

Remarks by the Judges

英汉互译【通用】竞赛单元点评人文稿



2020中华笔译大赛
2020 CHINA WRITTEN TRANSLATION CONTEST
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2020 中华笔译大赛

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It was a pure delight for me to participate in the 2020 China Translation Contest as a commentator. Let me begin by applauding the efforts made by all the candidates in producing praiseworthy translations from English to Chinese and Chinese to English as well.

In reviewing the final products, other commentators may proceed by looking at the translations and then issue remarks on their salient points, weaknesses or errors. I, on the other hand, took a different approach. I began by studying the original texts with an eye on the hurdles and pitfalls that might present a challenge to the candidates and then focused my attention on how these challenges were dealt with in the translations. This might be called a deductive approach as opposed to an inductive approach.

Having been involved in translation between Chinese and English formally or informally for much of my adult life, I am of the opinion that the important technique for professional and aspiring translators to hone is the ability to render one language (source) into the other (target) in a manner that is familiar and acceptable to the thinking mode of the target-language audience. This ability certainly encompasses a myriad of aspects at different language and cultural levels, but my focus in this assignment is on the translator's ability to make structural adjustments and more importantly changes which are different from the

source text in sentence organization and sequencing. I'll dwell on the specifics in the following by looking at two texts, from English to Chinese and from Chinese to English separately.

From English to Chinese

One of the most remarkable differences between English and Chinese is how the sentences in a passage or text are strung together. Whereas English sentences are typically long and embedded with a focus on cohesion, Chinese sentences are typically short and straightforward with a focus on coherence. In looking at the English text, one cannot fail to notice the length of the sentences. There are altogether 16 paragraphs in the text and the majority of them consist of one sentence only. The following are but two examples:

“We will spare no effort to free our fellow men, women and children from the abject and dehumanising conditions of extreme poverty, to which more than a billion of them are currently subjected,” ran the Millennium Declaration that was adopted at the summit.”

“If progress on the MDGs has been mixed – and the final report plainly admits that it has – then their architects can at least claim that progress on ending extreme poverty has been spectacular: between 1990 and this year, the number of those living in extreme poverty has fallen from 1.9 billion to 836 million.”

Examples like the above would require the adept rendering by the translator into readable Chinese that captures the original meaning but at the same time in keeping with the convention of Chinese sentence organization, which is typically short and chronological. Most of the candidates seemed to master this technique very well such that there are no

noticeable long and unwieldy sentences in the Chinese translations. There are, however, some instances, where a very long attribute is attached to a head. A case in point is the following:

在世界领导人聚集于纽约通过一个全球范围内的空前的对贫穷、疾病和不平等的抨击的 15 年后。

There are certainly other problems in the translation which I will address later on.

Other than the sentence organization, a major challenge for the candidates is to find equivalents to words in English that may not exist in Chinese either in denotation or in connotation. Sometimes, there may be “false” equivalents which share the same denotation but with different connotation. The following is just a sampling of them:

Example 1. Global assault: assault tends to have a negative connotation in the sense of a sudden, violent attack; onslaught. This may have led some candidates to translate the word into 抨击, 威胁 or 危机. While 威胁 and 危机 are totally off the mark, 抨击 is not correct in that it is usually used in Chinese to refer to a verbal rather than a physical attack. The correct rendering would be 向 ... 发动进攻. There was one translation of the phrase that I found quite apt, which is 在全球范围内攻克...

Example 2. Last year, the UN deputy secretary general, Jan Eliasson, **bemoaned** the lack of action on clean water and sanitation...

English has a variety of ways to express the idea of saying things and bemoaned is one of the unusual ones. Other than supplying the word 说 in Chinese, the translator would have to find an accurate way to translate the meaning of the word. These translations observed did not seem to capture the correct meaning: 批评, 悲叹于, 哀叹, 悲叹埋怨. Some candidates did a better job by translating the word as 惋惜地说 or 叹息地说. 不无惋惜地说 sounds

quite good to me.

