

# Creative Translation as a Faithful Translating Technique Disguised—With Examples in the Chinese Version of *The Life of Napoleon Bonaparte*

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Under the core guideline of creating a reading response that is the same on both sides of the native and target readers, Eugene A. Nida puts his translation theory in form of functional equivalence. Thus translation becomes a task of reproduction of providing in the target language the closest version that is natural and idiomatic in style, context and semantics. Due to various reasons, creative translations can be made to fulfill that purpose. The second thought and the thorough manipulation of words and expressions help bridge the discrepancy in comprehending the source language and the translated one, whose requirements literal and traditional ways of handling translation may fail to meet.

*Keywords:* creative translation, Eugene A. Nida, functional equivalence, *The Life of Napoleon Bonaparte*

## 1. Creative Translation and its Necessity

Faithfulness comes in first place among the three criteria—faithfulness, expressiveness and elegance—brought forward by Yan Fu, the famous enlightenment thinker in late Qing Dynasty. For quite a long time a school in translating research value the “faithfulness” standard in their own right so much that directness is viewed as a desirable way conduct translating process and word-for-word translation is advocated by them even on the price of a possibly twisted mother tongue.

When a new angle of looking at the problem is taken, the surprising result can be that creation, which seems to be least related to the so-called “loyalty”, could, under certain circumstances, turn out to be the very faithful and even exact version. Always regarded as “traitor” instead of “translation”, creation is thought of as the translator’s willful manipulation of words, a manifestation of the translator’s rebellious mentality of trying to take the aroma away from the maker. There are occasions when creative translation stands out. Robert Escarpit, a French literary sociologist, composes the term creative treason to explain that translation is a creative activity, and that with all the unexpected turns in the target language that enjoys a different frame of linguistic system, variant cultural background and particularly, different ways of understanding what the context displays, creative

translating empowers a refreshing perspective, and embarks a stable communication in literature. In a word, creative translation is the “second life” of the original work.

Why is creative translation necessary in some cases? One of the elements considered is the high-context quality of the target language that by either literal translation or translation through meaning will more or less cause imbalance on the reading experience of the target readers.

## **2. Eugene A. Nida’s Functional Equivalence Theory**

Eugene A. Nida (1914-2011) puts forward the translation theory named functional equivalence that entitles the creators and revisers a right to translator’s original ideas so as to make translation “exact”—that is, a seemingly proper version is actually not natural and may even incur ambiguity or different semantic denotation, which with all the faithful intention of proceeding translation, fails to grasp the genuine and idiomatic expression in the target language. So here translation is more a “technique”, an exact “science” rather than something simple and superficial.

Functional equivalence highlights the effect of translation on the target reader being the same or similar to the effect of the source text on the source reader, providing a theoretical basis for the creation. The purpose of creative employment is not to display virtuosity on the translator’s side but to “bridge” the gap between the source expression and the target one formed possibly by the discrepancy in culture, context, and even mindset for different nationalities.

According to Nida, the aim of translation, aside from conveying the meaning, is to realize in the target language the function, i.e. the intention of the original author’s writing it—whether it is a social one, a cultural one, or a practical one, when some aspects of those purposes and functions are lost in the translated version or new angles are triggered because of it, the different channel of comprehension makes the translation “unfaithful” surprisingly. So the requirements translators need to meet are the following: the translation need to be reasonable and have a solid foundation; the spirit of the original text will not be omitted; the translation need to be natural and usage idiomatic in the target language; the degree of bringing about empathy is the same or similar on readers of both sides.

## **3. *The Life of Napoleon Bonaparte* and Its Recent Chinese Version**

In 2020, authorized by Sino-culture Press, the Chinese book of *The Life of Napoleon Bonaparte* which being introduced in 1908 is a late work by the British scholar Sabine Baring-Gould (1834-1924), has been published. And the writer of this article has the honor of being the first and sole the translator for this book, would like to share certain experiences during the process to advocate advice and bring on more concern and interest about classic books and their translation.

A versatile and very accomplished priest, hagiographer, antiquarian, novelist and folk song collector, S. Baring-Gould has shown many aspects of writing techniques and the manifestation of sense of culture, literature, history, and sociology makes translation in no means a simple task of converting something from one language to another. Further exploration need to done, thorough semantic understanding considered and balance or compromise made for a frame or category “larger” or “smaller” than the original one—that is, the faithful

deliberation on the other hand fails to be faithful sometimes, and the truly loyalty of translation is about the choice from overstatement to understatement in order to attain disambiguation and a more stabilized equilibrium.

