

Style and Stylistic Accommodation in Translation

By Aiwei Shi
M.A. in English Linguistics and Literature
Xinzhou Teachers University
Shanxi, China

Abstract: Accommodation in translation emerges in perspectives such as cultural accommodation, collocation accommodation, ideological accommodation and aesthetic accommodation. This article focuses specifically on stylistic accommodation in translation, proposing that accommodation should be oriented to style which includes writer's style, genre style and historical style.

Style

Style means all kinds of things. Encarta English dictionary lists 11 definitions for it. Its third definition says: way of writing or performing: the way in which something is written or performed as distinct from the content of the writing or performance. This is where we commence our discussion. Lynch provides us with more or less what is generally understood of style in our school days. He says that at its broadest, it means everything about your way of presenting yourself in words, including grace, clarity, and a thousand undefinable qualities that separate good writing from bad. (Lynch, 2001) I also remember huge amount of stress from my teachers is placed on economy, precision and so on, plus clarity as stated by above. In a word, **style** is used as a term distinguished from **content** in writing and it stresses form or format. In other words, style means 'how' whereas content refers to 'what'.

If style comes only second in priority, it certainly stands very high in importance. It is only natural that good form conveys the content in more sufficient and adequate way. In translation discussion faithfulness in content has always been emphasized and treated seriously, but faithfulness in style seems to pose more difficulties. In literature, style is the novelist's choice of words and phrases, and how the novelist arranges these words and phrases in sentences and paragraphs. Style allows the author to shape how the reader experiences the work. For example, one writer may use simple words and straightforward sentences, while another may use difficult vocabulary and elaborate sentence structures. Even if the themes of both works are similar, the differences in the authors' styles make the experiences of reading the two works distinct. Without extensive reading the capture of the so-called style is really a tough challenge.

Translation

E.Nida(1984) defines translation as " Translation 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." How is style transferred in the receptor language becomes a problem and challenge for every translator or interpreter. As translators and interpreters we are **mediators**. The ancient Chinese referred to the translator as a "match-maker" or "go-between" (*mei*) and translation as a medium through which both parties finally understand each other, though it was not considered a highly-valued profession. Obviously, the translator should not only have a bilingual ability but also a bi-cultural vision. Translators mediate between cultures (including ideologies, moral systems and socio-political structures), seeking to overcome those incompatibilities which stand in the way of transfer of meaning. What has value as a sign in one cultural community may be devoid of significance in another and it is the translator who is uniquely placed to identify the disparity and seek to resolve it.

But there is another sense in which translators are mediators; in a way, they are 'privilege readers' of the SL text. Unlike the ordinary ST or TT reader, the translator reads in order to produce, decodes in order to re-encode. In other words, the translator uses as input to the translation process information which would normally be the output, and therefore the end of, the reading process. Consequently, processing is likely to be more thorough, more deliberate than that of the ordinary reader; and interpretation of one portion of text will benefit from evidence forthcoming from the processing of later sections of text. Now, each reading of a text is a unique act, a process subject to the particular contextual constraints of the occasion, just as much as the production of the text is. Inevitably, a translated text reflects the translator's reading and this is yet another factor which defines the translator as a non-ordinary reader: whereas the ordinary reader can involve his or her own beliefs and values in the creative reading process, the translator has to be more guarded. (cited from Wilss,2001)

It is widely-acknowledged nowadays that translation is interaction. The key concept here is interaction. I suggest that interaction is a process which takes place not only between participants (the traditional 'trinity' in the translation process: author, translator and target reader), but also between the signs which constitute texts and between the participants and those signs.

Armed with this complex structural outline, the translator makes choices at the level of texture in such a way as to guide the target reader along routes envisaged by the ST producer towards a communicative goal. That is, items selected from the lexicogrammatical resources of the TL will have to reflect the overall rhetorical purpose and discursal values which have been identified at any particular juncture in the text.

