A Contrastive Analysis in Language and Register Style of the Two English Versions of Jin’s *Yizuo Changqiao*

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This paper is a contrastive study of two translated versions of an essay which are very different in language and register style. It comes to the conclusion that the translator has to follow the fundamental translation principle of functional equivalence, that is, to faithfully reproduce the linguistic and stylistic features of the original, while retaining the verbal beauty of the original as much as possible. Through contrastive analysis, this paper also argues that stylistic features should be consistent with the choice of word, syntactic structures, rhetorical devices, and overall textual layout.

*Keywords:* language style, register style, translation principle, contrast, analysis

**Introduction**

*Yizuo Changqiao* is the first prose of the academic monograph *On Translation Beside a Bridge* that a famous translator and litterateur Professor Jin Shenghwa created, published by Chinese Translation Publishing Company in 1997. The author initiatively discussed the essence and characteristics of translation work from a macro perspective and then presented the translator’s occupation morals, professionalism and personal cultivation with vivid dialogue design and well-organized discourse layout. From the point of literature style and linguistic skills, the author was inclined to probe a complex problem combining translation and literature quality while using a lively and relaxed language style, generating a strong sense of inspiration and a sense of beauty and the stains of literature. Perhaps the real translator should also be a litterateur, Professor Jin can’t do her excellent and outstanding translations without the combination of the following aspects: the proficient literal skill, the multilingual competence and the literature and moral cultivation. Thus, a good translation should be the render of the original’s language style and register style faithfully in order to represent the unique features in the original literature. Moreover, in order to strive to reproduce the original translation appropriately, the translator also needs to pay more attention to the diction, syntactic structure, rhetoric skills, discourse layout using the basic translation principle—equivalence, faithfully matching language style and register style of the original literature to pursuing

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romantic charm in literature and art.

**Comparison in Language Style**

Detailed reading this essay, rather than rich vocabulary, vivid tongue, sonorous syllables, appropriate couplet sentences and reiterative sentences in the general lyric probe, the language style of which is more concise and graceful with the profound rational philosophy in nature. The ultimate delivery of language style of the original probe should be conveyed by appropriate verbal signs in translated render. Therefore, the translator should first comprehend the original diction, discourse layout and rhetoric skills to capture the language style of the original literature. Alexander Tytler, a British scholar at the end of the Eighteenth Century, advocated “Three Principles of Translation” in his book *Essay on the Principles of Translation*: The translation should give a complete transcript of the ideas of the original work; The style and manner of writing should be of the same character as that of the original; The translation should have all the ease of the original composition. According to his second principle, he stressed that “the style and manner of writing should be of the same character with that of the original” (Tytler, 2006, p. 9). During the process of translating, the translator can maximize some translation strategies through language, vocabulary, grammar, voice and rhetoric to maintain inter-consistency between the original and the translated in language style. The following paper is to make a further contrastive analysis on the different language styles of two versions to probe how to achieve the better inter-consistency between the original probe and the translated rendering.

**Functional Equivalence of Linguistic Meaning and Form**

Nida put forward the core translation principle—“functional equivalence”, which also means that translation does not require rigid correspondence on the literal meaning, but also achieves equivalence between two languages. According to this theory, he pointed out that “translation is a reproduction of the source language from semantic and stylistic renders, using the most appropriate, natural and equivalent language (GUO, 2000). The equivalence in “dynamic equivalence” includes four aspects: (1) lexical equivalence; (2) syntactic equivalence; (3) textual equivalence; and (4) stylistic equivalence. In these four aspects, Nida believes that “the meaning of language is the top priority and language form is the second” (GUO, 2000). Later on, we mainly probe about the contrastive analysis on two versions of *Yizuo Changqiao* based on “functional equivalence” in terms of the linguistic meaning and the language form as well.

(Source text):

> 翻译就像一座桥，桥两端，气候悬殊，风光迥异。两端之间，原隔着险峻的山谷，湍急的溪流。两旁的人，各忙各的，世代相传，分别发展出一套不同的习俗风尚以及语言文化来。 (JIN, 1997, p. 2)

(Version 1):

> Translation is like a bridge with a very different climate and landscape at either end of it. Under the bridge, there lies a valley between steep mountains with a rapid stream flowing through it. Before the bridge is built, people on either side of the valley have for generations made no contact with those on the other. Hence, there have developed two different customs and habits, and two different languages and cultures. (ZHANG, 2007, p. 237)

(Version 2):

> Translation is just like a bridge. On either side of the bridge, both climate and landscape vary. Between the two sides,
there lies a steep valley with a torrential stream. For generations, people on both sides are committed to their own business and they have cultivated quite different customs and habits, and languages and cultures. (LI, 2006, p. 208)

