

The Achievement of Target Language and Cultural Balance from the Dynamic Equivalence Perspective: A Case Study of the Translation of *Congcong*

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Abstract: *The Dynamic Equivalence Theory was put forward by a well-known American linguist and translation theorist Eugen A. Nida. The main content of this translation theory is to reproduce a faithful and expressive translation that can arouse the same emotions among target readers. From this perspective, the dynamic equivalence translation theory plays a vital role in guiding and measuring the prose translation. This paper analyzes the two English versions of the prominent Chinese prose Congcong by two renowned translators under the guidance of dynamic equivalence. Case analysis has been conducted from two aspects: 1) the style and underlying emotion of the original text is translated or not; 2) the target readers' response is considered or not. Stylistic equivalence in the target text and culture as well as the response of the target readers are compared in the case analysis. The application of dynamic translation theory in prose translation can enrich the theoretical research in this field as well as providing some new insight into translator's practice.*

Keywords: *Prose translation; The Dynamic Equivalence Theory; Congcong*

1. INTRODUCTION

Eugene Nida's Functional Equivalence Translation Theory can be counted among the most renowned and widely-used translation theories in current use. Since its introduction in China some thirty years ago, it has been an inspiration both for translation theorists and practitioners, and has had a profound impact on our country's modern approach to translation research. Most notably, the theory incorporates both 'formal equivalence' theory and 'dynamic equivalence' theory which has challenged countless researchers to better achieve linguistic and stylistic equivalence in their translation efforts.

A number of English translators have employed this theory in their respective fields for practical purposes, such translating advertisements, legal documents, etc., as well as to translate literature in novels, drama, poetry and prose. In the 21st century, it has become increasingly important that Chinese prose, for example, is made widely available to international readers which will help popularize and disseminate Chinese culture across the globe.

In this paper, the author intends to apply Nida's dynamic equivalence theory to analyze two translated versions of *Congcong* by Zhu Chunshen and Zhang Peiji by using Nida's stylistic equivalence theory. This stylistic equivalence comparison, including target language, culture, audience, will be conducted in detail in an attempt to highlight areas of these separate translations that were most helpful.

2. THEORIES

2.1. Nida's Dynamic Equivalence Theory

It should be noted that dynamic translation was first introduced in Nida's book, *Toward a Science of Translating* (1964). He believed that dynamic translation concerned the relationship between the targets and the message should be substantially the same in the translated version as it is in the original document (cited by Ma Huijuan, 2005:159). Nida changed 'dynamic translation' into 'functional translation' to clarify any misunderstanding of it in publication *From One Language to Another* (1986).

Nida's dynamic-equivalence theory, along with other theories of correspondence in translating, is elaborated in his essay *Principles of Correspondence*, where he explains, given that 'no two languages are identical, either in the meanings given to corresponding symbols or in the ways in which symbols are arranged in phrases and sentences, it stands to reason that there can be no absolute correspondence between languages. Hence, there can be no fully exact translations.' While the impact of a translation may bring us close to the original meaning of the text, there can be no identical translation. Therefore, what one must seek to do is to find the 'closest natural equivalent' to provide an acceptable translation.

Eugene Nida's translation has introduced a breath of fresh air and innovative thinking to the translation world which has encouraged millions of researchers to refine their translation study and practice. However, overemphasis on reader's response diminishes the importance of the translator whose style, character and knowledge can deeply undermine the accuracy of meaning in their translated works. Moreover, the functional equivalence translation theory isn't a rule of thumb for all translations. Literature and pragmatic translation sometimes demands the use of alternative translation strategies and also theoretical guidance to achieve success. Thus a dialectical view to Nida's translation theory should be established so that we can adopt the best strategies that do help us achieve our translation goals.

Dynamic equivalence aims to achieve complete 'naturalness' of expression that is directed toward an equivalence of response rather than an equivalence of form. But an observance of this principle may sometimes result in a violation of formal equivalence. In this case, the readers' response is to be measured and valued. The relationship between the target language target and the message should be substantially the same as that between the source language targets and the message. Therefore, the principles governing a dynamic equivalence translation would be: 'the conformance of a translation to the target language and culture as a whole; and the translation must agree with the context of the message which involves the stylistic selection and arrangement of message constituents'(Nida,1964). C-E translation has been described by Nida(1964) as 'the closest natural equivalent to the source language message.' This type of definition contains three essential elements: (1) equivalent, which involves the source-language message, (2) natural, which involves the target language, and (3) closest, which binds the two orientations using the highest degree of approximation (Ma Huijuan, 2009:21).

As to 'dynamic equivalence', it is the 'closest natural equivalent to the source language message'. The target language, source language message and the degree of approximation of the two orientations should be considered. Thus, translating entails reproducing in the target language the closest natural equivalent of the source message, first in meaning and second in terms of style (Nida and Taber, 1982:12). A natural rendering shall fit the target language and culture as a whole, and the context of the particular message and the target-language audience (Nida, 1964).

