

Original Paper

A Contrastive Study on Two English-Translated Texts of *the First Memorial to the King Before Setting off for War* Under Functional Equivalence Theory

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Received: August 29, 2023 Accepted: December 04, 2023 Online Published: December 07, 2023

doi:10.22158/eltls.v5n5p128

URL: <http://dx.doi.org/10.22158/eltls.v5n5p128>

Abstract

The First Memorial to the King Before Setting off for War reads sincerely. It manifests emotions of loyalty and chastity. It is highly approved of and considered as a representative work of its kind. This paper, taking functional equivalence theory as a basis and contrasting two English-translated texts respectively by Luo Jingguo and Xie Baikui from perspectives of word-level and syntactic-level equivalence, attempts to locate a translated version that can make the reading experience of the target-text receptors more similar to that of the original receptors. According to the analysis, it has been found that Luo Jingguo's version can elicit a more ideal response from the target-text receptors and that it realizes functional equivalence in a better way.

Keywords

translation, contrastive analysis, functional equivalence theory, *The First Memorial to the King Before Setting off for War*

1. Introduction

After Eugene Nida proposed equivalence theory, other novel translation theories at home and abroad have also been put forward. However, studies concerning functional equivalence theory is far from coming to an end. There are researches combining functional equivalence theory with texts of political propaganda, journalistic ones and subtitles translation of films, but those with ancient Chinese prose writings are relatively rare. This paper, contrastively analyzing two translated texts of *the First Memorial to the King Before Setting off for War* under the frame of functional equivalence theory, aims to find a translated version that can make the reading experience of the target-text receptors more

similar to that of the original receptors. In the meantime, it also aims to contribute to verifying and enriching the feasibility and applicability of the theory.

This paper will first make a general introduction to functional equivalence theory, as well as the original work and its two translated texts, then launch a contrastive analysis of the two texts from perspectives of word-level equivalence and syntactic-level equivalence respectively. Finally, it will reach a conclusion that Luo Jingguo's version can make the response of the target-text receptors more similar to that of the source-text readers and that his version adheres to functional equivalence theory to a larger extent.

2. Functional Equivalence Theory

The practice of translating is a bridge which connects various kinds of languages. What kind of principles should be obeyed when doing translation has been debated for a long time by scholars at home and abroad in the field of translation study. The focuses have been whether loyalty should be preferred over beauty, whether literal translation should be adopted instead of free translation and whether form should be considered primary rather than the content, etc. Literal translation is more of maintaining what the original text looks like while free translation cares more about the elegance of the translated text. These two translation methods have both strengths and limitations, and they both concern the contrast between the original and the translated text.

Functional equivalence theory concerns receptors and it holds that translation must serve its receptors (Wan, 1989). This theory was gradually developed, proposed and tested by the famous American linguist, translator, translation theorist, Eugene Nida in the process of his translating *Good News Bible*. In his book *Toward a Science of Translating*, the concept of dynamic equivalence was put forward for the first time, and a discussion was launched in which dynamic equivalence was contrasted with formal equivalence. The latter pays attention to "message", including form and content. It emphasizes equivalence of formality in translation and tries to make the translated-text receptors understand the customs, modes of thinking and expressive tools of the original language. On the contrary, dynamic equivalence pays attention to a kind of "dynamic relationship". It means that the relationship between the translated-text receptors and the translated text is substantially the same as that between the original receptors and the original text (Wan, 1989). Dynamic equivalence stresses the naturalness of expressions and attempts to make translated-text receptors experience the reading process basing on their own cultural contexts instead of that of the original language. To put it another way, dynamic equivalence mainly concerns the equivalence of reader response rather than that of form. And equivalence of form, under certain circumstances, should make way for equivalence of reader response. Nevertheless, it is not implicated that formal equivalence should be dismissed out of hand. In Nida's book *From One Language to Another, Functional Equivalence in Bible Translating*, the term "dynamic equivalence" was revised as "functional equivalence" (Waard & Nida, 1986). And it was underlined that the translated text and the original text should achieve equivalence not only in the sense of the

