

From “Semantic Equivalence” to “Verve Reproduction”— Exploration on Xu Yuanchong’s English Translation of the *Analects*

GUO Junyi

Shanxi Tourism Vocational College, Taiyuan, China

This paper focuses on the English translation of Xu Yuanchong’s *Analects*, explains in depth the theory of semantic equivalence and the theory of verve reproduction. It analyzes the application and integration of these two theories by Xu Yuanchong in detail. Through a comprehensive textual analysis, this paper summarizes the remarkable achievements of the English translation of the *Analects*, such as the accurate transmission of semantics and the vivid reproduction of cultural charm, which is expected to bring new thinking directions and valuable references to the study of the English translation of the *Analects*.

Keywords: semantic equivalence, verve reappeared, Xu Yuanchong, English translation of the *Analects*

Introduction

The *Analects* is a Confucian classic and a treasure of the traditional culture of the Chinese nation. It was compiled by the disciples of Confucius and his followers, and embodies the political ideas, ethical thoughts, moral concepts, and educational principles of Confucius and his disciples. The *Analects* not only had a profound influence in ancient China and became a must-read classic for students throughout the ages, but also attracted much attention in the world today. The wisdom and philosophy contained in it transcend time and space, and have important implications for personal cultivation, social governance, and the development of human civilization (Qian, 2023, p. 89).

Mr. Xu Yuanchong is a well-known translator in China, who has made remarkable achievements in the field of translation. He is committed to translating excellent Chinese literary works into foreign languages, so that Chinese culture can be disseminated around the world. Mr. Xu Yuanchong proposed the theory of “three beauties”, namely the beauty of meaning, the beauty of sound, and the beauty of form, which provides a unique perspective and method for translation practice (Wang, 2022, p. 236). His translations are loved by readers for their unique style and beautiful language, which faithfully convey the meaning and charm of the original text.

The selection of Xu Yuanchong’s translation of the *Analects* for re-study has important academic value and practical significance. First of all, as a classic representative of traditional Chinese culture, the translation of the *Analects* is crucial to the dissemination of Chinese culture. Mr. Xu Yuanchong’s translation is unique among many translations, and re-studying it will help people to understand the transmission and reception of the *Analects*

GUO Junyi, Associate Professor, Department of Tourism Foreign Languages, Shanxi Tourism Vocational College, Taiyuan, Shanxi, China.

in cross-cultural communication. Secondly, the analysis of Xu Yuanchong’s translation from the perspective of semantic equivalence and verve reproduction can reveal how to reproduce the charm and style of the original text to the greatest extent, which will provide a useful reference for the development of translation theory. In addition, through the study of this topic, it can provide reference for future translation practice, cultivate more excellent translation talents, and promote the exchange and integration of Chinese and foreign cultures.

Relevant Theories

Semantic equivalence is an important concept in translation, which refers to the fact that the meaning conveyed by the target language is as close or consistent as possible with the source language during the translation process (Zhang, 2016, p. 64). Its main principles include the followings. Translations should accurately convey the basic information of the source language and avoid misunderstandings and ambiguities. Completeness covers all the important content of the source language without missing critical information. Contextual adaptability considers the context in which the source language is located, including linguistic environment, cultural background, and communicative context. It ensures the translated text has the same function and effect in the context of the target language. The logical structure and reasoning of the translation should be consistent with the source language to ensure the coherence and rationality of the information transmission. Lexical correspondence tries to find the closest equivalence to the source word in the target language, but also balances the nuances and cultural connotations of the words in different languages. Semantic equivalence seeks to achieve the greatest degree of coherence between the source and target languages at the level of meaning, so that readers can gain similar understandings and feelings as the original readers.

Semantic equivalence is an important principle in the translation of the *Analects*, but it also has certain limitations. When translating the *Analects*, translators need to consider a variety of factors, including cultural differences, language characteristics, and the reader’s background, in order to convey the meaning and cultural connotations of the original text as accurately as possible (Wang, 2023, p. 53). At the same time, readers should also keep an open mind when reading translated works.