2.2. Relevant Studies on Stylistic Equivalence

Regarding translation studies on stylistic equivalence, Susan Bassnet (2002:145) developed the concept of 'pragmatic equivalence' introduced by Peter Newmark in his book *Translation Studies*. Peter Newmark (1981:78) put forward his communicative translation theory which incorporates the readers' response and semantic translation, and message proximity which is introduced in the book *Approaches to Translation*.

From the linguistic perspective, 'style' refers to 'the way in which language is used in a given text, by a given person, for a given purpose' (Leech, 1969). But from another perspective, 'style is the essential characteristics of every piece of writing, the outcome of the person's personality and his emotions at the moment, and no single paragraph can be put together without revealing in some degree the nature of its author' (Theodore Savory, 1957) . Thus, when it comes to the writing style of a writer, varied factors must be considered, such as the author's tone, expression, emotion and word choice, figurative devices, etc. With what has been offered above, we may form a preliminary outlook of Zhu Ziqing, which helps us know something about the author's personality and style. But literature translation has its standards. 'Literature works differ from news, advertisement and scientific materials. The latter all have their clear purposes and applications while literature isn't restricted in terms of that (Chen Xin, 1999:315). Without specific focus on purpose and application, literature emphasizes more on imaginative elements and emotional expression, and demands a more vivid and faithful translation to adhering to the original style of the text.

3. COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS OF TWO VERSIONS OF CONGCONG

Congcong was written during a seemingly depressed period in Chinese history when people were feeling desperate after the May 4th Movement had ended. As the author observed the darkness of society and people's suffering and turmoil during this special time, and he began to cherish what was happening around him. He also hoped that all Chinese people would learn to take due responsibility for their motherland by reading his essay. This work typifies Zhu Ziqing's style of prose which adopted simple, vernacular language in his description of the times which may have been more real and appealing to his readers. Therefore, the translation of this short essay should involve not only its words and sentences, but also take its vernacular style into consideration.

Zhang Peiji is a renowned translator, professor and translation theorist in China. He experienced strict and systematic English learning from his childhood through his overseas postgraduate study. Motivated by patriotism and the love of his motherland, Zhang returned to China in 1949 where he immersed himself in English translation practice and theory research at the PLA Institute of Foreign Languages. He enjoyed numerous honorable titles and admiration. For more than twenty-five years, he published papers and books that had a profound impact on China's translation circle.

Zhu Chunshen, a prominent professor of translation, has taught at Fujian Normal University, the National University of Singapore, and finally at the City University of Hong Kong where he concentrated on interpretation, teaching translation, and researching stylistics. His efforts in Chinese-English translation as manifested in his numerous publications have been appreciated. His translated version of Congcong, for example, has stood the test of time by its delicate use of language, structure and spirit coherence throughout the work.

As communication between China and foreign countries steadily improves, translations of Chinese literary works have become more widely celebrated. Congcong has already been translated by three noted translators, Zhang Peiji, Zhu Chunshen and Zhang Mengjing. Works from the former authors will be analyzed in this dissertation due to their attention to translation craftsmanship. The stylistic equivalence theory will be employed to comparing these two English versions.

In stylistic equivalence, attention is directed, not so much to the source message, but rather the target response. A natural translation is mainly measured from three aspects of the communicative process; 'for a natural rendering must fit (1) the receptor language and culture as a whole, (2) the context of the particular language, and (3) the receptor language audience. A natural translation involves two principal areas of adaptation, namely, grammar and lexicon (Nida, 1986) . Naturalness of expression in the target language is essentially a problem of co-suitability on several levels including word class, grammatical categories, semantic classes, discourse types and cultural contexts. As to the context of a particular language, not only must a translation should faithfully adjust the message to the context, but it also must incorporate certain positive elements of style to provide the proper emotional tone for the discourse. Lastly, the readers' level of experience and capacity for decoding should be considered if an appropriate translation is to be written. Examples will be presented to explain this theoretical approach.

3.1. Stylistic Equivalence in the Target Language and Culture

Nida (Nida, 1964) stresses the impact of language and culture in the target language on translation involving two different languages. Language and culture deeply influence people's thought pattern and perception, as well as their expressions and orientation. Only by familiarizing ourselves with the target language and culture can we achieve equivalence, and produce a translation that will be acceptable to readers.

Excerpt 1

Source Text : 我不禁汗涔涔而泪漉漉了。

Target Text One (translated by Zhang Peiji) : At the thought of this, sweat oozes from my forehead and tears trickle down my cheeks.

Target Text Two (translated by Zhu Chunshen) : Already sweat is starting on my forehead, and tears welling up in my eyes.

