

# Translation Strategies of Instructional Text

## —Taking *Murder Your Darlings and Other Gentle Writing Advice from Aristotle to Zinsser* as an Example

KE Li

Guangdong Polytechnic, Foshan, China

With the popularity of English learning in the world, the demand for instructional materials is increasing, and how to accurately convey the information of these texts to English-learners and provide the learners with an effective learning experience has become a major problem. Therefore, the role of the translator is crucial. It is found that that translators should make linguistic choices based on the text functions and target readers' expectations, and flexibly adopt the translation strategies, such as addition, conversion, and cohesion to convey the intention of the source author and generate the source context accurately and appropriately. Applying relevant theories to the analysis of translation cases, the paper tentatively puts forward solutions to the problems encountered in the E-C translation of chapter one of *Murder Your Darlings and Other Gentle Writing Advice from Aristotle to Zinsser*. Hopefully, it could provide a reference for other translators working on instructional texts.

**Keywords:** informative texts, instructional text, function plus loyalty, reader- response, translation strategies

### Introduction

Due to the surge of interest in learning English, books of English language skills have attracted people's attention, of which English writing is one of the most popular. As a famous American writing coach, devoted to creating a nation of writers, Roy Peter Clark has provided much precious advice and gained fame around the world. His new book, *Murder Your Darlings and Other Gentle Writing Advice from Aristotle to Zinsser*, published in 2020, is an effective writing tool with no doubts.

### Characteristics of the Source Text

Clark's book was mainly written for educational purpose, attempting to provide useful and inspirational writing guide to English learners at mid- and advanced levels, including ESL (English as a second language) learners.

This book is aimed at transmitting the appropriate information about writing skills to English learners, so that their learning, especially of writing, could be more effective. Apart from Clark's own writing experience, this book also contains a variety of advice from other writing experts and coaches. On the whole, the translation

---

LI Ke, Master's degree, Teaching Assistant, School of Foreign Language and International Trade, Guangdong Polytechnic.

material is an instructional text, featuring two distinct modes of expression—narrative writing and expressive writing.

### **Narrative Writing**

The first expression mode is narrative writing, which is to convey Peter Clark's personal experience as a writer. For this part, the language is diversified with many colloquial words and informal expressions.

At the lexical level, this part presents many oral expressions being used in personal anecdotes. Besides, some are culture-loaded and need to be reproduced in the target language based on both English context and Chinese expression. At the syntactic level, it mainly appears to be short sentences where cohesion should be the priority in the translation, and such rhetoric as metaphor and hyperbole are more often shown in this part. Taken all together, the expression of this part is more flexible.

### **Explanatory Writing**

The second expression mode in this book is explanatory writing. For this part, large quantity of lines is created for analysis which involve example illustration and advice list, thus challenges remain during the translation, such as difficulties in gaining sufficient background information and expressing in a concise manner but to the point.

Therefore, the explanatory writing plays a role as informative texts. At the lexical level, this part displays many literary terms and expressions, which requires the translator to acquire relevant knowledge to guarantee the accuracy of the translation. At the syntactic level, there are some long and difficult sentences with strict logic. Hu Ni and Li Xiaolu (2020) put forward that these sentences in the informative text increase the difficulty in understanding and translation, although the meaning of the original text could be more precise with objective and logical expression.

In addition, fluency is another one highlighted during the translation. At the textual level, given that different writing books and professional writers are introduced, the text is written at one stretch for each chapter. Therefore, coherence and cohesion should be emphasized in translation.

## **Case Analysis**

The translation of the first chapter (over 8,000 words) of *Murder Your Darlings and Other Gentle Writing Advice from Aristotle to Zinsser* from English into Chinese is a complex process that contains appropriate adaptations according to the ST-context, different expression habits and thinking patterns between English and Chinese readers. In this chapter, the author will elaborate the corresponding translation strategies based on case studies at lexical, syntactic and textual levels.

### **Target-reader Investigation**

In order to know the acceptability of the translation, a questionnaire survey (see appendix) with some typical examples was conducted online among four different universities in China. Respondents were selected from English learners.

For this research, 115 questionnaires were distributed, and 115 valid answers were received. In the second part of this questionnaire, each question consists of two translation versions, among which option A is more informal and option B more formal. After analyzing the results of this survey, the author found that the

respondents gravitate toward the option A in seven questions for the second part, while for another 3 questions, including Q2, Q4 and Q8, the respondents choose the second option with the concision and “relatively formal” (accounting for 47.83% in appendix) considered.

