

A Comment on *On Translation—An Expanded Edition**

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The present paper, first of all, gives a brief introduction of Part II in *On Translation—An Expanded Edition* published by City University of Hong Kong in 2006, which consists of five essays of Mr. JIN Di written in different times. Those essays provide further insights into the principle of “equivalent effect” and its applications in literary translation. Then the present paper makes a comment on the book. That the principle of “equivalent effect” is a further development of “functional theory”. It involves a new outlook and a new orientation in translation, because it pays close attention to the natural effect that the translation may produce on our target-language receptors. The book aims to prove that principle of “equivalent effect” is not just a quick fix of any particular difficulty in translation, but it can produce a closest natural “equivalent effect”.

Keywords: *On Translation—An Expanded Edition*, translation theory, “equivalent effect”

Introduction

Co-authored by Eugene A. Nida and JIN DI, *On Translation—An Expanded Edition* was first published in 1984 in Beijing, “It is widely recognized as a classic in translation theory with a practical orientation” (LAO, 1987, p. 56). Following the theoretical framework, Nida (1998) had developed over decades of work on translation and semiotics. The two writers offered an easily comprehensible analysis of the complex problems involved in translation. After a critical review of the historical development of translation theory in the light of modern information theory, they elucidated the most fundamental principles of translation in accordance with the concept of dynamic equivalence. The treatment is closely related to actual translation practice, and the principles elucidated are applicable to all types of translation, though most of the examples analyzed are taken from translations between Chinese and English.

This new and expanded edition has two main parts. Part I is the complete text of the original work as published in the early 1980s. Part II consists of five of Professor Jin’s more recent essays, which provide further insights into the principle of “equivalent effect” and its applications in literary translation. Particular attention is paid to practical procedures and the extremely complex relationship between creative translation and real fidelity.

There are, however, two aspects in which they differ from the original work co-authored with Dr. Nida. The first is that all these essays are devoted to the analysis of contemporary literary translation: They do not have the historical aspect of the original *On Translation—An Expanded Edition*. The second difference is that some of the supplements involve a further development in his theoretical outlook. This is a development of the

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theory of “equivalent effect” as explicated in the original work co-authored with Dr. Nida, but it represents a distinction from his later concept of “functional equivalence”. To Dr. JIN’s mind that concept, though it may serve religious translation well, is not appropriate for literary translation, and he has made the point clear in Part II of the expanded edition.

And the present essay will mainly comment on the Part II of the expanded edition.

A Book Briefing

In the first essay “The Great Sage in Literary Translation—Transformations for Equivalent Effect”, the writer told us how he got the term “equivalent effect” and how his idea of “equivalent effect” was different from others.

I used the term “effect” in a broader sense than I believe it is understood among many translators and translation theorists—I prefer to the overall impression a translation produces on the mind of the receptor, which the spirit and the substance as well as the aesthetic effect. And I used the term “equivalence” as it is defined by Nida—not identity but the closest possible resemblance. (JIN & Nida, 2006, p. 206)

Then he explained that some of the supplements in the expanded edition involve a further development in his theoretical outlook. This is a development of the theory of “equivalent effect” as explicated in the original work co-authored with Dr. Nida, but it represents a distinction from his later concept of “functional equivalence” evidenced in the book *From One Language to Another* that he co-authored with Waard and published in 1986. He emphasized that the concept, though it may serve religious translation well, is not appropriate for literary translation, which, the author of the present paper think, is the most important contribution of the new edition.

After that, Dr. JIN mentioned how Peter Newmark has made praiseworthy efforts to solve the problem by distinguishing tow kinds of translation—communicative and semantic. Dr. JIN agreed with Newmark that in translating serious literature, one must respect the intention of the original writer. But Dr. JIN failed to see how could a translator divide his loyalty in the way Newmark advised: “His first loyalty is to his author, his second to the target language, his last to the reader” (as cited in JIN & Nida, 2006, p. 205). But Dr. JIN could not agree with him. He explained that he could not see:

If a translator have rendered the idea from the original in such a way that it makes no sense to the target language receptor, he is not being loyal to the writers but betraying him. On the other hand, an inclination to overtax the reader’s powers of imagination is often one of the main mistakes which lead to inadequate transformation and opaque translation. (JIN & Nida, 2006, p. 215)

In order to prove his view, a survey was made by JIN, in which nine different versions of a poem were shown. The poem is “The Night Thought” (静夜思), which may be described as the acme of poetic beauty in simplicity (JIN & Nida, 2006, p. 200). The poet of the poem is LI Bai (701-762), a famous ancient Chinese poet of TANG Dynasty. The nine versions were shown to native English speakers and aim to ask their comments towards the versions. The result of the survey revealed that no matter how slight a detail a translator had overlooked, it would surely affect the translation and target language receptor. A vivid analogy according to one of the four famous ancient Chinese classics *A Journey to the West* (the mid-16th century) was used here to give a further explanation. The successful translator may be compared to the Great Sage, the main character of novel. At his best, with his transformations appearing so natural that they are accepted without a question, while a

translator's slip and failures are not unlike the sages' less fortunate feats, when he is human enough to have such imperfections in his magical display as lead to setbacks.

