

Analysis of *The Trumpet of the Swan* from the Perspective of Functional Equivalence

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Abstract—In the field of translation, different translation theories are adopted for different purposes and target readers. For the translation of children's literature, Eugene Nida's Functional Equivalence is one of the most influential and effective translation theories. In this paper, the author tries to study the Chinese version of *The Trumpet of the Swan*, the most beloved fairy tale in 20th century, from the perspective of Functional Equivalence, in order to prove that, this theory is so flexible that it can be used in the translation of children's literature, which will definitely enhance the development of the translation of children's literature in China.

Index Terms—*The Trumpet of the Swan*, functional equivalence, children's literature

In the past few decades, great progress has been made in Chinese translation theory and practice. Among those progresses, translation of one kind of literature genres is paid special attention to—children's literature, since it is very different from other kinds of literature in its target readers: children. Because children are not so literate as adults are, also, their acceptance of certain information may have more influence on their growth, besides, some kinds of ways of expression may be beyond their reach, under these circumstances, translators of children's literature must always bear in mind these special features of children and attach great importance to the choice of words, phrases and sentences of their translated work.

Although translation of English children's literature has been developed along with that of the other kinds of literary works, its pace of development seems not to be so fast that more work needs to be done. In order to meet the demands of Chinese parents and their children for beautiful and original works from other languages, more and more translators are pouring more and more time and energy into the translation of children's literature. Besides, these translators are trying to adopt some widespread translation theory which could be applied as a guideline in their translation practice to suit the special features of children's literary works. Despite the pains-taking progress, a lot of translators do have some breakthrough and discoveries. One of those discoveries is that they find Eugene Nida's Functional Equivalence, which is based on sociolinguistics and years of practice for the translation of the worldwide book, Bible, is an effective and can be applied in the translation of children's literature. Nida (2001) argues "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 the translated text understand and appreciate the translated text." (Nida, 2001, P86)

Ren Rongrong, who is a master in the field of children's literature, has translated many famous children's literary works into Chinese. Among them, *The Trumpet of the Swan*, the most beloved fairy tale in 20th century, is a masterpiece in the translation field. In this book, Ren's translation of the original work has created the same effect on the target readers as the source text on the source reader. Since the target readers of children's literature are small kids, for them, those "word-for-word" translations are not so good a choice.

In this paper, the author tries to study the Chinese version of *The Trumpet of the Swan* translated by Ren Rongrong from the perspective of Eugene Nida's Functional Equivalence which consists of three important aspects: meaning equivalence, stylistic equivalence and cultural equivalence. The author holds the view that, just it's the proper adoption of Eugene Nida's Functional Equivalence in the Chinese version of *The Trumpet of the Swan* that makes it an extraordinary masterpiece in the field of translation of children's literature. After the study, it can be safely said that Eugene Nida's Functional Equivalence is suitable for the translation of children's literature, thus can be used for the further development of translation of children's literature in China.

I. A BRIEF INTRODUCTION TO *THE TRUMPET OF THE SWAN* AND ITS CHINESE VERSION

A. About the Author

E. B. White, (1899-1985) the author of such beloved children's classics as *Charlotte's Web*, *Stuart Little*, and *The Trumpet of the Swan*, was born in Mount Vernon, New York. He graduated from Cornell University in 1921 and, five or six years later, joined the staff of The New Yorker magazine. E.B. White authored over seventeen books of prose and poetry and was elected to the American Academy of Arts and Letters in 1973. In addition to writing children's books, E. B. White also wrote books for adults, as well as writing poems and essays, and drawing sketches for The New Yorker magazine. Some of his other books include: *One Man's Meat*, *The Second Tree from the Corner*, *Letters of E. B. White*, *The Essays of E. B. White*, and *Poems and Sketches of E. B. White*.

Mr. White has won countless awards, including the 1971 National Medal for Literature and the Laura Ingalls Wilder Medal, which commended him for making “a substantial and lasting contribution to literature for children.”

B. *About the Novel*

The Trumpet of the Swan is a children’s novel by E.B. White published in 1970. It is a story about growing up. The main character of this book is Louis, a Trumpeter Swan born without a voice and trying to overcome it. In order to communicate with others, he learns many skills including how to write and how to play a trumpet. At last, he becomes a famous musician and falls in love with a swan named Serena. They live a happy life together.

