

Study on the Application of the Functional Equivalence Theory in the English Translation of *Constitution Regimens of Inner Cannon of Huangdi*

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Abstract: Guided by Nida's theory of functional equivalence, the author conducted a practical translation of *Constitution Regimens of Inner Cannon of Huangdi*, applying the theory to analyze the translation process and the English text at the levels of lexicon, syntax, and discourse. This study explores the applicability of functional equivalence theory in the practice of translating ancient Chinese medical texts, offering insights and guidance for translators of such works.

Keywords: Functional Equivalence Theory; English Translation; Constitution Regimens of Inner Cannon of Huangdi; Traditional Chinese Medicine.

1. Introduction

As Traditional Chinese Medicine (TCM) gains prominence globally, the translation of classic TCM texts plays a vital role in its cultural dissemination. Inner Cannon of Huangdi, the earliest medical classic in China, lays the foundation for medical development, with "Constitutional Nurturing" being an integral part of the TCM treatment system. Recognized for its proactive role in preventative health, especially post-COVID-19, this concept has seen increased public engagement. Effective translation theories are crucial not only for understanding the intricate concepts of "Constitutional Nurturing" but also for promoting the broader spread and development of Chinese cultural heritage.

2. Literature Review

2.1. Current Status of the English Translation of the Inner Cannon of Huangdi

The Inner Cannon of Huangdi is the earliest extant medical text in China, comprehensively articulating the content and structure of the theoretical system of Chinese medicine. It reflects the academic thoughts and theoretical principles of Chinese medicine, representing a significant achievement in ancient Chinese medical science and an essential component of traditional Chinese culture. Therefore, this book is considered a fundamental text for studying Chinese medicine and is revered as the 'Ancestor of Medicine'.

The translation of The Inner Cannon of Huangdi is essential for promoting TCM globally. Given its ancient origin and classical Chinese format, which includes sophisticated rhetoric and culturally deep terms, translating its vocabulary, syntax, and discourse poses significant challenges. Presently, there are twelve published English versions of this book, with significant scholarly attention given to five influential translations: Ilza Veith's 1949 edition, revised multiple times until 2012; two complete translations by Maosheng Ni in 1995; the comprehensive version by TCM practitioners Wu Liansheng and Wu Qi in 1997; and the complete and partial translations by Li Zhaoguo in 2008 and Luo Xiwen in 2009, respectively.(YU, 2015).

Due to the archaic language, profound medical theories, and its antiquity, the original texts of The Inner Cannon of Huangdi present considerable reading challenges not only for Chinese readers with adequate knowledge and cultural background but even more so for non-native speakers lacking relevant knowledge. In light of this, the China Light Industry Press has compiled a series titled Constitution Regimens of Inner Cannon of Huangdi. This series aims to explore and organize the health preservation theories from a holistic health perspective. Currently, the English translation of this series remains unavailable.

2.2. The Necessity of Nida's Functional Equivalence Theory for the Translation Practice of Constitution Regimens of Inner Cannon of Huangdi

The theory of Functional Equivalence, proposed by the American linguist, translator, and translation theorist Eugene Nida, originates from a linguistic perspective grounded in the essence of translation. Nida's theory evolved from "formal equivalence" to "dynamic equivalence,"(NIDA, 1964)and in 1993, the term was changed to "functional equivalence." This shift marked a transition from a direct correspondence between the source and target languages in structure and content to viewing translation as a form of communication, emphasizing the outcome and content of translations. Nida's definition of the translation process underscores that translation must achieve equivalence not only at the lexical level between the source and target languages but also in terms of meaning and style. Translation should convey not just the superficial lexical information but also the deep cultural meanings embedded within.(NIDA, 1993).

Nida's Functional Equivalence Theory emphasizes the reader's response and is particularly applicable to texts dominated by informational functions(YANG, 2018). "The Yellow Emperor's Classic of Medicine: Principles of Health Preservation" serves as an informative text characterized by objectivity and logical structure, primarily tasked with conveying information and listing facts. To promote the global dissemination of Traditional Chinese Medicine education through its English translation, translators must

endeavor to replicate the semantic and stylistic features of the source language(XI, 2023). Consequently, Functional Equivalence Theory is highly suitable for guiding the translation of this text.

