How to Redefine and Re-position Translation from the Perspective of Current Translation Development in China

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Abstract. As a long history of intercultural communication practice, translation plays an increasingly important role in the exchange of different languages and cultures in the context of economic globalization, political multi-polarization and cultural pluralism. As the second largest economy in the world, China also needs to continuously improve its cultural soft power with its economic development. Translation will undoubtedly play an increasingly important role in enhancing the national cultural soft power, disseminating the achievements of contemporary Chinese culture, displaying the charm of Chinese culture, and shaping the image of contemporary China. Therefore, in the new period, it is very necessary and important to redefine and re-position translation.

Introduction

In recent years, some important changes have taken place in China’s translation research. There are two following notable things on the basis of its overall situation: the first one is the strengthening problem consciousness and the second one is the diversified means of the translation research. The increasing consciousness of problems is mainly reflected upon the positive response of the translation research to the demands of the country's strategy.

With the implementation of China’s development strategies of "Road and Belt Initiative" and China’s culture going out, theoretically or practically, China’s scholars and translators have put forward many issues that deserve the public attention. And the diversity of research approaches derives from the following two aspects: On the one hand, the new technology brings new possibilities to the empirical research on translation; On the other hand, the richness and complexity of translation activities in the new period require the academia of translation to explore new research approaches in response to the new challenges to translation research.

During the period of drastic or major changes in history, new emerging problems often give birth to new ideas and concepts, which also cause some confusion and reflection. Recently, I have been reflecting on the essence, value and ethics of translation out of the a translator’s responsibility. I hold the viewpoint that it is necessary to address some of the puzzles and different views of the academia of translation and to focus on how to re-position translation to exchange the ideas with my colleagues for further discussion.

Views on Redefinition and Re-positioning of Translation

In the new historical period, the translation activities showed some new characteristics, which have aroused the academia’s attention and proposed that the translation should be re-positioned. From March 28 to March 29, 2015, a high-level academic forum entitled "What is Translation - Re-position and Definition of Translation" was held at Guangdong University of Foreign Studies [1]. Many scholars like Xie Tianzhen, Wang Ning, Zhong Weili, Mu Lei, Hu Kaibao and other scholars expressed their opinions on the issue of translation re-positioning. On the re-positioning of translation, "Chinese Translators Journal" has focused on the views of many famous Chinese scholars in its third publication in 2015.

Discussions on the Views on Redefinition and Re-positioning of Translation
As a translator, professor Xie Tianzhen has paid close attention to the new changes in the development of the translation activities, and consciously and sensitively raised the issue of re-positioning and redefinition of translation. His basic viewpoints are as follows: first, the current translation definition lags behind the development of the times; second, it is necessary to re-position the translation with significant changes in China’s translation activities. No matter from the theoretical consciousness or from the viewpoint of logical evolution, Xie Tianzheng's viewpoint undoubtedly deserves public attention, and his call for translation re-positioning has received a positive response from the scholars and translators.

The specific content of his point of view is clearly stated in his article "Current Translation Definition lags behind the Development of the times: Several Reflections on Re-positioning and Redefining Translation"[2]. In terms of the translation re-positioning, there must be some reflections on the current position and definition of translation. And what is the current definition of translation? In the article, Xie Tianzhen has cited the two representative definitions of translation from Chinese and foreign languages: "the representative Chinese interpretations on translation are selected from “Cihai” [3] and "the volume of language and literature of the Encyclopedia of China". “Cihai” says that 'Translation is to express the meaning of a language in another language. And "the volume of language and literature of the Encyclopedia of China" [4] says that 'Translation is an activity to express the meaning of what is said or written in another language." while the representative Western definition is selected from "Oxford English dictionary [5] which are as follows: (a) 'The action or process of turning from one language into another; also, the product of this; a version in a different language'; (b) 'to turn from one language into another; to change into another language retaining the sense ...'

What deserves our attention is that there is an astonishing agreement on the current definitions of translation between China and Western world enumerated by Xie Tianzhen. These definitions of translation should be naturally reflected by scholars and translators. However, I am somewhat confused by the question that what should the academia explore for translation and its findings in the past 30 years? If the discussions on translation activities are based on these outdated definitions. In other words, the achievements made in translation in the past 30 years by Chinese and foreign scholars and translators should be fully taken into account for the re-positioning and redefining of translation in the academia of translation. The definition of translation is usually given from the two aspects, form and function. The so-called “current” definition enumerated by Xie Tianzheng means to define the translation activities by its form, which is narrow-minded and inadequate. For more than 30 years, Chinese and foreign scholars have continuously explored the truth of translation and deepened their understanding on translation.

Several Factors to Be Considered in Re-positioning and Redefining Translation

If we take such definitions as the basis for the academic research on the re-positioning of translation, it will neither be in conformity with the actual research on translation studies nor be conducive to the further exploration of translation research work. Hence, Zhong Weihe's point of view has an important guidance to re-position the translation in the new historical period. In view of the vague understanding of translation in the academia of translation, Professor Zhong Weihe proposed the following factors, which needs to be considered in re-positioning and redefining the translation" in an article entitled with "Several Factors to Be Considered in Re-positioning and Redefining Translation"[6] published in Chinese Translators Journal". First, it is necessary to understand the characteristics of translation in redefining and re-positioning the translation. Second, to understand the essence of translation means importantly to redefine and re-position translation. Third, to fully understand the role of translation is critical to redefine and re-position translation. Fourth, it is also very necessary to focus on a few changes in the development of translation and translation activities in redefining and re-positioning the translation.

Zhong Weihe's point of view on redefining and re-positioning the translation is generally acceptable inclusive myself and the deep reflections on the essence, function and value of translation made by Chinese and foreign scholars and translators should not be neglected in arguing
the issue of re-positioning of translation. Nor should the important achievements and research progress made by the academia of translation. In his article, Zhongwei proposed that the changes in the six aspects of translation activities and the translation development have aroused the attention from the translation academia, which is undoubtedly inspired by Xie Tianzhen's relevant views. Scholars including me have paid special attention to the changes in five aspects proposed by Xie Tianzhen, including the main object of translation, the mode of translation, the tools and means of translation, and so on. In the fourth aspect, he pointed out: "More and more countries and nations are beginning to actively translate their own culture so that the world can understand themselves much better. In this way, a major change has taken place in the traditional translation activities in China dominated by the translation from foreign language to Chinese and the translation of China’s national cultures into foreign languages has also become an important area of the current translation activities.

Accordingly, China’s cultural translation, including the corresponding theories on China’s cultural translation, is becoming an important part of the translation research work in China at present, which is very important because to cognize and understand translation needs to focus on the changes on the means for translation and the current status of research on cultural translation in the new historical period from my point of view. On the whole, I think the cognition of translation should go further from many scholar’s point of view including me.

Conclusion

There are several points that need the attention from the translation academia from my point of view: First, to have an essential understanding of translation needs to cognize the essential characteristics of translation, especially the correct understanding of the status of symbol creation in human society, and its important contribution to the development of mankind itself, social progress and cultural creation. Second, to cognize and understand translation needs to establish the outlook on the development of history. Third, to cognize and understand translation needs to pay much attention to major problems in reality. Fourthly, the re-positioning and redefinition of translation should be contemplated from the perspective of intercultural communication to examine the richness, complexity and creativity of translation activities with the aim of maintaining cultural diversity.

References


