

A Report on the Translation of *Smiling in the Thorn Bush* (Excerpt)

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Abstract—Children’s literature includes a variety of literary works that are understood and loved by children and are conducive to their healthy physical and mental development. Along with the development of the times, the translation of children’s literature has been given more and more attention by mainstream academia. The source text of the translation practice report is taken from Section 1 to 5 of Chapter 2 of *Smiling in the Thorn Bush* written by children’s writer Yang Xiaoyan. The book was published in March, 2020, and there is currently no English version for the book. Based on real history and combined historical sources, the author reproduces the Nanjing Massacre and the Chongqing Bombing from the perspective of children. The translator is guided by Eugene Nida’s theory of functional equivalence to translate selected texts. This theory requires the translator to convey the meaning of the original text according to the four aspects of functional equivalence theory, namely lexical equivalence, syntactic equivalence, textual equivalence, and cultural equivalence, followed by form. This report analyses translations at both lexical and syntactic levels. Functional equivalence at the lexical level is achieved through the use of class conversion, free translation and annotation, while at the syntactic level, functional equivalence between the original text and the target text is achieved through the use of voice conversion, sorting method, fractional translation and reverse translation. The purpose of this paper is to probe into the role of functional equivalence in the translation of children’s literature in terms of vocabulary and syntax.

Keywords—children’s literature, functional equivalence theory, *Smiling in the Thorn Bush*, translation strategies

I. INTRODUCTION

This part introduces some basic information of the thesis, which includes background, objectives and significance of the thesis as well as guiding translation theory.

A. Background of the Research

Children’s literature refers to literature which children understand and enjoy, which is beneficial to their health. Children’s literature is the most childlike part of literature. And Oittinen thinks that “Children’s literature is literature created for children or read for children [1].”

The study on the translation of children’s literature in China is relatively late, which has received little attention from mainstream Chinese translation circles, and still has a lot of room for development. Li Hongshun believes that “since the beginning of the 21st century, the translation study of western children’s literature has developed rapidly, and the Chinese translation community has not paid due attention to this field. There are still a large number of academic gaps to be filled [2].”

B. Objectives and Significance

Smiling in the Thorn Bush, written by the Chinese writer

Yang Xiaoyan, tells the story of the survival and growth of a teenager in the context of the Anti-Japanese War. This paper aims to analysis and explores the guiding role of functional equivalence theory in the translation of children’s literature at the lexical and syntactic levels, and provide some references for the English translation of children’s literature. By telling the ups and downs of the war years, the author makes the young readers feel the fighting spirit of their predecessors, and then cherish the present happy life more, which has profound educational significance. The book won the Best Literature Work of the Year of 2020 Chen Bochui International Children’s Literature Award. After investigation, it is found that there is no report on the translation practice of *Smiling in the Thorn Bush* in English translation. This thesis has certain research significance and value, namely, it takes the translation practice of this work as an example to study the application of functional equivalence theory in the translation of children’s literature.

C. Introduction to Functional Equivalence Theory

The theory of functional equivalence is derived from the theory of dynamic equivalence put forward by Eugene A. Nida. Nida’s “Dynamic Equivalence” theory was formed in 1964. Nida, in his book *The Theory and Practice of Translation*, defined “dynamic equivalence” as “Dynamic equivalence is therefore to be defined in terms of the degree to which the receptors of the message in the receptor language respond to it in substantially the same manner as the receptors in the source language [3].” In the 70s of the 20th Century, Nida replaced “dynamic equivalence” with “functional equivalence”, although both pay attention to information equivalence, making the translation closer to the target language reader, but compared with the “dynamic equivalence” originally proposed, “functional equivalence” not only focuses on the equivalence of content, but also attaches importance to form equivalence. In the 90s of the 20th Century, Nida further refined the theory of functional equivalence on the basis of the original theory, and the theory of functional equivalence paid more attention to the feelings of the target language reader than before. The language culture of the target language reader and their understanding of the translation are an important dimension in measuring the translation.

