

A Comparative Study of Nida and Newmark's Translation Theories

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Abstract:

Both Nida and Newmark are outstanding western theorists in the field of translation. Nida's dynamic equivalent translation and Newmark's semantic and communicative translation play an irreplaceable role of the translation in the world. This paper presents a detailed analysis and comparison of the similarities and differences between their translation theories comprehensively. Finally, this paper arrives at a conclusion from different angles and at different levels, both the theories of Nida and Newmark are built on a scientific and correct understanding of translation.

Key words: translation theory; dynamic equivalence; semantic translation; communicative translation

1. Introduction

Both Nida and Newmark are outstanding western theorists in the field of translation. They play a great role not only in western countries but also in China. The theoretical basis of Newmark and Nida's translation theories are both linguistics. One of the most prevalent theories of Nida is his "equivalence principle". Numerous theories of Nida are built on the modern linguistics such as message theory, reception theory and Chomsky Transformative-Generational grammar. By the contrast, Newmark's translation theory is based on the comparative linguistics and mainly the semantics. The great contribution of Peter Newmark is his semantic and communicative translation and text-category theory, which provide effective and scientific guidance for translation practice.

Considering the theories of Nida and Newmark which are adored by many people all over the world, their translation principles can be a scientific and effective guidance for translation practice. Probing into their theories, we can find that some similarities and differences emerge. Actually, numerous Chinese scholars have studied their theories by comparison while this paper will make a detailed comparison between Nida's and Newmark's theories in order to find out the radical reasons of their theories at different levels.

2. Retrospection on translation theories of Nida and Newmark

2.1 Nida's translation theories

Eugene Albert Nida was born in Oklahoma City, the United States. He was interested in the Bible and then he obtained his Master's degree in Greek New Testament. Finally, he received his PHD about linguistics. With the knowledge background of language, the Bible and linguistics, he was employed by the American Bible society (ABS) and later appointed in the United Bible Society (UBS). During his work for ABS and UBS, Nida organized several major new translations and revisions of Bibles with the guidance of his principle of "dynamic equivalence" among which Good News Bible (also Today's English Version, TEV) won great popularity (Brenner, Athalya. & Jan Willem van Henten, 2002). He made great influence to the renaissance of Bible translation in the 20th century and translation theory.

His famous work is *Toward a Science of Translating* (1964) -- Employing the knowledge of semantics, information theory, transformational theory and communicational theory, etc. He proposed not only the proposition of "dynamic equivalence" but also the three-stage model of translation process including analysis, transfer and restructuring. Another book is *From One Language to Another* (1986) with Jan de Waard in which Nida substituted "functional equivalence" for "dynamic equivalence" just to avoid unnecessary misunderstandings. He also modified his attitude towards "formal correspondence" which had been regarded as the opposite of "dynamic equivalence" in his works of the 1960's. In addition, his books include *Language and Culture: Context in Translating* (2001). Besides, he wrote some books on Bible translation including *Bible Translating*(1947), *Message and mission* (1960).

To sum up, Nida's translation theories include "dynamic equivalence" and "functional equivalence". Moreover, he found out the translation foundation from the angle of linguistics. Nida synthetically studied semantics, function, context and culture. Most of his translation theories based on linguistics are scientific, systematic and interdisciplinary. All in all, Nida's works and theories exert a great influence throughout the world.

2.2 Newmark translation theories

Peter Newmark was born in Brno, Czech Republic. In 1921, he moved to the UK and Studied in Cambridge. During the Second World War, he joined the army and stayed in Italy. In 1940, as a teacher, his translation theory came into being. His main work is *Approaches to Translation* (1981) that proposes "semantic translation" and "communicative translation" which exert tremendous influence all over the world. Another is *A Textbook of Translation* (1988) that concludes theories and principles, translation methods and culture.

In the pre-linguistics period of writing on translation, which may be said to date from Cicero through St. Jerome, Luther, Dryden, Tytler, Herder, Goethe, Schleiermacher, Buder, Ortega y Gasset, not to say Savory, opinions swung between literal and free, faithful and beautiful, exact and natural translation, depending on whether the bias was to be in favor of the author or the reader, the source of the target language of the text (Newmark, 1968:38). However, Newmark's view on translation is that translation rests on at least three dichotomies such as cultures, languages, the writer and the translator

(Newmark,7). Provided that equivalent-effect is secured, the literal word for word translation is not only the best, it is the only valid method of translation (Newmark, 39). He puts forward his famous translation theory-semantic translation and communicative translation. And Newmark defines semantic translation as “attempts to render, as closely as the semantic and syntactic structures of the second language allow, the exact contextual meaning of the original”. Besides, his communicative translation attempts to produce on its readers an effect as close as possible to that obtained on readers of the original. Communicative translation focuses on the reader, aiming at making the text more native and original. Meanwhile, semantic translation emphasizes the contextual meaning of original.