The second essay, "Contra-Bly Stages of Translation", is a speech delivered in 1989 at a academic conference of translators. Dr. JIN expressed his view towards American poet Robert Bly's "The Eight Stages of Translation" (as cited in JIN & Nida, 2006, p. 226). He disagreed with Bly's view that a translation should start from a word for word translation. In that way, people would develop the bad habit of thinking in his native language. So in the third essay "Translation Procedures", Dr. JIN put forward his own ideas of three stages of translation, which emphasized the importance of thinking in target language so that an "equivalent effect" can be achieved.

In the fourth essay "Annoying Choice", and fifth essay "Literature and exoticism", Dr. JIN elaborated how to solve the problem of the third language in the original text. He used a very interesting metaphor to describe such kind of phenomenon as "Third Party or Person". With his translation experience of *Ulysses*, he introduced his translation principles. One is to translate both the English and the third language into Chinese, that is remove the third language. The second way is to remain the third language and add notes to it, so that the exoticism remained. Since the original materials where there are third language are the most brilliant part of the text, in order to keep the "equivalent effect", a dynamic translation principle is the best choice.

All in all, Part II of the expanded edition emphasizes the importance of the principle of "equivalent effect" and its application in translation.

A Brief Comment on the Book

Part II of the expanded edition provides further insights into the principle of "equivalent effect" and its applications in literary translation. Dr. JIN'S "equivalent effect" which is influenced by Nida's "dynamic equivalence" is the further development of "functional theory". It is a new criterion of translation, because both of them pay close attention to the target receptor reader's reaction and "equivalent effect". But in dealing with different kind of materials, Dr. JIN holds that his "equivalent effect" is not the same as Nida's "functional equivalence".

Another influential concept was Nida's dichotomy "formal vs. dynamic equivalence" (1964). His celebrated example from Bible translation is the phrase "Lamb of God", whereby "Lamb" symbolizes innocence, especially in the context of sacrifice. A literally translation ("formal equivalence") would create problems in a culture, such as that of the Eskimos, where the lamb is an unfamiliar animal and symbolizes nothing. The "dynamic equivalent" in this case would be "Seal of God", the seal being naturally associated with innocence in the Eskimo culture. It was this pragmatic, appreciative approach that Nida had in mind when he formulated the phrase "closest natural equivalent" in his definition of translation.

Then why, according to the book, is the principle of "equivalent effect" a cure to the pernicious headache? Because it is not just a quick fix of any particular difficulty, but involves a new outlook, a new orientation. Whereas by our old orientation, many translators of all the generations starting from the very beginning of translation even before Cicer's time, we thought of our own words when we looked at the foreign words in the source text, now by our new orientation achieved in accordance with the principle of "equivalent effect", we try first to visualize the effect the source text produces on the source-language receptors, and then try to imagine what kind of text in the target language may produce on our target-language receptors an effect as close to that effect as possible.

The survey of nine different versions of LI Bai's "The Night Thought" (静夜思) in the book seems to have made one point beyond dispute—all stylistic and other formal variations, however, trifling they might appear, will play a role in forming the effect the translation produces on the receptor, because they will touch on subtle elements in his linguistic and socio-psychological background, sometimes in ways quite unexpected to the translator if he is not wary, or if he lacks the native speaker's instinct or at least adequate knowledge.

As for the problem of "Third Party or Person", we have to be cautious and do according to Dr. JIN's suggestions. Or else it may have lost whatever beauty or charm of its identity, and its artistic integrity may have been seriously damaged and it may no longer be a piece of literature at all. Linguistic exoticism has always been one of the worst obstacles to translators, because it is so easy for expressions and structures natural to the source language but incompatible with the target language to creep into the translation.

Conclusions

Dr. JIN and Nida are the most influential persons in the translation field and the founder of equivalent theory. Their works and opinions guide the translation procedure. In commenting their works, we benefit a great deal.

Some of the translators have the mistaken impression that equivalent translation means free translation which is easy to produce since it seems to imply considerable freedom. On the contrary, an equivalent translation is very difficult to produce, because the translator must constantly be aware of the capacity and motivation of the receptors. It is, of course, necessary to say "roughly equivalent to", since no translation can be an absolute rendering of all the content and form of the original.

In fact, the more the texts that are considered untranslatable, the more we should use the principle of "equivalent effect", because there is no other way that can produce the effect as this equivalent translation principle does. The "equivalent effect" here does not mean that literally the 100% is the same as the original text. Of the various translation principles, the one that carries the closest effect to original text is the best translation principle.

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