II. ANALYSIS OF THE SOURCE TEXT

The source text is excerpted from a work of children’s literature, the translator should have a good understanding of the author, the story and stylistic features of *Smiling in the Thorn Bush* so as to finish the task better.

A. The Author

The author of *Smiling in the Thorn Bush* is Weixi, whose real name is Yang Xiaoyan, a teacher, writer and native of Nanjing. Many of her works have been published, including novels *The Bond*, *Minning Town* and *The Marriage of Guoguo* as well as children's literature *Something About Kids*, *Small Green Grasshopper*, *Things from Class Four Grade Five* and so on. Her works have been awarded Bingxin Literature Award and Golden Windmill Children's Book Award. Her screenplay *Something About Kids* won the 14th Huabui Award * Children's Film Award, the Gold Medal of China International Children's Film Festival in Jiangyin and the 28th Golden Rooster Award * Screenwriter Nomination Award.

B. The Story

Based on the true story of Yang Xiaoyan's family, the novel took her several years to write, using numerous historical and local records to tell the brutal history, true and warm humanity, and the innocence of the child. Eighty-three years ago, her grandfather, grandmother, and two uncles from Nanjing to Chongqing. The story of *Smiling in the Thorn Bush* took place during the Chinese People's War of Resistance against Japanese Aggression. In that wary, turbulent age, Xiao Cong and Hu Zi followed their parents to flee, from Nanjing to Chongqing, all the way difficult, and the apprentice Shen Xusheng was left in the city of Nanjing. Through the eyes of Xiao Cong, a child, and Shen Xusheng, a teenager, readers will witness two major historical events, the Nanjing Massacre and the Chongqing bombing. The painful experience of modern China and the Chinese people being invaded by foreign enemies is vividly remembered and heartbreaking. The author spent four years consulting historical materials and local chronicles to understand all this and get close to that time. In addition to the Xiao Cong family and Shen Xusheng, the author also portrays a number of characters who shine the light of humanity, including the general who guards the city of Nanjing, Mr. And Mrs. Liu, the neighbors of the Xiao Cong's family, the monks in the Nanjing temple, and the foreign friends in the safety zone. In these characters, more historical details are shown.

C. Stylistic Features

After a preliminary reading of the text, the translator understands that the text belongs to a typical novel, with most of the characteristics of a novel.

The book uses both narrative and descriptive language, but mainly descriptive language. The author uses descriptive language to shape the image of Xiao Cong, Shen Xusheng, Hu Zi, Boss Jin and other characters with distinctive characteristics. The author writes mainly in long sentences; the language is vivid, exquisite and emotional. The language of the novel is simple and easy to understand, featured by verbal expressions that can be transformed into actions, pictures, or scenes.

III. DESCRIPTION OF TRANSLATION PROCESS

In this part, the author introduces translation process as three stages. The first one is pre-translation preparation, which describes the preparation before translation; the second one is while-translation, which mainly introduces the

difficulties encountered in the translation process; and the last one is post-translation proofreading, which mainly describes the process of post-proofreading.

A. Pre-translation Preparation

The translator reads the book *Smiling in the Thorn Bush* in its entirety twice before translating it. She learns about the background of the story, the main characters, the plot of the story, and the historical materials in the appendix. This is the first time she has done children's literature translation, so she read some famous children's literature translation in advance. Since the translation is conducted under the guidance of Functional Equivalence Theory, she also reads a lot of literature and journals to deepen her knowledge and understanding of the theory before translation.

B. Main Problems during the Translation Process

After thorough preparation, the translator translates the text. The source text is selected from the second chapter of *Smiling in the Thorn Bush*, Section 1 to 5, and about 6600 words are translated after completion and the translator finishes this translation task within 10 days. She encountered a lot of difficulties with translating. The first one is that there are many new words and concepts involving the military, such as “师”, “旅”, “排”, “勤务兵” and the names of some military weapons. It is the first time for the translator to come into contact with this kind of text, so she spends some time searching for sources, corpora and parallel texts. The second problem is that culture-loaded words cannot be found in the target language, such as “焐雪天”, “披屋”, “铜脚炉”, and so on. This problem is solved by the translator using the methods of annotation and free translation.