In theory, there are wide differences between semantic translation and communicative translation. Communicative translation addresses itself solely to the second reader and would expect a generous transfer of foreign elements into his own culture as well as his language where necessary. But the translator has to respect and work on the form of the source language text as the only material basis for his work. While semantic translation remains within the original culture and assists the reader only in its connotations if they constitute the essential human message of the text. The purpose of communicative translation is accessible to the reader and to effect on its readers' minds. The suitable texts conclude most non-literary writings, journalism, textbooks, scientific and technological writings, public notices, serious literature and informative texts. By contrast, the purpose of semantic translation is to create precise flavor and tone of the original and preserve the author's idiolect. The suitable texts conclude quotations, autobiography, private correspondences, minor literature, definitions and explanations.

3. The Definition and property of translation

3.1 The definition of translation

As an independent discipline, the prerequisite of translation is to address the problem like “what is translation? ” In the perspective of Nida, he defines that translating consists in reproducing in the receptor language the closest natural equivalent of the source-language message, first in terms of meaning and secondly in terms of style. But this relatively simple statement requires careful evaluation of several seemingly contradictory elements (1969). On the contrary, Newmark hold the view that translation is a craft consisting in the attempt to replace a written message or statement in one language by the same message or statement in another language (1981). From the above, it is obvious that Nida emphasizes equivalence, information, meaning and styles while Newmark pays much attention to meaning and text.

At the first glance, compared with Newmark, the definition of translation proposed by Nida is more comprehensive and elaborative. Otherwise, from the aspect of their theory system, the definition of translation is based on distinct foundations. Nida lays stress on communicative function on account of semantics and information that are involved in meaning and text only at the level of communication. But Newmark attach great importance to the meaning of text, which is sophisticated and multilevel. Moreover, the meaning is similar to the idea proposed by Geoffrey N. Leech, such as conceptual meaning, social meaning, thematic meaning and influence meaning. As a result, the text meaning put forward by Newmark is not solely at the level of communication. What's more, Newmark object to the

view that translation is a way of communication. In his perspective, if we pay much attention to the communicative translation, it will be prone to result in the inadequacy of meaning. Thereby, Newmark regards the text as a fundamental unit and hold that all studies of translation theories should refer to text. The kernel of Newmark's theories is text-centered while the core of Nida's theories is functional equivalence.

3.2 The property of translation

The argument about the property of translation is becoming increasingly fierce and intense in the translation field. The most conspicuous dispute is if translating is a science or an art. The knowledge of translating has experience a process.

Since the 1950s, Nida's translation theory has roughly experienced three main stages. At first, Nida looks upon translating as a science, after that he takes translating as an art. From the above, Nida's recognition has changed substantially. At the second stage that is communicative theory period, he agrees that translating is a science. It is a scientific description of translation process. At the same time, he admits that the description of translation can be divided into three functional levels, for instance, science, technique and art. At the third stage, he tends to treat translating as an art and translators are innate during the process of social semiology and social linguistic. Meanwhile he changes his idea "translating is a science" into "translating study is a science". At the 1900s, Nida proposed that translating is a technique. He insisted that translating is a science, art and technique. Actually, Nida never stated to simply take translating as a science or an art. What Nida truly meant is to apply a completely scientific approach to study the translating process. While a highly developed skill of art is needed in doing actual activities (Liyi,2016:147-148) . Newmark has changed his recognition toward translating roughly. At the beginning, he thought that translating is a science, an art or a technique. Then, he held that translating is a part of science, art or technique. The property of translation proposed by Newmark is based on the division of language which is divided into standard language and non-standard language. Standard language including terminologies, formula or legal terms, has accepted translated version through common practice. As for non-standard language translating, the translator is free to display his initiative and creativity within an appropriate limitation. In this way, translation is an art. Translating is a science because standard language usually has one correct means of translating underlined the regular principles which embodies the science such as scientific terminology. On the contrary, we possess lots of translating means for non-standard language dependent on translator's foresight and capabilities, which incarnates the property of art and style. However, translated text should be examined scientifically so as to avoid unnecessary mistakes including content and words. Moreover, text ought to be natural and cater for concrete situation. In a nutshell, although Newmark agreed that translation is a science, he disagreed that translation exists as a science in that in his opinion, translation theory lacks a consolidated comprehensively system. Thereby, there is no science of translation even in the future. Newmark held that translation is an art when it is semantic and translation is science when it is communicated (Liyi,2016:147-148).