According to the first part of the questionnaire, it is found that 68.7% of respondents are looking forward to acquiring practical writing skills from the writing-guide books, and over one half prefer relatively formal language, while only 7.83% don’t care about the style. Based on data from first part of the survey, the author realized that the respondents have high expectations for acquiring knowledge and information in instructional text featuring with relatively formal language.

As for the second part (concerning diction and syntax of specific cases), to words’ diction, data collected in the questionnaire indicates that the version with concise and popular expressions is more favored, such as Q2. In handling narrative part of ST, translators are supposed to keep the author’s writing styles. As is shown in the data of Q3 and Q5 respectively, 53.91% of respondents choose the option A with colloquial expressions and 40.87% think the option A more acceptable in terms of its vivid description. Based on these data, the author found that the target readers prefer colloquial expressions or even humorous words in the instructional text. In handling long and complex sentences, translators should use simple, direct and clear expressions which are easily accepted by the readers as is shown Q1, and 29.57% think both versions are acceptable for the conciseness. However, comparing two options, the author realized that option A is more likely to be favored for the greater readability of straightforward expressions.

### Case Studies

According to Nord’s translation theory, functionality and loyalty are the cornerstones. Considering the functionality of the ST, the author has given priority to the realization of its referential function in the TT, so the integrity of information is the main criterion of the translation evaluation. In addition, since the ST is an instructional text, it is not only required to convey the original information accurately, but also to retain its fluency and readability.

Besides, according to the survey findings, the author has revised the translation accordingly by adopting translation strategies at different linguistic levels, including lexical level, syntactic level and textual level, which is elaborated respectively with case analysis in the following sections.

#### Analysis at lexical level

##### Example (1)

**Source Text:** In examining my first draft, I loved everything I had written. What was I to do? A voice with a British accent invaded my thoughts: “**Murder** your darlings.” So that’s what I did. I **murdered** my mother. (Clark, 2020, p. 22)

**Target Text:** 审阅初稿时，我对一切都很满意。接下来该做些什么？那个熟悉的英伦腔声音闯进了我的脑海：“**忍痛割爱**！”于是我照章办事。**舍弃**了我的“母亲大人”。

**Analysis:** The word “murder” appeared twice here. The literal meaning of “murder” in Chinese is “谋杀”. Apparently, this word cannot be translated literally, or the translation will appear confusing and impenetrable with heavy translationese. Therefore, the word should be further extended from its basic meaning according to the context, being loyal to the original text and conforming to the habits of target readers. With this in mind, the

translator rendered “murder your darlings” as “忍痛割爱” instead of “谋杀汝爱”, which matches the contextual meaning that the writer should cut his beloved words when it comes to writing. As for the second, the original author said he abandoned the part of talking about his mother in his draft. In view of the Reception Theory and Nord’s ideas of “function plus loyalty”, the translator rendered the second “murder” as “舍弃” so as to coincide with reading habits.

#### Example (2)

**Source Text:** There were problems he could not identify and solutions he could not remember and re-create. That, my friends, is the vulnerability that all **apprentices** feel—and some masters, as well. (Clark, 2020, p. 28)

**Target Text:** 他坦白说自己也想不起从原文中删减了什么。所以无法辨别问题，也无法记起相应的处理方案以及再现自己做过的标记。我的朋友们，这可是所有**嫩角儿**都存在的问题——一些大师也概莫能外。

**Analysis:** This paragraph writes about an exercise at the beginning of a seminar which demonstrates an easy atmosphere and shows the author’s sense of humor. In the ST, it seems like a dialogue with the readers as the sentence begins with “my friends”. Besides, “apprentice” is contrary to the word “master”. According to the findings of the questionnaire, the target readers choose the colloquial version for its attractiveness. Therefore, the author translated “apprentice” into “嫩角儿”, echoing the translation of “大师”, so as to assure the readability and maintain the fun of the TT.

#### Analysis at syntactic level

#### Example (3)

**Source Text:** Writing may look like magic in the hands of an author such as John McPhee, but Bill Howarth reveals that the magic is not magic at all, but the product of a process—elaborate, yes, but one that can be learned. (Clark, 2020, p. 18)

**Target Text:** 在约翰·麦克菲 (John McPhee) 这类作家的笔下，写作好比变魔术一般。比尔·豪沃思 (Bill Howarth) 则认为，这种魔术可不像魔法那样**无中生有**，它源自作者的匠心独具和精雕细琢。

**Analysis:** This addition belongs to semantic addition. In ST, the author holds that writing is not a magical creation but an elaborate process of learning. Two words of “magic” are included in this sentence—“the magic is not magic at all”, which are totally different in contextual meaning. The former refers to an elaborate process for trick while the latter is a sheer fabrication out of nothing. Therefore, the author added “无中生有”, so that the target readers can acquire the underlying message of the original text more accurately.