C. Post-translation Proofreading

Finally, check and verify. This step is vital because it is an important guarantee of translation quality. The translator uses Youdao Writing (A software that can edit sentences and correct grammatical errors) and Grammarly (For real-time grammar correction and spell checking) to check grammar, spelling and collocation to make sure there are no basic mistakes. After correcting her mistakes, the translator submits her translation to her supervisor, who distributes it to other students in the thesis team for revision. Finally, the supervisor checks again, and the translation is complete.

IV. CASE ANALYSIS BASED ON FUNCTIONAL EQUIVALENCE THEORY

In this part, the author makes an analysis of the translation from two aspects: vocabulary and syntax. According to Ye Zinan, “Functional Equivalence means the equivalence of language and culture between the source text and the target text [4].” Depending on the situation, the translator can use a variety of translation methods to achieve the same function.

A. Functional Equivalence at the Lexical Level

Vocabulary is the most fundamental component of a sentence, and it is also the first of four levels in Nida's theory of functional equivalence. In order to achieve functional equivalence between the original text and the target text, the translator adopts the lexical conversion method, free translation method and annotation method in translation.

1) Word class conversion

Chinese is a dynamic language with verbs; while English, on the other hand, is a static language, which often relies on parts of speech other than verbs, such as adjectives, nouns, adverbs, prepositions or other forms of verbs such as infinitives and non-predicates. In order to realize the functional equivalence of the source text and the target text, the translator may adopt the method of class transformation.

Example 1:

Source Text: 温和有礼的先生，上了战场如同一柄出鞘的锋利长剑。

Target Text: The man of gentleness and politeness went into battle like a sharp sword out of its sheath.

Analysis: In the original sentence, General Hong Jinsong is described as mild and polite using adjective phrases, while the translator uses noun phrases when translating into English. This is more consistent with the English language.

Example 2:

Source Text: 好容易站定了，旭生一看，是一个打着绑腿、执了一支警棍的警察。

Target Text: When he stopped, Xusheng saw a policeman with gaiters and a baton.

Analysis: In this sentence, the content verb is “look,” so the verbs “打着” and “执” can be translated into prepositional phrases “with gaiters and a baton”.

Example 3:

Source Text: 旭生趴在炳正照相馆的门上，哇地哭出来。

Target Text: Xusheng was crying at the door of Bingzheng Photo Studio.

Analysis: There can only be one meaningful verb in the English frame, and what the author wants to highlight here is Xu Sheng's excitement and happiness when he saw that his master's photo studio was still standing, so the translator chooses “crying” as the main verb, and the action of leaning over the door is put into prepositional phrases.

2) Free translation

Free translation refers to a method in which the original text and the target text do not have the same form of expression. Sun Yingchun believes that “when there is a contradiction between the thoughts of the original text and the expression of the translation and it is not suitable to use literal translation, free translation should be adopted [5].”

Example 4:

Source Text: 南京人老话说，这是焐雪天，即将有一场大雪落下。

Target Text: Nanjing people thought this was precursor to snow and there would be a heavy snowfall.

Analysis: “焐雪天” is a Nanjing dialect that means the weather gets warm before heavy snow. Since there is no such expression in English, the translator takes it as a precursor.

Example 5:

Source Text: 今天，也许明天，会是他人生最终的时刻，他愿意把夫人的信物放在心口处，九泉之下也就仿佛与家人在一处了。

Target Text: Today or tomorrow would be the end of his life. He put their love token in the chest. It was as if he were in the same place with his family even though he was dead.

Analysis: “九泉之下” means the place where the dead are

buried. But there is no such word in English, so it is directly translated as death.