4. Theoretical cores of Nida and Newmark

4.1 Theoretical core of Nida

As two eminent translation theorists in the world, Nida and Newmark make tremendous contribution to the study of translation. Nida's dynamic equivalent translation and Newmark's semantic and communicative translation play an irreplaceable role of the translation in the world. Besides, it has important meaning for guiding translation practice and translation criticism.

Nida focuses on the translation of Bible all his life, and injects the principles based on Bible translation into his major academic activities. In 1969, in Nida's work *From One Language to Another*, he started to use the term functional equivalence to replace dynamic equivalence. However, there are not many differences between them. Functional equivalence is the core of his translation theory. According to Nida, translating consists in reproducing the closest natural equivalent of the source language message, first in terms of meaning and secondly in terms of styles (Nida,1964:117). Nida described functional equivalence like this: Basically, dynamic equivalence has been described in terms of functional equivalence. The translation has been defined on the basis that the receptors of a translation should comprehend the translated text to such all extent that they understand how the original receptors must have understood the original text (Nida, 1969).

Functional equivalence emphasizes the information instead of the direct formal equivalence in translation. The relationship between the target language receptor and the target text should generally be equivalent to that between the source language receptor and the source text. Besides, four aspects of functional equivalence are the following: lexical equivalence, sentence equivalence, passage equivalence and stylistic equivalence. For the lexical equivalence, the meaning of a word lies in its usage in language. In translation practice, what confuses us is how to find the corresponding meaning in target language. For sentence equivalence, with sentence structure and grammar, such as number, gender and tense. To achieve passage equivalence, language is not the unique element to be considered, how the language represents meaning and performs its function in a specific context matters most. For stylistic equivalence, different stylistic works have different language features, achieving stylistic equivalence needs good mastery of both source language and target language. Different language styles represent different culture elements.

Nida then sets forth the differences in translation, as he would account for it within three basic factors. The first is the nature of the message. In some messages, the content should be of primary consideration, and in others the form must be given a higher priority. The second is the type of the audience. Prospective audiences are different both in decoding ability and in potential interest. The last one is the purpose of the author and the translator. To give information on both form and content and aim at full intelligibility of the reader, he may understand the full implications of the message. And the imperative purposes aim at not just understanding the translation but also at ensuring no misunderstanding of the translation. Actually, there are similar idea of translation theory compared with Nida. Tyler said that a good translation is one which the merit of the original work is so completely transfused into another language as to be distinctly apprehended, and as strongly felt, by a native of the country to which that language belongs as it is by those who speak the language of the original work (1790). Nida's focus on receptor's response in his new concept of translating is actually

the theory of dynamic equivalence, which is directed primarily toward equivalence of response rather than equivalence of form (Nida,1969). Nida held that a dynamic equivalent translation must fit the receptor language and culture in order to make the translated message intelligible and natural to the target language receptors. A translation of dynamic equivalence aims at complete naturalness of expression, and tries to relate the receptor to modes of behavior relevant within the context of his own culture, it does not insist that he understands the cultural patterns of the source language context in order to comprehend the message (Nida,1964:159). Nida further perfects his theory in the 1990s. In his book *Language, Culture and Translating*, he divided functional equivalence into different degrees of adequacy from minimal to maximal effectiveness on the basis of both cognitive and experiential factors. The Minimal definition of functional equivalence is “The readers of a translated text should be able to comprehend it to the point that they can conceive of how the original readers of the text must have understood and appreciated it.” The maximal definition of functional equivalence could be stated as “The readers of a translated text should be able to understand and appreciate it in essentially the same manner as the original readers did.”

In all cases, one must measure both the designative and associative meanings, not merely in terms of lexical and syntactical features but also in terms of the total rhetorical impact and the complete communication event (Nida, 224). The term “equivalence” must be understood in a broad sense of “having essentially the same function” although never possessing an identical function. Thereby, Nida's functional equivalence theory opens up a new perspective to translation studies.

4.2 Theoretical core of Newmark

Newmark's translation theory is based on the language function and text. In Newmark's opinion, translation is the text translation. According to Jakobson and Buler, language possesses three main functions, such as expressive function, information function and vocative function. He held that most texts conclude these three functions to some extent. Translators should take different translating methods and process to achieve success in the same text and even in the same passage. Translating method depends on what the main function of text is. That is to say, for the special text, the main function influences translator's work that is involved in style, unit, language types, inadequacy meaning, new words, critical words and metaphors, etc. Newmark builds a foundation to the reference to translator who should adopt different translation methods to attempt to produce on its readers an effect as close as possible to that obtained on the readers of the original. Therefore, Newmark is in favor of the point employing different translation methods for different text types.

