

The Application of the Equivalence Theory in Translating Ancient Prose of New Year's Addresses

QU Wen-yu

University of Shanghai for Science and Technology (USST), Shanghai, China

In recent years, New Year's addresses have been characterized by frequent golden phrases, which have attracted much anticipation and attention. Among them, it is not difficult to find that quotations from ancient literature begin to appear often in the New Year's addresses. This reflects Chinese culture, but the ensuing problem is how to further spread Chinese culture through foreign translation. In this paper, from the functional equivalence theory of Nida, combined with the five major equivalence translation standards in Kohler's equivalence theory, the German translation of ancient prose in the New Year's greetings is analyzed.

Keywords: equivalence theory, ancient prose, translation analysis

Introduction

At the dawn of every New Year, the leaders of the country issue New Year's addresses. Each New Year's message is highly anticipated and noticed, and the important ideas in the message are widely disseminated, causing people to think and discuss them enthusiastically. They are usually released by national leaders through radio and television stations and the Internet, usually in oral form. Therefore, the sentence structure is usually not complex and is easy to understand. In terms of content, the main text basically follows the idea of summarizing and reviewing the country's major achievements in the previous year, briefly describing the current domestic and international situation and policies, looking forward to the country's future in the new year, and expressing good wishes to the people. Therefore, the translation of New Year's greetings needs to consider many factors such as communication and culture, and through the theory of equivalence, it is hoped that the message conveyed by the original text will be preserved to the greatest extent possible and the most natural expression of the translated text will be obtained.

From the New Year's addresses of President Xi Jinping in the past ten years, it can be found that the frequency of quotations from ancient texts has increased significantly. The first key point that needs to be explored about the translation of ancient prose is whether they are translatable or not. Austrian linguist M. Wandruszka believes that literary works are untranslatable. In his opinion, not only the language itself is untranslatable, but also beyond the language level. On this issue, Bassnett presents a different view. She argues that a prerequisite for translation is to recognize that no translation can be completely equivalent. Translators

QU Wenyu, Master of Translation, College of Foreign Languages, University of Shanghai for Science and Technology (USST), Shanghai, China.

can approach literary translation through the solution of “replacing constant information in the source phrase with information from the target language’s cultural system”. This paper follows the idea that ancient proses are translatable but clarifies that there will be a certain degree of lacking in the translation process.

Given the cultural elements inherent in ancient texts, translating them is not an easy task. Based on Nida’s functional equivalence theory, this paper aims to analyze the embodiment of the equivalence effect in the text by taking the German translation of the ancient prose in the New Year’s address as an example, in combination with the five major equivalence translation criteria in Kohler’s equivalence theory.

Equivalence Theory in the Translation

Known as the “Father of Modern Translation Theory”, Nida, an American linguist, translator, and translation theorist, formed his own translation theory with his translation of the Bible. “Functional equivalence” is the central idea of Nida’s theory. “Functional equivalence” means that the two languages are functionally equivalent, rather than being limited by rigid forms of expression. Functional equivalence theory is supported by transformational generative grammar, emphasizing that the reader’s response is the criterion for judging the translation, focusing on the social role of language symbols and the communicative function of language.

Kohler has also conducted in-depth research on equivalence, which he classified into five different types, namely denotative, connotative, text-normative, pragmatic, and formal equivalence. Kohler’s theory of equivalence is highly progressive compared to previous theories of equivalence; these equivalences greatly broaden the scope of equivalence and consider extra-linguistic equivalence. Kohler’s theory of equivalence also has shortcomings. On the one hand, there is no uniformity in the criteria for the division of equivalence, and on the other hand, it is difficult to assign an element to a particular hierarchy of equivalence in certain cases. In addition, the order of priority between the levels is not mentioned.

Overall, Nida explores equivalence issues focusing primarily on retaining content and effect equivalence at the syntactic level, whereas Kohler’s theory of equivalence proceeds at the level of the language pair, emphasizing the determination of the ultimate meaning of the text through stylistic and discursive analysis.

Analysis

This article collects ancient prose and its German translations from the New Year’s greetings of Chinese state leaders for the years 2017-2023, from which the most compatible examples are selected and analyzed. Considering the context of use, the excerpts are kept in context to the greatest extent possible to avoid bias in understanding.

