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A Report on E-C Translation of *The Lord of the Rings* Based on Functional Equivalence Theory

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With the development of language and the continuous integration of culture, the introduction of literary works has gradually become an important part of cultural communication; therefore, the question of how to improve the quality of translation becomes significant. In this case, Nida's theory of functional equivalence would be useful; it can be used when considering whether to adopt the translation strategy of alienation or naturalization for specific words or sentences. Therefore, through a series of comparisons, this report analyzes different translation versions of *The Lord of the Rings* from the lexical level. Under the guidance of Nida's functional equivalence theory, translators can start from cultural factors and flexibly choose translation strategies. Through the strategy of alienation and naturalization, the target audience can maximize the information conveyed by the work, so as to better understand the exotic culture.

Keywords: language, translation, culture, functional equivalence theory

Introduction

Background and the Object of Research

In 1898, the translated version of *The Lady of the Camellias* was released, it sold amazingly well. And that was the beginning for Chinese translators to translate foreign works (Song & Lin, 2003). Subsequently, more and more excellent translations came one after another, and so far, the translation industry has developed more maturely, and many scholars have carried out research in this field.

The Lord of the Rings is a famous Western literary work about the dynastic changes in a fantasy world; it is regarded as one of the epic fantasy novels created by Tolkien, the founder of Western fantasy literature. The book's popularity has influenced many readers over the past decades, as well as the progress of Western culture and literature. A series of fantasy works came up, for instance, *A Song of Ice and Fire*, *The Witcher*, *The Elder Scrolls*, and even the classic board game *Dungeons and Dragons* originated from Mr. Tolkien's grandiose worldview. The book is well-written and widely accessible, with spin-offs such as the critically acclaimed movie trilogy and the very recently aired television show on streaming media. Due to the differences in cultural backgrounds between countries, there have been several translation versions of *The Lord of the Rings*. Translators need to process the original text according to various strategies and their own experiences; thus, the final versions inevitably differ. As a representative work of Western fantasy literature, it is valuable in literary studies and translation studies. At present, there are three Chinese translation versions of this novel in China: *The Lord of the*

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Rings Trilogy by Taiwan Lianjing; *The Translation Edition of The Lord of the Rings* published by Yilin Publishing House in 2001, and the *Century Literature and Culture Edition* by Shanghai People's Publishing House in 2013 (Feng, 2021). The texts used in the following analysis are mainly from the version of the Yilin edition, with a few from Shanghai People's Publishing House, and a few from the subtitles of the movie trilogy. From the perspective of Eugene Nida's innovative linguistic theory, the research tends to explore the translation strategies adopted in comparing different translations.

Theoretical Basis

Nida's functional equivalence has been considered highly valuable in translation practice; the research adopts this theory as the guiding theory for the following comparisons between different translation versions. As a famous American psychologist, Nida has his own set of core theories, namely, functional reciprocity theory. In 1964, Nida put forward a new concept for the first time, introducing the concepts of "Dynamic Reciprocity" and "Formal Reciprocity" (Nida & Jan, 1986). On one hand, "Formal Equivalence" is the exact same order of form arrangement, requiring the highest degree of equivalence between the translated context and the initial one in terms of form, sentence, and vocabulary. In case of inevitable conflicts, translators are allowed to modify their editions at the expense of expression fluency. However, the perfect equivalence can be rare to find due to cultural and linguistic differences. On the other hand, "Dynamic Equivalence" is semantic equivalence, which means that the translator has to achieve the highest degree of meaning equivalence between the original text and the editioned text. It is notable that for this purpose, formal equivalence can be ignored. Nida advocates whenever there are conflicts between form and content, the quality of content should always come first. Afterward, considering that the term "dynamic" could be easily misunderstood by readers as a kind of "influence", Nida replaced the term "functional equivalence" with "functional equivalence" in his eminent sequel *From One Language to Another* (Yu, 2022).

The concept of functional equivalence consists of four aspects: lexical equivalence, syntactic equivalence, chapter equivalence, and stylistic equivalence. Functional equivalence theory is reader-oriented, it takes care of readers' feelings and puts them in the first place. The essence of the theory can be conveyed as the response of translation readers should be approximately the same as readers of the original text; until now, it has been taken as a criterion for evaluating whether the translation is qualified or still needs adjustments (Zhao, 2011). Nida's functional equivalence theory emphasizes that the original text and the translated text should achieve the highest degree of equivalence, but it does not mean that the translated text and the original text should be exactly the same, which requires that the translators and the translated text should be exactly the same. Although Nida emphasizes that the highest degree of equivalence should be achieved between the original text and the translated text, it does not mean that the translated text and the original text should be exactly the same. Therefore, the translator should endeavor to make the final translation natural and smooth, and the response of target readers should be similar to the readers of the original text.