content of the message, but also in the sense of the form. This revision was made because it tended to be mistaken that “dynamic equivalence” focuses solely on the content and effect of the translated text while neglecting equivalence of linguistic form. Adopting the term “functional equivalence” highlighted equivalence of both content and form, thus avoiding the misunderstanding of the concept. As was pointed out by Nida, translating is to reproduce the closest natural equivalent of the source-language message in the receptor language, first in terms of meaning and secondly in terms of style (Nida & Taber, 1969). “Equivalent” means functionally equivalent. To be specific, it means that the response by translated-text receptors to the target-language message is basically the same as that by original receptors to the source-language message. “Natural” means that the translated text reads naturally smoothly and that little “translationese” can be perceived. “The closest” indicates that the translated text should follow the original text as closely as possible, achieving relative equivalence. And it should be noted that there is no such state as categorical or absolute equivalence. In addition, Nida stated that concerning functional equivalence theory, there is equivalence on word level, syntactic level, textual level and stylistic level.

3. The Original Work and Its English-Translated Texts

Zhuge Liang was prime minister of the Kingdom of Shu in the period of the Three Kingdoms. He was also a statesman, strategist, essayist and calligrapher. In 223 A.D., Liu Bei, king of the Kingdom of Shu, on his deathbed, entrusted his son Liu Shan to Zhuge Liang. Under the assistance of Zhuge Liang, a series of political and economic measures were implemented within the Kingdom of Shu, which effected great prosperity in the kingdom (Zhu, 2023). In order to achieve national unification, in 227 A.D., Zhuge Liang decided to launch the northern expedition. On departure, he sent in a memorial to Liu Shan. It was *the First Memorial to the King Before Setting off for War*. This essay by Zhuge Liang, employing sincere wording, advised and encouraged Liu Shan to carry on the late king’s lofty virtues. It also suggested him listening extensively to the counsels of officials, being close to the virtuous and able officials and keeping away from the vile and mean persons, in order that the Han Dynasty can be rejuvenated. It expressed Zhuge Liang’s genuine gratitude to the late king Liu Bei who had understood and treated him well. It also conveyed his great and unchanging loyalty to the Kingdom of Shu, and his strong will and determination to help the present king restore the Han Dynasty.

The two translated texts to be analyzed are included respectively in *a Selection of Classical Chinese Essays from Guwenguanzhi* (Luo, 2005) and *a Collection of Chinese Ancient Prose Writings* (Xie, 2014). The former is a work by Luo Jingguo, and the latter, Xie Baikui. They are both experienced translators but are different in translating habits and styles. Therefore, it is worth a contrastive analysis.

4. A Contrastive Analysis of the Two English-Translated Texts

In Nida’s book *Language, Culture and Translation*, it is suggested that when applying functional equivalence at word level, what should be considered first is vocabulary of equivalent value. By using

vocabulary of equivalent value in the translated text, adjustments in form will not be necessary (Nida, 1993). Secondly, different languages carry different kinds of culture and linguistic components are language-and-culture specific. In order to preserve functional equivalence between the translated text and the original text, and to secure similar response of translated-text receptors and original receptors, necessary explanatory notes should be added, provided that the original text should not be distorted. Thirdly, the thoughts expressed by the original text should be fully understood and grasped before putting pen to paper, thus avoiding comprehending deviation which could mislead and cause undesirable responses on the part of the target readers. In the following section of word-level equivalence, the translated texts will be analyzed from these three aspects.

4.1 Functional Equivalence at Word Level

4.1.1 Employing Vocabulary of Equivalent Value

Example A:

受命以来，夙夜忧叹，恐托付不效，以伤先帝之明。

Luo's translation: Since then I have been *worrying and sighing night and day* lest I should do harm to the late king's illustrious fame if I fail to be effective.

Xie's translation: Being thus committed, I have often *worried at night*, fearing lest I should belie the trust, reflecting discredit upon His Majesty's sagacity.

