

外贸英语书信的翻译技巧

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外贸英语书信是国际贸易中最为常见的一种通讯手段。外贸英语书信的好坏反映出一个公司的业务水平和经营作风。因此,提高外贸英语书信的质量是一个值得经常研究的问题。本文不打算涉及外贸英语书信的种类、格式以及其他一些有关外贸英语书信的基本常识问题,而是试图从语言的角度就如何才能译好外贸英语书信这一问题。谈一些粗浅的看法。

一、避免对号入座,逐字直译。

中文和英文是两种大相径庭的文字。其差异不仅表现在它们的表达形式方面,而且表现在它们的思维逻辑方面。因此,我们在将中文函件译成英文时,切不可对号入座,逐字直译。否则,其译文很可能是洋泾浜式的英文或者是人们常说的所谓中式英文。试举数例以说明这个问题。

example one:

我们相信,这一建立在相互信赖基础上的业务关系将在今后的岁月里继续得到发展。

word-for-word translation:

We believe that this business relation established on the basis of mutual trust will continue to achieve developments in the future years.

The noun phrase "this business relation" sounds all right when it stands independently. But it does not give a correct implication of the original Chinese. What the original wording of the Chinese here implies is something like "such business relations as ours". For the same reason, "to achieve developments" is incompatible with the sentence structure and should be replaced by the verb infinitive "to develop". As a matter of fact, there is not such a usage as "in the future years". What the original Chinese calls for is the prepositional phrase "in the coming years", which means "in the years to come". With the above corrections the English version would sound more natural, idiomatic and compatible with the implication of the original Chinese. Here is the modified translation:

We believe that such business relations as ours established on the basis of mutual trust will continue to develop in the coming years.

To prove what has been illustrated in the preceding paragraph we might as well have another example.

example two:

我极其愉快地通知你,本公司贸易小组一行四人將於今年十二月中旬去贵国访问。

word-for-word translation:

I am extremely happy to inform you that a trading group of four persons of my corporation will go to visit your country in mid-December this year.

The trouble lies in the place where words are underlined. When a message is conveyed on formal and semi-formal occasions, the language used therein should be agreeable with the circumstances. "I am extremely happy" can hardly be considered as a proper saying either in formal and semi-formal introduction or in business correspondence. Therefore, the Chinese wording for this part should be translated in two ways, either saying "It gives me great pleasure……" or "I have pleasure in……".

There may be four alternatives of translation for the Chinese wording……的: an adjective, a participle phrase, a verb infinitive and a prepositional phrase. The original Chinese 本公司贸易小组一行四人 means a trading group of four persons sent by this corporation rather than the idea of a trading group belonging to this corporation. It is therefore necessary to change the prepositional phrase "of my corporation" for that of "from my corporation". It goes without saying that the Chinese word 去 should not be translated at all.

The correct translation of the complete sentence should be as follows:

I have pleasure in informing you (It gives me(a) great pleasure to inform you that ……) that a trading group of four persons from my corporation will visit your country in mid-December this year.

The above two examples have fully demonstrated that owing to the difference in presentation between Chinese and English translation from either language into the other can never be a word-for-word practice. In other words, omission or adding of words and reversing of the word order are required wherever necessary. But such changes must be well arranged in accordance with the rules and principles governing the language.

Let us just take the omission for example. According to English grammar the subject in a subordinate clause can be omitted if it is the same as the subject in the main clause, otherwise it should not be missed out. Please see the following illustrations:

example three:

你在开证时必须在信用证中加入港口拥挤费条款, 注明如发生港口拥挤费, 其费用可在信用证金额之外支付。

English version with correct omission:

When opening the covering L/C (When you open the covering L/C ,), you must insert a clause in it stating that port congestion surcharge, if any, will be payable in excess of the L/C amount.

example four:

你最好在此报盘失效以前下决心向我们订购。

English version allowing no omission:

You had better make up your mind to place an order with us before this offer lapses.

二、切忌节外生枝，任意增减。

所谓翻译，就是将某种文字的原意用另一种语言或文字明白无误地表达出来。笔者认为，这是对一个翻译工作者的最起码的要求。外贸英语与小说、诗歌、散文等文艺作品不同，它具有高度的政策性。因此，我们在将中文函件译成英文时，必须忠实于原文，切不可节外生枝，任意增减。现举例说明如下：

example five:

我们必须指出，因货物离开此地时处于完好状态，我们不应对所谈的货损负责。

We have to point out that as the goods left here in perfect condition, we should not be held responsible for the alleged damage, which, we believe, must have occurred in transit.