This book is the last fairy tale book of E B White. And the story is based on a real news report of *New York Times* in 1965. It was about two trumpet swans in Philadelphia zoo gave birth to 5 little swans, and people took pictures of them. White was astonished by the rare swan and felt interested in them, and then he collected lots of information about the swan and finally he decided to write a fairy tales about the swan. In this book, the author tells us a beautiful story in a vivid tone by using many figures of speech, colloquial words and so on. After reading it, readers will be touched by Louis’ spirit of optimism. It’s a warm story and it has inspired people generation by generation. And that may be the reason why it is praised as “the most beloved fairy tale in 20th century”.

C. *About the Translator and the Chinese Version*

Ren Rongrong (1923-) is master of the translation of children’s literature. In his translation career of more than 60 years, he has translated about 300 works, most of which are in the category of children’s literature. Ren’s translation is vivid and readable, thus greatly welcomed by children all around China.

Ren can do translation in Russian, English, Italian and Japanese. People get an easy access to great authors and famous works of children’s literature. Ren does his translation with a conscientious and serious attitude. His translation works are perfect combination of thoughts and artistic forms with unique styles. His works not only benefit young readers, but also help the creation of children’s literature in China.

Ren’s Chinese version of *The Trumpet of the Swan* is a masterwork in the translation of children’s literature. His version is best known and the most accepted one in China. With easy, simple and beautiful language, Ren’s version meets the reading and psychological needs of children and benefits Chinese children a lot. As a translator, Ren tells a story of a swan who surmounts various difficulties and grows up happily in a childlike language style from the viewpoint of a child. Ren himself also pays attention to whether his version provides the same reading experience with the readers of the original text for Chinese readers. His version not only meets the reading need of children, but also meets the artistic demand of adults.

II. ANALYSIS OF *THE TRUMPET OF THE SWAN* FROM THE PERSPECTIVE OF FUNCTIONAL EQUIVALENCE

Among all the translation theories, Eugene Nida’s theory of functional equivalence is one of the most influential, which is the vital part of all those Eugene A. Nida’s translation theories. In language, Culture and Translating, Nida has stated different degrees of “functional equivalence”, including the minimal, realistic functional equivalence and the maximal, ideal functional equivalence. As for the maximal, ideal functional equivalence, Nida (1993) argues, for the translated text, its readers should understand and appreciate it just as the original readers did (Nida, 1993). To achieve this ideal degree, the translator should always bear three aspects in mind: meaning equivalence, stylistic equivalence and cultural equivalence. Also, because the target readers are children, some scholars, include Xu (2004) argues that a translation that applies children-featured and humorous language style is more likely to resonate with young readers and create a close feeling among them. Thus, it requires a translator be familiar with children’s language style, know what children like and make his translated version accepted by young readers (Xu, 2004).

A. *Meaning Equivalence*

One theory of translation is “word-for-word’ translation to preserve the meaning. But not all words in one language can find the same word in another language. If the translator just sticks to this theory, he may find the translation work is an impossible mission. Due to the linguistic and cultural diversity between languages, translators must change the form in order to preserve the meaning, especially between Chinese and English, which belong to different language systems. Words normally have more than one meaning, and in different languages, the semantic areas of corresponding words are not identical. Therefore, translator should not always translate one word in the source language into a corresponding word in the receptor language. Instead, the choice of the right word which can produce the same meaning in the target language according to the context is important in order to achieve meaning equivalence. For example:

“Now is my time to act!” he said to himself. “Now is my moment for risking everything on one bold move.”(White, 1995)

“现在我行动的时刻到了！”它对自己说。“现在我孤注一掷的时刻到了。”(White,2010)

“Risking everything on one bold move” means to act no matter what the consequence is. It can be translated as “一个冒着所有风险的大胆行动”, but the translator used “孤注一掷” to convey the meaning of this phrase, it’s more acceptable in the target language and familiar to the target readers. By using this phrase “孤注一掷”, the target readers can see the determination of the father swan’s intention to get a trumpet for his son. And actually, he sets his safe and

reputation aside in order to help his son. The trumpet is the last hope for Louis to have his voice. From this we can say, the choice of the phrase “孤注一掷” is both faithful to the original meaning and close to the target readers.

“*He is over there sitting on a muskrat house, dreaming about the empty-headed young female he’s so crazy about.*” (White, 1995)

“它正坐在那边鼯鼠窝上，梦想着它想的发疯了的那位傻乎乎的天鹅小姐。”(White, 2010)

“Empty-headed” means one is dull or ignorant. The Chinese translation can be “没有头脑的” “傻而无知的”，in most cases, it bears a negative meaning, but here the translation use “傻乎乎的” in stead of “没有头脑的” to describe the female swan. This is a conversation of Louis’s parents’, “傻乎乎” is a tender tone of the parents. and it shows that the lady swan is adorable and even Louis’ parents like her. And they are proud of their son’s falling in love.

