English-Chinese translation textbooks provide translation techniques between two languages, among which the most important translation techniques are usually considered as addition, division, omission, combination, shift, cross-cultural translation, and pragmatic translation. Adding these methods and techniques to one's translation skills requires a lot of practice.

3.1 Translators are excellent language switchers

A sense of expression reflects the thinking mode. The difference in the mode of expression between the two languages is due to its unique way of thinking. So, the translator should think in a similar fashion as the target audience think. A translator should have full command over the two languages so that he/she may act as an excellent language switcher.

3.5 Machine translation

Translators typically use machine translation (MT), machine-aided (computer-aided) translation (MAT/CAT) techniques, and Translation memory tools in their translation work. Online MT tools, such as Google Translate, Bing Translate, Youdao, Iciba, Baidu Translate, etc., all have attained remarkable progress and are accurate to some extent. Chinese translators can post-edit MT output to achieve high-quality translation, provided that they are doing the technical translation. It has its own limitations, but it may be used to get the instant gist of the text. The development of technology offers endless opportunities for novice translators. Using machine translation and its editing with relevant online information, the desired results can be achieved. Although the use of MT helps Chinese translation to be done faster and better through later editing, translators' various abilities and experiences still play a crucial role in ensuring the quality of translation.

4. Principles of Translation

Lu Dianyong has enumerated the following principles of translations as Omission, Amplification, Repetition, Conversion, Inversion, and Negation. Yanfu (1898-1973) was the first person to translate Western philosophies in modern China. He believes that there are three principles of a good translation: faithfulness (信), comprehensibility (达), and elegance (雅). Faithfulness, which means to be faithful to the original content, should be the primary principle and the foundation for the other two principles.

Comprehensibility and elegance should both be based on faithfulness. Comprehensibility means that the target text should be as understandable as possible compared to the source text. Elegance typically means as it does in computer software/coding, using as few words as possible to produce accuracy and clarity. Munday (2009) argues that the word-for-word method of translation should be revised using a sense-for-sense method. A sense-for-sense translation method focuses on the whole meaning of the contexts and the cultural background.

5. Chinese translation knowledge and skills:

In order to overcome various challenges in Chinese translation, a translator must have certain skills and knowledge required for the translation. Da Huidong says Translators must have a requisite skillset, specialized knowledge, expertise, and the ability to access various resources. Chinese translation knowledge is regarded as consisting of bilingual knowledge, extra-linguistic knowledge, and knowledge of translation theories. There are beliefs that Chinese translation skills must be internalized and synthesized if one is to achieve strategic competence. With web-based search tools, corpora and machine translation, translation memory having emerged as major translation resources in the context of contemporary Chinese translation, Chinese translators can now consolidate knowledge in the field, sharpen translation skills, and utilize the ever-accumulating resources to obtain high translation quality.

5.1 Bilingual knowledge

Bilingual knowledge required for Chinese translators includes all linguistic elements of the Chinese and English languages such as lexicology, phonetics, syntax, text, rhetoric, and genre. A translator may refer to various Chinese-English comparative and contrastive studies, bilingual reports from authentic sources, or translation textbooks. By analysing the bilingual corpora, a translator can easily enhance his/her translation skills. This exercise helps translators to analyze the various aspects of the translation and helps them to produce a more native-like translation.

5.2 Extra-linguistic knowledge

Extra-linguistic knowledge is very important for a translator to understand the wide range of source texts. It should include domain knowledge, cultural knowledge, and encyclopaedic knowledge. Ma (2014) specifically mentioned the seven most common items in Chinese and English faced by Chinese translators: allusions; appellations, taboos, pejoratives and epithets, metaphors, imagery, and personal and place names. In addition to terminology, both encyclopaedic and thematic knowledge, translators need to understand the stylistic features and rhetorical norms of different text/discourse types.

5.3 Chinese translation skills

Chinese translation skills include three aspects: translation strategies, translation methods, and translation techniques. According to Chesterman, translation strategy refers to the "plan" to solve translation problems. Nida's formal equivalence and dynamic equivalence and Newmark's communicative translation are the strategies providing help and rule based approaches to translation. Venuti mentioned two translation strategies: domestication and foreignization. It should be noted that these two strategies are just different choices and neither is better than the other, although foreignizing is considered more ethical than domesticating.