The original Chinese gives no indication of where and how the alleged damage has occurred. How could a translator get to know that the damage must have occurred in transit?

example six:

关于你方第3784号定单，现通知你，货已备妥。请收到此信后赶快开证，以便尽快装船。

We wish to advise that the goods under your Order No.3784, are ready for shipment. You are requested to expedite the opening of the covering L/C after receipt of this letter, so as to enable us to ship the goods by first available steamer upon arrival of your L/C.

The underlined part of the translation does not conform to the original Chinese, which gives no limit to the time of shipment. "To ship by first available steamer" confines the shipment to being effected by the first steamer on which shipping space can be obtained after arrival of the L/C. So the last part of the above translation should be modified like this:....., so as to enable us to ship the goods the earliest possible.

The above two examples are convincing illustrations that any arbitrary change in translation might cause intolerable distortion of the original meaning of the Chinese wording. But they do not in any sense reject necessary modifications in need of rhetoric. In this instance we might have one more example.

example seven:

双方决定，首先有选择性地从某几个商品开始做起。

In order to start the ball rolling, the two sides have decided to commence their business with a few items to be mutually selected.

You may see that with a prepositional phrase placed at the head of the sentence the English version looks even better than the original Chinese while keeping to the sense of the latter.

三、顺理成章，莫说外行话。

外贸英语书信所使用的语言是商业英语。它与基础英语并不等同。外贸英语在长期的国际贸易发展过程中形成了它独有的一整套表达方式，如 FOB (船上交货价)、C&F (成本加运费到岸价)、CIF (成本加运保费到岸价)、DEAD FREIGHT (空舱费)、DEMURRAGE (滞期

费)、OFFER FIRM(报实盘)、OFFER WITHOUT ENGAGEMENT(报虚盘)、SUBJECT TO ONE'S FINAL CONFIRMATION(以某人的最后确认为准),等等。如果我们不明白此理,误以为只要掌握了基础英语便能轻而易举地翻译外贸英语书信,其结果往往是满纸外行语,虽合语法,但远非是地道的外贸英语。现略举例说明如下:

example eight:

现通知你,在我方的贷方帐下你仍欠我500美元。望这笔款子能於今年年底之前汇给我们。

Owing to lack of words and expressions used in business correspondence, translation of the above sentence would probably turn out like the following:

We wish to advise that you still owe us US\$ 500.00, which, we hope, will be remitted to us before the end of this year.

There seems to be nothing wrong either in meaning or in grammar, but the language does not look like that often used in business correspondence. As a matter of fact, the translation should be like this:

We wish to advise that there is still a balance of US\$ 500.00 in our favour, which, we hope, will be remitted to us before the end of this year.

example nine:

有关信用证中规定,买方在装船单据第一次提交时,就必须立即进行议付。

Not accomplished with English business correspondence, a graduate of an ordinary foreign languages institute would get his translation done as the following:

It is stipulated in the covering L/C that the shipping documents should be duly paid by the buyer as soon as they are shown to them.

For the same reason the above translation should be adapted to the mode of English business correspondence. The modified translation may go like this:

It is stipulated in the covering L/C that the draft accompanied with the shipping documents must be duly honoured by the buyer upon their first presentation.

example ten:

我们已将我们的价格降低到几乎无利可图的最低限度了。

Ignorant of the difference between the language used in business correspondence and the essential English, one might present his translation as follows:

We have cut down our price to the lowest point where there is almost no profit left for us.

This sentence may have nothing to do with what is called a proper name or a phrase peculiar to business correspondence. It is rather a matter of the sense of business correspondence itself. With this in mind, we are going to rewrite the above translation in still more business-like English:

We have cut down our price to the minimum where the margin of our profit has become almost insignificant.

翻译外贸英语书信是一项十分复杂而又严肃的工作,它在外贸业务活动中占有十分重要的地位。翻译外贸英语书信不仅需要精通外贸英语,而且还要熟悉外贸业务。因此,掌握外贸英语书信的翻译技巧决非一日之功,需要常切常磋,逐步提高。