#### Example (4)

**Source Text:** *Writing Well* is a composition textbook written by a poet. The advantage of that is a deeper appreciation for the individual word and families of words. It’s as if a word has a door and you are invited to step inside. (Clark, 2020, p. 32)

**Target Text:** 《写作指南》是一本诗人谈写作的教科书，其特点在于作者对单个字眼和词组有着深入理解。一个词好比一扇门，受邀入内，**方可一探究竟**。

**Analysis:** When the author reads through this sentence, it is noticed that “step inside” remains as a challenge to expressing the information completely. What it means here is that this book is written by a poet who is able to

provide more profound insights in terms of the word. The ST says that each word has a door await the reader to explore. But it seems like the sentence does not come to an end in the target language when the sentence is rendered into “受邀入内” according the original words. On the contrary, the target readers may feel bewildered. Therefore, the author added “方可一探究竟” to make the expression sound more complete.

#### Analysis at textual level

##### Example (5)

**Source Text:** I calculated that I could deliver about 2,000 words in 15 minutes. By early May I had a first draft. **It** spread to 8,000 words. I did the math. I had prepared a speech that would take at least an hour to read. (Clark, 2020, p. 22)

**Target Text:** 我算过, 15分钟内能念2000词左右的稿子。五月初, 我完成了一份底稿。洋洋洒洒8000词, 算一下, 至少需一个小时才能念完。

**Analysis:** In the ST, the translator uses the cohesive device “reference”. It is an important device to embody cohesion, which can make one language component correlate with another language component. This device is divided into three types—personal reference, demonstrative reference, and comparative reference. The word “it”, which is used to represent the word “draft” in the case sentence, belongs to personal reference, and can also be translated into “draft”. In this example, the translator omitted the pronoun “it” and translated the sentence into “洋洋洒洒8000词” instead of “初稿延伸至8000词”. Obviously, the latter is Chinglish which should not occur in translation. In this way, target readers will have the similar reading experience as the original readers do, thus the communicative function of the ST could be achieved with internal logic in the translation.

##### Example (6)

**Source Text:** Over the next hundred days, I thought of little else but that speech. Without committing a word to paper or screen, I spent a month in bed, in the shower, over coffee, behind the wheel, rehearsing the imagined text. (Clark, 2020: p. 22)

**Target Text:** 接下来的一百多天里, 除了这场演讲, 我心里什么也装不下。但我并没有在纸上或电脑屏幕上写一个字, 而是在床上、在浴室、喝咖啡时、开车时, 花了一个月时间, 反反复复在脑子里排练演讲词。

**Analysis:** In this case, the second sentence expresses an implicit logical relationship. Based upon the observation, the sentence “without committing...” implies an adversative relation. The preceding sentence introduces the original author’s worries of this speech, and the latter sentence makes description that he didn’t commit a word to paper or screen but rehearsed the imagined text in his mind. As mentioned above, instrumental translation concentrates on presenting a familiar target text to its readers, and Reception Theory requires reader-oriented strategies in translation. According to the logical relationship, the translator added the linkage word “但我并没有...而是...”, so its explicit relationship was preserved. As a result, an understandable and smooth text is made for the target readers, which echoes the referential function and loyalty principle in a way.

### Conclusion

The research is based on the E-C translation of an excerpt from *Murder Your Darlings and Other Gentle Writing Advice from Aristotle to Zinsser* and viewed from the perspectives of Nord’s Function plus Loyalty as well as the Reception Theory. It is aimed at studying the strategies for the translation of instructional texts at

lexical, syntactic and textual levels, supported by findings from a questionnaire with target readers. Firstly, while studying the various strategies used in translation within this report, it can be found that the expression of instructional texts have such features as flexible and varied vocabularies, concise and logical sentences as well as coherent discourse. The findings could provide a reference for other translators working on instructional texts. Secondly, it is believed that faithfulness must be seen as paramount in translating instructional texts and the translator must adopt reader-oriented strategy in transferring what was found in the original, including meaning, culture and the implied values to the target audience. Thirdly, the questionnaire results show that the target readers are more likely to accept concise and straightforward expressions, although there are still some relatively formal expressions in popularity according to the survey. In addition, some translation innovations such as colloquial expression in the TT have been also approved by the respondents; this proves that the attractiveness of the instructional texts is an important element in the acceptability of the translation.