In translation studies, the concept of verve reproduction emphasizes that in the process of translation, it is not only the accurate transmission of the semantics of the original text, but also the reproduction of the inner spirituality, charm, style, and emotion of the original text (Qian, 2015, p. 18). Its connotations include: Capture the soul of the original text; Understand and convey the unique thoughts, emotional tendencies, and creative intentions contained in the original text; Reproduce the characteristics of the style. This includes language style, rhythm of writing, and rhetorical devices, so that the style of the translated text is consistent or similar to the original text; Reflect the cultural background, social customs, and values, carried by the original text, so that readers can feel the cultural atmosphere in which the original text is located. Verve reproduction requires the translator to go beyond the superficial linguistic forms in the translation and strive to convey the intrinsic charm and unique value of the original text (Tan, 2019, p. 233).

Semantic Equivalence in the Translation of Xu Yuanchong’s *Analects*

At the lexical level, Xu Yuanchong’s choice of translation of the key words in the *Analects* reflects the principle of semantic equivalence. For example, for the word “君子”, Xu Yuanchong translated it as “intelligenteleman”, which accurately conveyed the meaning of “gentleman”, that is, a person with wisdom and moral character. This kind of translation is not only semantically accurate, but also echoes the original text in

form, reflecting the characteristics of sound and form. For another example, for the core concept of “仁”, Xu Yuanchong’s translation is “virtue” or “goodness”, which can better convey the moral connotation of “benevolence”. Through such translation choices, readers can find concepts in English that correspond to the original text, achieving semantic equivalence at the lexical level. In addition, Xu Yuanchong also pays attention to preserving the cultural connotation of the original text in translation. For example, for the word “仪”, he translated it as “ritual” or “ceremony”, and explained in his commentary the important position and role of rite in Chinese culture. This approach helps readers better understand the cultural context of the original text and achieves semantic equivalence at the cultural level.

Literal translation refers to a translation method or translated text that maintains both the content and form of the original text; Paraphrasing refers to translating according to the general meaning of the original text, without translating word-for-word (Wu, 2024, p. 48). The following are examples of the use of literal and paraphrase methods in the English translation of Xu Yuanchong’s *Analects*. In the *Analects*, “gentleman” and “villain” are two important concepts. Xu Yuanchong literally translated “gentleman” as “intelligentman” and “villain” literally as “small man”, retaining the basic concept of the original text. “仁” is the core concepts of Confucius’s thought, which Xu Yuanchong literally translates as “virtue” or “goodness”, which accurately conveys the moral standard.

“学而时习之”, this is the opening sentence of the *Analects*, which Xu Yuanchong translated as “To learn and to practice what is learned from time to time”, in which “时习之” was paraphrased as “from time to time”, which is more in line with English expression habits. The phrase “吾日三省吾身” means “I reflect on myself many times a day”. Xu Yuanchong translated it as “I examine myself three times a day”, which is more concise and clear. In the English translation of the *Analects*, Xu Yuanchong flexibly used literal translation and paraphrase translation methods according to specific conditions. On the basis of retaining the semantics and cultural connotations of the original text, the translation is more in line with the English expression habits and easier to be understood by Western readers.

The processing of sentence structure and grammar requirement achieves a faithful reflection of semantics. When translating the *Analects*, Xu Yuanchong carefully crafted sentence structure and grammatical processing to achieve a faithful reflection of semantics. He skillfully used part-of-speech transformations, such as the mutual transformation of nouns, verbs, and adjectives so that the translation is more in line with English grammar norms and did not deviate from the semantics of the original text. For complex Chinese sentence patterns, he moderately adjusted the word order and put the key information in front, which is in line with the expression habits of English. For example, in the original text, he retained the original logic and emphatic meaning through the use of parallel structures in English. In addition, for some metaphorical and symbolic expressions, he accurately grasped the connotation and chose appropriate English words. Most of Xu Yuanchong’s translations could accurately convey the core semantics of the original text, and in some sentences, there would be appropriate explanations and supplements in order to make the translation more fluent and easy to understand. The degree of semantic equivalence is at a high level, which is both faithful to the original text and takes into account the acceptance of the target language reader.

