

Original Research Article

Comparative Analysis of Two English Versions of *Gui Yuan* Under Functional Equivalence Theory

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Abstract: Nida's functional equivalence represents not just that the equivalence is between the function of the original text in the original culture and the function of the target text (translation) in the target culture, but that function can be thought of as a property of the text. In this view, this paper makes a comparative analysis of the two English versions of the ancient Chinese poem *Gui Yuan* from the two aspects of form and meaning. It aims to verify the feasibility of functional equivalence theory in English translation of Chinese poem. Meanwhile, it provides some new perspectives for the appreciation and exploration of English translation of Chinese poem.

Keywords: Functional equivalence, Form and meaning, *Gui Yuan*, Xu Yuanchong, John A. Turner, English translation of Chinese poem.

INTRODUCTION

In terms of the development of Nida's functional equivalence theory, it was dated back to the UK in the 1790s. Tytler (1790) proposed the equivalent effect theory. Fydröv (1955) presented translation equivalence. Jacobson (1959) came up with the differential equivalence. Nida (1986) put forward the dynamic equivalence theory based on the equivalent principle. Also he modified dynamic equivalence theory into functional equivalence theory, because it has been misunderstood by other researchers (Nida, 2004). With the development of functional equivalence theory, many scholars have carried out a host of theoretical and practical researches. Gao & Yang (2007) reinterpreted functional equivalence theory from the translation operation process. Ruan (2010) has done a comparative study of the English version of *Gui Yuan* from post-colonial perspective. Yuan (2013) has appreciated the English translation of *Gui Yuan* from the transitivity analysis. Yang (2015) explored merits and defects of functional equivalence theory. From the perspective of Nida's functional equivalence theory, this paper analyzes two English versions of *Gui Yuan* on the two side of form and meaning, which possesses three aspects of research significance. Firstly, it makes readers aware of the differences between form and meaning of the ancient Chinese poem and its English

translation so that the readers can gain a deeper understanding of the aesthetic studies. Secondly, it provides some new perspectives and references for the appreciation of the English translation of Chinese poem. Finally, it verifies the feasibility of Nida's functional equivalence theory on the translation of Chinese poem, which brings guidance and enlightenment for relevant translation practice.

Functional Equivalence Theory

Among numerous translation theories, Nida's functional equivalence theory stands out with its long history and far-reaching influence. The basic ideas of functional equivalence theory mostly consist of two aspects. For one thing, functional equivalence in translation was defined as the closest natural equivalent to the original language message (Nida, 2004). Above all, the functional equivalence here emphasis that it is equally important for the meaning and form proximity between the original text and the target text. If they really conflict, meaning equivalence is the first and form equivalence is the second. For another thing, it is essential that functional equivalence be stated primarily in terms of a comparison of the way in which the original receptors understood and appreciated the text and the way in which receptors of translated text understand and appreciate the translated text (Nida,

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1998). As for this view, it is obvious that Nida's functional equivalence theory increasingly focuses on the receptor's response to the target text rather than simply comparing the original text and the translation text.

Compared with varieties of translation theories, Nida's functional equivalence theory is more applicable to translation practice because of its special principle that the relationship of the target language receptors to the target language text should be roughly equivalent to the relationship between the original receptors and the original text (Nida, 1998). Moreover, he insisted that translation consists in reproducing in the receptor language the closest natural equivalent of the original language message, first in terms of meaning and second in terms of form (Nida, 2004). The meaning equivalence mainly refers to the equivalence of the choice of the words and the depiction of the image and the scene, reproducing the artistic imagery and conception of the original text to the greatest extent and reaching the most natural meaning equivalence. The form equivalence signifies primarily the equivalence of rhythm and style, achieving the rhyming of the target text, recurring the unique style of the original text and finding the equivalent of the original text. When form and meaning contradict, meaning is more important involving the following three areas: (1) special literary forms. (2) semantic expression form of centrifugal structures. (3) meanings between structures (Xie, 2008).