Denotative Equivalence

Example: “新故相推，日生不滞。”即将到来的2017年，中国共产党将召开第十九次全国代表大会，全面建成小康社会、全面深化改革、全面依法治国、全面从严治党要继续发力。

Translation: “Man sagt, das Alte wird stets durch das Neue ersetzt. Die Welt ändert sich täglich und stagniert nicht”. Im Jahr 2017 wird die Kommunistische Partei Chinas den 19. Parteitag einberufen. Wir sollen uns auch im neuen Jahr für den umfassenden Aufbau der Gesellschaft mit bescheidenem Wohlstand, die

umfassende Vertiefung der Reformen, umfassende Rechtsstaatlichkeit und eine umfassende strenge innerparteiliche Verwaltung bemühen.

Analysis: Denotative equivalence, which is the equivalence of the extra-linguistic aspects of the projected language, is mainly aimed at the lexical level. “新故相推，日生不滞” is a line from the Ming Dynasty's Wang Fuzhi's ‘Shangshu Y-Taijia’. This expression basically means that new things and old things are constantly changing and do not stop with time. “新” denotes something new, as opposed to “旧”, and the translations use “das Neue” and “das Alte” respectively”. The verb “stagnieren” is used in the translation to indicate stagnation, which is very appropriate.

Connotative Equivalence

Example: 2018年是全面贯彻中共十九大精神的开局之年。中共十九大描绘了我国发展今后30多年的美好蓝图。九层之台，起于累土。要把这个蓝图变为现实，必须不驰于空想、不骛于虚声，一步一个脚印，踏踏实实干好工作。

Translation: 2018 ist das Anfangsjahr für die umfassende Umsetzung des Geistes des 19. Parteitags der Kommunistischen Partei Chinas. Auf dem 19. Parteitag wurde die schöne Planung für die Entwicklung unseres Landes in den kommenden 30 Jahren gestaltet. “Man sagt, Der Bau eines Hochhauses beginnt mit der Basis.” Um die Planung zu verwirklichen, müssen wir auf alle Fantasie und falschen Behauptungen verzichten. Im Gegensatz dazu sollen wir alle Arbeiten schrittweise und sorgfältig leisten.

Analysis: Connotative equivalence is also oriented primarily at the lexical level, indicating different ways of expressing the same extra-linguistic object. The phrase “九层之台，起于累土” is from Laozi, meaning that a nine-tiered platform is built up from a basket of soil. “九层之台” means “nine-tiered high platform”, but it is not translated directly as “Neunstöckige Plattform”, but as “der Bau eines Hochhauses”, and “土” is not translated as “Erde” but as “Basis”. This sentence is not specifically used to illustrate how the high platform was built, but rather it is intended to emphasize the importance of the accumulation of little bits and pieces, so the translation here is more appropriate than the direct translation by following the literal meaning of the words.

Text-normative Equivalence

Example: “安得广厦千万间，大庇天下寒士俱欢颜！” 340万贫困人口实现易地扶贫搬迁、有了温暖的新家，各类棚户区改造开工数提前完成600万套目标任务。各项民生事业加快发展，生态环境逐步改善，人民群众有了更多获得感、幸福感、安全感。（2018）

Translation: “Man sagt Nur wer sicher wohnt, kann Freude und Glück haben.” Etwa 3,4 Millionen in Armut lebende Menschen wurden zur Armutüberwindung umgesiedelt und haben neue gemütliche Wohnungen bekommen. Im Rahmen der Umgestaltung von Stadtvierteln, die baufällige Behelfsbehausungen aufweisen, wurde das Ziel des Baus von mehr als 6 Millionen Wohnungen frühzeitig erfüllt. Nicht nur die Branchen für das Leben der Bevölkerung haben sich schneller entwickelt, sondern auch die Umwelt des Landes hat sich schrittweise verbessert. Dadurch hat das Volk ein größeres Gefühl der Teilhabe, des Glücks und der Sicherheit erhalten.

Analysis: According to Katharina Reiß's theory of text types, texts can be broadly classified into informational, expressive, and operational texts, in addition to composite texts, which are in between the three and have the characteristics of multiple types. Different fragments in the New Year's greeting address have

different functions, conveying information as well as expressing emotions and appealing to the masses, so they are composite texts and need to be analysed in context. Example 3 quotes a line from Du Fu's *My Cottage Unroofed By Autumn Gales*, which contains a wealth of emotion and favours the characteristics of an expressive text. The literal meaning of this sentence is long when explained in simple words, and the translation would be even longer if translated directly. For example, Xu Yuanchong's translation goes like this: "Could I get mansions covering ten thousand miles, I'd house all scholars poor and make them beam with smiles." The translation here is a good attempt, although there is a great deal of change and loss of fidelity to the content and expression of emotion.