The Strategy of Verve Reproducing in the Translation of Xu Yuanchong’s *Analects*

In the process of translating the *Analects*, Xu Yuanchong adopted a variety of ingenious strategies for the transmission of cultural elements and philosophical ideas. He pays attention to retaining key cultural terms in the

original text, provides readers with a clear understanding of specific cultural concepts through literal translation and annotation. For example, he might translate the core concept of “仁” literally as “benevolence” and explain its connotation further in the commentary. For sentences that contain philosophical ideas, he carefully selects expressive words and sentence patterns to accurately convey deep speculative meanings. At the same time, according to the English language habits and cultural background, he would appropriately transform some metaphors, symbols, and other rhetorical devices, so that English readers can feel the charm of the philosophical ideas in the *Analects*. In addition, he would also highlight the key points through word order adjustment and sentence structure optimization, showing the logical relationship and philosophical level in the original text. As a result, cultural elements and philosophical ideas could be clearly presented.

Culturally loaded words carry unique cultural connotations and need to be handled carefully when translating to ensure the accurate transmission of cultural information. The common translation strategies of culturally loaded words include literal translation and paraphrase translation (Li & Su, 2024, p. 93). Xu Yuanchong’s strategy for translating the Chinese loaded words in the *Analects* is quite subtle. For example, the word “君子” is translated by Xu Yuanchong as “gentleman”. “Gentleman” in English represents a well-educated and virtuous person, to a certain extent, it conveys part of the meaning of “君子”. Another example is “礼”, Xu Yuanchong translates as “rituals” or “propriety”. “Rituals” focuses on rituals, and “propriety” emphasizes appropriateness. Through the alternating use of these two words, it shows the rich connotation of “礼” more comprehensively. There is also the word “孝”, which is translated as “filial piety”, “filial” means “child”, and “piety” means piety and respect, which together can give English readers a general understanding of the respect and obedience of children to their parents.

Xu Yuanchong’s translation embodies the concise, subtle, and other stylistic characteristics of the *Analects*. The language of the *Analects* is concise and subtle. Xu Yuanchong has embodied this style in a variety of ways during the translation process, and here are some specific examples. For example, Xu Yuanchong literally translates “君子” as “intelligentman”, which retains the cultural connotation of the original text, while his transliterating “器” as “implement” is more in line with English expression habits and concisely conveys the meaning of the sentence as a whole. In the translation of “学而时习之”, Xu Yuanchong adopts the “provincial translation method”, omitting some information that is self-evident in English, making the translation more concise. The translation of the style and the rhythm of Xu Yuanchong pays attention to the neatness, presenting the “beauty of sound”. For example, the words “君子” and “小人” are translated as “intelligentman” and “bad man” respectively, which not only are relative in meaning, but also maintain a certain symmetry in form, reflecting a concise and rhythmic style.

In terms of rhetoric, Xu Yuanchong’s translations often use rhetorical techniques such as confrontation and comparison to enhance the expressiveness and sense of the translation. For example, “有朋自远方来不亦乐乎?” “人不知而不愠，不亦君子乎?” Xu Yuanchong translated it as, “Is it not a pleasure to learn and practice what you have learned? Is it not a delight to have friends coming from afar? Is it not a gentleman who does not feel resentment when he is not understood?” Through this confrontation, not only the meaning of the original text is conveyed, but also the rhythm of the original text is reproduced. In terms of prosody, Xu Yuanchong pays attention to the phonetic beauty of the translation, and makes the translation have a certain musicality through rhyme and leveling. For example, Xu Yuanchong translates the sentence “A gentleman is inclusive but not exclusive; a bad man is exclusive but not inclusive”, where “inclusive” and “exclusive”, “not inclusive”, and “not exclusive” form a rhyme, which is catchy and rhythmic to read. In the process of translating the *Analects*, Xu

Yuanchong reproduced the charm of the original text through the skillful use of rhetoric and rhyme, so that the translation has high artistic value and cultural connotation.