The original language is concise and fluent, natural and clean, not nearly tedious and complex. A large number of short verses and four idioms are originally used to display simple but exquisite form of the prose. Nida advocated “translation means translating meaning”, therefore, the equivalence of linguistic meaning in “functional equivalence” is obviously emphasized especially in the literary translation (Nida, 1964). Barr Huda Rolf, a linguist in the former Soviet Union, held that “translation is a process of changing a source language speech into another target language version, preserving its original content and meaning in context (Barr Huda Rolf, 1985). The use of “险峻的山谷，湍急的溪流” (xian jun de shan gu, tuan liu de xi liu), version 1 translates “steep mountain, rapid stream”, version 2 uses “steep valley, torrential stream, generally latter expression is much better than the first, truly conveying the corresponding meaning in the original text in the source text. “Translation is like a bridge with a very different climate and landscape at either end of it. Under the bridge, there lies a valley between steep mountains with a rapid stream flowing through it” (ZHANG, 2007, p. 237). The linguistic structure presents in version 1, a redundant and tedious form with short simple sentences dotted with prepositional phrases as post-positional attributes or adverbial modifiers; whereas the linguistic form in version 2 is more likely concise and flexible, light and graceful, “Translation is just like a bridge. On either side of the bridge, both climate and landscape vary.” The translator corresponded the linguistic form to the original to a great extent, used simple sentences and an exquisite verb “vary”, outwitting the tedious objects in the version 1, maximizing the correspondence of simple and concise linguistic form in the original.

As for “functional equivalence”, a good translation does not correspond with the literal meaning rigidly, but the equivalence of its function between two languages. The version 1 almost adopted literal translation, emphasizing an absolute faithfulness both in linguistic structure and form. Can such a translation faithfully reflect the language style of the original? No doubt a monotonous literal translation is like a pool of stagnant water, there is no deep integration of language style and form based on its ideological contents of two languages. In terms of prose translation, it’s not merely the delivery of the content and linguistic form as well. Moreover, it should convey the artistic conception of the original corresponding linguistic meaning and form, so that readers can get the same feelings as they read the original.

**Functional Equivalence of Syntactic Structure**

In comparison with the two languages of English and Chinese, it is due to the abundant form of combination in syntax in English, such as, affixes, metaplasm, pronouns, passive voice and connectives in various semantic logical relationships. Whereas, Chinese emphasizes parataxis, giving more stress on the inner cohesion of the meaning, forming a hidden interior connotation, mainly because Chinese is ideographic, and parataxis structure in Chinese is mainly reflected in word order, active voice, abbreviated sentence and four-character structure. Taking English as an example, Partridge believes that “no less than 90 percent English sentences are placed in a SVO sentence pattern” (Partridge, 1954). In fact, any English sentence “can be extracted into a SV basic sentence skeleton” (LIU, 1994), but Chinese sentences do not have certain frame restrictions of a SVO sentence pattern. There is no difference between the predicate verb and non-predicate verb. It is possible that several verb structures are used together or a few noun phrases are continuously arranged to display a concise and succinct
rhythm. In terms of syntax in both languages, the passive voice in Chinese seems obscure and implicit, a passive voice in logic is often presented in an active voice form. Generally, the object and the doer of an action can be existed in a sentence. However, the distinction of the voice in English is obviously explicit, stable and clear, as well as the active and passive sentence structure (Liu, 1992).

(Source text):

桥还是建了，一座座，一条条，知识在传递，文化在交流。可是有谁想起建桥人? (JIN, 1997, p. 2)

(Version 1):

Bridges are being built one after another. Knowledge spreads and cultures interflow. But who thinks of the bridge builders? (ZHANG, 2007, p. 237)

(Version 2):

Bridges are being built, one after another. Knowledge is being transmitted and cultures are being exchanged. But who has ever thought of bridge builders? (LI, 2006, p. 208)

From the above points of view, comparing the original and the two versions, we probe how translation strategies can be used to achieve the effect of functional equivalence in differentiated English and Chinese sentence characteristics. In the original text, “知识在传递，文化在交流” (zhi shi zai chuan di ,wen hua zai jiao liu) is a typical parataxis sentence of Chinese language, a passive voice in an active sentence structure using a word “在” (zai), instand of the definite symbol of the tenses or the obvious marker “被” (bei) in a passive voice, this sentence pattern is very obvious in Chinese language. But in fact, the implicit and reserved semantic passive voice sentence without a definite marker “被” is consistent with the habit of Chinese language expression. When translating such sentence into English, we do not only focus on linguistic and cultural characteristics of the original, more importantly on the analysis of the sort of linguistic phenomenon and the acceptable translating strategy in a target language culture. While translating into English, we should consider habits and usages of expression in the target language, converting its syntactic structure, definite tense and specific passive voice corresponded with the syntactic characteristics in English language, retaining a comparative equivalence in the syntactic structures in both language, maintaining a distinctive syntactic characteristics to a great extent to pursue a maximized equivalence in syntactic function. Comparing the two versions, the translation of “knowledge is being transmitted and cultures are being exchanged” in version 2 has been taken into account the obvious differences of syntactic structure and linguistic expression in both language, the usage of tense in context and the passive voice in syntax is reproduced a habitual and native translation in the target language integrated some acceptable translation strategies.

