

# Prose Translation Strategy Study from Chinese to English from the Perspective of Functional Equivalence

Yanli Hu

China University of Petroleum, Qingdao, China

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**Abstract:** Prose works boast rich cultural connotation, loose structure, free form of expression. There are great cultural differences between Chinese culture and West culture; English pays attention to hypotaxis and strictly obeys the grammatical expression norms. Achieving complete equivalence between the original text and the translated text when translating Chinese prose works into English is difficult. Nida's functional equivalence theory emphasizes that grammatical accuracy and literal corresponding should not be attached great importance in translation but that the reaction of the readers to the translation should be essentially like that of the original readers, which effectively reduces the conversion between the source language and target language of objective standard and furthest achieves functional equivalence between the original text and translated text and effectively solves the problems in the process of prose translation. Under the guidance of functional equivalence theory, four strategies for prose translation from the lexical, syntactic, discourse and stylistic levels are proposed in this paper, which are lexical transformation, sentence structure changing, constituent addition, holistic consideration.

**Keywords:** Functional equivalence, Prose translation, Translation strategies.

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## 1. Introduction

Prose is an important literary genre which boasts a long history and plays a vital role in the development of Chinese culture. Under the background of the globalization of Chinese culture, it is particularly significance to improve the study quality on the English translation of Chinese prose works.

The new translation work, especially the excellent translation work, can greatly promote the development of prose translation research. Therefore, as a high-quality prose translation work, the publication of this book has prompted scholars to discuss and study prose translation from different perspectives. However, at present, there are still many flaws in the study of prose translation in China, and there is even no monograph in this field. In addition, scholars study prose translation mostly from the perspectives of aesthetic effect, skopos theory and stylistic features, while few of them discuss the translation of prose works from the perspective of functional equivalence. Nida believes that the quality of a translated text depends on the understanding and appreciation of the translated text by the target language readers, and the theory of functional equivalence can also enable the translated text to accurately present the cultural connotation of the source language in the target language. This thesis attempts to find out the prose translation strategies under the perspective of functional equivalence theory.

## 2. Literature Review

### 2.1. Study Status of Prose Translation

The English translation of prose in China started not too late. As early as 1956, the Foreign Languages Press published *The Complete Works of Lu Xun* co-translated by Yang Xianyi and Dai Naiji. Later, other translators also published some English translations of prose, but the number of these works is not too much. Therefore, the study of English translation prose works by scholars is rare, too. Since 2000, there has been a remarked improvement in the study of modern prose translation. The research on Zhang Peiji's translation accounts

for about half of the total number of theses, indicating that his prose translation works have received great attention and recognition. Scholars have also studied Zhang Peiji's English translation prose from many aspects, among which the majority of the theses have studied the prose from the perspectives of aesthetic effect, stylistic features, skopos theory and translator subjectivity [2]. After 2010, some scholars began to introduce the latest translation theories into the study of prose translation which enriched the perspective of prose translation study. However, the disadvantages are also obvious: the guiding theories of prose translation studies are rigid, and most studies are analyzed by skopos theory or from aesthetic perspective, lacking a more flexible theory as a guide.

### 2.2. Study Status of Functional Equivalence Theory

In the early 1980s, with the development of China's opening-up policy, Nida's functional equivalence theory was introduced into China by some scholars, which gave Chinese translators the opportunity to get in touch with more systematic western translation theories. Tan Zaixi is one of the most important figures in the study of Nida's theory in China. Tan believes that functional equivalence is of great significance to the development of translation studies, although there still exist certain limitations. Ma Huijuan, another famous Chinese scholar, systematically introduces the functional equivalence theory in her book *A Study on Nida's Translation Theory*, which has great reference significance for relevant studies and provides a new perspective for understanding Nida's functional equivalence theory.

Since its introduction, more and more attention has been paid in this theory by academic circles, but according to the survey, the number of theses on this theory has been declining in recent years. In addition, the study content of these theses based on this theory focuses on the theory itself, and the study on the application and translation practice of the theory focuses on subtitle translation, advertising translation,

business English translation and translation of public signs, while the study of functional equivalence theory in literary translation relatively is rare.