Transformation and Integration From Semantic Equivalence to Verve Reproduction

The transformation and integration from semantic equivalence to verve reproduction is an important topic in translation studies. The reasons and opportunities for this transformation can be analyzed from two aspects: the purpose of translation and the target audience.

Translation purpose is an important factor influencing translation strategies and methods. Translators may choose different translation strategies to achieve different translation effects for different translation purposes (Zeng, 2023, p. 16). For example, when translating a literary work, the translator's goal may be to reproduce the charm and style of the original text, so that the translated text has an artistic appeal similar to that of the original text; When translating scientific and technological literature, the translator's purpose may be to accurately convey the information of the original text, so that the translated text has the same scientific and professional nature as the original text. Therefore, the different purposes of translation will lead translators to adopt different strategies and methods in the translation process, so as to achieve the transition from semantic equivalence to verve reproduction.

The target audience is also an important factor influencing translation strategies and approaches. Different target readers have different cultural backgrounds, language habits, and reading needs, so translators need to choose appropriate translation strategies and methods according to the characteristics of their target readers (Sun, 2022, p. 17). For example, for children readers, the translator may use simple and easy-to-understand language and vivid expressions to capture the child's attention; For professional readers, translators may use jargon and rigorous expressions to accurately convey the message of the original text. Therefore, the difference in the target audience will also lead the translator to adopt different strategies and methods in the translation process, so as to achieve the transition from semantic equivalence to verve reproduction.

For example, Xu Yuanchong translates the phrase “Is it not a pleasure to learn and practice from time to time?” In this example, Xu Yuanchong translates “学而时习之” as “learn and practice from time to time”, conveying the basic meaning of the original text. At the same time, he translates “不亦乐乎?” The use of rhetorical questions enhances the expressiveness of the translated text and makes it easier for the reader to understand the meaning of the original text. For another example, Xu Yuanchong translates the phrase “The virtuous are broad-minded and the vicious are narrow-minded.” In this example, Xu Yuanchong translates “gentleman” as “the virtuous” and “villain” as “the vicious”, using words commonly used in English to express these two concepts. At the same time, he translated “frank dang” as “broad-minded” and “long-relative” as “narrow-minded”, using vivid words to convey the artistic conception of the original text. These examples show that when translating the *Analects*, Xu Yuanchong flexibly chooses translation strategies and methods according to the specific situation and the needs of the target audience, so as to achieve the transformation and integration of semantic equivalence and verve reproduction.

In the English translation of Xu Yuanchong's *Analects*, the integration of semantic equivalence and verve reproduction mainly includes the following aspects. Literal translation is combined with paraphrasing. When Xu Yuanchong translated the *Analects*, he not only adopted the method of literal translation, which retained the basic meaning and form of the original text, but also adopted the method of paraphrase translation to convey the cultural connotation and charm of the original text. For example, he translates “学而时习之，不亦乐乎?” as “Is it not a

pleasure to learn and practice from time to time?” The meaning of key words such as “learning” also conveys the cultural connotation of “learning is a kind of happiness”.

Transliteration is combined with paraphrasing. When Xu Yuanchong translated some of the names, place names and cultural terms in the *Analects*, he adopted a combination of transliteration and paraphrasing, which not only retained the phonetic beauty of the original text, but also conveyed the cultural connotation of the original text. For example, he translated “孔子” as “Confucius”, “仁” as “virtue” or “benevolence”, and “礼” as “ritual” or “propriety”.