3. Functional Equivalence Theory in the Practice of English Translation of Constitution Regimens of Inner Canon of Huangdi

3.1. Functional Equivalence at Lexical Level

Eugene Nida once said, "Translation refers to the reproduction of the information of the source language with the closest and most natural equivalent from semantic to stylistic. Many grammatical and lexical adjustments must be made to reproduce the information of the source text" (TAN, 1983).

To achieve lexical equivalence between English and Chinese, various factors including linguistic, social, and cultural elements must be considered(LIAN, 2011). In the source text, meanings can be categorized into TCM terminology, idioms, culturally loaded words, and proper nouns. Accurately translating the embedded TCM knowledge and cultural connotations poses significant challenges. Therefore, the author skillfully employed methods such as annotations, text conversions to achieve lexical equivalence.

3.1.1. Annotation

Annotation is needed when a word in one language may not have a corresponding word in another language(LI, 2010). So it is a common method that is indispensable in translation (YUAN, 2004), and also an important method used to bridge the meaning of words. When a term in the source language has no direct counterpart in the target language, annotation can provide the necessary background information and explanation. For example, in the translation of Chinese medicine texts, terms such as Qi and Five Organs carry deep cultural and philosophical meanings that are not easily conveyed through direct translation. By annotating these terms, translators can provide readers with insight into their meaning in the context of Chinese medicine.

Example 1

ST:特别是五脏应五味, 偏嗜某味就会导致相应的脏腑功能受到影响, 致使 机体阴阳失衡, 继而导致体质出现偏颇。

TT: Especially since the five zang-organs(the liver, the heart, the spleen, the lung and the kidney) correspond to the five flavors(sour, bitter, sweet, pungent and salty), an excessive preference for any flavor can affect the corresponding organ's function, causing an imbalance in the body's Yin and Yang, and consequently leading to an imbalanced constitution.

In the Constitution Regimens of Inner Canon of Huangdi, the human body is viewed as an organic whole. This complex organism is composed of five specific elements, each representing a distinct type of Qi and corresponding to the five zang-organs in the body, which are also associated with five distinct flavors. Any minor change in one part can affect the entire system. Therefore, the original text states that preferences for certain flavors can alter the functions of the corresponding zang-organs. However, for foreign readers unfamiliar with the concepts of the five zang-organs and five flavors, it is challenging to understand their interrelations, especially the terms representing the five elements. In this

context, the translator first renders "五脏" and "五味" as "five zang-organs" and "five flavors." Subsequently, annotations are provided to elaborate on these terms, detailing the specific organs and flavors they refer to, thereby enabling foreign readers to comprehend the specific correspondences between the zang-organs and flavors.

3.1.2. Conversion of Part of Speech

Differences between Chinese and English are also reflected in the use of lexis that affects sentence structure, which should be respected when translating to resonate with the target readers. English is relatively static and used to use nouns, adjectives and prepositions. In addition to verbs, abstract nouns and prepositions are often used to express the meaning of action in English. In contrast, Chinese is more dynamic(LIAN, 2006), in which verbs, adverbs, verb phrases, repetition and superposition of verbs are used frequently, and verbs can be used as a variety of sentence components. In translation practice, flexible methods such as changing verbs into nouns and nouns into prepositions can often make the translation more in line with the expression habits of the target language.

Example 2

ST:《黄帝内经》在理论上建立了中医学的阴阳五行学说、藏象学说、经络学说、病因学说、脉象学说以及病症、诊法、论治、养生学、运气学等学说。

TT: The Inner Canon of Huangdi lays the theoretical foundation of TCM with its doctrines on the interplay of Yin-Yang and the Five Elements, the theory of viscera, meridians, etiology, pulse readings, and various other aspects including diagnosis, treatment, and health maintenance.

In the example sentences provided, the original Chinese text uses the verb "建立" to express the role of the Constitution Regimens of Inner Canon of Huangdi in the formation and establishment of the theoretical system of TCM. In the English translation, "建立" is converted into the noun phrase "lays the theoretical foundation of TCM" instead of a single verb "erect" or "establish". In the translation process, the translator needs to ensure that the message is accurately conveyed. Converting "lays the theoretical foundation of TCM" into a noun phrase helps to convey more comprehensively the contribution of this book to the theoretical system of TCM rather than just the action of laying the theoretical foundation itself.

