

Original Paper

Language Features of Song Deli's Chinese Version of *The Theory Of Moral Sentiments* from the Perspective of Functional Equivalence Theory

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Abstract

Moral construction cannot be ignored when people are making great efforts to develop economy. Adam Smith makes a concise theoretical explanation of a rich and colorful world of human moral sentiments in The Theory of Moral Sentiments. Based on the principle of "sympathy", he puts forward his own views on the ethical categories of justice, kindness and conscience, and comprehensively constructs his own ethical system, which has been helpful for the economic development and moral construction of other countries. From the perspective of Nida's translation functional equivalence theory, the author chooses Song Deli's Chinese version of The Theory of Moral Sentiments to analyze and study its language features in lexical, syntactic, textual and stylistic levels, so as to make an objective evaluation to help readers appreciate the translation and also provide reference for translation learners in terms of diction.

Keywords

The Theory of Moral Sentiments, functional equivalence theory, Song Deli's Chinese version of The Theory of Moral Sentiments, language features.

1. Introduction

With the increasing development of China's economy, our comprehensive national strength is constantly enhanced, and people's material life is steadily improved. While pursuing material prosperity, we cannot ignore spiritual pursuit and moral construction.

Our country has attached great importance to moral construction since ancient times, and it is necessary for China to learn from other countries in a proper way. *The Theory of Moral Sentiments* was written in

response to the urgent need of British social morality in the mid-18th century when British economy was developing rapidly, and the impulse of individuals to pursue their own rights and interests was very strong, resulting in the money-oriented mercantilism. Ideas in this book turn out to be useful to deal with the phenomena in other countries, so the book may provide some reference for moral cultivation in rapid economic development, which needs eligible translators and identified translated texts.

Currently, there are many Chinese versions of *The Theory of Moral Sentiments* in China, some of which obviously rely on machine translation and are not able to convey Adam Smith's original meanings. And some of them just copy the previous translated versions but make little changes on the basis of previous ones. Among the translated versions with uneven qualities, the paper chooses Song Deli's Chinese version of *The Theory of Moral Sentiments* which enjoys comparatively better reputation. Guided by functional equivalence theory, the paper attempts to analyze its language features under the guidance of functional equivalence theory.

The key problems to be solved are as follows:

- (1) How does Song Deli's Chinese translation meet the needs of Chinese readers in terms of lexical level, syntactic level, textual level and stylistic level?
- (2) In light of functional equivalence theory, how can a translator better transform one language into another and make the target language conform to the language habits and cultural backgrounds of the target readers?

To some extent, this paper will provide some guidance for translators, thus enabling them to better convert the source language into the target language. At the same time, it is conducive to promote the spread of ideas in the book in China, which helps to strengthen the readers' moral construction and rectify the social atmosphere and improve the social morality.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Research on Functional Equivalence Theory

Eugene A. Nida (1964) puts forward "dynamic equivalence" for the first time, distinguishes it from "formal equivalence", and lays stress on "dynamic equivalence". He believes that due to the great diversities in forms and contents of different languages, "formal equivalence" in translation is rare while "dynamic equivalence" pursues the closest and most natural equivalence to the source language information. Dynamic equivalence is defined as "in terms of the degree to which the receptors of the messages in the receptor language respond to it in substantially the same manner as the receptors in the source language"(Nida, 1969, p. 24). To stress "function", Nida and Jan de Waard (1986) bring forward the concept of "functional equivalence". They explain that there is no essential difference between "functional equivalence" and "dynamic equivalence". In *Language and Culture-Contexts in Translating*, Nida (2001) dedicates a special chapter to discussing functional equivalence. It is pointed out that translation consists in reproducing in the receptor language the closest natural

equivalent of the source language message, first in terms of meaning and secondly in terms of style (Nida, 1969, p. 12).

Since functional equivalence theory was put forward by Eugene A. Nida, it has been valued and developed by researchers and scholars at home and abroad .