The Chinese sentence uses a repetitive phrase which boosts its imbedded meaning. “汗涔涔而泪漉漉” means “sweat continuously and cry with ongoing tears”, reflects the author's deep

regret and resentment for having wasted so much time. Zhang perfectly relates the original meaning and implied feelings of the author by using a contrastive translation and clever use of verbs such as ‘oozes’ and ‘trickle down’. In this way, the original elements are maintained and made understandable to target language’s readers. Zhu Chunshen’s version achieved a faithful translation but failed to arouse the target readers’ true feelings while reading the prose because English readers can’t really understand the passage’s original sense of regret in this translation. Thus, language and culture factors must be considered carefully to produce stylistic equivalence for prose.

Excerpt 2

Source Text : 于是——

洗手的时候，日子从水盆里过去；吃饭的时候，日子从饭碗里过去；默默时，便从凝然的双眼前过去。

Target Text One (translated by Zhang Peiji) : Thus the day flows away through the sink when I wash my hands; vanishes in the rice bowl when I have my meal; passes away quietly before the fixed gaze of my eyes when I am lost in reverie.

Target Text Two (translated by Zhu Chunshen) : Thus — the day flows away through the sink when I wash my hands, wears off in the bowl when I eat my meal, passes away before my day-dreaming gaze as I reflect in silence.

These parallel source languages transmit the author’s complex feelings and Zhang uses “vanish” while Zhu employs “wear off” in their respective translations. But while the former translated text symbolizes fast disappearance, the latter translation means to disappear slowly. Zhu Ziqing’s translation concerns the dynamic and static flow of time as slipping away or suddenly vanishing. Zhang’s translation shows the readers two ways that time disappears—the acute way or the gradual way. However, Zhu failed to bridge the cultural and language gap between Chinese and English readers due to a lack of emotional conveyance in his translation, even though the language is smooth and beautiful. Hence, stylistic equivalence is established on the basis of familiarity with culture and language in the target language to produce the translation.

3.2. Comparison in the Target Language’s Audience

Given that Nida’s stylistic equivalence should have been realized, the target reader’s response must also be taken into consideration.

Excerpt 3

Source text :

过去的日子如轻烟，被微风吹散了，如薄雾，被初阳蒸融了；我留着些什么痕迹呢？我何曾留着像游丝样的痕迹呢？

Target Text One (translated by Zhang Peiji) : The bygone days, like wisps of smoke, have been dispersed by gentle winds, and, like thin mists, have been evaporated by the rising sun. What traces have I left behind? No, nothing, not even gossamer-like traces.

Target Text Two (translated by Zhu Chunshen) : Those bygone days have been dispersed as smoke by a light wind, or evaporated as mist by the morning sun. What traces have I left behind me? Have I ever left behind any gossamer traces at all?

The original reflective sentence takes the form of question with multiple meanings. As regards the details, Zhang performs his translation duties more precisely by adding words like ‘gentle’, ‘thin’ and ‘rising’, which echo the style of Zhu Ziqing’s simple, gentle prose. To translate the last sentence, Zhang stressed the tone by adding repetition like ‘no’, ‘nothing’ and ‘not even’ which explains the release of the original author’s remorse and repentance for wasting so much time while achieving nothing. Zhu did well on preserving linguistic equivalence, but his translation really emphasized less on the emotions and the detailed description of images. Stylistic equivalence can only be achieved when the translation arouses identical readers’ response.

In order to fully achieve stylistic equivalence, one must be aware of the target language's culture and audience. After the complete understanding of an original text, one has to produce a complete translation which is much more difficult than simply preserving linguistic equivalence.

In short, retaining linguistic and stylistic equivalence involves a number of factors from grammar, rhetoric and semantics, culture, and the audience's response. Many elements must be carefully examined in order to work out the best translation. This requires all translation workers commitment to always show their best talents.

By employing the theory in evaluating the two English versions of *Congcong*, its functions of guidance could be better examined so as to know how to adhere to translation principles and how to best utilize the guidance of translation theory to make high-quality translated works. It is by sticking to stylistic equivalence (mainly target language, culture and audience) that a translation could be named as a satisfactory one.

4. CONCLUSION

In this thesis, applying Nida's dynamic equivalence theory can help us determine whether or not the translated text has remained faithful to the original text. It is advisable, however, that while implementing this theory, in terms of target language and culture as a whole, the situational context and the target audience must be kept firmly in mind.

When applying this theory in translation, the spirit (style) of the original text and the target language readers' response are valued accordingly. In this way, a balance can be achieved on the basis of concrete requirements. Based on the above analysis of two English translation of *Congcong*, the conclusion could be made that Zhang's translation performs better than Zhu's translation due to better stylistic equivalence performance in its transmission of spirit and meaning in the original text.

The conclusion can be made that Nida's dynamic translation theory plays a critical role in measurement of translated works and guidance of translation study and practice. For translators, great efforts should be made to broaden our bilingual language ability and cultural knowledge to enhance our translation study, learning and practice. Only through additional training will we learn that stylistic equivalence can and must be strictly maintained.

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