

# Analysis on Translation Strategies of *The Little Prince* under the Guidance of Nida's Functional Equivalence Theory

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**Abstract:** Eugene Nida's Functional Equivalence Theory holds guiding significance for the translation of literary works in different languages. The paper initially introduces the fundamental principles of Eugene Nida's Functional Equivalence Theory in lexical, syntactic, textual, and stylistic dimensions, then analyzes its practical rationale in application. Taking *The Little Prince* as the case, the author analyzes the application of functional equivalence theory in translation through specific lexical, syntactic, and textual strategies in order to gain deeper insight into the practical application of Functional Equivalence Theory in literary translation.

**Keywords:** Functional Equivalence Theory, *The Little Prince*, Translation.

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## 1. Introduction

In the era of globalization, cultural exchanges have become more frequent, and the advent of modern communication technologies has made interactions across the globe simpler, more convenient, and faster. Functional equivalence theory is crucial in cultural exchanges, as it can guide human's cultural interactions, break down barriers between different languages, and ensure the equivalence of information. That allows audiences to better appreciate the nuances and cultural depth of the works, achieving emotional resonance. Eugene Nida's theory is a commonly used translation theory. This theory encompasses four aspects: lexical equivalence, syntactic equivalence, textual equivalence, and stylistic equivalence, providing valuable guidance for translation work. *The Little Prince* is a classic children's literature work that has garnered affection from many audiences[1]. We can use Eugene Nida's theory of functional equivalence to understand the translation strategies used in *The Little Prince*.

## 2. Basic Content of Functional Equivalence Theory

Functional equivalence theory is formulated by Eugene Nida, who emphasizes that translation should not only achieve equivalence in word meaning but also correspond in semantics, style, and register. By utilizing this theory, one can effectively express the intended meaning of the text, reflect the spirit and style of the original work, and create a reading experience that is similar to that of the original text, even aligning on a deeper cultural level.

### 2.1. Equivalence at the Lexical Level

In the process of text translation, the foundation of language is vocabulary. Words come together to form sentences that can clearly and precisely convey specific meanings. Due to this foundation, it is crucial to pay attention to the issue of lexical equivalence during translation between different languages. Vocabulary is formed within specific linguistic contexts and also encompasses social psychology and life experiences. Therefore, even if words appear to

correspond on the surface in different linguistic contexts, their connotations and denotations can differ significantly. The cultural variations can lead to substantial differences in the meanings contained within vocabulary. Consequently, it is essential to understand and grasp these differences during the translation process to accurately convey the intended meanings. With lexical equivalence established, the accurate expression of the text has a solid foundation to build upon.

### 2.2. Equivalence at the Syntactic Level

A sentence is a complete unit of meaning with a specific grammatical structure. Moreover, the grammatical structures of sentences vary across different languages. For example, Chinese typically follows a structure of "subject-verb-object", while English often uses "subject-linking verb-complement". Although there are grammatical distinctions between these languages, translation can create a fascinating correspondence between them.

This difference necessitates adjustments to sentence structures during the translation process based on grammatical considerations. Translators should take the purpose of the translation into account when addressing sentences with different grammatical structures, ensuring that the syntactic structures in the target language align with conventional language usage for smooth reading. This not only enhances the comprehensibility of the language but also promotes readability.

There is no doubt that to ensure syntactic equivalence in translation, it is crucial to restore the original text as closely as possible without arbitrarily altering its content, and to do so with sound reasoning and justification.

### 2.3. Equivalence at the Textual Level

Discourse encompasses not only vocabulary and sentence structures but also forms the contextual environment and situational aspects of language. Therefore, literary discourse should be viewed as a cohesive whole rather than merely a combination of sentences and words. In discourse, different sentences are organized according to a specific structure, exhibiting a certain degree of logic and thematic coherence.

