

# A Study of the Functional Equivalence of the Lyell's Translation of Lu Xun's "New Year's Sacrifice"

LI Qifan, GAO Wencheng

University of Shanghai for Science and Technology, Shanghai, China

In the long development process of translation science, Nida's functional equivalence translation theory, as the core of its translation stage, is one of the very important theories in the development process of translation science. As a translation theory that was introduced earlier, domestic scholars have also done a lot of research on functional equivalence theory. In this paper, the Lyell's translation of Mr. Lu Xun's "New Year's Sacrifice" is studied from three aspects: words, sentences, and chapters. Among them, it can be found that the Lyell's translation can not only achieve the functional equivalence between the translation and the original text, but also make the translation better. And the translation can be said to be a very good model of the theory of functional equivalence in translation practice.

*Keywords:* Luxun, functional equivalence, naturalization, dissimilation

## Introduction

In the long history of the development of translation, many linguists have put forward numerous translation theories. Each translation theory has systematically summarized translation from its own perspective and has played an important guiding role. Among these linguists, Eugene Nida, a Western master of translation, had a profound influence on translation communication theory, which had played an important role in guiding translation communication activities, especially the translation of literary works between different languages. The core part of the communicative theory of translation is the theory of "functional equivalence", also known as dynamic equivalence. As a translation term, functional equivalence is mostly used to explain the relationship between the original language and the target language. Functional theory has always been a guide for translation practice. Nida believes that the important point in translation is that the translation can reproduce the information of the original language in the most appropriate and natural form from semantic to stylistic, and the formal equivalence is not so good or bad, but the degree of the translation is its function, and it depends on whether the translation can be accepted and understood by the readers, and whether it can resonate with them, rather than the formal equivalence (Nida, 1993). Although functional equivalence theory cannot be regarded as a new trend in today's perspective, functional equivalence theory had dominated the translation world around 1970s, and it was the first one to include readers in the study of translation theory. It emphasizes meaning and style, and believes that readers of the target language should respond in the same way as readers of the original language in reading (Nida, 1993). Because of this, the study of functional equivalence has also contributed to the present-day

translation research at a time when cognitive translation studies are making a new wave in the translation community.

### **Lu Xun's "The Blessing" and Lyell's English Translation**

This familiar novel tells the story of "Sister Xianglin", and he describes the unfortunate fate of Sister Xianglin in a sympathetic way, revealing her misfortune in detail and pointing out that the root cause of her misfortune is the evil old Chinese society. The novel is a profound revelation of the feudalism. The novel profoundly reveals the cruel nature of the feudal system, which is oppressive to the people, not only for material deprivation, but also for the soul. It is in such a "cannibalistic society" that such a hard-working, peaceful, and simple working woman as Sister Xianglin suffers such a tragedy, and is even terrified of the world after her death. In such a novel, there is a strong traditional Chinese vernacular flavor in the wording and lines, as well as unique traces of Chinese writing. It is a very difficult task to translate such a novel into English and to have it accepted and recognized by native English-speaking readers. Among Chinese translators, Yang Xianyi and Dai Naidian have translated Lu Xun's *Na Shout*, and their translations have been widely circulated and regarded as classics of their generation. However, in the author's opinion, although Mr. Yang's version is fluent, it is heavily "translated". If we look at the text in isolation, it is obvious that the lines are not in line with the English works. Although Mr. Yang Dai translated Mr. Lu Xun's works into English, most of the readers of the translation were Chinese readers, so it can be said that the translation was not well accepted among English readers. William A. Lyle, one of the leading Western scholars of Lu Xun's works, has also published an anthology of his own translations (*Diary of a Madman and Other Stories*). In this anthology, since Mr. Lyall is a native English speaker, his translation is more in line with the English writers' style and phrasing than the translations by Yang and Dai, and the translation is more charming in English. Such translations, translated by native English speakers, will naturally be more acceptable to English readers because their language and style will be closer to English, and the effect of "functional equivalence" will be more relevant than that of Yang and Dai's translations. Since reader acceptance is a very important criterion in the theory of functional equivalence, because the English translation of Lyell is more in line with the reading habits of English readers, the degree of reader acceptance will be higher, thus making its functional equivalence more relevant, so the English translation of Lyell is a more suitable model for the study of functional equivalence. The novel "The Blessing" is also chosen because it contains many descriptions of unique Chinese customs, which are difficult to translate into English, and if not handled properly, the translation will be very obscure, so the study of the translation of this novel has more academic value.

### **The Application of Functional Equivalence Theory in the English Translation of Lyell's "The Blessing"**

The functional equivalence theory is well reflected in Lyell's English translation, which, as an American, largely represents how the target language readers go about receiving the translation. His translations can be found to follow the functional equivalence theory very closely in the process of study.

#### **Functional Equivalence of Culturally Loaded Words and Phrases**

In the novel "The Blessing", because the story is set in the traditional Chinese rural town of Luzhen, the opening of the story is also limited to the beginning of the traditional Chinese New Year custom of "blessing", so there are a lot of culturally loaded words and phrases in the text. These phrases, which carry Chinese folklore and Chinese culture, have few equivalents in English. In dealing with these culturally loaded words, how to retain

the function and meaning of the original words while finding a suitable translation method in the translation to make it highly acceptable to Western readers is a matter that tests the translator's level. The word "blessing" can be translated as "blessing" if we use the direct translation method without considering the function of the title and the content after the text. However, Mr. Lyle translated the title "The Blessing" as "New Year's Sacrifice", and this translation is a good example of functional equivalence. The title "The Blessing" is not just a word, but a ritual, a kind of New Year's ritual in Luzhen, which includes "boiling blessing ritual" and "sacrifice to heaven and earth", etc. The rituals include the "Blessing Ceremony" and the "Sacrifice to Heaven and Earth", which have Chinese folklore characteristics. The activity of "blessing" is also used throughout the article, and the changes in each "blessing" are used to show the injustice of the character's fate and the poison of feudal society to her. Therefore, the word "blessing" is not only a culturally loaded word, but also the center of the text. Naturally, Lyell's translation translates this word with the meaning of the text. In this way, the reader can quickly understand the meaning of the text without being confused and unable to find the central point of the text. Move on to the following example:

- followed by a blunt sound, a firecracker to send off the stove (Lu, 2002, p. 207);
- followed by the muffled sound of distant explosions-pyrotechnic farewells to the Kitchen God (Lyell, 1990, p. 219).