This sentence shows that Zhuge Liang attaches great significance to what the late king had entrusted him with. The expression “夙” means “early in morning”, and “夜”, “by night”. “忧” is “to worry”, and “叹”, “to sigh”. Thus, “夙夜忧叹” includes four pieces of information. The translated text by Luo Jingguo (hereinafter referred to as “Luo”) adopts an expression of equivalent value “worrying and sighing night and day”. It contains all of the four pieces of information and accurately conveys the idea indicated by the original text, i.e., Zhuge Liang is making constant efforts in order to fulfil the instructions given by the late king and he is so concerned about the instructions that he worries and sighs a lot. In this way, the translated-text receptors can feel what the original receptors can feel—Zhuge Liang is sparing no effort in the performance of his duty. Functional equivalence is then realized between the translated text and the original text.

By contrast, certain messages in the original text become missing in the translated text by Xie Baikui (hereinafter referred to as “Xie”)—the information carried by “夙” and “叹” is lost. The embodiment of the messages and thoughts of the original text is therefore greatly reduced when thus translated. In Xie's version, Zhuge Liang, after receiving the task given by the late king, worries only at night. This way of expressing is inadequate to convey the anxious state depicted by the original text. Besides, the Chinese form “夙夜忧叹” has an expression of equivalent value in English, “worrying and sighing night and day”. This expression of equivalent value should be considered first when translating. However, Xie failed to capture it. In conclusion, Luo's translated version of this sentence is more appropriate.

Example B:

先帝不以臣卑鄙，猥自枉屈，三顾臣于草庐之中，咨臣以当世之事。

Luo's translation: With an utter disregard of *my low social status and meagre fund of knowledge*, the late king condescended to visit me at my thatched cottage three time to consult me about the current events of the country.

Xie's translation: The late Emperor, disregarding *my humble birth and low position*, condescended to pay me three visits in my thatched cottage, consulting me on contemporary issues.

This sentence shows that Zhuge Liang is indifferent to fame and wealth and that he is uniquely well-talented. The expression “卑鄙” includes two aspects of sense: low in status and meagre in knowledge. But in fact, Zhuge Liang has a good command of knowledge. He is well-talented and is therefore appreciated by Liu Bei. The expression “卑鄙” is used to show humbleness. According to Xie's version, Liu Bei condescended to pay visits to Zhuge Liang three times in his thatched cottage only because Zhuge Liang has “humble birth and low position”, which, however, does not show consistency in logic. Zhuge Liang is not the only one who is humble in birth and low in position but he is the one who catches Liu Bei's attention. No others may have this kind of honor. The reason is what “鄙” implies: Liu Bei values Zhuge Liang's talent and learning, despite his low birth. It is a pity that Xie missed this message. For one thing, vocabulary of equivalent value could have been employed but in Xie's translation it is not. For another, messages contained in the original text are inadequately passed to the translated text, which negatively influences how target readers comprehend the translated text and how they respond to it.

By contrast, Luo's version reproduces in the translated text what “卑” and “鄙” mean. In particular, “meagre fund of knowledge” explains why Liu Bei, the king, is willing to pay visits repeatedly to a commoner and this is the key point to effecting similar response between translated-text receptors and original receptors, and to achieving functional equivalence.

4.1.2 Adding Explanatory Notes of Necessity

Example C:

先帝在时，每与臣论此事，未尝不叹息痛恨于桓、灵也。

Luo's translation: When the late king was alive and talked with me about these historical lessons, he used to heave a sigh in detestation for *Emperor Huan and Emperor Ling*⁶. (6. *Emperor Huan and Emperor Ling were two emperors during the last years of the Eastern Han Dynasty. They appointed people by favoritism and corruption was rampant during their rules.*)

Xie's translation: When the late Emperor was still alive, he did not fail to sigh with regret and bear a bitter grudge against *Emperors Huan and Ling* every time he discussed this history with me.

This sentence shows that the late king Liu Bei felt truly grieved and sorry for Emperor Huan and Emperor Ling who went close to vile and mean courtiers but alienated virtuous and able ones. They thus failed to rule the Eastern Han Dynasty well. As for the translation of “桓” and “灵”, Xie puts it straightforwardly and translates them simply as “Emperors Huan and Ling”, which can hardly yield

ideal response from the readers of the translated text. Foreign readers who do not know Chinese culture well may have doubts: why did Emperors Huan and Ling make Liu Bei so sorrowful? Doubts like this cannot be solved by Xie's translation. Luo's version also translates “桓” and “灵” as “Emperor Huan” and “Emperor Ling”. But the difference is that Luo further explains the deeds of the two emperors through annotation: they appointed people basing on their personal preference and as a result, corruption ran riot under their reign. This annotation makes clear why Liu Bei is so sorrowful and, in the meantime, makes up for the cultural gap that prevents the target readers from further understanding the translated text. By and large, Luo's way of dealing with the original text by adding annotation better realizes functional equivalence.