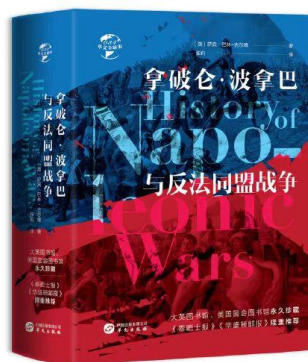


Figure 1. The Chinese version of The Life of Napoleon Bonaparte.

#### 4. Practicing Maneuvers about the Four Steps of Creative Translation

The writer for this article, as translator for this book, in handling certain cases, under the guidance of functional equivalence theory, adopts four steps in creative translation, which is more complicated than the two-step English-to-Chinese method. With personal translating experience shared, the translator does not mean that it is a hundred percent proper and no other ways can be found. With shortcomings on the translator's side, the consideration may not be ideal and then any advice or improvement will be welcome.

Firstly, the original text is broken down in its semantic hyponym and smaller units of language senses or sense groups will be found and due attention will be paid to them. In here a draft of English version is formed with core meanings and language senses that may otherwise have been overlooked, and the whole step can be named paraphrasing.

Secondly, instead of commencing from the original expression, translator does it from the paraphrased version to a general or transitional Chinese version. Of course this Chinese message is no the final one. Key points being primary and explanations being a little bit verbose will occur.

Thirdly, realizing that the second version is rough and redundant and somewhat Anglo-Chinese, not the natural and native one meant to set up, the second result of translation is revised into one that is smooth and concise.

Last but not least, Chinese-to-Chinese work is done again, and this time abrupt change may take place as to the expression and demonstration of the word or phrase. Sometimes it is more of remaking than revising. The similarity between the third result and the final one is functional, social, cultural and contextual, so the final version, compared with the original one, may be beyond all recognition and readers by shedding the same tears and gasping in the same awe admit the same effect in reading experience.

##### 4.1. Is the Creative Translation Composed Arbitrarily?

With versatility and least patience, S. Baring-Gould and his kind would not describe a thing or narrate a story in every detail so that the reader and the possible translator while reading get down to the truth of the problem easily. Understand it or not, the leverage is on the reader's cognition. Under certain circumstances

common practice need to be broken down and new level of balance built. Then a translator's basic job is to uncover the hidden message that the original author does not even care to leave out intentionally, and the possible injection in the target language is both necessary and admiring.

For example, in the 1908 published version, S. Baring-Gould ended the whole biography with the following sentence—"Les revolutions ne se repetent pas", which is a quoted French sentence with the literal meaning that the revolution will never repeat itself. However, given the high-context nature of Chinese, direct forwardness would only confuse the Chinese readers by misleading them into understanding it as discussion about the French revolution instead of the hero of topic. Then we need to correlate more information in the last paragraph to understand it as designating the unique and insurmountable appearance in history of Napoleon.

Is there any prospect of another great Napoleon arising out of the same family? Of the dynasty reascending to the throne in France? There was no second great Caesar after Julius. Charlemagne's family died out in insignificance. "Les revolutions ne se repetent pas." (Baring-Gould, 1908, p. 541)

Through analysis of the source paragraph, the translator thinks that the last sentence functions as a thought-provoking, meaning and automatic end of the whole book. So when the Chinese version is provided, it must be guaranteed that the same feeling can be perceived, the same effect fulfilled, and the same naturalness obtained. The translator understands it from the version that the revolution can't be self-repeating into an improved comprehension—No offspring of the Napoleon family can have the similar accomplishments as the first generation Napoleon Bonaparte did in history. Yet it is not enough for the translator to stay here and view that as the final translated variant. A step further and more profound will push the translator to investigate exactly the factors leading to such unparalleled establishment in mankind's history, to allay the side-ambiguous sense that the comparison is what the author really wanted.

When holding such a long piece of history book, chapters do not go separately. And while doing translation, the correlation to the former-mentioned key points and central ideas is timely brilliance. The translator delivers in recalling the very first paragraph of the book and a topic sentence in Chapter One and a mention of the revolutionary era's position in Chapter Four to improve understanding of the final sentence with the whole book as its background being organic.