Newmark has written many preeminent translation theories and he has classified the translation texts into different types. He proposes translation method -semantic and communicative translation, which is the core in his book *Translation Problem Explore*. According to Newmark, communicative translation attempts to produce on its readers an effect as close as possible to that obtained on the readers of the original. Semantic translation attempts to render, as closely as the semantic and syntactic structures of the second language allow, the exact contextual meaning of the original. In theory, there are wide differences between the two methods (Newmark, 39). These differences show how to express the target language. Semantic translation emphasizes the precise flavor and the tone of the original and

it traces not author's intention but the author's thought process. Translation unit is small so that it can approach the original text in structure and order. Moreover, it strives to keep the language feature and the uniqueness of original works. Therefore, the translated text must be faithful to the original author, rhetorical devices and other formal factors. Communicative translation responds to the representational and vocative functions so that communicative translation must emphasize the effect rather than the content of the message, which is equal to the effect of the original to reader. Thus, translator should rearrange the language structure by emphasizing the receiver's perception and reaction to make the translation fluently. All in all, the core of communicative translation is reader-oriented and direct.

Differences between semantic and communicative translation are conspicuous. First, semantic translation is objective and pays much attention to the exact words. It is subjected to the original culture and author. When the connotative meaning of text is difficult to understand, we will explain semantic meaning of text. Whereas communicative translation is subjective by emphasizing the reader's reaction and it won't leave anything misunderstanding. Second, at the expressive form, semantic translation is to make translated text similar to the original by retaining vocative effect. While communicative translation tries to employ common words and phrases in a new arrangement to make translation fluently and smoothly, which is easy to understand the meaning. Third, when it comes to conflicts between content and effect, semantic translation emphasize content rather than the effect while communicative is otherwise. In short, semantic translation where unfaithful and inaccurate translation isn't allowed is an art that is translated by only one person. On account of absence of cognitive meaning and pragmatic meaning, semantic translation is far from the original. By contrast, communicative translation is a technique which is translated by several people. Considering the effect and simplicity that make up the inadequacy of meaning, communicative meaning is better than the original because of embroidery.

To conclude, in Newmark's view, semantic translation and communicative translation is an entirety, we'd better employ both methods rather than split these individually so as to achieve the fulfillment.

5. Similarities of Nida and Newmark

For one thing, both of their theories are binary concepts. Literal translation and free translation are two major method of traditional translation. Literal translation refers to an adequate representation of the original while free translation doesn't adhere to the formal or word order of the original (郭著章, 1996). The theory demonstrated the idea of structuralist (朱晓箐, 2006:5). Nida put forward functional equivalence. In 1981, Newmark posed his binary concepts like semantic translation and communicative translation. Both of their concepts combine the macro-control and micro-translation. First, translators study the object as a whole. Second, the result of research should be systematized and scientific.

For another, Nida and Newmark hold similar perspective on translatability and untranslatability. They both believe that the community of languages and translatability exist. Newmark held that without doubt, anything can be translatable. And Nida thought that any language can be expressed by

another language. Moreover, they both point out that it is impossible to reach the absolute equivalence. In Newmark's opinion, inadequacy of the original meaning is inevitable due to distinct cultures, value views. He points out that complete meaning or significance can hardly be transferred, especially expressive texts such as poems whose form is essential part of the message, are almost impossible to transfer (Newmark, 2001:68). And Nida insists that "anything that can be said in one language can be said in another unless the form is an essential element of the translation" (Nida, 1982:4). Conveying the spirit and manner of the original is a prerequisite. Translator may well use another word with similar image or meaning to replace it. He lays stress on the view that correspondence in meaning must have priority over correspondence in style. In short, Nida is more in favor of translatability in that he emphasizes "sacrificing certain formal niceties for the sake of the content".

What's more, Nida and Newmark combine theory with practice. They devote their life to studying the theories with practice. As a science, translation has strong practicality. Nida has taken change of organizing and translating Bible. And Newmark has been engaged in teaching translation theory and practice.

The last similarity is one of their limitations. They both advocate equivalence effect, varying only in degree. Nida emphasizes the reader's response and Newmark focuses on the effect produced on the reader in his communicative translation. However, it's impossible to achieve equivalence effect in that linguistic differences between source language and target language make it impossible to reproduce the equivalence effect that relies on puns, poems and idiom. (关越, 2013:131-133)

6. Conclusion

From the above analysis, theories of Nida and Newmark share both similarities and differences. Their theories are more scientific and systematic than traditional theories, which make a great impact on all scholars. Through comparison, Nida's theory based on the practice of Bible is more limited than Newmark's theory from teaching practice. However, through hardworking and diligent study, they possess their unique theoretical system. The theories of Nida and Newmark are built on a scientific and correct understanding of translation from different angles and at different levels. Comparing the theories of Nida and Newmark, we obtain enlightenment about translation considering equivalence between different languages and cultures, applying scientific approach and employing an aesthetic skill.

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