3.2. Functional Equivalence at Syntactic Level

English and Chinese are two totally different language systems with many differences in sentence (such as length, pattern and order of sentence)(LIAN, 2011). Based on the theory of functional equivalence, translation should avoid literal translation. Instead, it should be conducted according to the usage and linguistic expressions of the target language. It is also crucial to divide and select appropriate sentence structures to ensure syntactic equivalence in the translation. Consequently, the translator transcends the syntactic limitations of the source language and modifies the sentence structure according to the characteristics of English syntax. Techniques such as voice transformation, reordering of sentence elements, and addition are employed to achieve functional equivalence at the syntactic level.

3.2.1. Translation of Voice

Nida stated, "To communicate effectively, one must respect the characteristics of the receptor language"(NIDA 等, 2003). One notable feature that distinguishes English from Chinese

is the extensive use of the passive voice. It is more used in English, especially in objective and neutral statements, which pays attention to the statement of facts and avoids subjective assumptions(QIU, 2008). However, in Chinese, passive sentences are used primarily to highlight passive actions or the conductor of this action. Therefore, if the translator does not take into account this difference between English and Chinese during the translation process instead pursuing simply formal equivalence and directly translating all the passive statements in English into passive sentences in Chinese, the translation will be stiff and unnatural, which greatly reduces the syntactic effect(XUE, 2024). Consequently, in the process of C-E translation, to achieve functional equivalence at the syntactic level, it is essential to align the translation with the reading habits of the target audience by converting passive constructions into active voice.

Example 3

ST: 疾病制约体质的形成, 体质又影响疾病的发生发展。

TT: The formation of constitution is constrained by diseases, and the constitution influences the onset and progression of disease.

The theory of functional equivalence emphasizes rendering the translation in a completely natural manner and prioritizes the target reader's response. In this instance, the original Chinese text uses the active voice, while the English translation employs the passive construction "is constrained." In English, the passive voice emphasizes objective facts and eliminates the author's subjectivity.

3.2.2. Conversion of Sentence Order

At the syntactic level, sentence order refers to the sequence of sentence components, which reflects the thinking patterns of language speakers. Due to the differences in cognitive styles between Chinese and English, different language orders for same objective facts are produced(ZHANG, 2002). Additionally, the divergence in sentence order arises from differences in logical relationships and linguistic habits between the two languages. Because of these differences in writing style and grammatical structure, it is necessary to flexibly adjust sentence structures during translation to achieve equivalence in meaning. This alteration of the source text's sentence structure ensures that the translation is smooth and coherent, better aligning with English expression habits.

Example 4

ST: 体质就是指人体由于先天的遗传以及受后天饮食、生活习惯、自然、社会、家庭环境等多种因素的影响, 在其生长发育和衰老的过程中, 所形成的外表形态上和心理、生理功能上相对稳定的特征。

TT: Constitution refers to the relatively stable characteristics of the human body in terms of physical appearance and psychological and physiological functions which are formed during the process of growth development and aging due to innate genetics and the influence of various factors such as diet living habits nature society family environment and so on.

In Chinese, the cause is first described as "由于先天的遗传以及受后天饮食、生活习惯、自然、社会、家庭环境等多种因素的影响", and then the result; whereas in English, the result is described first, and then the cause. Therefore, in Chinese to English translation, in order to bridge the differences in the target readers' understanding habits, it is necessary to change the order of the words, to describe the

result first, "the relatively stable characteristics of the human body", and then describe the reasons "due to", so as to achieve functional equivalence at the syntactic level.

3.3. Functional Equivalence at Textual Level

A discourse refers to any natural language that is not constrained by sentence grammar and expresses complete meaning within a specific context, exhibiting cohesion and coherence. The components of discourse are coherent in both form and semantics. By processing the coherence of the discourse, dispersed parts can become a meaningful and thoughtful whole. Therefore, in discourse translation, coherence is crucial for achieving functional equivalence. However, coherence must be achieved through various cohesive devices and logical means, as it is essential for ensuring the smooth flow and semantic consistency of the discourse. Hence, translators should pay particular attention to the coherence and consistency between the source text and the target text. In this section, the translator will examine the cohesion and coherence between sentences and paragraphs from a textual perspective, guided by the theory of functional equivalence.