B. Stylistic Equivalence

Stylistic equivalence is another important aspect of Eugene Nida’s theory of functional equivalence. Sometimes it seems to be more important than meaning equivalence. Under some circumstances, the translator should sacrifice meaning equivalence for stylistic equivalence. In order to reproduce the style of the original, one should not follow the usually misleading role of formal correspondence. He should try his best to reproduce the same effect upon the reader of his translation as that upon the reader of the original by following the author’s style in a dynamic way. The readers of a translated text should be able to understand and appreciate it in essentially the same manner as the original readers did. Song and Huang (2010) argue that a stylistically equivalent translation should be one that has the same stylistic value. Plain it should be if the original is plain, and elegant if the original is elegant (Song & Huang, 2010).

1. Reduplicate words and Interjections

The usage of reduplicated words is a unique characteristic of Chinese language and a way to bring the childlikeness in translation. Using reduplicated words in translation will make it easy for children to accept. For example:

Just then, three young girls entered the lobby. They were giggling and squealing. (White, 1995)

正好这时候，三个年轻的姑娘走进大堂。她们在格格笑，还唧唧喳喳的。(White, 2010)

The translator uses “咯咯笑” and “叽叽喳喳” to describe the girls’ laughter. The translation gives a vivid description of the scene and the outgoing characteristics of the girls.

The first baby, the first cygnet was soft and downy. (White, 1995)

这是它第一个小宝宝，第一只天鹅，它毛茸茸，软绵绵。(White, 2010)

The translator uses “毛茸茸” and “软绵绵” to describe a new life, a baby swan. These two reduplicate words show how cute and lovely the swan is. And it also shows the love of the parents for their kids.

Interjections can enhance the tone, helping stand out the context and making the translation more inspiring and meet the needs of children as well. For example:

The cygnet can breathe now; it just keeps wiggling until it wiggles free. (White, 1995)

小天鹅现在能够呼吸了，它就是不断地扭，扭啊扭啊，直到从蛋壳里挣出来为止。(White, 2010)

The translator repeatedly uses the interjection “啊” as a rhetorical method to describe the action of “扭”，which enhances the tone of the speech, lifts the simple sentence and provides a vivid scene where the swan breaks its way to the world with so big difficulties for the children readers. Ren also repeatedly uses interjections like “吧”，“吗”，“嘛” and “呢”。For instance, Ren uses 15 interjections in the 5th chapter to express various emotions of animals and make the translated version more inspiring. More examples are as follows:

A real live swan, playing a trumpet! Life was a dream, all right. What a lark! What fun! What pleasure! (White, 1995)

一只真正的活天鹅，还吹奏起小号来！生活如做梦，一点不假。多么有趣啊！多么好玩啊！多么快乐啊！(White, 2010)

On and on he flew, toward Boston. (White, 1995)

它向着波士顿飞啊飞。(White, 2010)

“Wear it in health!” he said. “Blow it in happiness! Make the woods and the hills and the marshes echo with the sounds of your youthful desire!” (White, 1995)

“健康地挂着它吧！”它说。“快乐的吹奏它吧！让森林、群山、沼泽地回响起你青春渴望的声音吧！”(White, 2010)

2. Colloquial words

Colloquial language style is a unique feature in children’s literature. Children develop concrete thought to abstract one during the growing process, which requires concrete images to a large extent. For example:

“Welcome to the world that contains this lonely pond, this splendid marsh, unspoiled and wild!” (White, 1995)

“欢迎来到这个世界来，它包括了这可爱的池塘，这呱呱叫的沼泽地，它们保持着大自然的风貌，没遭到过破坏！”(White, 2010)

This is a remark given by the father swan to welcome his kids to their living place. In this sentence, the translator uses “呱呱叫” in stead of “壮丽的” to convey the meaning of “splendid”. The translation is vivid and the word “呱呱叫” is more frequently used in children’s daily conversation, and it is full of childlike flavor.