Pragmatic Equivalence

Example: 中华民族伟大复兴绝不是轻轻松松、敲锣打鼓就能实现的，也绝不是一马平川、朝夕之间就能到达的。我们要常怀远虑、居安思危，保持战略定力和耐心，“致广大而尽精微”。

Translation: Die großartige Wiederauferstehung der chinesischen Nation kann auf keinen Fall einfach im Handumdrehen oder nur durch Selbstlob oder Angeberei verwirklicht werden. Der Weg vor uns verläuft gewiss nicht reibungslos und unser Ziel lässt sich keinesfalls in einigen Tagen erreichen. Wir müssen unser Bewusstsein schärfen, vorzusorgen, auch in Sicherheit potenzieller Gefahren gewahr sein sowie unsere strategische Beständigkeit und Geduld bewahren. Man muss Großartiges anvisieren und zugleich auf die kleinsten Details achten.

Analysis: Pragmatic equivalence, i.e. recipient equivalence, focuses on translating for specific readers to produce the same response as the original readers as much as possible. “致广大而尽精微” in zhongyong refers to the pursuit of the broad and the deep, while also working on the fine and the subtle. The translation is basically the same structure as the original text, but the cleverness lies in the use of the modal verb “muss”, which emphasizes the do's and don'ts and enables the readers to comprehend it better.

Formal Equivalence

Example: 明天的中国，奋斗创造奇迹。苏轼有句话：“犯其至难而图其至远”，意思是说“向最难之处攻坚，追求最远大的目标”。路虽远，行则将至；事虽难，做则必成。只要有愚公移山的志气、滴水穿石的毅力，脚踏实地，埋头苦干，积跬步以至千里，就一定能够把宏伟目标变为美好现实。

Translation: Nur ein harter Kampf schafft Wunder für das China von morgen. Der alte Literat Su Shi hat einst geschrieben: “Die schwierigsten Schlüsselprobleme müssen gelöst und die größten Ziele angestrebt werden.” Vor uns liegen eine lange Reise und schwierige Aufgaben, doch solange wir beharrlich voranschreiten, werden wir unser Ziel erreichen. Wir müssen den Mut haben, Berge zu versetzen und in der Überzeugung, dass steter Tropfen den Stein höhlen kann, hart und standfest arbeiten. Solange wir diese lange Reise einen Schritt nach dem anderen zurücklegen, können wir die großen Ziele sicherlich in eine schöne Realität umwandeln.

Analysis: Formal equivalence is defined as the formal, aesthetic, and personal equivalence of the translation and the original. Three points in this example are worth analyzing. The first sentence, “犯其至难而图其至远” is immediately followed by the vernacular explanation, so the translation directly translates the meaning and does not deal with it twice. The second sentence “路虽远，行则将至；事虽难，做则必成” is a distortion of the first ancient prose, but instead of translating it into two sentences, the translator puts “路虽远”

(eine lange Reise) and “事虽难” (schwierige Aufgaben) side by side to form a compound sentence, thus making the meaning of the whole sentence in a more pertinent and natural way. This is a clever way of sorting out the sequence and avoiding redundant repetition. The third sentence, “积跬步以至千里”, is a corruption of “不积跬步无以至千里”. The word “以” here is also treated with “solange” and ties the following sentence together, making the translation smooth and coherent.

Conclusion

In summary, this paper analyzes German translations of ancient prose in New Years addresses, focusing on the use of the five major equivalence translation criteria of Kohler's equivalence theory in the text.

In the practical situation, it can be found that due to the language gap, Chinese works are prone to problems in foreign translation. The difficulty of translation in this paper lies in the fact that translation of ancient prose is a kind of “re-creation” process, in which one must fully understand the meaning of ancient prose and organize other languages into sentences with the same meaning, thus inevitably losing the original phonetics of ancient Chinese prose. Overall, Kohler's Equivalence Theory can provide guidance for translation practice, but as mentioned earlier, some shortcomings are unavoidable. The impassioned spirit behind the translation of the poem, as in Example of text-normative equivalence, cannot be expressed in German. Given the different historical and cultural contexts, German-speaking audiences were also unable to understand the historical connotations behind this. Therefore, translation is a process that requires consideration of many factors, whether it is a literal translation, a free translation, or the addition of paraphrases, all of which need to be carefully considered based on understanding.

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