In the process of translating the *Analects*, Xu Yuanchong converted and adjusted the sentence structure of the original text according to the English expression habits and grammatical rules, so as to make the translation more smooth and natural. For example, he translates “五日三省吾身” as “I daily examine myself three times” and “The virtuous are broad-minded and the vicious are narrow-minded”.

The transmission of cultural imagery plays a crucial role in translation. In the translation of the *Analects*, Xu Yuanchong paid attention to conveying the cultural imagery in the original text, so that the readers of the translated text could feel the unique charm of Chinese culture (Zhu, 2016, p. 237). For example, he translates “岁寒，然后知松柏之后凋也” as “When the year grows cold, then we know how the pine and the cypress remain green”, translates “A gentleman’s friendship is as pure as water; a villain’s friendship is as sweet as wine”.

Through the above fusion methods, Xu Yuanchong successfully combined the semantic equivalence and verve reproduction in the *Analects*. The translation not only faithfully reflected the meaning of the original text, but also conveyed the cultural connotation and verve of the original text, making an important contribution to the English translation of the *Analects*.

Xu Yuanchong’s integration of semantic equivalence and verve reproduction has played a significant and positive role in conveying the essence of the *Analects*. Firstly, in terms of semantic equivalence, it ensures the accurate transmission of core concepts and main ideas, so that English-speaking readers can clearly understand the basic teachings and moral principles in the *Analects*. For example, for the classic expression “do unto others as you would have them do unto you”, an accurate semantic translation allows readers to directly grasp the principles of empathy and respect for others. Secondly, the incorporation of verve reproduction adds to the appeal and artistic charm of the translation. Through beautiful language, appropriate rhetoric, and clever transmission of cultural connotations, the *Analects* is no longer a dry article, but a crystallization of wisdom full of vitality and charm. For example, the translation of “Three some, there must be my teacher”, not only conveys the meaning, but also gives readers a beautiful enjoyment in rhythm, so that readers can feel the spirit of open-mindedness and learning advocated by Confucius. This integration makes the *Analects* more attractive and influential in cross-cultural communication, allowing English-speaking readers to further appreciate the breadth and profundity of ancient Chinese wisdom, which promotes communication and understanding between different cultures.

The Influence and Evaluation of the English Translation of Xu Yuanchong’s *Analects*

Xu Yuanchong’s English translation of the *Analects* has had a profound impact on the academic and translation circles. He has provided a lot of inspiration and impetus for the subsequent research on the translation of the *Analects*. Firstly, he emphasized the importance of the reproduction of verve, so that later researchers realized that on the basis of accurately conveying semantics, more attention should be paid to the style, artistic conception, and cultural connotation of the original text. This prompts researchers to not only pay attention to the correspondence of words, but also to deeply understand the philosophical ideas and cultural heritage behind

the text. Second, Xu Yuanchong’s flexible and diverse translation strategies and techniques, such as literal translation, paraphrase translation, transliteration, etc., provide a wealth of cases and references for follow-up researchers. This makes latecomers have more ideas and methods to choose from when facing complex culturally loaded words and unique sentence structures. Third, his translations have stimulated in-depth thinking in the academic community on how to maintain cultural identity and convey core values in cross-cultural communication. It prompts researchers to further explore how to balance faithfulness and readability in translation, so as to better promote the dissemination of Chinese classic culture around the world.

Xu Yuanchong’s successful integration of semantic equivalence and verve reproduction in the English translation of the *Analects* has made significant contributions to translation theory and practice. Theoretically, his practice has deepened his understanding of the nature of translation. It shows that translation is not only the transformation of language forms, but also the transmission of culture and spirituality. This convergence challenges the monotonous focus on semantics and form in traditional theories, and promotes a more holistic and dynamic conception of translation. In practice, practical examples and methods are provided for translators. He made it clear to translators that while pursuing semantic accuracy, the charm of the original text should be reproduced through clever word choice, sentence structure adjustment, and rhetorical use. For example, when dealing with metaphors and symbols in ancient texts, it can not only accurately convey meaning, but also show a unique cultural rhyme.