### References

- Christine, N. (1991). *Text analysis in translation: Theory, methodology and didactic application of a model for translation-oriented text analysis*. Amsterdam-Atlanta: Rodopi.
- Christine, N. (1997). Translating as a purposeful activity: Functionalist approaches. *Explained*. Manchester: St. Jerome Publishing.
- Christine, N. (2016). Meaning, sense, function—What is transferred? *Procedia—Social and Behavioral Sciences*, 231.
- Clark, R. P. (2020). *Murder your darlings and other gentle writing advice from Aristotle to Zinsser*. New York: Hachette Book Group, Inc.
- Claudia V. A., & Holly, E. J. (2009). *Testing and assessment in translation and interpreting studies: A call for dialogue between research and practice*. Amsterdam: John Benjamins Publishing Company/Philadelphia.
- Crystal, D., & Davy, D. (1973). *Investigating English style*. London: Longman.
- Delisle, J. (1988). *Translation: An interpretive approach*. Ottawa: University of Ottawa Press.
- Dos, S., & Luis, M. (2016). Nord's documentary versus instrumental translation: The case of Hugo's *démain, dès L'aube*. *English Language and Literature Studies*, 06, 76-81.
- Halliday, M. A. K., & Hasan, R. (1979). *Cohesion in English*. London: Longman.
- Iser, W. (1987). *The act of reading: A theory of aesthetic response*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press.
- Jauss, H. R. (1989). *Toward an aesthetic of reception*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.
- Jean, B. B. (2014). *Stylistic approaches to translation*. Beijing: Taylor and Francis.
- Joan, P. (2000). *The translator's guide to Chinglish*. Beijing: Foreign Language Teaching and Research Press.
- Munday, J. (2001). *Introducing to translation studies: Theory and applications*. New York: Routledge.
- Newmark, P. (2001). *A textbook of Translation*. Shanghai: Shanghai Foreign Language Education Press.
- Nida, E. A. (1989). *Language, culture, and translating*. Shanghai: Shanghai Foreign Language Education Press.
- Trosborg, A. (1997). *Text typology and translation*. Amsterdam: John Benjamins Publishing Company.
- 方梦之. (2014). 应用(文体)翻译学的内部体系. 《上海翻译》, (02), 1-6.
- 胡爱梅. (2012). 论文学翻译中“度”的把握——基于诺德之功能翻译理论的思考. 《盐城师范学院学报 (人文社会科学版)》, 32(03), 95-97.
- 胡妮, 李小璐. (2020). 目的论指导下的信息类文本翻译——以《不再丢失一个客户》(选译)为例. 《南昌航空大学学报 (社会科学版)》, 22(02), 84-88.
- 胡壮麟. (1994). 《语篇的衔接与连贯》. 上海: 上海外语教育出版社.
- 李权东. (2012). 功能加忠诚: 一种翻译伦理而非原则——介评诺德的《译有所为——功能翻译理论阐释》. 《海外英语》, (01), 144-145+166.
- 刘红新. (2014). 应用文本翻译原则探究. 《语文学刊(外语教育教学)》, (09), 45-48.
- 刘竞. (2006). 《目的性行为——析功能翻译理论》简述——兼评德国功能派翻译理论. 《宿州学院学报》, (01), 81-83.
- 田璐, 赵军峰. (2018). 新世纪的功能翻译理论——克里斯蒂安·诺德教授访谈录. 《中国翻译》, 39(04), 86-90.

## Appendix: Questionnaire

您好! 本人正在做关于英语写作指南类书籍翻译的问卷, 为有写作需求的中国英语写作者提供写作建议。该问卷调查旨在验证相关翻译策略是否有效, 不作它用。请根据情况如实回答, 谢谢支持!