Ideological nuances, cultural predispositions and so on in the source text have to be relayed as closely as possible. To achieve that end, accommodation must, more often

than not, be adopted. In this case, it is accommodation in writing style, more accurately, in rewriting style.

Stylistic Accommodation

Philosophically arguing, I believe content and style formulate a whole that can not be neatly separated. Any content is expressed in a specific style. Yet when comparison and contrast is carried out, certain nuances are found to exist uniquely among a group of writers, between different genres and within a certain historical period.

Here in this article I would like to concentrate on these three aspects: writer's style, genre style and historical style.

Writer's style

Writer's style is the most-discussed topic in our literary course. Lecturers encourage us to read extensively about a certain author and compare between authors so we could formulate in our mind 'style' of a specific author. For instance, Hemingway's economical writing style often seems simple and almost childlike, but his method is calculated and used to complex effect. In his writing Hemingway provided detached descriptions of action, using simple nouns and verbs to capture scenes precisely. By doing so he avoided describing his characters' emotions and thoughts directly. Instead, in providing the reader with the raw material of an experience and eliminating the authorial viewpoint, Hemingway made the reading of a text approximate the actual experience as closely as possible. Hemingway was also deeply concerned with authenticity in writing. He believed that a writer could treat a subject honestly only if the writer had participated in or observed the subject closely. Without such knowledge the writer's work would be flawed because the reader would sense the author's lack of expertise. In addition, Hemingway believed that an author writing about a familiar subject is able to write sparingly and eliminate a great deal of superfluous detail from the piece without sacrificing the voice of authority. The success of his plain style in expressing basic, yet deeply felt, emotions contributed to the decline of the elaborate Victorian-era prose that characterized a great deal of American writing in the early 20th century. (Encyclopedia article from Encarta of Ernest Miller Hemingway, 2004) In contrast, A complex style uses long, elaborate sentences that contain many ideas and descriptions. The writer uses lyrical passages to create the desired mood in the reader, whether it be one of joy, sadness, confusion, or any other emotion. American author Henry James uses a complex style to great effect in novels such as *The Wings of the Dove* (1902):

The two ladies who, in advance of the Swiss season, had been warned that their design was unconsidered, that the passes would not be clear, nor the air mild, nor the inns open—the two ladies who, characteristically had braved a good deal of possibly interested remonstrance were finding themselves, as their adventure turned out, wonderfully sustained.

When translating Hemingway into Chinese, it is advisable for the translator to stick to the above-mentioned style, though the conventional Chinese criterion for a good piece of writing thinks highly of a flourish style with a little too much superfluity. Those who translate Chinese into English will agree with me readily here. This stylistic distinction calls for accommodation, by which writer's style is well-preserved. And this is especially good for Chinese literary scholars for one of their focal points of study lies in the nuances between different writers' style. If the translator, for the sake of the readership, wants to make his/her version more acceptable and appealing, I suggest that they must always bear in mind the central principle---style. There are several translated versions of Hemingway's *The Old Man and the Sea* in China and apparently all versions seek to reproduce the simple and economic style. If I were asked to judge which is a better version, I would unhesitatingly pick the one that best reflects such a style. And when translating Henry James, the translator must be conscious of his complex sentence structure and make accommodation accordingly.