According to Chesterman, the translation method refers to the specific way or procedure for translation. According to Venuti, domestication strategy requires four translation methods; namely liberal/free translation, imitation, variation, and recreation. Similarly, when adopting a foreignization strategy, there are four translation methods: zero translation, transliteration, literal translation, and word-for-word translation. Foreignizing strategy, also known as source orientation, aims to bring the translation reader into the author's language and culture (Venuti, 1995). Chinese translators who choose this strategy can adopt four translation methods.

5.4 Translation resources

Austermuhl argues that the use of translation resources by translators has changed dramatically in terms of availability and facilities compared to decades ago. In addition to traditional resources such as bilingual dictionaries, monolingual dictionaries, professional dictionaries, and encyclopedias, translators rely more on digital resources such as Wikipedia, Google search, terminological databases, and translation corpora (2001).

Shei (2010) distinguished three kinds of Internet resources for Chinese translation: tool resources, source materials resources, and communication resources. Tool resources include dictionaries, encyclopedias, search engines, search tools, and machine translations; Source material resources include websites, documents, images, video, and music; communication resources include contents of forums, social media, instant messaging, email, and form inquiry methods.

With the rapid development of information technology in the 21st century, translation corpus and web-based knowledge have generated important translation resources (Shei, 2010). Translators are now faced with the new challenge of making full use of machine resources to supplement their personal translation knowledge and hone their translation skills.

6. Translation process

Biel says standard translation procedures ensure translation quality. The process consists of six stages: translation, checking, revision, review, proofreading, and final validation. Paying close attention to the skill level of translators and the six-stage translation process can significantly improve the accuracy and readability of specific translations. The translated product should first be proofread by the original translator and then reviewed by a different translator, he said. People need to have knowledge of the subject and work ethics to be a good translator.

7. The qualities of competent translators. These qualities can be summarized as the following:

- (i) Excellent command over Source Language and Target language and in their contrastive study.
- (ii) Comprehensive understanding of both cultures; source language culture and target language culture.
- (iii) Good research and translation skills
- (iv) Exceptional composing and editing ability
- (v) Skill in the subject matters and interdisciplinary knowledge
- (vi) Respect for the professional translator's code of ethics
- (vii) Sufficient translation experience and translation certification
- (viii) Capable of continual learning
- (ix) Understanding of MT, TM, and other online tools for the relevant domain

Conclusion

The Chinese language is one of the most difficult languages in the world. When it comes to Chinese English translation, it is full of challenges and complexities due to the vast gap in the different aspects of these two languages. Numerous Chinese dialects, peculiar morphological features, different sentence structures, ellipsis, are the few Chinese language-related Challenges. The problem of Chinglish is one of the main problems faced by Chinese translators and it arises due to lack of cultural sensitivity, overreliance on machine translation, limitation of domain-specific knowledge, and lack of professional responsibilities. These challenges can be overcome by a well-qualified and experienced professional translator.

A Chinese to English translator need to have a thorough knowledge of both Chinese and English, covering various linguistic aspects such as lexical, grammatical, syntactical, semantic, etc. Domain-specific knowledge is the second important aspect of translation. A translator must be proficient in more than one domain; however, the knowledge and use of translation skills and techniques are more important than the domain-specific knowledge. Cultural nuances of both Chinese and English-speaking people are of utmost importance for a Chinese translator. Knowledge of translation theories, translation skills, bilingual knowledge, and knowledge and skill in the use of digitized/IT tools, use of bilingual corpora are essential requirements for a professional translator. In Chinese, to English Translation, we have to adopt certain

important principles like Omission, Amplification, Repetition, Conversion, Inversion, and Negation. Few techniques like being an excellent language switcher, thinking as target language speakers think, widening cultural knowledge, skill in the coinage of words are the few useful techniques in Chinese-English translation, however, a translator develops his/her own techniques based on the rich knowledge and experience in this field. Concluding this discourse, it may be said that Chinese to English translation is a field full of challenges and difficulties, so long as a translator has the quest for knowledge, love for both languages and cultures, and courage to handle difficult translation projects, he/she may boldly face the above challenges and do justice to the job and can provide quality translation.

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