

Nida's Translation Theory of "Functional Equivalence" and Its Application in Chinese Herbal Medicine Translation

Yan Li

Youjiang Medical University for Nationalities, Baise, China

Email: susanliyan8@163.com

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Abstract

This paper gives a brief introduction to Nida's life experience and the formation of "functional equivalence" translation theory. Nida's translation theory was not formed overnight, but perfected and deepened through unceasing practical exploration. From the initial "dynamic equivalence" to the final "functional equivalence", Nida's translation theory fully embodies its vivid life value. This paper attempts to achieve the best functional equivalence from four aspects: the communication of language information, the transmission of spiritual style, the communication of language habits and the similar reaction of readers.

Keywords

Nida, Dynamic Equivalence, Functional Equivalence, Practical Application

Nida's "functional equivalence" theory is the earliest translation theory introduced into China, which has a significant and far-reaching impact on China's translation practice in the past 40 years. Although many other translation theories have been learned and used for reference in China, Nida's "functional equivalence" theory has always occupied an unshakable position. It has been widely praised and recognized by scholars in the translation field, and has been widely applied to the translation practice of various texts. So what are the core advantages that make Nida's translation theory have enduring influence?

1. Brief Introduction to Nida

Born in 1914 in the United States, Nida had a keen interest in language disciplines as a child and began to learn various languages, such as Latin, Greek, Ger-

man, French, etc. Moreover, Nida sincerely believed in Christ and became a Christian as a teenager. In his later study and work, Nida deeply integrated his interest and devotion into his study and work, laying a solid foundation for the fruitful translation research achievements. From 1936 to 1946, Nida studied the *Bible* and Linguistics in an in-depth, systematic and hierarchical way, respectively and successfully got a master's degree and a doctor's degree. After graduation, Dr. Nida served as the executive secretary of the Bible Translation Department, which provided a base for him to display talents and carry out continuous practice and exploration. In his translation, Nida did not stick to old rules and put forward a set of classical translation theories with his own distinctive characteristics.

2. Translation Theory from “Dynamic Equivalence” to “Functional Equivalence”

Nida's translation theory was not achieved overnight, rather, it has gone through decades of unceasing practice and exploration, and has been developed through continuous revision and improvement. Nida is good at summing up experience from practice, deepening it into theory, and then guiding practice with theory. Therefore, Nida's translation theory can stand the test and deliberation of time and has fresh and alive value of life.

The first influential theory put forward was reflected in the *Bible Good News Version*. According to Nida's guiding ideology, a “common language” that both ordinary people and high-level and high-culture intellectuals can understand and accept must be used in the translated text. After being published, translated works have become the bestsellers, welcomed and affirmed by readers and highly praised by scholars in the translation field. This is the famous “dynamic equivalence” translation theory. It can be seen that the “dynamic equivalence” translation theory has been successfully verified in practice. The so-called “dynamic equivalence” translation is to use the most appropriate and natural equivalent language to reproduce the information of the original text (Tan, 1989). The most fundamental task of translation is to maximize the most appropriate and natural equivalence of language of the translated text and the language of the original text, so that the language can conform to the language conventions of the target language and be expressed smoothly. When proposing the “dynamic equivalence” translation theory, Nida believed that the translator should focus on the meaning and spirit of the original text, rather than the formal equivalence of the language structure of the original text. It can be seen that the “dynamic equivalence” translation theory has certain limitations and provides the possibility for further improvement and amendment.

In *From One Language to Another* published in 1986, Nida mentioned “functional equivalence” for the first time, which not only retained the essence of “dynamic equivalence” translation theory, but also made its meaning clearer and more accurate. The “functional equivalence” theory amended the previous “formal

equivalence tends to emphasize fidelity to the language structure of the original language". It holds that in translation, attention should be paid not only to the meaning and spirit of the language, but also to the form as much as possible, because form also has meaning. If formal equivalence can be preserved without affecting the appropriateness and natural transmission of meaning and spirit, it is the best. If meaning and spirit are restricted by form, then form equivalence can be ignored, that is, "meaning first, form second". It can be seen that Nida's translation theory has been continuously amended, perfected, developed and sublimated in practice to achieve the optimization the translation effect. Meanwhile, it has become applicable to more and more extensive range with greater universality.

The "function" in Nida's "functional equivalence" refers to different pronunciation, grammar, vocabulary and discourse, but with the same or similar expression function. This is the "reader's response theory" frequently mentioned by Nida, that is, the readers of a translated text should be able to understand and appreciate it in potentially the same manner as the original readers did. The target readers can comprehend the spirit and meaning of the original author from the lines in the translated text. However, it should be noted that, general readers cannot response the same way in the original text and the translation at the same time, because most general readers cannot master both languages at the same time. Only those scholars who can understand the original text and appreciate the translated text can response the same way after reading. It can be seen that the translator plays an extremely important role as a bridge in translation. The translator's knowledge, culture and professional qualification have an important influence on the translation quality of the work, and at the same time they also put forward high requirements for the translator.