In the translation, Lyle treats the word "send zao" as fairs to the Kitchen God, a translation technique. In Chinese culture, the word "send zao" means to send to the Kitchen God, and the imagery of "sending zao to the Kitchen God", as one of the more important cultural customs in Chinese Spring Festival, is self-explanatory to Chinese readers, although Chinese readers can also read and understand. The passage is self-explanatory to Chinese readers, who can understand it. However, for readers in the English environment, if the word is translated as "songzao" in pursuit of the same form, it will really confuse people and make them wonder where it is. So here, in order to pursue the goal that the reader of the translation can know the meaning of the word as soon as he sees it as the reader of the original, Lyell's translation structures the word "send stove" and writes its own meaning into the translation. So the phrase "farewells to the Kitchen God" is used. However, it is not clear to English-speaking readers who do not know the Chinese cultural background. Therefore, the translator uses the technique of text with commentary to explain why the Zaowang God is sent to the Kitchen God, which also allows the audience readers to have the same cultural senses and similar reading experience as the original readers, which is a good reflection of functional equivalence. Let's look at the next example:

- Now it is always cleaned up by the changeless (Lu, 2002, p. 207);
- Well, now at last Wuchang had swept her away without leaving the slightest trace (Lyell, 1990, p. 226).

Here in the translation, we can see that the translation of the word "Wuchang" adopts a direct translation approach, that is, the word Wu is often translated phonetically as "Wuchang". In this case, the translator pursues formal equivalence, but is this contrary to the theory of functional equivalence? In the literature review above, scholars have concluded that functional equivalence is also a certain degree of "seeking common ground while preserving differences", and Nida has also concluded that in translation, the uniqueness of the original text is best preserved in the text if needed (Nida, 1993). Here, the author retains the term "Wuchang", which is a term specific to Chinese culture, and does not specifically expand it for replacement. Unlike "sending a stove", "Wuchang" is a proper noun, not a verb with traditional meaning, but a cultural symbol with Chinese cultural characteristics, which cannot be replaced or explained in English in the translation. Therefore, the translator has marked it but kept the word "impermanence" directly in the translation. This treatment respects the writing habits of the original

text and allows the readers of the translation to accept this translation better. Moreover, the translation is sufficiently detailed in the markup, which achieves the effect of "seeking common ground while preserving differences" on the basis of respecting the original text, thus making the theory of functional equivalence better reflected.

### Functional Equivalence of Sentences

In Mr. Lu Xun's "The Blessing", apart from the basic sentences used in the outgoing lines, the rest of the sentences are generally either short sentences in the form of dialogues or long and short narratives in the form of dialogues, followed by some culturally loaded sentences. For culturally loaded sentences, it seems to be a little easier to deal with the translation than culturally loaded words, because point-to-point word translation without corresponding words for replacement, basically in order to achieve the effect of functional equivalence, is necessary to carry out in-text explanation or under-text marking means to deal with the translation. However, for culturally loaded sentences, since the sentences themselves are linguistic units with explanatory nature, the effect of functional equivalence can be best achieved by ensuring that the translated sentences are the same or similar to the original sentences, for example:

- This is really called "the unpredictable clouds of heaven" (Lu, 2002, p. 216);
- Like a bolt out of the blue-there really is something to those words (Lyell, 1990, p. 233).

In Chinese, "天有不测风云" is used to indicate that things are unpredictable, unexpected, and unpredictable. The use of weather changes to express the meaning of unexpected and unpredictable is unique to Chinese and would not be expressed in English. In order to pursue functional equivalence, Lyle uses the common English expression "Like a bolt out of the blue" to express the meaning of "unexpected" and "unpredictable". This expression not only perfectly translates the meaning of "unanticipated" and "unpredictable" in English, but also translates "like a bolt out of the blue". This expression not only perfectly translates the phrase "the sky is unpredictable", but also uses a writing technique often used in English, so that readers in the native English environment can better accept the translation, and thus can get the same reading experience as the original readers.

Of course, among the many culturally loaded sentences in the text, there are those for which substitution is not possible, e.g.:

- But he knew that although he had read that "the ghosts and gods are the good energy of the two energies" (Lu, 2002, p. 211);
- Although Fourth Uncle had read that ghosts and spirits do but natural transformations of the two powers be (Lyell, 1990, p. 225).

Therefore, Lyell uses the technique of interpretation here, and does not stick to the form, but translates the meaning of the Chinese completely, using the phrase that the English reader can understand. If there is a phrase in the translated language that can express the meaning of the original, then it can be replaced according to the technique of "naturalization". If no equivalent or similar expressions can be found, then the meaning of the original can be interpreted, thus achieving functional equivalence.

### Concluding Remarks

The analysis of the Lyell translation of "The Blessing" shows that functional equivalence is not rigid in translation practice. Sometimes it is possible to retain the format of the original text and make a direct translation, and sometimes it is necessary for the translator to make an interpretation and consider how to make the reading

experience of the readers of the translation the same as that of the readers of the original text. This is also something that every translator needs to consider in translation practice.

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