In *Contemporary Translation Theories*, Edwin Gentzler (2004) mentions that Nida builds his theory on the premise that the message of the original text not only can be determined, but can also be translated so that its reception will be the same as that perceived by the original receptors. And he points out that the theory emphasizes not formal correspondence, but functional equivalence; not literal meaning but dynamic equivalence; not “ what” language communicates, but “ how” it communicates.

Functional equivalence theory was brought into China in the 1980s, and it was highly praised by the majority of translation scholars in that it caters to the mainstream view of translation in China at that time. Some scholars study the theory itself further while others apply this theory to translation practices in many fields such as poetry translation and film subtitle translation.

In terms of further theoretical research, Heng (2003) researches into functional equivalence in social semiotics, and points out that we ought to consider the relationship between symbols, things, concepts and the language users in order to decrease the omission of information and be faithful to the source text to the maximum extent. Tan (2004), a Chinese scholar, believes the core of functional equivalence theory raised by Nida is that the wording of the translated text is smooth and natural and that the content is expressive and the target readers’ response is similar to that of original readers. And Ye (2013) believes that the kernel of Nida’s theory is chiefly functional equivalence, which is mostly to attain functional equivalence between the translated text and the source text, rather than formal equivalence.

At the same time, functional equivalence theory has been widely applied to translation practice. In poetry translation, Li (2004) attempts to achieve approximate equivalence in sound, form and meaning, and he applies rhyme to retain both the beauty of form and the beauty of sound. In film subtitle translation, Shao (2009) points out that under the instruction of functional equivalence theory, the relatively long dialogues in movies can be dealt with in a reduced way, sacrificing the form of the source language and translating the meaning as well as spirit of the original dialogues in an appropriate form.

Thus it can be seen that functional equivalence theory has formed a relatively systematic research results at home and abroad. At the same time many scholars are devoted themselves into this theory and apply it to various fields of translation.

2.2 Research on The Theory of Moral Sentiments

The Theory of Moral Sentiments is an ethical work of Adam Smith. Adam Smith revised it for six times. Smith uses the basic principles of sympathy to explain the origin of justice, kindness, self-restraint and other moral sentiments, and also explains the nature, principles and characteristics of various virtues of moral evaluation. Swiss philosopher Biancamaria Fontana (2020) mentions that Smith regards sympathy as one of the main sources of human social ability, which is a natural tendency to share

emotions with others. Smith (2004) reveals its inevitable moral complexity. Human beings begin to get involved with each other and try to establish a structured social relationship, following the impulses that are neither completely altruistic nor completely selfish. Sympathy, jealousy, vanity, the tendency of exchange and the desire for recognition constitute the complex background of all human interactions. Smith tells us that the market economy should be full of morality, honesty, conscience and responsibility. Without these basic moral concepts, no matter how prosperous the economy is, it will eventually lead to inevitable disasters. Furthermore, it reveals the basis for the maintenance and harmonious development of human society, and the general moral principles that human beings should follow.

The Theory of Moral Sentiments has brought far-reaching influence on the western world and has played a basic role in promoting the social purpose of human welfare. And it is quite possible that ideas in this book are of great significance for the benign operation of China's market economy in the transition period, the deeper understanding of human nature and human emotions for everyone and ultimately the promotion of the harmonious development of society, which requires the Chinese version of *The Theory of Moral Sentiments* with high-quality translation.