Comparison in Register Style

In his language stylistics, Wang Dechun defines register style as functional style, which falls under the category of parole and is a functional variant of language. Interlocutors, limited by the object and situation of communication, make a choice of language material and attendant devices according to content and motive of communication, leading to repeated similar choices based on identical psychological basis (WANG, 2000). It follows that register style does not exist independently of the object or situation of communication. At the same
time, the speech of the object is restricted by time and place. In simple terms borrowed from American sociolinguist Joshua Fishman, it is “who speaks what language to whom and when” (WANG, 1987, p. 23). In a nutshell, register style is a language style in use tailored to the thematic and contextual needs.

In *Xiandai Hanyu Zhishi Cidian* (Dictionary of Knowledge about Modern Chinese Language), register style is defined as “stylistic feature”, which is the style divided in accordance with functions of language communication. Register style is different from language style. The latter describes individual linguistic features in writing or speech, but the former is a mode a language user is compelled to abide by during choice of language material or rhetorical device. Therefore, register style should maintain correspondence and agreement with diction, syntactic structure, rhetoric device and layout of the selected language material. The following is a contrastive analysis of functions in register style and modification between the original and two English versions.

**Features in Style**

According to mode of communication and function, register style is divided into two categories: spoken style and written style. Spoken style should remain natural, lively, popular and vivid. In the original text by Professor Jin, paragraphs from the fourth to the tenth constitute the core of the entire prose, where she talks about professional integrity, devotion and indifference to fame and fortune in dialogic and verbal terms. This is the original intention of the author, and it should also serve as criteria for a translator. Communicative function of language is highlighted to make it reflect the beauty of the original text in this specific situation.

(Source text):

再追问：”难道不知道从来没有人是干这一行而发达的吗? 做这一行必须默默耕耘，若想抱着沽名钓誉的心，还是趁早别干。（JIN, 1997, p. 2)

(Version 1):

The questioner says again, “Don’t you know that none in this profession have ever become prosperous. You have to toil away in obscurity. If you want to go after fame and compliments, you had better not choose this profession. (ZHANG, 2007, p. 237)

(Version 2):

They are further asked, “Don’t you know that none of the job-takers in this field has ever gained a high social position? The job requires your toiling away in obscurity. If you strive for reputation, you’d better refrain from doing it. (LI, 2006, p. 208)

In this original text, two phrases, and their English translation of course, deserve close attention in terms of register style and language function. The first is “发达” (fa da), which is generally classified as a commendatory term meaning “prosperity, thriving or flourishing” according to *Modern Chinese Dictionary*. However, in this specific context, the author’s original intention is not the case. When asked about discrepancy between effort made and reward received, this group of translators’ answer is very clear: they don’t want to get wealthy. So the phrase “fa da” obviously means “发迹” (fa ji), meaning that poor people become rich and powerful according to *Modern Chinese Dictionary*. Consequently, this author would translate the whole sentence into “Don’t you know that none of the job-takers in this field has ever gained fame and fortune?” Whether it is appropriate or not is open to discussion. The second phrase that merits our attention is a four-character Chinese fixed expression “沽名钓
誉" (gu ming diao yu). According to register style, it is a derogatory term meaning “act deliberately or try to fish for fame by some means”.

Judging from the context, Jin’s use of the word is in a stark contrast in structure and meaning to the preceding spirit of quiet devotion and indifference to fame and fortune, thereby enabling a translator to choose his own future and destiny. After much consideration, this author tends to believe that “strive for reputation” in version 2 gains the upper hand. It is pretty clear from the comparison in context and register style that what the original author intends to convey is a sharp contrast through which to reflect the translator’s professionalism, open-mindedness and generosity unlike those people chasing fame and fortune. With the actual context brought to light, the diction in version 2 seems to be very appropriate and the language style in its entirety proves to be very similar to that of the original through vividly presenting a similar style and creating the communicative functions similar to those of the original.

Modification Function

Any rhetorical activity is inseparable from a certain context, and is restricted by register style. Contextual suitability is part and parcel of rhetoric. Rhetoric must follow functional principle; all rhetoric is to enhance communication effect of language use and realize its function. Use of rhetorical device can better serve the purpose and achieve communicative functions.