In translation process, it is essential for different cultural

texts to achieve an equivalent effect in relation to the original. The coherence, logic, and thematic elements within the discourse can be effectively reflected. This way, the content of discourse across different cultures can achieve equivalence, allowing for the meaningful and accurate transmission of ideas and information.

#### **2.4. Equivalence at the Stylistic Level**

Style refers to the distinctive characteristics formed during the writing process based on practical needs. In the translation process, different stylistic approaches emphasize various core elements. Therefore, translators need to help the audience accept these stylistic differences and minimize the disparities between styles in different languages as much as possible. Styles are diverse. For example, literary works, scientific literature, and administrative documents have their unique characteristics, while differing in grammar, syntax, and rhetoric. During the translation process, these stylistic features should be effectively corresponded. Only in this way can the stylistic qualities of the original text be preserved, achieving stylistic equivalence.

### **3. The Practical Basis of the Translation Model in Functional Equivalence Theory**

The emergence of functional equivalence theory provides operational guidance for translation activities between different cultures. There are many practical foundations for the application of Functional Equivalence Theory in translation activities, as real-world needs make its use a natural fit. From the perspective of translation between different cultures, language and culture originate from real life and serve it. Thus, language has commonalities in expressing life needs, while being influenced by people's experiences. Coupled with the demands of social development and the specific requirements of translation, functional equivalence theory can play a positive role in this context, better facilitating communication between cultures.

#### **3.1. Commonality of Language**

The emergence of written language has undergone a lengthy historical phase, and the development of human language has been a gradual process of improvement and refinement.

Language begins with physiological sounds and gradually develops into written forms, which are used in everyday life. To express similar concepts, there emerges a commonality in written expression. For instance, the word "mother" has a similar pronunciation across different languages and cultures, showcasing the phonetic commonality among them. While many words may differ in content, they often convey similar meanings, as seen with terms like "love" "miss" and "hate". Which despite their varied expressions, convey consistent emotions. During the translation process, it is possible to find corresponding vocabulary across different cultures.

Beyond vocabulary, there are also many similarities in sentence and text structures. For example, the belief in perseverance is expressed in literature, such as in the novel *The Old Man and the Sea*, which emphasizes "heroism". Similar themes of heroism can be found in novels across various languages and cultures. It can be said that there are analogous themes among different cultures. Therefore, during the translation process, it is essential to find corresponding

content to convey similar emotions. It is precisely because of this linguistic commonality that the theory of functional equivalence has a foundation and possibility for existence.

#### **3.2. Acceptability of Audience**

"There are a thousand Hamlets for a thousand readers", which highlights that different audiences can have varying responses when reading, even recreating the text in their own ways. The goal of translation is to enable the audience to experience the content and meaning of the text as they would with the original. During the translation process, it is crucial to pay attention to the audience's reactions, ensuring that the translated text aligns well with the original, allowing even audiences from different cultural backgrounds to gain similar experiences and feelings. From this perspective, functional equivalence arises from the reading needs of the audience. The translated content should meet the audience's needs and achieve a fusion of perspectives and emotional resonance with them. The emergence of functional equivalence theory can guide translation activities, helping translators align the translated content more closely with the audience's requirements.

#### **3.3. The Need for Cultural Exchange**

From the perspective of global development, the demand for economic exchange will inevitably drive the exchange of culture and daily life. However, different linguistic and cultural barriers are significant obstacles to globalization. Breaking down these linguistic and cultural confines to facilitate the exchange of ideas and cultures is a necessary condition for promoting global development. Functional equivalence theory emphasizes the concept of "equivalence", which places greater importance on the accurate transmission of information. The cultural connotations behind the text can correspond across different linguistic cultures, allowing a broader audience to understand the works and the cultural themes, thereby to achieve cultural exchange and integration while conveying cultural meanings and spirit. Therefore, from this perspective, it is clear that there is a necessity for the development of functional equivalence theory within the context of cultural exchange.