### **3. Prose Translation Strategies from the Perspective of Functional Equivalence Theory**

#### **3.1. Core Content of Functional Equivalence Theory**

The theory of functional equivalence was put forward by Eugene A. Nida, a famous American linguist. He believes that functional equivalence of translated content should be achieved in translation, which means, translation should not pursue too much grammatical accuracy and text correspondence, but should achieve functional equivalence between two languages. Functional equivalence attaches importance to the response of target language readers. Nida emphasizes that the response of target language readers to the target text should be essentially like that of the original text readers [1]. Nida's theory of functional equivalence effectively reduces the objective criteria for the conversion between the source language and the target language, and can achieve functional equivalence to the most extent. In translation activities, appropriate, natural and equivalent ways are the main ways to reflect the information and connotation of the source language. In the specific process of translation, equivalence should be achieved from lexical, syntactic, textual and stylistic levels.

#### **3.2. Guiding Significance of Functional Equivalence Theory in Prose Translation**

##### **3.2.1. Lexical Level**

Due to the differences in social background between English and Chinese, there are some phenomena such as lack of meaning and inconformity in the process of translation, thus translators need to find the words which best match the meaning expressed in the original text to achieve equivalence of the lexical meaning.

Based on the above discussion, in the process of prose translation, the theory can be used to find appropriate English words to realize the function of words in prose works, so as to convey the original meaning and connotation of words in the original text to the greatest extent.

##### **3.2.2. Syntactic Level**

In terms of syntax, English emphasizes hypotaxis and long sentences are used more, while Chinese emphasizes parataxis with more short sentences. Under the guidance of Nida's functional equivalence theory, in order to achieve functional equivalence in syntax, translators should try their best to retain the original syntactic structure and reproduce the meaning of the original text. However, sentence structures are different in different languages. Sometimes, if the original structure is retained, ambiguity will emerge. The translator should make appropriate adjustments to make the target language more in line with the reading habits of the target language readers, so that the target language readers can get the same information and reading experience as the original language readers.

Prose translation under the guidance of functional equivalence theory can solve the problem of syntactic and sentence structure equivalence in the process of prose translation from Chinese to English, so that the translated

prose conforms to the syntactic habits of the target language without losing the meaning and function of the original text as much as possible.

##### **3.2.3. Discourse Level**

Contextual context, situational context and cultural context are three aspects of discourse equivalence that need to be considered. The analysis of contextual context is to determine the meaning of words or semantic units in the original text, so as to determine the semantic translation. For situational context, it means that the exact meaning of some linguistic phenomena cannot be made clear through the context, and the meaning can only be determined by referring to the events, participants and communication mode. Cultural misunderstandings and even cultural conflicts are also big problems in translation. Therefore, translators must have a deep understanding of the source culture.

Prose translation under the guidance of functional equivalence theory can fully consider the problem of cohesion between texts, and make the English translation work be as logical and rigorous as possible.

##### **3.2.4. Stylistic Level**

The overall style of prose is not only reflected in the linguistic factors such as lexis, syntax and discourse, but also reflected in the author's subjectivity, the overall tone of the article, writing background and so on. Therefore, word-for-word translation cannot achieve the stylistic equivalence of prose completely. Nida's functional equivalence theory emphasizes that translation is more than just correspondence of words and grammar, and the reading experience of target language readers is the criterion for judging the quality of a prose translation. The reading experience of the original readers should be essentially like that of the target language readers. Prose translation based on functional equivalence can be effectively carried out by achieving equivalence of these non-textual factors. Therefore, the stylistic equivalence of the translation should be realized.

### **4. Prose Translation Strategies from the Perspective of Functional Equivalence**

Based on the above analysis, the following four prose translation strategies from the perspective of functional equivalence can be drawn. This chapter will show the application of each method in prose translation through case analysis.

#### **4.1. Lexical Transformation from the Perspective of Lexical Equivalence**

English attaches great importance to hypotaxis and its syntactic structure is rigorous, with its meaning very precise. Chinese, on the other hand, focuses on parataxis and has a loose syntactic structure, so the task of expressing the meaning of words is heavier. The vocabulary in prose works is characterized by rich cultural connotation and more advanced vocabulary, so it is difficult to translate into English. Due to the different cultural knowledge background and language structure of the two languages, the parts of speech of many English words and Chinese words are not completely equivalent, or even completely unequal.