However, there are so many Chinese versions of *The Theory of Moral Sentiments* whose translation qualities vary. The Commercial Press publishes the translated book written by Jiang Ziqiang, Qin Beiyu, Zhu Zhongdi and Shen Kaizhang in 1997. After that, Xie Zonglin, Song Deli, Luo Weidong and others successively publish their Chinese versions of this book. There are some problems such as the usage of inaccurate words, illogical sentences and confused structures. One example will suffice to illustrate this point:

ST: *For this sentiment, like all the other original passions of human nature, is by no means confined to the virtuous and humane, though they perhaps may feel it with the most exquisite sensibility.*

TT: 这种情感同人性中所有其他的原始情感一样，绝不只是品行高尚的人才具备，虽然他们在这方面的感受可能最敏锐。

(Jiang, Qin, Zhu, & Shen, 1997, p. 05)

TT(Luo): 这种情感和人性中其他与生俱来的激情一样，绝不仅限于善良仁慈的人，尽管他们可能是以最敏锐的感受力来感受这种情感。

(Luo & Zhang, 2018, p. 39)

According to the context, “For” here is a conjunction, used to introduce the reason mentioned in the previous statement but this point is not reflected in the translation of Jiang or Luo. And in Chinese, fact, condition or premise often appears in the first half of a sentence indicating a turning point but the three translated versions do not obey the basic rule. Further, Luo translates “passion” as “激情”, which is easy to cause misunderstanding and is not appropriate here. Examples like this are great in number. Different versions flood the market and dazzle the readers.

3. Case Analysis of Language Features of Song Deli's Chinese Version of *The Theory of Moral Sentiments*

The language features of Song Deli's Chinese version of *The Theory of Moral Sentiments* from the perspective of functional equivalence theory will be analyzed in four levels: lexical level, syntactic level, textual level and stylistic level.

3.1 Equivalence in Lexical Level

According to functional equivalence theory in translation, the equivalence in lexical level does not refer to formal equivalence but dynamic equivalence. A translator should render one language to another in a new and proper way in order to conform to the language habits of the target readers of his translated text. And generally speaking, words can be divided into notional words and functional words according to whether they have real meanings. Notional words are words with real meanings, while functional words only play a certain grammatical roles in sentences.

3.1.1 Notional Words

Notional words include verbs, nouns, adjectives, pronouns, adverbs, numerals and so on, and here the paper will focus on the translation of typical verbs, nouns and adjectives. Here are some examples:

Example 1:

ST: *As we **have** no immediate experience of what other men **feel**, we can **form** no idea of the manner in which they **are affected**, but by **conceiving** what we ourselves should **feel** in the like situation.*

TT: 我们对于他人的感受**缺乏**直接体验, 只能**设身处地**加以**想象**, 否则就无法**感同身受**。

(Song, 2011, p. 03)

Verbs in this sentence contain “have” “feel” “can form” “are affected” “conceive” and “feel”. Among them, “conceive” is suitable and normal here to be translated as “想象”, while “feel in the like situation” is great to be translated as “设身处地”. Compared to the translated text by others, it is better to translate “have no ” as “缺乏” than “没有”, and to translate the sentence containing “form” and “affected” as “感同身受” than “知道别人的感受” in that it is more smooth and clear, and better in line with the language characteristics of Chinese readers.

Example 2:

ST: *If the very **appearances** of grief and joy...it is because they suggest to us the general idea of some good or bad fortune that has befallen the **person** in whom we observe them: and in these passions this is sufficient to have some little **influence** upon us.*

TT: 如果悲伤和快乐的**情感流露**……那是因为这种流露能使我们对**感情流露者**或好或坏的命运产生一种总体概念: 悲伤和快乐这些激情足能使我们产生些许**共鸣**。

(Song, 2011, p. 06)

According to The Oxford Dictionary, appearance refers to the way that somebody or something looks on the outside, or what somebody or something seems to be (Hornby, 2010). So what is it in Chinese? Can a translator or a writer say “悲观和快乐的外表” in Chinese? That is obvious improper. So what is the “appearance” of a kind of emotion? It could be the expression on one's face. Song translated it as

“情感流露”, which is acceptable, but not as direct and clear enough as “表情”. In addition, it repeats “情感流露” mentioned above, which makes the sentence redundant and that is unnecessary. Further, the “little influence” in the text refers to the influence in terms of passion, and “共鸣” here is suitable in chapter 1 *Of Sympathy*, which is concise and expressive.