Example D:

侍中、侍郎郭攸之、费祗、董允等，此皆良实，志虑忠纯。

Luo's translation: *Shizhong* Guo Youzhi and Fei Yi as well as *Shilang* Dong Yun are kind and honest men with a strong sense of loyalty.

Xie's translation: *Ministers* such as Guo Youzhi, Fei Yi and Dong Yun, having integrity and probity as well as faith in our cause and purity of mind,

Example E:

侍中、尚书、长史、参军，此悉贞亮死节之臣也。

Luo's translation: *Shizhong*, *shangshu*, *zhangshi* and *canjun* are faithful, upright, and ready to lay down their lives for honor and fidelity.

Xie's translation: *Ministers* such as Chen Zhen, Zhang Yi and Jiang Wan are all constant and loyal subjects.

Similarly, in these two sentences, when dealing with “侍中”，“侍郎”，“尚书”，“长史” and “参军”，Luo not only transliterates them but also adds further explanatory notes: *shizhong* was an official at court, serving as the king's consultant; *shilang* was an official at court who was in charge of carriages, horses and gates, and fought in wartime; *shangshu* was a high-ranking official who helped the king in administrative work; *zhangshi* was a high-ranking official who helped the Prime Minister in administrative work; *canjun* was an important official in the Prime Minister's Office (Luo, 2005). These annotations, which are necessarily essential, show the target readers how each official position is significant to the king's rule and what role each of them is playing in the king's regime. By contrast, in Xie's version, “侍中”，“侍郎”，“尚书”，“长史” and “参军” are translated uniformly as “minister”, which cannot reflect original cultural messages and the differences among various official positions. According to *Oxford Advanced Learner's English-Chinese Dictionary*, “minister” means “a senior member of the government who is in charge of a government department or a branch of one” (Hornby, 2014). Xie's translated text employs “minister” to refer to officials of different ranks and officials who have different duties. It has to be pointed out that “minister” is excessively general under this usage.

4.1.3 Understanding Thoughts of the Original Text to the Full

Example F:

亲贤臣，远小人，此先汉所以兴隆也。

Luo's translation: To be close to the virtuous and able officials and keep away from *the vile and mean persons*. That was the reason that the Western Han Dynasty was prosperous.

Xie's translation: To be close to virtuous courtiers and alien to *knavish ones* was what made the Earlier Han Dynasty strong and prosperous.

The expression “小人” literally means “persons who have a small body shape”. It is also used to refer humbly to oneself. In this sentence, it means “persons who are base in character and vile in morality”.

Luo and Xie both grasp the essence of the original text and select the proper item of meaning for the expression “小人”. What is different is that Luo's version presents a more detailed description of “小人” in that they are not only morally bad but also lack dignity or honor, while Xie's version portrays “小人” only as dishonest. Therefore, Luo's version, being more complete in message reproducing, creates an image of “小人” which is more similar to that of the original figure. Luo's translation better achieves functional equivalence.

Example G:

臣本布衣，躬耕于南阳。

Luo's translation: I was originally *a commoner who had to wear clothes made of hemp*, and tilled land in Nanyang.

Xie's translation: I was originally *a commoner*, tilling my land in Nanyang.

The expression “布衣” refers to clothes made of hemp. In old times commoners were only allowed to wear this kind of clothes. Therefore, “布衣” in this sentence is understood as its extended meaning “commoners”. Both Luo and Xie understand this extended meaning, but Xie's version appears to be redundant to certain extent. The original text adopts the expression “布衣” for the purpose of expressing the concept of “commoners”. Thus, reproducing the message of “commoners” will suffice. However, in Luo's version, an attributive clause “who had to wear clothes made of hemp” is used to modify “a commoner”. The attributive clause does not express any new information and thus it is unnecessary. Adding this attributive modification will make the burden even heavier of understanding the translated text for target readers. On the contrary, Xie's translation of “布衣” comes straight to the point and has it neatly done. Therefore, Xie's translation of this sentence better reflects functional equivalence.