Genre style

Encarta English dictionary defines genre as "category of artistic works: one of the categories that artistic works of all kinds can be divided into on the basis of form, style, or subject matter." From this definition we can see genre is also closely associated with style. Literary genres cover the following: biographies and autobiographies, children's literature, history writing, science writing, poetry, short stories and so forth. For example, as history is concerned the totality of all past events, historiography should try to be the authentic written record of what is known of human lives and societies in the past, though inevitably how historians have attempted to understand them is also included. Of all the fields of serious study and literary effort, history may be the hardest to define precisely, because the attempt to uncover past events and formulate an intelligible account of them necessarily involves the use and influence of many auxiliary disciplines and literary forms. The concern of all serious historians has been to collect and record facts about the human past and often to discover new facts. They have known that the information they have is incomplete, partly incorrect, or biased and requires careful attention. But the foremost characteristic of history writing is the historian's effort to write in a true-to-life way. In the translation of this genre, the translator has to accommodate to the target language style. For instance, the Chinese refers to history writing as *shibi* (literally, historical pen), which defines a style of truthfulness in stating a fact and trying to avoid personal bias. The historian only lets his/her voice heard at the end of each chapter by clearly stating "the historian says" (*zhuzhe yue*) When dealing with historical materials from English into Chinese, accommodation should be made according to the traditional Chinese style in order to clarify what is the so-called historical facts and what is the historian opinion on the subject or topic.

Another genre is letter writing which has its own stylistic features. Letter writing may be broadly divided into business and personal letters. The following example, I hope, will demonstrate how accommodation is made to keep the style. Here is the translation of a letter of refusal of contribution.

I received your letter yesterday. Your article is very good, but I am sorry that owing to pressure of space, I find it too long to be published. (Ge, 1980)

Without much accommodation, the translation might be read: *I received your valuable letter yesterday and I have paid my respective reading. Your article is excellent but owing to its excessive length it is not suitable for publication in our journal because our journal has limited space. We feel very sorry for that.* I guess a native English speaker will not regard this as a good letter, or simply, good English due to its redundant elements and too much politeness.

Historical style

In the English literature history, there were two important movements, classic and romantic movement, which formed their own specific styles.

Classicism, when applied generally, means clearness, elegance, symmetry, and repose produced by attention to traditional forms. It is sometimes synonymous with excellence or artistic quality of high distinction. More precisely, the term refers to the admiration and imitation of Greek and Roman literature, art, and architecture. Because the principles of classicism were derived from the rules and practices of the ancients, the term came to mean the adherence to specific academic canons.

In translating this style, the translator will have to equip him/herself with wide knowledge about Greek and Roman literature, art, and other cultural aspects so as to preserve the archaism in the target language and to make such stylistic accommodation easy to carry out.

Although in literature romantic elements were known much earlier, as in the Elizabethan dramas, many critics now date English literary romanticism from the publication of Wordsworth and Coleridge's *Lyrical Ballads* (1798). In the preface to the second edition of that influential work (1800), Wordsworth stated his belief that poetry results from "the spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings," and pressed for the use of natural everyday diction in literary works. Coleridge emphasized the importance of the poet's imagination and discounted adherence to arbitrary literary rules. Such English romantic poets as Byron, Shelley, Robert Burns, Keats and some others often focused on the individual self, on the poet's personal reaction to life.

Resulting in part from the libertarian and egalitarian ideals of the French Revolution, the romantic movements had in common only a revolt against the prescribed rules of classicism. The basic aims of romanticism were various: a return to nature and to belief in the goodness of humanity; the rediscovery of the artist as a supremely individual creator; the development of nationalistic pride; and the exaltation of the senses and emotions over reason and intellect. (cited from the Columbia Electronic Encyclopedia)

Chinese literature history did not have a romantic movement or anything similar to that in the western sense until modern times. Even the modern romantic style is but a simulation of the west, or at least influenced by the western ideas. Probably that is because realism has always been the overwhelming mainstream. There were indeed some romantic literary figures occasionally but they were never as popularly accepted. This is where accommodation is needed urgently in translation of this group of authors. Translators are faced with a dilemma---too much accommodation to meet the readers' reading tradition means traitors of the original whereas inadequate accommodation simply drives the readers away. It is the job or responsibility of the translator to find the appropriate place between these two ends. Yet such stylistic accommodation must always occupy an important position in the translator's mind.

Epilogue

It is my hope that my article on style and stylistic translation could bring about more similar research and study so its importance in translation should be fully realized.

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