3.1.2 Function Words

In English grammar, a function word is a word that expresses a grammatical or structural relationship with other words in a sentence. A function word has little or no meaningful content and it does not change in form. Articles, prepositions, conjunctions and exclamations all belong to function words and here the paper will focus on the translation of typical prepositions and conjunctions. The examples are following:

Example 3:

ST: *Even our sympathy **with** the grief or joy of another, before we are informed **of** the cause of either, is always extremely imperfect.*

TT: 即便我们同情他人的悲伤与快乐,但在弄清悲伤与快乐**的**原因之前,我们的这份同情之心也总是极不完美的。

(Song, 2011, p. 06)

In this sentence, the first preposition “with” is not shown in the target text because of the application of the translation strategy Noun to Verb, and the “of” is in the phrase “are informed of”, so there is no need to treat it specially. Anyway, it does not lose the original meaning in spite of the change in form.

Example 4:

ST: ***But** the poor wretch, **who** is in it, laughs **and** sings perhaps, **and** is altogether insensible of his own misery.*

TT: **然而**置身其中的那个可怜虫却开怀大笑, **或**放声高歌, 对于自己的悲苦麻木不仁, 了然无知。

(Song, 2011, p. 07)

Here “but” is translated as “然而”, which is more formal than “但是” we often use; “and” is translated as “或”, which is different from “和” in meaning. “Who” is translated in an invisible way but has little influence on the expression of meaning.

Although there are a few inaccuracies, the conclusion can be achieved that in the translation of most words, Song is not subject to the literal forms of the original words, but adopts the combination of literal translation and free translation, and presents it in a simple and clear way, which retains the features of formality and repetition of the original text, to a certain extent making the translated language as equivalent as possible to the original text in terms of meaning.

3.2 Equivalence in Syntactic Level

Sentences are the transition of words to the text and the equivalence in syntactic level is of great importance. If the translated sentences are highly equivalent to sentences in the source text, equivalence in textual level will be reached with ease. As mentioned and analyzed above, the syntactic features of the source text include long and complex sentences, as well as various sentence patterns, which are

mainly embodied in declarative sentences. Here functional equivalence in syntactic level will be analyzed in terms of declarative sentences, interrogative sentences, imperative sentences and exclamatory sentences, which will contain long and complex sentences.

3.2.1 Declarative Sentences

A declarative sentence refers to a sentence in the form of a simple statement, which could be affirmative or negative. And declarative sentences will be analyzed separately. Here are some examples:

Example 5:

ST: *...but by conceiving what we ourselves should feel in the like situation.*

TT: ……只能设身处地加以想象，否则就无法感同身受。

(Song, 2011, p. 03)

The analysis of the lexical features of the sentence above is helpful to the further study of its syntactic level. It can be seen as long and complex, with compound sentences and clauses. The translator reorganizes the parts of the sentence according to the language habit of Chinese: to put the condition ahead and the result behind. What is more, the sentence in the target language becomes more concise than that in the source language, which also conforms to the language habits of Chinese.

Example 6:

ST: *As the person who is principally interested in any event is **pleased** with our sympathy, and **hurt** by the want of it, so we, too, seem to be **pleased** when we are able to sympathize with him, and to be **hurt** when we are unable to do so.*

TT: 任何当事之人，会因为我们的同情而**感到**高兴，会因为无人同情而**感到伤心**，因此当我们能够同情他的时候，我们自己似乎也十分**高兴**，而不能这样做的时候，我们也会**感到**伤心。

(Song, 2011, p. 11)

The source sentence contains some words implying passiveness, which have been analyzed above. And in the target sentence there is no words like “被” “为” that represent apparent passiveness. Instead, the translator translates them into “感到” which means “feel” in English in order to accord to the rule that active sentences are highly common and widely used in Chinese rather than passive sentences. The forms are changed while the meanings retain.