3) Annotation

“Paratext” is a concept opposite to text. Genette said that “literary works are completely or mainly composed of text, but these texts rarely appear independently without decoration, and usually have some amount of verbal and non-verbal material, such as author names, titles, forewords, illustrations, etc [6].” Annotation is an element of paratext, defined by Genette as “a statement of variable length (one word is enough) related to or placed next to a definite text [6].”

Example 6:

Source text: 十九年过去了，他参加过北伐，进攻湖南平江，转战江西九江、南昌等地。

Target text: In the past nineteen years, he had participated in the Northern Expedition War (The war of unification launched by the National Government of the Republic of China between 1926 and 1928), attacked Pingjiang in Hunan, and moved to Jiujiang in Jiangxi, Nanchang and other places.

Analysis: Foreign readers may not understand the Northern Expedition, so adding annotations when translating makes it easier for readers to understand the article.

Example 7:

Source text: 因作战英勇，屡立战功，他升任排长、连长，后又投身淞沪会战，同日军展开血战。

Target text: Because of his heroic battles, he had repeatedly made combat merits and was promoted to lieutenant, captain. Later, he engaged in the Battle of Shanghai (The Battle of Shanghai was the first large-scale battle between China and Japan in the Chinese People's War of Resistance against Japanese Aggression, and it was also the largest and most brutal battle in the entire Sino-Japanese War.) to combat the Japanese army.

Analysis: The Battle of Shanghai is a major battle of the Chinese People's War of Resistance against Japanese Aggression. But foreign readers do not know, and adding notes can let them know the importance of this war.

B. Functional Equivalence at the Syntactic Level

The structure of Chinese and English sentences is very different. English is a kind of hypotactic language which emphasizes on the structure of the sentence, and Chinese is a kind of paratactic language with relative freedom in the sentence structure. In the following part, the author mainly uses voice conversion, sorting method, fractional translation, reverse translation to achieve functional equivalence.

1) Voice conversion

“Voice is a kind of language which uses verbs to express the relation between the subject and the predicate [7].” Most of the English language is passive, but the active voice is often used in Chinese. Therefore, the translator should pay attention to the translation.

Example 8:

Source Text: 巷子已经不成形了，半条巷的房屋已经炸塌，满地乱砖碎石。

Target Text: The alley was shapeless, half the houses had been blown down and the floor was littered with rubble.

Analysis: The example sentence describes the state of the

alley after the bombing by Japanese planes. The use of passive is more objective in English translation.

2) Sorting method

“The sentence structure in English is mostly front-center, and conjunctions and prepositions are often used [8].” When expressing thoughts, one should start with the main content and then add other information. Chinese, on the other hand, is euphemistic and reserved, expressive and flowing, with scattered form and concentrated spirit, and the writing seeks to be comprehensive and repetitive.

Example 9:

Source Text: 小丛被压在几个人的身体下面，他开始喘不上来气儿。

Target Text: Xiao Cong began to lose his breath as he was crushed beneath the bodies of several people.

Analysis: The key point of this sentence is to highlight that Xiao Cong is out of breath, so the order should be reversed in translation, and the unimportant content should be put behind.

Example 10:

Source Text: 隆隆之声从远远的天边滚过来，眨眼之间就到了近前，轰炸又开始了。

Target Text: Bombings began again with rumbles of bombers coming around from afar in the blink of an eye.

Analysis: The point of this sentence is that the bombing began again, so when it comes to the translation at the beginning of the sentence, the modified words and sentences are not so important, and they will be translated later.

3) Fractional translation

Chinese and English are different in terms of word collocation, grammar and expression, so the translator can adopt fractional translation in translation. Ouyang Zhiying believes that “In order to ensure that the meaning of the original text remains unchanged, it is essential to make corresponding changes in the original text to conform to the expression form of the translated text. Thus, the translation is not only faithful to the original text, but also conforms to the translation.”