3.3.1. Cohesion and Coherence Between Sentences

In translation practice, Chinese sentences are typically concise and straightforward, with sentence relationships often being parallel. Therefore, Chinese logic is usually reflected through sequential transition and adjustment of word order. In contrast, English mainly utilizes grammatical and lexical means to achieve coherence and cohesion between sentences, as evidenced by using conjunctions, pronouns, lexical repetition and collocation, and the omission of certain elements. When translating medical popular science texts from Chinese to English, due to the differing textual characteristics of the two languages, the translator should understand sentence and paragraph relationships to grasp the overall text and achieve functional equivalence at the textual level.

Example 5

ST: 《黄帝内经》是中医理论体质学说的鼻祖, 其论述内容涵盖了人体的性别、年龄、禀赋、体态、外貌、性格、心理、地域、对环境的适应能力、社会地位、生活条件及临床治疗等各个方面, 为个体治疗和养生提供了指导纲领。

TT: The Inner Canon of Huangdi is acknowledged as the progenitor of the constitution-based theory in TCM, which extensively discusses various aspects of the human condition including gender, age, innate endowment, physique, appearance, personality, psychology, geographical factors, adaptability to the environment, social status, living conditions, and clinical treatment, thereby providing a comprehensive guideline for individualized treatment and health preservation.

The first part of this passage elucidates the rationale behind the establishment of the theory of constitution in TCM as delineated in the Inner Canon of Huangdi. The latter part presents the conclusion, explicating the practical application of the established theory. There exists a logical relationship from "cause" to "result" in this passage; however, this relationship is not explicitly conveyed through conjunctions in the source text. Therefore, the translation should incorporate implicit logical connectors to achieve clarity. The clearer frame of the sentence makes the translation more harmonious in structure and more coherent in logic.

3.3.2. Information Restructuring

Based on the theory of functional equivalence, if the translation cannot accurately convey the meaning of the source text solely through structural adjustments, the method of information restructuring can be employed. Information restructuring involves reorganizing the source text information according to the expression habits of the target language, built on an accurate understanding of the source text information. This method addresses cultural differences and achieves functional equivalence between the source language and the target language.

Example 6

ST: 七情为“喜、怒、忧、思、悲、恐、惊”，中医有“过喜伤心、过悲伤肺、过怒伤肝、忧思伤脾、惊恐伤肾”的说法。

TT: The "Seven Emotions" in TCM are joy, anger, anxiety, pensiveness, sorrow, fear, and shock. According to TCM, excessive expressions of these emotions will damage the corresponding organs: excessive joy will damage heart, grief hurt lungs, anger hurt liver, pensiveness hurt spleen, and fear or shock hurt kidneys.

In the source text, the first half is about "emotions," and the second half is about the impact of "emotions" on "organs." However, there are no conjunctions or annotations to connect the logical relationship between the two parts. For foreign readers who lack common knowledge of Chinese culture, it would be challenging to understand the logical connection without explanation. Therefore, the translator summarized the logical relationship between "emotions" and "organs" and restructured this part of the information to make the sentence logically clear and semantically accurate, thus achieving functional equivalence.

4. Conclusion

The Constitution Regimens of Inner Cannon of Huangdi is a popular science work that deeply explores the concept of health preservation based on Inner Cannon of Huangdi. It addresses the application of constitution-based health practices, introducing complex medical terms and constructions that pose challenges for English translation. The application of Eugene Nida's Functional Equivalence Theory at lexical, syntactic, and textual levels in translation practices demonstrates its crucial role in translating Chinese medical texts into English. This theory helps translate original texts into forms easily understandable to readers, maintaining fidelity to the original while accurately conveying its

information and reflecting its cultural essence. This paper analyzes the applicability of Nida's theory in the English translation of The Constitution Regimens of Inner Cannon of Huangdi, aiming to enhance the proficiency of translators and the quality of translations."

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