3.2.2 Interrogative Sentences

Interrogative sentences are used to ask questions or to attract readers in order to lay stress on what he wants to stress. In the source text, there are 123 interrogative sentences totally and some typical ones will be selected for analysis. Here are some examples:

Example 7:

ST: *How are the unfortunate relieved when they have found out a person to whom they can communicate the cause of their sorrow?*

TT: 不幸者发现一个能与之倾诉悲伤原因的人，他们该是何等地如释重负啊！

(Song, 2011, p. 10)

According to the context, the author tries to express his own ideas rather than asking a question really, so translating the sentence literally seems inappropriate. Instead, Song realizes that this interrogative sentence is used to stress the degree of the emotion of being relieved. That is flexible and sensible.

Example 8:

ST: *What character is so detestable as that of one who takes pleasure to sow dissension among friends, and to turn their most tender love into mortal hatred?*

TT: 有人乐于在朋友中间挑拨离间, 转爱为仇, 普天之下还有什么样的品行比这种人的更可憎?
(Song, 2011, p. 37)

In this sentence, Song turns a long sentence with a clause into a catchy and clear sentence with four-word set phrases “挑拨离间” and “转爱为仇” in Chinese, which conform to the target language in form at the same time reaches the equivalence in meaning.

3.2.3 Imperative Sentences

In grammar, an imperative sentence contains the root form of a verb. Most imperative sentences have no subjects. And they are usually used to tell or ask someone to do something. Here are some examples:

Example 9:

ST: ...*let us consider how a man of humanity in Europe...would be affected...*

TT: 让我们思考一下欧洲一位颇具人性的人……将会受何影响。
(Song, 2011, p. 131)

The word “let” here is a symbol of imperative sentence, and the translator directly translates it as “让” in Chinese, which can be viewed as word for word translation, but it is proper here in that the meanings of “let” and “让” here are mainly equivalent.

Example 10:

ST: *But let their dwelling be always at home.*

TT: 但是要永远让他们在家里住。
(Song, 2011, p. 222)

This imperative sentence also contains a “let”, but in the process of translation, Song changes the subject “their dwelling” as “他们”, which conforms to the habit that Chinese is conditioned to make people as subject in sentences, different from English which stresses objectivity comparatively. In this way, it achieves the equivalence in meaning but fails to achieve the equivalence in form.

3.2.4 Exclamatory Sentences

Exclamatory sentences are used to express surprise or strong feelings, which acquires the translator to try to reproduce the original author’s idea. Here are some examples:

Example 11:

ST: *What pity, we think, that any thing should spoil and corrupt so agreeable a situation!*

TT: 损害或葬送如此令人愉快的状况, 在我们看来实在可惜!
(Song, 2011, p. 050)

By rearranging the order of the sentence, Song puts the part which expresses the strong feeling of pity in the second half of it, which is in conformation with the Chinese language habit of putting ideas behind facts.

Example 12:

ST: *How amiable does he appear to be...who grieves for their calamities, who resents their injuries, and who rejoices at their good fortune!*

TT: 试想一个人该有**多么**和蔼可亲呀! 无论他和谁谈话……他不仅为他们遭遇的不幸感到悲伤, 也对他们受到的伤害感到义愤, 更为他们的时来运转感到高兴!

(Song, 2011, p. 019)

This exclamatory sentence contains so many clauses and it is long and complex, which may be difficult for Chinese readers when reading the source text or the target text which is translated literally. And Song splits this sentence into two sentences, first expressing the key emotions, and then leading to the specific cases mentioned. In this way, it reaches the equivalence in meaning while changing the structure of the source language.

3.3 Equivalence in Textual Level

The translated text shows the same feature of clear logic as the source text, which refers to how all the parts of the text connect well in a logic and smooth way. Equivalence in textual level will be analyzed in two aspects including coherence and cohesion on a basis of long and complex sentences as well as the application of various sentence patterns.