Example 11:

Source text: 小丛快要被闷得失去知觉了，忽然，他身体上一轻，原来，是白白抱着他，从压住他们的人身下挣扎了出来。

Target text: Xiao Cong was about to suffocate to unconsciousness. And suddenly he felt his body was getting lighter. It was his father struggling to hold him up from other people's bodies.

Analysis: In this sentence, the Chinese sentence is too long and contains a lot of content, and it is more concise to split into two sentences when translating, which is easier for the reader to understand.

Example 12:

Source text: 这片山不陡，山阳是一片平缓的坡，半腰有一道墙，山阴更缓，然而并无退路。

Target text: This was not a steep mountain. To the south of it was a gentle slope and a wall stood on the mountainside; the north was gentler but there was no retreat.

Analysis: This sentence can be divided into two parts. The first one is a general sentence, and the second one is a special

one. So it can be translated into two sentences.

4) Reverse translation

Reverse translation is the translation of a sentence into English in reverse order or in Chinese. Orthographic translation and reverse translation have the same effect, but the reverse translation is usually more consistent with the English way of thinking and expression, so it is more authentic. Ablikim Abdulmijiti thinks that “Reverse translation is a highly enforceable translation technique that corrects the linguistic form of the original text during the implementation phase to more accurately explain the meaning of the original text and achieve the translation goal [9].”

Example 13:

Source Text: 一切布置完成，寂静还持续着。

Target Text: Everything was set up, and the silence was not over.

Analysis: In this sentence, the translator translates “寂静还持续着” into “the silence was not over”, the use of reverse translation here is more in line with the English expression custom.

Example 14:

Source Text: 旭生父子二人劝说了半天，爷爷执意不肯走。

Target Text: Xusheng and his father had persuaded his grandpa for a long time, but he insisted on staying there.

Analysis: This sentence says that grandpa does not want to go to the city with Asahi and his father, and changing the negation to an affirmation can better reflect grandpa's determination to stay and watch the family.

V. CONCLUSION

In this chapter, the author summarizes and enlightens her task and its implications for future translation work.

A. Summary

For the first time, the author met with some difficulties in translating children's literature. But she also learns a lot in the process.

In the process of translation, the main difficulty is to grasp the author's emotions, and the language style of the context must be consistent. In addition to mastering the original text, the translator should also take into account the differences between Chinese and English, and improve the readability of the translation under the guidance of Functional Equivalence Theory.

In the process of translation, there are still a lot of deficiencies. First, the holistic thought of translation needs to be improved. Sometimes she just tries to translate the sentence in front of her, without considering the context, which easily leads to inconsistent language styles. The second is the use of sentence patterns and vocabulary is too simple. In translation, the translator uses the verb “be” too often, and the sentence structures used are mostly subject-verb-object structures.

B. Enlightenment

The author is also inspired by this practice and writing a translation practice report.

First of all, the translator has a better understanding of

Nida's Functional Equivalence Theory. Translation practice cannot leave the guidance of translation theory, and the practice of translation also proves and enriches the theory of translation. Second, as a translator, you need to master at least two languages. In this respect, there is still much room for improvement. The author should not rely too much on machine translation, but should constantly improve her Chinese and English abilities. Third, in addition to learning professional knowledge, translators also need to cover a wide range of knowledge. Last but not least, the translator should do more translation practice and more academic writing in order to enhance her professional competence.

As Zhangsun Furong said, "As a qualified translator, you should have the practical ability to interpret, negotiate, construct and express knowledge and experience in different language communication situations [10]." The author is still far from being a qualified translator.

CONFLICT OF INTEREST

The author declares no conflict of interest.

AUTHOR CONTRIBUTIONS

The author's contributions include selecting the source text *Smiling in the Thorn Bush* and designing the translation framework guided by Functional Equivalence Theory, then completing the translation of about 6,600 words. She applied the theory to analyze translation strategies at lexical and syntactic levels with case studies. She solved translation challenges of specific terms using corpus research and annotations. Finally, she structured the report and incorporated feedback to highlight the theory's value in

children's literature translation.

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