Translation is a process of transformation between multiple languages and different cultures. Guided by the theory of linguistics and cross-culture, this report concentrates on certain vocabulary and lines from *The Lord of the Rings* to conduct a practical comparison of translation strategies. When dealing with dilemmas or other cultural factors in the source language, naturalization and alienation (also known as paraphrasing and direct translation) are two common strategies in the translation process. Alienation represents the culture of the source language. It tends to express the original language and reserve differences as much as possible, while

naturalization is centered on the culture of the target language. The strategies of alienation and naturalization put the center on the two terminal participants in the translation activity, also known as the writer of the original text and the reader of the translated text; it provides guidance for the translators by telling the relationship between the two. In the process of comparison, this research expounds on alienation and naturalization as examples of translation strategies. After that, we find that the direct translation is relatively faithful not only to the original content but also to the original form, while the naturalization version focuses more on the cultural atmosphere of the reader's region. When the writer's intention cannot be conveyed accurately and effectively, alienation should be used to restore their authentic intention.

No matter whether we choose a direct translation or naturalization, faithfulness to the original content should always be the first priority to be carried out. Therefore, in the process of translation, alienation and naturalization should be wisely chosen. However, each book should be viewed differently; it will be wise to take the matter on the work's merits. Generally speaking, the trend of foreign literature translation is to adopt more alienation, and the writer's own intention should also be taken into consideration.

Literature Review

As the pioneer of fantasy literature, *The Lord of the Ring* has spanned a long period of time and has abundant information available for investigation. The literature review centered on the importance of the theory of functional equivalence and its connection with translation field strategies, and the thorough research on various perspectives of domestic and foreign scholars on the book itself.

The Guiding Value of Functional Equivalence Theory

First of all, functional equivalence theory has been widely used in linguistic fields, which has brought significant progress to cognitive pragmatics and other fields (Wang, 2005), and provided a theoretical framework for translation research (Bo & Sun, 2007). The application of functional equivalence theory has been of great practical significance; it could also guide future work for translators. There have been several studies about Nida's functional equivalence theory in China. In 2004, Ni and Yang (2004) proposed several guidance principles for researchers to actually apply the theory in their work. They believed that the priority of translators is conveying the message of the original text as much as possible, and if it is necessary, the form could give way to maintaining the equivalence of the content. Moreover, when making adjustments to the edition, translators should make sure to retain the main cultural information as much as possible (Ni & Yang, 2004). In 2011, Zhao Danda further elaborated on the theory by giving a brief introduction to its connotations and criteria. According to her view, translators should treat the whole translation process correctly. The essence of applying this new theory was about paying extra attention to choosing direct translation or trying to naturalize the content (Zhao, 2011).

Previous Research on *The Lord of the Rings*

When it comes to the studies related to the translation of *The Lord of the Rings*, researchers mainly focused on contextual deconstruction and translation of specific sentences; they were more inclined to pay attention to the semantic problems of translation. Since the process of this research linked cross-cultural theory with translation, articles related to cultural factors were considered more helpful. In that case, Allan Turner's meticulous examination of *The Lord of the Rings* was beneficial for reference. He brought up a novel point that the study of the book can be connected to some linguistic approaches, such as purposivism. Also, he argued that translators should focus on Tolkien's deliberate use of self-made neologisms and ancient vocabulary at different

textual levels, and the writer's own requirements for translation cannot be ignored. Domestic researchers, such as Wei (2012) in her study comprehensively applied different kinds of equivalence theories by three scholars; she believed that complete equivalence was difficult to achieve, so translators should flexibly choose different translation strategies to maximize the effect of the original text to approach the standard. This was similar to the functional equivalence theory, which could be used as guidance for the following research. Tang (2003) brought up similar points; he analyzed the translation strategies of the "Yilin Edition" according to the steps of "Trust, Intrusion, Absorption, and Compensation". In addition to the careful choice of translation strategies, translators also needed to adjust the translation according to cultural factors. From the perspective of cultural factors, the cultural differences between the two countries were not negligible. Wan (2016) took the new version of translation as an example to explore the reproduction of fantasy in the book; she introduced the concept of uncertainty, that was, readers needed to explore the "blank" in the content from their own point of view to interpret the meaning of the text. She discussed the best translation strategies for translators to adopt when dealing with such uncertainties. With the introduction of more and more literary works, it was obvious that the level of target language readers has also changed, away from the unclear perception of Western fantasy culture during the period of confusion.

In summary, the theory of functional equivalence has been of great significance to translation research, and the current research on *The Lord of the Rings* is mainly distributed in the analysis of culture and the practice report of translation. Therefore, the following comparison would be an in-depth study on the basis of the previous translation of vocabulary, and the choice of translation strategies would be analyzed by the guidance of functional equivalence.

Case Analysis

Unlike technical translation, additional considerations are required when dealing with literary content. Translators find it necessary to ensure the exact meaning of the original text is conveyed through translation; at the very same time, they need to take the feelings of the readers into consideration. Therefore, a good translation should try its best to achieve equivalence with the original text in terms of vocabulary and syntax. This is similar to the theory of functional equivalence, which emphasizes that the target readers can receive the same feelings as readers of the source language. However, due to cultural factors and the limitations of the language itself, it is generally not possible to achieve complete equivalence between the translated text and the original with both their content and form. In this case, the priority of Nida's theory will be useful; it is acceptable that the form of translation can be appropriately neglected for the good of contents. It can be seen that the theory of functional equivalence has a certain guiding significance for literary translation, which can be used when considering whether to adopt the translation strategy of alienation or naturalization for specific words or sentences.