3. Practical Application of Functional Equivalence Theory in Chinese Herbal Medicine Translation

The core of Nida's translation theory is "functional equivalence". In translation practice, how to achieve equivalence in the most appropriate and natural language, and make the target readers read the translation and the original readers have basically similar reactions? The following four aspects are analyzed respectively from the communication of language information, the transmission of spiritual style, the communication of language habits and the similar reaction of readers, so as to achieve the maximum functional equivalence (Wang, 2010).

3.1. Communication of Language Information

Nida believes that the words, sentences and texts in the source text all have the designative meanings and associative meanings. The designative meaning refers to the meaning in real language world, and the associative meaning refers to the value and attitude generated by the language (Huang, 2010). Then there will be "low-level equivalence" and "high-level equivalence". Obviously, "low-level equi-

valence” means that the reader of the translated text understands the designative meanings and associative meanings of the original text by virtue of imagination, that is, the translation and the original achieve full equivalence, which is the most basic requirement of translation effect, which is lower than this standard and cannot be accepted; “High-level equivalence” means that the reader of the translated text can understand and appreciate the designative meanings and associative meanings of the translation, and the way of understanding and appreciating the designative meanings and associative meanings of the original text is the same as that of the original text, that is to say, a high degree of equivalence is achieved. In translation, it can hardly reach the highest standard, and can only be infinitely close (Xiong, 2001).

Example 1: チンピ風呂は肩凝りや腰痛、肌荒れ、疲労回復によいとされるだけでなく、血行がよくなるのだとか。

It can be translated into: “Tangerine peel bath can not only effectively improve shoulder acid, backache, rough skin and eliminate fatigue, but also promote blood circulation (陈皮浴不仅可以有效改善肩酸、腰疼、皮肤粗糙和消除疲劳等症状, 还可以促进血液循环)”. It clearly expresses the meaning of the sentence, gives the target readers a dynamic picture sense, and makes the target readers have basically the same reaction when they read the original text.

3.2. Communication of Language Habits

In the translation, the first thing is to convey the language information accurately, and the second is that the target language should conform to the habits of the target language, that is, the translation process should not be constrained by the form and structure of the original language, but should fully consider the language and cultural environment of the translation, so that readers can fully enjoy and appreciate the charm of the language.

Example 2: 体を温め、緊張を緩和させる作用を持ちます。

Literal translation is: It can warm the body and relieve tension (有能暖和身子、缓和紧张的作用). Although the translation has already expressed the basic meaning, it has not grasped the language characteristics of traditional Chinese medicine better. Most of the language features of traditional Chinese medicine have strong literary color, contain rich cultural information, and emphasize the balance, symmetry and charm of text structure. This sentence can be translated as “It has the effect of warming the body and calming the nerves (有暖身、安神之功效).”, which not only conveys information, but also conforms to the characteristics of traditional Chinese medicine language expression habits, so that the translation readers have basically the same reaction when reading the translation as the original readers.

3.3. Transmission of Spiritual Style

The appearance of spiritual style is realized on the basis of effective communication of language information and the use of language expression habits in accordance with the target language. In the translation, Nida believes that the most ap-

appropriate and natural equivalent language should be used to reproduce the meaning and spiritual style of the source text, that is, meaning is the first, followed by spiritual style. Different language styles have different expressive effect, which endows the works with different momentum and verve. Therefore, we should find the right words in translation to maximize the spiritual style equivalence.

Example 3: ジメジメ、いやな梅雨の時期に、昔の呉服商たちに重宝されていたのがソウジュツです。

“重宝されていた” can be translated as “being regarded as a treasure”. However, if translated as “take it as a treasure”, it not only accurately conveys the information, but also conforms to the language expression habits of the translation. More importantly, it conveys the spiritual style of the original text. From “take it as a treasure”, it fully shows the emotion and attitude of clothing merchants towards “rhizoma atractylodis”. The sentence can be translated as “Once upon a time, garment merchants took rhizoma atractylodis as treasure in the wet and fretful plum rain season (从前，在潮湿、烦躁的梅雨季节里，苍术被服装商人视为珍宝)”.

4. Conclusion

Nida’s functional equivalence translation theory is not abstract, but concrete, and has been constantly explored and perfected in practice. It has clear ideas, thoughts and theoretical guidance to help achieve optimal functional equivalence. Translation is not only a simple transformation of two languages, but also the integration and exchange of cultures. To achieve the best translation effect, certainly there is no translation theory that is universally applicable. Translators need to consider carefully, choose effective translation methods, and give full play to the best effect of translation from the perspective of readers.

Founding

The Project of Improving the Basic Scientific Research Ability of Young and Middle-aged Teachers in Colleges and Universities in Guangxi in 2019 (2019KY0563).

Conflicts of Interest

The author declares no conflicts of interest regarding the publication of this paper.

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