#### **3.4. Requirements for Translation Content**

In linguistic and cultural translation, numerous theories have emerged, each of them plays a significant role in the field. Functional equivalence theory is one of the most widely applied and effective theoretical principles. Today, translation activities are required in various domains, including business, law, and literature. The functional equivalence theory can enhance the accuracy of translations and provide a clearer expression in the original text functions and key information. This, in turn, better meets practical needs and demonstrate that functional equivalence theory holds real significance and value in translation activities. Consequently, it is extensively utilized in translation to satisfy cultural application demands.

### **4. Strategies Application of Functional Equivalence Theory: A Case Analysis on *The Little Prince***

The application of functional equivalence theory is evident in many literary works. The translator has chosen the children's literature classic *The Little Prince* (translated by Fang Zhenyu) as the subject of analysis to examine the translation

strategies and techniques in four aspects: vocabulary, sentence meaning, text structure and style.

## 4.1. Translation at the Lexical Level

*The Little Prince* is a work by the French pilot, Antoine de Saint-Exupéry. The story chronicles the experiences of the Little Prince, who travels from his own planet to earth. Through the eyes of this child, the author reflects on the adult world, highlighting the loneliness and isolation of adulthood while also celebrating truth, goodness, and beauty[2]. The whole story is imbued with a strong sense of childhood innocence, while it also conveys profound philosophical insights and filled with reflections on human nature. The novel is rich in content, which naturally includes many unique vocabulary items. During the translation process, the translator strives to apply functional equivalence theory as much as possible.

### 4.1.1. Direct Correspondence: Matching Perfect

In the process of translating vocabulary, it is essential to find corresponding words in different language cultures for effective translation. Many words possess specific characteristics, and corresponding terms can often be found in the target language. When translating, a direct correspondence can achieve a perfect match.

For example, in the second paragraph of Chapter Two in *The Little Prince*, there is a sentence that reads: "The first night, then, I went to sleep on the sand thousand miles from my human habituation." In this sentence, words such as "night," "sand," "sleep," and "thousand" have direct equivalents in the target language, which can be translated literally as "夜晚" "沙漠" "睡觉" and "千里". These correspondences allow for a relatively successful translation pairing, resulting in a "prototype" in the translated content. The direct translation of this type of vocabulary can meet the basic needs of translation and effectively convey the overall meaning.

### 4.1.2. Grasping Lexical Meaning: Highlighting Context

In different language cultures, the meanings of words are rich and varied, with differences in part of speech, emotional connotation, and more. During the translation process, it is important to translate according to the context, highlighting the emotional tone within the content.

For example, in the last paragraph from Chapter 1, the text states: "And the grown-ups would be greatly pleased to have met such a sensible man." In Fang Zhenyu's translation, this is rendered as "于是，大人都很高兴认识了我这样通情达理的人。" Here, the word "sensible" literally means "wise" or "astute," but this sentence is presented from a child's perspective, showcasing the "adult-like" characteristics of grown-ups, which differ from the child's focus. The translation as "通情达理" carries a tone of irony, which would be lost if translated simply as "明智."

## 4.2. Translation at the Syntactic Level

There are many unique aspects in the content of *The Little Prince*, particularly in its imaginative and associative elements. Many sentences have distinctive word orders, and the numerous long sentences are included. When these sentences are translated, it is important to pay attention to both the word order and the combination or division of sentences, all while adhering to the principle of "functional

equivalence".

### 4.2.1. Word Order Adjustment to Ensure Logical Consistency

The original text of the book was written in French and later translated into English for wider dissemination, and subsequently translated into Chinese. There are differences in sentence structure between French and English, as well as between English and Chinese. Therefore, it is essential to pay attention to syntactic equivalence to ensure that the translated content is logically coherent in translation. For example, in the second paragraph of Chapter VI, there is the sentence: "I am very fond of sunsets. Come, let us go look at a sunset now." The concept of "sunset" recurs throughout this work. This sentence is translated as "我喜欢看日落。走，我们现在去看日落吧..." In the translation process, the translator adjusted the sentence structure and omitted the translation of the be verb. By doing so, "fond" is translated as "喜爱", which becomes the core of the sentence, making the translation more aligned with the linguistic logic of Chinese readers.