4.2 Functional Equivalence at Syntactic Level

The translation of sentences is more sophisticated than that of words and in translation more factors should be considered besides equivalence at word level. In order to achieve equivalence at syntactic level, the flavor and style of the original text as well as the linguistic habit of the target language, etc. should also be considered when translating. In this section, three groups of sentences are selected from the translated texts for the contrastive analysis.

Example H:

愚以为宫中之事，事无大小，悉以咨之，然后施行，必能裨补阙漏，有所广益。

Luo's translation: ... and *I respectfully opine* that all political affairs at court, regardless of magnitude, be first subjected to their inquiry before actions are taken. In this way can *errors be amended, negligence avoided, and greater results attained*.

Xie's translation: *I think* that they should be consulted on all court affairs, be they great or small, before they are put into execution. This will certainly be conducive to *making up for loopholes and defects* in our work and to *effecting greater successes*.

With regard to this sentence, Luo's translated version better reproduces the linguistic style of the original text and is more naturally structured in the target language. It therefore brings target receptors the kind of reading experience that is similar to that generated from reading the original text, and it better performs functional equivalence.

Firstly, the expression “愚” is a self-depreciatory expression, used to refer humbly to oneself. It implies a tone of modesty, politeness and formality. In English, there is no first-person self-depreciatory expression, but such humbleness can be conveyed by other means when translated into English. In Luo's version, the adverb “respectfully” is used to express the modesty conveyed by “愚” in the original text. This adverb mirrors the kind of great respect and worship that officials in feudal times hold for their sovereign, enabling target readers to experience the cultural flavor experienced by original readers. By contrast, Xie's version translates “愚” plainly as “I”, not specifying the sense of respect and modesty expressed by the original text in the target text, thus losing the cultural message. Secondly, the original text is a memorial to the throne and there is a high degree of formality in style and wording. The expression “以为” is translated by Xie as “think”. But the word “think” has a colloquial property. It is an informal form to express opinions and thus goes against the original stylistic intention of the source text. In contrast, Luo employs the word “opine”, which, according to *Oxford Advanced Learner's English-Chinese Dictionary* (Hornby, 2014), means “(formal) to express a particular opinion”. This word renders the translated-text receptors the sense of formality experienced by the original receptors, not only in terms of word meaning but also in terms of style. Thirdly, Chinese language tends to use active voice more, and English, passive. The two languages' different ways of expressing themselves should be noted when translating one language from another. In the original Chinese text, “裨补阙漏, 有所广益” intends to state that Liu Shan can have errors amended, negligence avoided and can attain greater results if he seeks consultation from loyal officials like Guo Youzhi and Fei Yi first before putting political policies into execution. That is to say, active voice is implied in the Chinese original text. Luo's translated version is not constrained by the form of the original text. It adjusts the active voice implied in the source language to the passive voice, a habit held by the target language. Although the original form of active voice is not preserved, on the whole, functional equivalence is adequately accomplished.

Example I:

由是感激, 遂许先帝以驱驰。后值倾覆, 受任于败军之际, 奉命于危难之间, 尔来二十有一年矣。

Luo's translation: I felt so grateful that I promised to serve him. Soon afterwards we suffered a military

defeat. *Twenty-one years have passed since* I received my assignment at the time of the setback and was dispatched as an envoy at the moment of crisis.

Xie's translation: I was therefore very grateful to him and promised him my whole-hearted service. Later our army suffered a disastrous defeat, I was appointed as envoy to Wu at the time of the debacle, and was installed in office at a moment of great peril and tribulations. *Since then twenty one years have elapsed.*

Concerning this sentence, Luo's translated version better achieves functional equivalence while Xie's version has an ambiguous facet.