Lexical transformation means that when translators could not find the equivalent lexis in English, they can use English slangs or idioms, change the parts of speech, replace the

analogy object, change the form of the word to solve the problem, thus eliminating the differences in culture and understanding, improving readers' reading experience and making sure that the target language readers' response of translation is essentially like that of the source language readers.

#### **4.2. Sentence Structure Changing from the Perspective of Syntactical Equivalence**

From the syntactic point of view, English is highly formalized, which abides by the strict grammatical structure, and takes verbs as the core constituent. Chinese, on the other hand, does not attach greatest importance in form, and its syntactic structure is incomplete. Chinese lays stress on parataxis, and verbs are not the most important element in Chinese. Under the guidance of Nida's functional equivalence theory, the translation of prose should retain the original syntax structure as much as possible, and it should reproduce the meaning and formal beauty of the original text. However, the sentence structure is different between different languages. If the original structure is retained, ambiguity will come into being, and the charm intended to be conveyed in the original sentence cannot be effectively expressed.

Sentence structure change refers that the equivalence in sentence structure of the article can be realized by changing the sentence structure of the original text which is loose or more in line with the Chinese expressive habits into the sentence structure which is more in line with the idiomatic English expression. By doing this, readers of the target language could learn the unique cultural connotation and charm of Chinese prose, thus achieving the syntactic functional equivalence.

#### **4.3. Constituent Addition from the Perspective of Discourse Level**

From the perspective of discourse, the meaning can be accurately expressed only by coherence and cohesion. The cohesive devices of English and Chinese discourses are different. Sometimes translator can not find the corresponding cohesive device. In the process of translation, translator needs to consider contextual context, situational context and cultural context to analyze the internal logical relationships between discourses. Only in this way can the translation be adapted to the reading habits of the target language readers, thus achieving textual equivalence. Since English emphasizes hypotaxis, the logical relations between sentences are often expressed by conjunctions, transitions or relative pronouns. However, Chinese emphasizes parataxis, so the logical relationship and context cohesion between prose and text are often not clearly expressed by the words that represent the logical relationship. This kind of difference leads to the non-equivalence in prose translation.

Constituent addition refers to the addition of connectives, relatives and other constituents according to the context and the logical relationship of the text in the process of translation to highlight the close cohesion and rigorous logic between the original discourses. In addition, according to the context, the translator can also add some elements that represent the psychological state and sensory experience of the characters to express the content which is contained in the original but not clearly pointed out.

#### **4.4. Holistic Consideration from the Perspective of Stylistic Level**

The style of prose works is difficult to define. On the one hand, prose covers a wide range of writing. Any text that is not a verse is called prose (Zhang, 2003). Therefore, it is difficult to analyze the style of prose works. Study of style equivalence in prose translation should not only pursue the word-for-word translation, but also be carried out with considering of many aspects.

By saying holistic consideration, the author means that the translator should take the subjectivity of the writer, the writing background, emotional tone of the article and so on into account, so as to represent the overall style of the original text to the readers. Prose is about what the author sees, hears and thinks, and it is about what the author feels about the world. Therefore, the analysis of the article style is inseparable from a certain understanding of the author's emotional world and personal cultivation. The overall emotional tone is an important factor to consider when dealing with words and sentences in the process of translation. The words and sentences of a prose reflect the style of the essay to some extent, so it is also very important to grasp the emotional tone of the prose. The writing background of prose determines the overall style of the prose to some extent, too. Only when all these factors are taken into consideration can prose translations achieve equivalence in style.

### **5. Conclusion**

Excellent prose works should have both exquisite language and spirit. By parity of reasoning, perfect prose translation works should also deal with the translation of these two aspects well. In the process of translation, translators should not only lay stress on the linguistic level which consists of lexical level, syntactic level and discourse level, but also strive to achieve the functional equivalence between the target text and the original text in terms of style. From the perspective of functional equivalence, the author concludes that lexical transformation, sentence structure change, constituent addition and holistic consideration are four strategies for translators to achieve the equivalence of the prose work and prose translation in terms of lexical, syntactic, discourse and style. Only by stick to achieve the equivalence of these four elements, can translators achieve prose translation at a higher level as possible and make contributions to spread Chinese culture.

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