Example 3. Stunning ambition: the word ambition in English is neutral in its connotation. It can refer to a lofty aspiration or underhanded scheme. These two ideas are separately expressed in Chinese by 抱负 and 野心, one positive and one pejorative. The word ambition is quite positive in the text, but was translated by some candidates as 野心, giving it a negative impression. One candidate went so far as to translate the sentence as 如果野心太大就会成为愚蠢的行为, which is certainly a gross mistake.

The first principal in translation is the complete comprehension of the source text. Lack of a thorough understanding would certainly lead to incorrect translation. The following are examples I observed:

Example 4. If the progress on the MDGs has been mixed: “Mixed” in the sentence refers to the result of the progress with things good and things are less than desired. Some candidates translated the word as 复杂的, 被混淆了, 被混杂了, which would prevent correct understanding on the part of the readers. Some candidates did a remarkable job by rendering the word into 有喜有忧 or 喜忧参半. 好坏参半, as one candidate rendered, is acceptable too.

Example 5. The final report **is in** on the eight millennium development goals (MDGs) they set.

The key is in the understanding of the simple, but idiomatic phrase **to be in**, which simply means **to be available**. Some candidates took it literally and translated as follows:

最后的报告展示在他们设立的八个目标中, ... 八项千年目标已收获最终报告, 最终报告已成形, 位列于他们提出的八条目标中, 最终的报告里呈现了, 最终报告呈现在

八项目标中

Whereas the correct rendering should be 最终报告在当年设定的八项千年发展目标 (MDG) 的基础上诞生了. Instead of 诞生, expressions such as 发表 or even 问世 are possibilities.

Example 6. “We need to catch people’s imagination with this because if you just say ‘sustainable development’, eyes **glaze**. If you say, ‘17 goals’, it takes a genius to recite the 17.”: The sentence shows a contrast between two approaches to promote the SDGs, suggested by “eyes glaze” and “it takes a genius” respectively. While the speaker favors the first approach, quite a few candidates misrepresented the intention by translating “glaze” as 眼光呆滞的. One candidate went so far afield as to say “如果你单单说 ‘可持续发展’, 人们一眨眼就忘记了; 而如果你说 ‘17 个目标’ 人们有记住 ‘17’ 的天赋. This is exactly the opposite of what the speaker intended. Glaze in the sentence should be translated as 眼睛一亮.

There are certain idiomatic expressions in the text that would call for careful selection of similar expressions in Chinese. Examples are as follows:

Example 7. Call to arms: Various translations such as 呼吁, 召唤, 对于脱贫的之战的空前号召 or 对开创新纪元武器的呼唤 were either wrong or did not seem to capture the full meaning of the expression. A good translation that a candidate came up with is (划时代的) 战斗号召. If 战斗 is felt to be too militant, 行动召唤 would be a good choice too.

Example 7. Hard sell: Hard sell is a technique of aggressive salesmanship or advertising, which should be translated as 强行推销, but the majority of candidates translated the idiom as 不买账 or something along that line, which is certainly not correct.

Example 9. Sheer number: As an adjective, sheer in the expression simply lends emphasis to the word it modifies, but some candidates took it literally and translated it as 纯粹数量, 数量之悬殊, 单单看其大目标, 严峻数字, which did not reflect what the expression intends to convey. Other candidates handled it aptly by translating it as 数量之多.

From Chinese to English

Chinese differs from English in sentence organization in a variety of ways, but the most striking feature is that Chinese favors coordination instead of subordination such that a subject can govern a number of predicates in a chronological sequence. This is referred to by linguists as the Principle of Temporal Sequence, or PTS. Because of PTS, relations between sentence constituents are logically indicated, there would be no need for the sentence connectors, or conjunctions, to be present, resulting in parataxis as opposed to hypotaxis, which characterizes English.