This integration also fosters a deep exchange of languages and cultures. It allows the target language readers not only to understand the content of the text, but also to feel the charm of the source culture, which sets a high standard for translation practice in cross-cultural communication.

Scholars praised Xu Yuanchong’s English translation for showing profound academic skills, accurately conveying the core ideas of the *Analects*, and providing a valuable reference for academic research. Professional translators consider their translations to be unique in their blending of semantic equivalence and verve reproduction, setting an example for translation practice. Regular readers have reported that the translation is beautiful and easy to understand, which has stimulated their interest in classic Chinese culture. The student body said that the translation helped them learn English and understand traditional Chinese culture, and was a good learning material. However, some readers feel that some translations are too much about formal beauty and a little obscure in some places.

Xu Yuanchong’s translation of the *Analects* has an important value and prominent position in cross-cultural communication. The translation accurately conveys the core ideas of the *Analects*, opening a window for readers from different cultural backgrounds to understand ancient Chinese wisdom. In terms of value, it promotes the exchange and understanding of Chinese and Western cultures, and allows Western readers to appreciate the profundity of traditional Chinese philosophy. In terms of status, it is an outstanding representative of the English translation of the *Analects*, and stands out among many translations with its unique translation style and superb linguistic skills. It has made important contributions to the “going out” of Chinese culture and has become an indispensable bridge and link in cross-cultural communication (Xu, 2022, p. 22).

Conclusions

In the English translation of Xu Yuanchong’s *Analects*, the following characteristics and rules can be summarized from the semantic equivalence to the reproduction of Verve. In terms of semantic equivalence, we pay attention to the accurate communication of key words and core concepts to ensure the integrity of the basic

meaning of the original text. At the same time, it flexibly handles culturally loaded words, and adopts methods such as literal translation and annotation to let readers understand their connotations. In terms of reproduction, he is good at using a variety of rhetorical techniques to enhance the expressiveness and appeal of the translation. Pay attention to the adjustment and optimization of sentence structure, so that it conforms to the English expression habits, while retaining the rhythm of the original text. Xu Yuanchong is based on semantic equivalence, with which the elements of verve are cleverly integrated. According to the style of the original text, the translation strategy should be selected in a targeted manner, such as keeping concise and clear sentences, and focusing on in-depth excavation of philosophical expressions. In short, the balance and integration of semantics and verve have been realized.

The textual analysis of this study selects a limited number of passages and paragraphs, which may not comprehensively cover all the contents of Xu Yuanchong's English translation of the *Analects*, and may rely too much on subjective judgment and personal interpretation, lacking the strong support of objective data and quantitative analysis. Textual analysis does not pay enough attention to the influence of external factors such as cultural background, historical context, and social and political factors at the time of translation, which affects the in-depth understanding of translation choices. The lack of access to first-hand information such as detailed notes or creative experiences left by translators during translation affects the in-depth exploration of the formation process of translation ideas and strategies.

It is hoped that the scope of research can be expanded to carry out a comprehensive analysis of the English translation of many of Xu Yuanchong's classic works, covering different genres and themes, and deeply exploring the commonalities and evolution of his translation styles and strategies. At the same time, it should focus on cross-cultural communication research, and conducts in-depth research on the adaptability and communication strategies of Xu Yuanchong's translation in a multicultural environment, especially how to better promote Chinese culture to the world in the current context of globalization. In the future, we will conduct research on readers' feedback and communication effects. This paper uses a variety of methods to collect feedback from readers from different cultural backgrounds on Xu Yuanchong's translation, including acceptance and understanding differences, and combines multi-modal elements to evaluate the communication influence of the translation in the multimedia era.

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