In estimating the character of Napoleon Bonaparte, and tracing its development, two things have to be taken into consideration, the threads out of which that complexity —the character, is formed, and the circumstances which determined the twist or texture it assumed. (Baring-Gould, 1908, p. 1)

Had not the conflagration of the Revolution cleared the ground, his genius would have died within him, undeveloped. (Baring-Gould, 1908, p. 26)

The word "circumstances" in the former and the subjunctive mood used in the latter point the central idea to that part of the reason why Napoleon is an earthshaking hero whose myth can never be duplicated is the particular time factor—the French revolution being so dramatic, so complete and so grounded for Napoleon to achieve his dreams. So the reason why the world cannot see a second genius like him is that kind of era will not come back again.

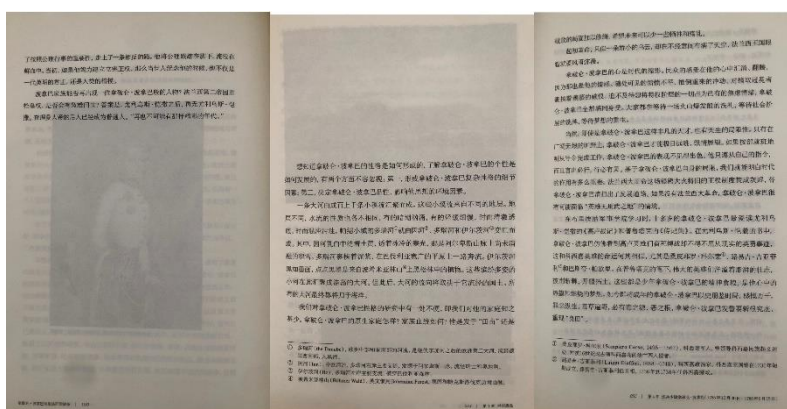


Figure 2. The process of analyzing and regulating the translation for last sentence.

#### 4.2. Is the Creative Translation Created out of Nothing?

With the above detailed narration on how the creative translation is conducted, it seems unnecessary to go through the task again to explicitly explain the following case and its final Chinese version, being irrelevant to each other on the first sight, but functioning as the natural and idiomatic expression arousing the same effect in the readers' mood swings in the original language as well as the second one. It describes the emotion and determination of Napoleon when fleeing from Elba:

His air was calm and serene; he turned, smiled on those around, and said, "The die is now cast." (Baring-Gould, 1908, p. 483)

**Step One:** The proverb "*The die is now cast*" is understood in its own sense, meaning a certain degree of completion is done and now cannot be undone. It is very much like another saying "*The rice is cooked*" so now everything is already set and no more human power can do about it. Paraphrase the phrase and turn it into an English version that is more closely related to the context to show the firm determination of Napoleon to come back to France and grasp the royal power again. Then the translator firstly puts it into a paraphrasing statement like—There's no way back. And then a further understood version appears: There's nothing to feel regret about. Just go ahead and reap the fruits you want.

**Step Two:** Covert the paraphrased version into its Chinese equivalent.

**Step Three:** Finding the Chinese equivalent easy to be misleading readers into thinking that Napoleon has had a new plan as Chinese readers are apt to be influenced by the high-context nature in its culture. In order to avoid the inconvenience from typical divergent way of thinking, the Chinese translation is from "It's no use crying over the spilt milk" to a more modulated variant "I have already made up my mind to go back to French and nothing can make me change my mind".

**Step Four:** Further regulation still need to be done about the revised Chinese. Considering its linguistic and cultural background, the translator thinks that the conveyance of Chinese, with all its cultural deposits and restraining connotations, should be dealt with more delicately and subtly. The complete message not exhibited, the exposure of a touch on the topic with an auxiliary tone will just do.

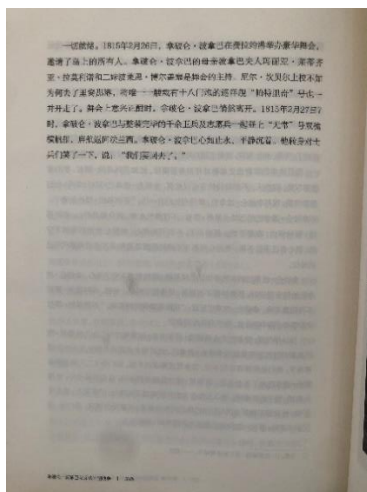


Figure 3. P1088 of the Chinese book where the English proverb is translated through creative translation.

## Conclusion

Based on Nida's functional equivalence theory for translation, this article presents the writer and translator's individual practice of creative translation with examples from the Chinese book published. The aim of the writer for this article is to advocate further investigation and exploration in translating classics activities. The effort and the analysis may not be quite satisfactory under every aspects; an open mind and tolerance of novel construction will be required. So creation is not necessarily about the building of something new; maybe after all it's about the second thought given to something old.

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