Comparative Analysis of the English Versions of *GUI Yuan*

The poem *GUI Yuan* was made by the poet Wang Changling during the period of the Tang Dynasty of national power with the ideal of "Join the military expedition and gain the achievements". Wang Changling's *Gui Yuan* has eight English versions, three of which are translated into English by Chinese scholars and the other five by foreign scholars. Xu Yuanchong and John A. Turner are famous translators. It is more meaningful to choose Xu's translation (Xu, 2013) and Turner's translation (Hua, 2014) and compare different cultures and ways of thinking between Chinese and western translation. Under the theory of functional equivalence, we analyze the title and the content of the ancient poem *Gui Yuan* from the points of form and meaning in detail.

The analysis of the title is as follows. The title of the original poem *Gui Yuan* embodies heroine, place and emotion, that is, a young woman in her boudoir is bitterly remorseful. Also, the title *Gui Yuan* represents both a topic and a profound meaning, which is easy to arouse the reader's suspense. For Turner's translation of the title, *Regret* is relatively concise achieving form equivalence with the original title, but his title expressed only part of meaning compared with the original title. Moreover, the title *regret* expresses the meaning of feeling sorry about something you have

done, which does not represent the extended meaning of the title of the original poem. Also, the way of expression is too straightforward and one-sided to the implied meaning of the original title. For Xu's title, *Sorrow of a Young Bride in Her Boudoir* is slightly lengthy in form than the original one, while it accurately conveys the whole connotation of the original title reaching the meaning equivalence. Both of the translations of the title are caused by different understandings to the title of the original poem. Because Xu is Chinese, he is able to comprehend the connotation of the original title better than Turner. What's more, Xu's title pays attention to readers' understanding and feelings of the original title by stimulating the reader's illusion about the young woman. For the functional equivalence theory, meaning equivalence is as important as form equivalence. When they are conflict, the expression of meaning is preferred, so Xu's translation is more faithful to the original title.

As for the translation of the poem, we make a comparative analysis in several aspects. With regard to the rhythm, the whole original poem presents both the head and the end rhyme. The first and fourth lines of the original poem have the head rhyme of Chinese Pinyin [ui] in [gui] and [hui]. The end rhyme of [ou] in [chou], [lou] and [hou] appear in the first, the second and the last lines respectively. In Turner's translation, the fifth line has the head rhyme of [s] in *sudden, she, sees*. The seventh line has the head rhyme of [h] in *her, heart*. The first and fourth lines carry the end rhyme of [ə] in *care, bower*. The second and third lines have [eɪ] in *array, day*. The sixth and seventh lines have [æd] in *clad, sad*. In Xu's translation, *suddenly, seeing* in the third line have the head rhyme of [s]. *Grieves, leaves* in the first and third lines have the end rhyme of [vz]. *Day, away* in the second and third lines carry the tail rhyme of [eɪ]. The head rhyme of the two translations in the third line reflects the turning point of the poem here, pointing out the regret and melancholy of the young woman in her boudoir for encouraging her husband to pursue fame and fortune. The two English versions achieve form equivalence with the original poem in this aspect of the prosody.

In terms of the stylistic view, the original poem is a seven-character quatrain of four lines, and its shape is just like the square beauty of Chinese characters. But Turner translates it into the form of American folk songs, that is, the the four-line poem is translated into two sections and eight lines, each of which is a whole sentence including two lines of the original poem. Xu's translation achieves form equivalence, paying attention to the feelings of the target readers, making readers to be inspired, and moved as if reading the original poem. His version has four lines like the original poem, and its approximate square with long and short sentences adds another sense of beauty. Functional equivalence theory emphasizes

the equivalence of form and meaning between the original poem and its translation. At the same time, this theory emphasizes the response of the target readers to the original poem. In terms of the proximity to the style of the original poem, Xu's translation is more desirable for achieving form equivalence.