一、根据实际, 选出合适的答案。

- 你期待从英语写作指南类书籍中收获什么?
  - 实用写作技巧 (68.7%)
  - 语言文字熏陶 (13.91%)
  - 外国语言文化 (17.39%)
- 在使用英语写作指南类书籍时, 你是否在乎文本的语言表述?
  - 很在乎 (33.91%)
  - 比较在乎 (58.26%)
  - 不怎么在乎 (7.83%)
- 你希望此类书籍的语言表述特点为 \_\_\_\_\_?
  - 非常正式 (6.09%)
  - 正式 (33.91%)
  - 比较正式 (47.83%)
  - 口语化 (12.17%)

二、下面为译文中的典型例句, 共十道题, 请选出你所认为的合适选项。

- 在美国前桂冠诗人唐纳德·霍尔笔下, 英语是一处惬意的居所, 居于其中, 可呼吸清新空气, 增添生活滋味 (40.87%)
  - 在美国前桂冠诗人唐纳德·霍尔笔下, 英语俨然成了一处不错的居所——居于其中, 可呼吸清新的空气, 增添生活滋味 (29.57%)
  - 以上两种译文均可接受 (29.57%)
- 在约翰·麦克菲 (John McPhee) 这类作家的笔下, 写作好比变魔术一般, 比尔·豪沃思 (Bill Howarth) 则认为, 这种魔术可不像魔法那样无中生有, 而是精心制作的产物、可以习得的技能 (24.35%)
  - 在约翰·麦克菲 (John McPhee) 这类作家的笔下, 写作好比变魔术一般。比尔·豪沃思 (Bill Howarth) 则认为, 这种魔术可不像魔法那样无中生有, 它源自作者的匠心独具和精雕细琢 (55.65%)
  - 以上两种译文均可接受 (20%)
- 有很长一段时间, 我的书跃至第二名, 但即便如此, 津瑟仍然甩我几条街 (53.91%)
  - 有很长一段时间, 我的书跃至第二名, 但即便如此, 于津瑟我仍瞠乎其后 (33.91%)
  - 以上两种译文均可接受 (12.17%)
- 好吧, 这个看似在行、实则是白费钱财的装饰就不属风格: 如果你需要实用的准则, 我会推荐下面这个 (8.7%)
  - 好吧, 这个看似专业、实则是白费钱财的装饰就不属风格: 如果你需要实用的准则, 我会推荐下面这个 (74.78%)
  - 以上两种译文均可接受 (16.52%)
- 我的朋友们, 这是所有嫩角儿都存在的问题, 一些大师也概莫能外 (40.87%)
  - 我的朋友们, 这是所有新手都存在的问题, 一些大师也是如此 (38.26%)
  - 以上两种译文均可接受 (20.87%)
- 虽然母亲是一位保守的天主教徒, 但她骂起人来与码头工和黑帮唱圈的爱子没什么两样 (56.52%)
  - 虽然母亲是一位保守的天主教徒, 但她能够像码头工和黑帮唱圈的爱子一样满嘴脏话 (24.35%)
  - 以上两种译文均可接受 (19.13%)
- 想要抓住一种特定题材或是写作风格的精髓, 其中一种方法就是要行文诙谐。如果你能让人频频点头的同时开怀大笑, 你就成功了 (42.61%)
  - 想要抓住一种特定题材或是写作风格的精髓, 其中一种方法就是要行文诙谐。如果你能让人认可的同时开怀大笑, 你就成功了 (33.91%)
  - 以上两种译文均可接受 (23.48%)
- 圆周句将文本呈现得更加生动, 具有说服力; 而松散句更易耗人心力, 令人厌倦 (38.26%)
  - 圆周句将文本呈现得更加生动, 具有说服力; 而松散句的表达效果则趋于弱化, 令人厌倦 (39.13%)
  - 以上两种译文均可接受 (22.61%)
- Q 是在做“加法”, 而非做“减法”, 这类作家打草稿的时候就一股脑儿写下所有的“文字宠儿”, 审校原文时才作无情地删减 (47.83%)

- B. Q 是在做“加法”，而非做“减法”，这类作家打草稿的时候就把所有的“文字宠儿”都写下来，审校原文时才作无情地删减 (26.96%)
- C. 以上两种译文均可接受 (25.22%)
10. A. 《第 4 号草案》收录了八篇麦克菲在《纽约客》发表的文章，这些文章体现了构思谋篇、报道编辑的写作技巧。如果说第一本书是盛宴中的美味佳肴；第二本则告诉我们佳肴如何烹制 (22.61%)
- B. 《第 4 号草案》收录了八篇麦克菲在《纽约客》发表的文章，这些文章体现了构思谋篇、报道编辑的写作技巧。如果说第一本书是盛宴中的美味佳肴；第二本书则揭示了这佳肴烹饪过程中的种种秘密 (47.83%)
- C. 以上两种译文均可接受 (29.57%)