(Source text):

起桥最要紧的是两端根基扎得实，起石桥得一块块石头砌；起木桥得一块块木头搭；哪怕是做绳桥也马虎不得，须一根根绳子打结，不然人一上桥就摔下深涧，怎么还到得了对岸? (JIN, 1997, p. 2)

(Version 1):

A solid foundation must be laid at each end of the bridge. A stone bridge is built with block after block of stone. A wooden bridge is built with piece after piece of wood. Even the building of a rope bridge requires great care. Each rope has to be tied tightly lest the foot passengers should fall into the ravine, to say nothing of reaching the opposite side. (ZHANG, 2007, p. 238)

(Version 2):

To build a bridge, the most important thing for you to do is lay a solid foundation at both ends of it. To build a stone bridge, you have to lay solidly one block of stone after another. To build a wooden bridge, you have to put up firmly one piece of wood after another. Even to build a rope bridge, you can by no means show carelessness. You have to tie tightly one rope after another so that no one will fall into the ravine underneath when they step onto it. If that does happen, how can people reach the other side? (LI, 2006, p. 209)

Parallelism by definition means use of three or more identical syntactic constructions in a certain logical way to make a meaning enhanced or toned down. It’s characterized by structural orderliness with imposing force; if adequately used, parallelism may raise awareness, arouse feeling, deepen impression and create what might be called “hierarchical beauty” in terms of language use and sentence pattern. To translate such beautiful sentences, a translator should in fact rack his brains to present to the reader full realization of logical relationship and meaning while remaining true to the original. All work tests a translator’s overall ability to make use of language, adjust sentence structures and gain insight into the author’s inner world.

In version 1, three declarative sentences are used with the pattern of subject + predicate + prepositional
phrase. The structure, albeit orderly, is lacking in power; besides, the meaning is dull despite structural appropriateness. Moreover, in all three sentences, passive voice is used only to lay emphasis on objectivity, but expression of man’s subjective resolution is neglected. In other words, objectivity stands out, but at the expense of the linguistic force of sentence. In version 2, three simple sentences, which convey ideas adequately with closer sentence patterns, are used. Each of the sentences starts with an infinitive, followed by “have to” to express subjective initiative. Not only is it better structurally, but information about the meaning is also highlighted, with stronger subjectivity, thereby demonstrating the effect of equivalence with parallelism in the original.

Then the author uses an adverbial clause of concession, “哪怕是做绳桥也马虎不得” (na pa shi zuo sheng qiao ye ma hu bu de), The tone is natural and thus lends weight to the entire power; it enables the meaning more smooth in a sense of hierarchy closer in structure.In version 1, the sentence is rendered into “Even the building of a rope bridge requires great care.” In terms of sentence structure, the translator makes much adjustment from the other three sentences above. “building” is used as a subject, with “a rope bridge” as a post-modifier; the meaning does not vary much. However, if viewed comprehensively, the parts before and after are far from consistent, not to mention the effect of power. Version 2 continues to remain orderly as the above. “Even to build a rope bridge, you can by no means show carelessness.” There is not much change structurally, and addition of “even” signals the change of meaning. Parallelism is also used to create “hierarchical beauty” in language and sentence pattern, thus achieving functional equivalence in content and form.

**Conclusion**

Through the above analysis, it is easy to see that translation of essays like the one in question requires us to not only preserve the language style in the original and re-present it in the target language, but also to embody its stylistic features in the process of translation. It requires painstaking effort to keep both the linguistic and stylistic features by means of skillful and accurate control of various linguistic devices such as diction, sentence making, syntax, voice, and rhetoric for the purpose of effective communication. In his monograph *Stylistics and Translation*, Liu Miqing points out that:

As translators, we are charged with not only conveying the meaning of the original, but also suiting our version to the original in its entirety by constant close reading and reflection to get familiar with the style of the original such as the general style of diction, sentence patterns, rhetorical devices and means of expression and make the translation adapt to the overall style of the original as much as possible. (LIU, 1998, p. 577)

In accordance with the above requirements, a translator is supposed to be keen on every nuance of meaning so as to the translated language full of its original vitality. As Jin mentions in the preface to her book *On Translation Beside a Bridge*, “translation is like a bridge, and the translator serves as a courier, shuttling all year round between the ends of the bridge of translation. Whether sunny or cloudy, whether in the sun or in the rain, whether in a gentle springtime breeze or bleak autumnal wind, the translator is always burdened with work to or from either end of the bridge” (JIN, 1997, p. 1). Such brilliant and dexterous use of language like prose poetry functions as a true reflection of every translator devoted to translation and as the greatest encouragement to and the highest compliment on their engagement in translation.

**References**