As for the choice of words, Turner's translation such as *lady fair*, *her lord*, *win glory of the sword* westernizes the Chinese culture in the original poem, fails to achieve meaning equivalence and ignores the target reader's response. “少妇” in the original ancient poem meaning a young Chinese woman is translated into *lady fair*, that is, fair aristocratic lady of England. “夫婿” of the original poem referring to her husband is translated into *her lord*, that is, western aristocrat or duke. “觅封侯” in the original poem indicating the pursuit of fame and fortune is expressed as *win glory of the sword* showing traditional western culture of warriors bayonet battle, making it confused for the target readers to understand the meaning of the original poem. In addition, the word as *care* in the English translation merely expresses the worries of the young women and doesn't convey the anxiety of the original poem “愁”, lacking of the feeling of remorse. However, Xu's translation achieves meaning equivalence and he pays attention to the target readers' feelings. *The young bride in the boudoir* conveys the meaning that the young woman in the squat as “闺中少妇” of the original text. *Grieves* expresses the sorrow and regret of the woman for “愁” in the original poem. *Gaily dressed* indicates that she is happily dressed as “凝妆” of the Chinese poem. *Regret* as “悔恨” in the original poem points out the theme of the whole poem. *Seeking fame* like “觅封侯” of the original poem shows the deep meaning of seeking fortune. The wording of Xu's English version expresses the meaning of the original poem accurately, achieving the meaning equivalence.

For the image and scene, Turner's translation deliberately presents the image of *leaf-emerald bower*, *the tower* and depicts the scene of *springtime day*, *in bright array*, *in light hues clad*, which is easy for readers to ignore the young woman's melancholy of the original poem by repeatedly describing the same scene and exaggeratedly portraying the environment. The original poem takes advantage of simply depicting images and scenes like “春日”、“翠楼”、“陌头”、“杨柳色” to express the young woman's feelings of sorrow and remorse to encourage her husband to pursue the fame and fortune. Although the overall image of Turner's translation still reflects the woman's sorrow and parting, the English version did not realize the meaning equivalence. However, Xu's translation reproduces the images of the original poem as *in the spring day*, *roadside*, *the tower*, *green willow leaves*,

which perfectly brings out the environment, taking advantage of the scene to express feelings and emotions achieving maximum meaning equivalence. Xu's translation has largely depicted the image of the original poem, reappearing the artistic conception of the young woman's sorrow and remorse. His translation is faithful to the original poem in the image aspect and emphasizes the readers' understanding and feeling of the target poem, thus realizing functional equivalence to the greatest extent.

CONCLUSION

All in all, Xu Yuanchong and John A. Turner's English translations of *Gui Yuan* all have their own strengths and weaknesses. In terms of John A. Turner's English version of *Gui Yuan*, although it has reached the form equivalence with the original poem in prosody, it is not able to reproduce the original text perfectly because it is slightly different from the original text in semantic and stylistic aspects. However, Xu Yuanchong's translation is very simple and clear, and is more accurate in all aspects than Turner's. Moreover, Xu handled the original meaning and associative meaning of the word well, and also preserved the image and scene of the original poem. Especially in the semantic and stylistic aspects, Xu's version is as consistent as possible with the original text, perfectly reproduces the original poem, and achieves Nida's functional equivalence theory to the maximum extent. Through comparative analysis, we can see that Nida's functional equivalence theory plays an important guiding role in the process of translating Chinese ancient poem into English version. What's more, the translators should take full account of the prosody, rhetoric, semantic, stylistic and thematic factors of the original poem, and achieve maximum equivalence in form and meaning, so as to be more conducive to the poetic expression of the original text.

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Appendix

闺怨

王昌龄

闺中少妇不知愁，
春日凝妆上翠楼。
忽见陌头杨柳色，
悔教夫婿觅封侯。

Regret

A lady fair that nothing knows of care
In bright array
On a springtime day
Mounts to the tower of her leaf-emerald bower.

Sudden she sees the wayside willow tress
In light hues clad:
And her heart is sad--
She had her lord win glory of the sword.
John A. Turner

Sorrow of a Young Bride in Her Boudoir

The young bride in her boudoir does not know what grieves.
She mounts the tower, gaily dressed, on a spring day.
Suddenly seeing by roadside green willow leaves,
How she regrets her lord seeking fame far away!

Xu Yuanchon