The prevalence of the text structure described above is demonstrated in the very first two sentences of the text the candidates contended with:

“3月5日, 李克强总理在全国两会上做2017年政府工作报告时提出, 要深入实施《中国制造2025》, 加快大数据、云计算、物联网应用, 以新技术新业态新模式, 推动传统产业生产、管理和营销模式变革。把发展智能制造作为主攻方向, 推进国家智能制造示范区、制造业创新中心建设, 深入实施工业强基、重大装备专项工程, 大力发展先进制造业, 推动中国制造向中高端迈进。”

Where we see a series of verb phrases, that address 李克强总理提出: 要深入实施、加快应用、推动生产、管理和变革。

The same organization is used in the second part of the paragraph even with the subject

suppressed: 把 ...作为, 推进...、深入实施...大力发展...、推动...

Rendering sentences such as these into idiomatic English would require that the translator come up with ways to establish a trunk or the main structure and attach various elements to it. In so doing, the translator would also need to make explicit the logical connection between sentence constituents using conjunctions or other connectors.

Take the second sentence above for example, there is an absence of the subject, which is understood to mean we or China. The translator would have no choice but to make it explicit.

In tackling the beginning paragraph with the two sentences above, most candidates were keeping the Chinese sentence sequencing in their English translation. It was probably be fine with the first sentence, but a little variation of the structure for the second sentence would render the translation more palatable to the English readers such as the following:

“With a focus/focusing on the development of intelligent manufacturing, China should set up national intelligent manufacturing demonstration zones and innovation centers, implement special projects like building robust industrial foundations and major equipment, and vigorously develop advanced manufacturing, striving to push China’s manufacturing to a mid-to-high level.”

Subordination relations are established once 把发展智能制造作为主攻方向 is turned into a prepositional phrase, modifying the main sentence. Note that the implicit subject in the original is made explicit in the form of China.

Other than the sentence organization, a major challenge for the candidates is the presence of many loaded phrases, “loaded” in the sense that they have become set expressions or chunks from the novel use in the media and the Chinese propensity of using short-hands. This would require that the translators keep themselves abreast of current events

and concepts, both social and political with a particular eye on the language expressions. The following is a sampling of such loaded expressions that I observed caused problems for the candidates:

智造: This was ingeniously created to achieve a homophonic effect with 制造 with the meaning of creativity in making or intelligent manufacturing, but it turned out to be the first stumbling block, as most people translated it as intellectual making, create in China, created in China, China-created, smartly made, which all sound awkward, unintelligent or ungrammatical.

制造业是国民经济的主体，是科技创新的主战场，是立国之本，兴国之器: This is one of the favored ways of saying things in literary Chinese, using a 4-word expression, often in pairs. For people not versed in classical Chinese, they may not be able to fully grasp the meaning. These two expressions, particularly the second one caused a great deal of difficulty for the candidates as seen in their imperfect translations such as foundation of a country, weapon of rejuvenation, foundation of essential national prosperity, important factor for prosperity, a set of tools, powerful equipment, etc. The correct understanding and rendering would be “Manufacturing is the pillar of the national economy, the main battlefield of technological innovation, and the **very foundation for building and rejuvenating our country.**”

升级版: Quite a few candidates were struggling with this expression, translating it as upgraded version of Chinese manufacturing, which is difficult to understand for English readers. As a matter of fact, there is a ready-made and relatively new English expression in the form of 2.0 that comes very handy to serve the role.

Finally, a word of advice for the candidates who aspire to be translators or interpreters for international organizations such as the UN. It is paramount to follow the international affairs and be familiarized with their lingo and conventional translations. The Deputy Secretary General should be translated as 常务副秘书长, as there are a host of Under-Secretaries Generals. Almost no one translated the title correctly. UNDP is officially translated as 联合国开发计划署. I've seen quite a few different translations by the candidates. The word "adopt" in the UN setting when it comes to resolutions should be translated as 通过 rather than 采用 or 采纳 as some candidates rendered.