Additionally, some sentences exhibit structural differences from Chinese. By adhering to the requirements of functional equivalence, these can be adjusted to align with the reading habits of the audience. For instance, "Where are the men? he demanded of the butterfly." can be translated as "他问蝴蝶：人都到哪儿去了?" The translation aligns better with the habits of Chinese readers and avoids any awkwardness in meaning.

### 4.2.2. Flexible Division and Combination in Close Meaning Connection

In this book, there are many long sentences that are divided into shorter phrases by commas. During the translation process, many of these short phrases may become even shorter due to the particularities of the Chinese language. Therefore, either splitting long sentences into several shorter ones or combining sentence elements into a longer sentence can satisfy the principle of functional equivalence. For example, in the first paragraph of Chapter 14, there is the long sentence: "The little prince was not able to reach any explanation of the use of a street lamp and a lamplighter, somewhere in the heavens, on a planet which had no people, and not one house." This sentence can be split into two shorter sentences: "小王子无法解释这里要街灯和点灯人" and "宇宙中一个没有人，也没有房子的地方。" These two clauses are closely related in meaning. When combined into a complete long sentence, it becomes clearer: "小王子也弄不明白，在浩瀚的太空中，在某个既没有房屋也没有居民的星球上，要一盏街灯和一个点灯的人有什么用。"[3] This complete sentence expresses the meaning fully, smooth to read, and aligns with the language habits of Chinese readers. That achieves syntactic equivalence in sentences translation.

## 4.3. Translation at the Textual Level

*The Little Prince* is a work of children's literature. The language throughout the story is engaging, concise, and easy to understand, making it accessible for children. It is essential to maintain this stylistic characteristic and convey the unique cultural connotations of the language in translation.

### 4.3.1. Theme Grasp and Emphasize Stylistic Features

A unique narrative perspective can be seen in this book.

Through the eyes of a child, it reveals the “utilitarian” and “lonely” in the adult world. In the translation process, it is essential to preserve these stylistic features. For example, in Chapter 15, the text states: “The sixth Planet was ten times larger than the last one. It was inhabited by an old gentleman who wrote voluminous books.”[4] This sentence reflects a child's perspective on the author. The translation reads: “第六星球比第五星球大十倍，上面住着一个老先生，他在写大部头的书。” In this translation, adjustments were made to maintain the playful tone. The word “voluminous” is translated as “大部头”，which literally means “large volumes” or “thick books”. This choice aligns better with a child’s perspective, evoking a sense of humor and playfulness. It allows readers to feel the innocent atmosphere of the original work, enhancing their engagement with the story.

#### 4.3.2. Culture Preservation and Emphasize Explanation

The author who wrote the book is French, so he has regional characteristics in his mindset and consciousness. This is reflected in the work, with recurring symbols such as “roses” and “sunsets”, which hold unique significance in French culture. For instance, the rose symbolizes various aspects such as “power, religion, light and freedom, trust and hope, as well as friendship and passion”, embodying history, culture, and values in France .

## 5. Conclusion

In summary, from these perspectives, the principle of

functional equivalence plays a guiding role in the translation of content across different languages and cultures. Taking “The Little Prince”, a piece of children’s literature, as an example, we can see that the translator adhered to principles at lexical equivalence, syntactic equivalence, textual equivalence, and stylistic equivalence during the translation process. This adherence allowed for an accurate rendering of the original text in Chinese and result in a work that has been well-received by its audience.

Therefore, in translation process among diverse languages and cultures, it is essential to practically apply functional equivalence theory and leverage its guiding principles to produce excellent translations.

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