Example 1:

Original word: Oldwinyards

Translation 1: 老酒庄

Translation 2: 老窖陈酿

According to the original text, Oldwinyards is a kind of signature spirit produced by a prestigious winery. The journey of *The Lord of the Rings* begins in the scenic place named Shire, a parody of the idyllic countryside. Mr. Tolkien tends to create a whole new world where people live in a pastoral mood. Most of the neologisms he created are derived from their occupations, physical characteristics, and environmental factors (Feng, 2021).

In the second translation, the Century Wenjing version adopts a four-letter word, which translates into the symmetrical structure of "old cellar" and "aged wine" that is more matched with the traditional Chinese expression. The translator chooses a typical naturalization as the translation strategy, which better reflects the quality of the wine than a direct translation. Also, the naturalization of the word shows a formal unity with the original word, which represents a formal equivalence, so that the final edition would be more acceptable for domestic readers. On the opposite way, in the first version, the translator directly translates the word into old wineries according to the literal meaning; it appears to be stiff and misses a part of the original connotation. Functional equivalence emphasizes the equivalence of meanings, so the translator adopts the translation strategy of naturalization, which can accurately convey the meaning of the original text, and also accurately convey the meaning to the audience.

Example 2:

Original word: Wormtongue

Translation 1: 蛇舌

Translation 2: 佞舌

In the first version of the translation, the translator adopts an alienating translation method, translating the word "worm" as a snake. But in the second edition, the translator translates the word "worm" into "sycophant", which expresses the characteristics of a treacherous little fella who is skillful in his crafty speech. The translator also took into consideration that the word sycophant is commonly used in Chinese historical dramas. Therefore, the audience would feel more familiar with their own culture, and expressions like that convey more care for the target readers. It is widely believed in the academic communities that translation is a continuous process; it is the process of searching for commonalities between cultures and languages, especially in terms of finding similar information (Qian, 2000). In general, the strategy of naturalized translation implies a heightened emphasis on the functionality of the work and a concern for the reader's experience after reading the book.

However, naturalization sometimes results in the loss of the original meaning. According to the original text, it can be seen that the worm in Wormtougue refers to the snake in Bible stories, which is also known as the "big worm". And in the religious story, the snake is the representative of evil and temptation (Li, 2019). This method of naturalizing foreign cultural imagery and translating it into the words of the local culture will undoubtedly cause confusion for the readers of the target language to understand. In order to find the equivalence in meaning, the translation should avoid conflict with cultural designations and take the alienation version as a more distinguished edition.

Example 3:

Original text: Over-heaven

Translation 1: 天堂之上

Translation 2: 穹苍高天

For this self-created word, Translation 2 still uses the naturalized translation technique, which damages the hidden meaning of over-heaven and loses the religious element in the original story. Therefore, it is not suitable for this context. According to the guidance of functional equivalence theory, translators must remember that when the content conflicts with the form, the latter can be ignored. Although Translation 2 conforms to the four-character form commonly used in Chinese and has a certain aesthetic value of phonology, it omits the meaning of heaven, which neglects the content. For that, the translator should adopt the foreignizing translation and retain

the reference to heaven in the original text. It should be noted that when cultural elements are confused, translators need to pay attention to differentiation.

According to the research, translators adopt foreignizing translation strategies far more often than domesticating translation strategies specifically in the book *The Lord of the Rings*. Following statistics, foreignization has been used 204 times in translation, accounting for 86% of the full text, while naturalization appears 33 times, accounting for 14% of the full text (Wen, 2021). Firstly, in the case of *The Lord of the Rings*, the original wishes of Tolkien cannot be ignored. In fact, the reason why translators use a lot of direct translation is that Tolkien wrote a guide for translators to use as a reference. According to the guidance book, translators should keep the "English style" intact rather than focus on converting new words into more common-sense words. The works of those creations are supported with immense depth that can be discovered from a linguistic level. Those new lexical creations are made not only from scratch but also from Old English and other European languages, which is a great mix of cultures. Out of consideration for the originality and completeness of the novel's worldview, Tolkien believed that all the original nouns should retain their original form relatively intact, or adopt a direct translation as close as possible to the original text. From this purpose, Tolkien's point of view is to use the translation strategy of alienation as much as possible, and the equivalence in meaning cannot be ignored (Feng, 2021).

Conclusion

In short, when translators deal with literary texts, the literariness of the texts should be highlighted. In other words, the foreign culture contained in the story should be preserved to the greatest extent. Under the guidance of Nida's functional equivalence theory, translators can flexibly search for more suitable translation strategies in foreignization and domestication; sometimes they need to make appropriate use of localized expressions. Thus, the target language audience can maximize the information conveyed by the film, so as to better understand *The Lord of the Rings* and the culture represented by its story.

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