According to the original text, Zhuge Liang is deeply moved by and feels very grateful to Liu Bei for being well understood and treated by him, and therefore promises to serve him. Afterwards, they suffered a military defeat. Twenty-one years have passed since Zhuge Liang received his assignment at the time of the setback and was dispatched as an envoy at the moment of crisis. Regarding the expression “后值倾覆，受任于败军之际，奉命于危难之间，耳来二十有一年矣”，Luo changes the word order and makes a condensed translation when rendering it into English. The changing of word order highlights the long length of time during which Zhuge Liang served Liu Bei and the tough times when they faced difficulties together. Luo condenses the original Chinese run-on sentences into one single English sentence. This practice conforms to English grammatical rules and norms of expressing. His translated version reproduces the messages contained in the original text through fine-tuning the linguistic form and therefore better realizes functional equivalence.

Xie's translated version is ambiguous in that the time deixis “then” can be interpreted in two distinct ways. One is that twenty-one years have passed since Zhuge Liang promised Liu Bei to serve him. The other is that twenty-one years have passed since the military defeat happened and Zhuge Liang was appointed as envoy to Wu and was installed in office. The latter interpretation is consistent with what the original text intends to mean. Although the differences between the two interpretations have little influence to the overall understanding of the translated text, accuracy of message-conveying should be pursued to the largest extent when translating. In this way can readers' responses to the target and source text become the most similar and functional equivalence be achieved to the best effect. In addition, Xie's English translated version, invariably following the word order of its Chinese source text, fails to deal with it flexibly. The original flavor is absent in his translated text.

Example J:

...庶竭驽钝，攘除奸凶，兴复汉室，还于旧都。

Luo's translation: ...Although I am *inferior in ability like a worn-out horse or a blunt knife*, I would do my utmost *to root out* treacherous evildoers, *rejuvenate* the Han Dynasty, and *move* the capital back to the old city.

Xie's translation: ...I wish that I might exhaust my mediocre ability in *extirpating* the treacherous malefactors and *restoring* the Han Dynasty with a triumphant *reentry* into the lost capital.

Luo's translated version of this sentence is more similar to the original text in terms of flavor and style.

It better realizes functional equivalence.

Firstly, the expression “驽” refers to inferior horses that cannot run fast enough and “钝” refers to blunt instruments that do not function well. The two expressions both figuratively imply incompetence (Luo, 2015). Zhuge Liang likens himself to inferior horses and blunt instruments. This kind of expression, for one thing, is how Zhuge Liang refers humbly to himself and for another, indicates that Zhuge Liang is willing to exert all his energies to the career of reviving Han Dynasty. Luo’s version, when reproducing the figurative expression in the target text, not only points out its surface meaning “a worn-out horse” and “a blunt knife” but also specifies its figurative meaning “inferior in ability”. Thus, the flavor and essence of the original text are captured in his translated text. By contrast, Xie’s version fails to specify the surface meaning of “驽” and “钝”, resulting in incompleteness in message-delivering from the original text to the translated text. Secondly, in the original Chinese text, a series of four-character phrases is employed. Semantically, there is cumulative progression. Prosodically, there is great readability. In Luo’s translation, three parallel components are used: “root out”, “rejuvenate” and “move”. These three verbal expressions, taking three nominal expressions as their complements, are unified both in form and in audition. The style of the original text is thus reproduced. In contrast, Xie’s version uses expressions of separate parts of speech—two verbal expressions “extirpate” and “restore”, and a noun “reentry” to translate the original four-character phrases which manifest great unity. Target readers can hardly experience what the original readers can feel in his translation.

5. Conclusion

This paper, basing on Eugene Nida’s functional equivalence theory, makes a contrastive analysis of two English-translated texts of *the First Memorial to the King Before Setting off for War* from word-level and syntactic-level equivalence. According to the analysis, it has been found that Luo Jingguo’s translation deals with the translation in a better way and achieves a higher degree of functional equivalence. Specifically, his translated version is a big success in terms of conveying the messages expressed in the original text in a more complete way, reproducing to a higher degree the flavor and linguistic style of the original text, and eliciting a larger amount of similar response from the target receptors, etc. Hopefully, this paper can provide reference for reaching a more thorough understanding of functional equivalence theory, as well as *the First Memorial to the King Before Setting off for War* and its English-translated texts.

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