3. Exclamatory sentences and parallel structures

Exclamatory sentences and parallel structures are frequently used in the translation of children's literature. Exclamatory sentences help authors to express what is in their mind. While parallel structures enhance the tone of speech and make readers resonate with the author. For example:

What a triumphant return it would be! When he left Montana, Louis had been penniless. Now he was rich. When he left, he had been unknown. Now he was famous. When he left, he had been alone in the world. Now he had his bride by his side---the swan that he loved. (White, 1995)

这是怎样的凯旋啊！离开蒙大拿的时候路易斯身无分文。现在它有了钱。离开的时候它是个无名小卒。现在它有了名。离开的时候它在这个世界上孤孤单单。现在在它身边有了新娘--它心爱的天鹅。(White, 2010)

The first sentence is an exclamatory one and the translator deals with it in the same way to achieve the equivalence in structure. Parallel structure is also applied in the following contrastive sentences and Ren deals with them in the same way. For instance, “它有了钱”, “它有了名”, “它有了新娘” enhances the contrastive effects between the former and the latter part. Meanwhile, Ren uses four-character phrases in his translation. For example, the phrases like “身无分文”, “无名小卒” and “孤孤单单” give a realistic description of Louis' life. Such contrast illustrates the process of Louis' growth.

4. Figures of speech

As a frequently used rhetorical device, simile helps to illustrate the vivid action of characters, giving direct, visual and subtle reading experience to children readers and making the work childlike. For example:

He climbed steeply, like a jet plane, and then leveled off, flying high and fast toward the Northeast. (White, 1995)

它像架喷气式飞机那样陡直的上升,接着平飞,高高的向东北方向急速前行。(White, 2010)

The author uses a simile to describe the flying posture of the swan as a jet plane, which gives a direct image to readers. That it flies speedily shows the courage and determination of the father swan to help Louis. And the translator also keeps the image of jet plane and translates it into “喷气式飞机”, which can express the meaning and be easily understood by the children.

C. Cultural Equivalence

A lot of translators just think meaning equivalence and stylistic equivalence are all they should achieve, but there is one other factor to be considered, that is cultural equivalence. Since culture is something that can't be omitted in the translation process. A language lies in culture, and a certain culture influences a language. From the perspective of culture, the translation criterion is that the original cultural features should be transferred to the fullest extent. In order to reach that purpose, three points must be taken into consideration.

In the first place, the translator is supposed to understand the original text and its cultural background as accurately as possible. Yu (2010) argue that a misinterpretation will inevitably lead to an incorrect translation, not to mention the representation of the cultural connotation (Yu, 2010).

In the second place, he should try to retain the original images to render the cultural message to the maximum to prevent the cultural color from dimming. To be faithful to the original content includes the faithfulness to the original images, that is, to represent them as far as possible. In most cases, if a sentence conveys cultural information, annotation can be a good method to solve the problem of misunderstanding, and readers can know more background information about the source culture. For example:

He finally decided to play “Beautiful Dreamer, Wake Unto Me.” He had always loved that song. It was sad and sweet. (White, 1995)

它最后决定吹奏《入梦的美人,给我醒来吧》。它一直爱这曲子。曲子忧伤而甜蜜。(White, 2010)

注:这是美国作曲家福斯特(1826-1864)的著名歌曲。

In the third place, the original images must not go beyond the limit of the reader's acceptance. When there are distinct differences between the implied meanings of the cultural images, if retaining the original images, the target text is likely to be misunderstood by the reader or even opposes little meaning to the reader, then translators can shift the image of the original text to a familiar image in the target culture or just reproduce the implied meaning of the original in order to convey the full information. For example:

“Danger!” said the old cob. “I welcome danger and adventure. Danger is my middle name.” (White, 1995)

“危险!”天鹅老爸说,“危险!我欢迎危险和冒险。冒险是我突出的个性。”(White, 2010)

In the Western culture, a middle name is a given name that often helps to differentiate between individuals in a family with the same first name. However, in this example, “middle name” gains a figurative connotation meaning a notable or outstanding attribute of a person. If literally translated as “冒险是我中间的名字”, the children readers would wonder what it really means. Therefore, the translator abandons the original image and keeps the implied meaning “突出的个性”. This makes sense. The father swan is very confident and proud about himself, by addressing this speech, he will put himself in danger in order to finish his mission and recover his reputation.

III. CONCLUSION

The author of this article tries to analyze the Chinese version of *The Trumpet of the Swan* from the view of functional

equivalence by illustrating some typical examples, which proves that the functional equivalence is practical in the translation of children's literature and general equivalence can be achieved.

From what has been analyzed, we may conclude that Ren's version keeps a childlike flavor, because it emphasizes stylistic equivalence, which has become a very prominent feature of Ren's version. In real translation process, maybe the meaning equivalence, stylistic equivalence and culture equivalence are not put in the same position, but they are all important. Translators can choose their own style in order to maximize the ideal response of the target readers. Another important idea is that, in order to produce some translators to meet the demands of target readers, translators themselves need to learn more, not only about two different languages, such as words, phrases, and sentences, but also they should learn the different cultures and other important knowledge relating to the languages, only in this way can they find the most appropriate way of expression in the target language for the source language.

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