3.3.1 Coherence

Coherence refers to in which all the parts of something fit together well. It will mainly include the logic in the text. Here is an example:

Example 13:

ST: *We run not only to congratulate the successful, but to condole with the afflicted. On the contrary... it hurts us to find that we cannot share his uneasiness.*

TT: 我们**不仅**乐于祝贺因成功而春风得意者, **也**乐于安慰因落败而愁肠寸断者……相反, 我们感到无法同情他时就总是郁闷不已。

(Song, 2011, p. 050)

The coherence of this paragraph is very obvious, and the author of the original text discusses his idea from both positive and negative aspects, which is very logical, attractive and persuasive. Therefore, it is necessary to have such logic in order to create an excellent translation. And Song as the translator, applies conjunctive words which are common in Chinese, obeying the rules in Chinese and meanwhile conveys the original author's meaning properly according to the translated text.

3.3.2 Cohesion

Cohesive means forming a united whole. A translator should not only take account of the accuracy of the language, but also think about different cultural contexts and other aspects to achieve textual equivalence.

Example 14:

ST: *We run **not only** to congratulate the successful, **but** to condole with the afflicted...On the contrary... it hurts us to find that we cannot share his uneasiness.*

TT: 我们**不仅**乐于祝贺因成功而春风得意者，**也**乐于安慰因落败而愁肠寸断者……**相反**，我们会因为发现自己不能分担他的不快而感到痛心。

(Song, 2011, p. 050)

The example has been mentioned in “Coherence”, which is logical and it is logic depends on the reasons themselves and also the adhesive words like “不仅” “也” “而” “相反”, which are approximately equivalent to the conjunctions in source language through grammatical and lexical links, reaching the equivalence not only in form but also in meaning.

3.4 Equivalence in Stylistic Level

The obvious feature of the source text is subjectivity. The translator retains the subjectivity in the target text. Here are some examples:

Example 15:

ST: *When **we** bring home to ourselves the situation of his companions, **we** enter into their gratitude, and what consolation they must derive from the tender sympathy of so affectionate a friend.*

TT: 当**我们**切身体会到他的怜悯之心时，**我们**就会和他们一样产生感激之情，也能**感觉**到他们从这样一位深情的朋友温馨的同情心中获得怎样的慰藉。

(Song, 2011, p. 019)

According to the source text and its analysis mentioned in Chapter Two, the author creates this book in a subjective way. In terms of the target text here, “我们” keeps the first-person perspective of the source text and expresses the author’s ideas and thoughts.

Example 16:

ST: ***We** are **disgusted** with that clamorous grief, which, without any delicacy, calls upon **our** compassion with sighs and tears and importunate lamentations.*

TT: **我们**厌恶那种闹闹嚷嚷的悲伤，它使当事者毫无风度地呼唤**我们**以叹息和泪水，乃至被迫而为的嚎啕痛哭来表达**怜悯**之心。

(Song, 2011, p. 020)

Here “我们” still retains the writing perspective of first person. “Disgusted” means feeling or showing dislike or disapproval and “our compassion” means a strong feeling of sympathy, expressing the author’s personal feelings under a given condition and the translator obey it, so as to keep the style of being subjective. In this way, the translated text reaches the equivalence in meaning.

4. Conclusion

With the rapid economic development, the pace of people’s life is speeding up. In the pursuit of a better life, individuals can also see some adverse phenomena such as waste, extravagance, corruption and so on. Moral restraints are as important as institutional restraints. These phenomena also appeared in

England in the middle of the 18th century, and *The Theory of Moral Sentiments* written for that time may be helpful for China.

Nowadays there are many versions of *The Theory of Moral Sentiments* in China, and the qualities of these translations are uneven. This paper selects Song Deli's Chinese version of *The Theory of Moral Sentiments* to analyze the language features of the source text, and then analyzes the language features of the translation from the perspective of functional equivalence theory, attempting to explore the functional equivalence degree between the translated text and the source text in lexical level, syntactic level, textual level and stylistic level. In lexical level, the translated text retains the source text's feature of being formal. The translator tries to find out the comparatively corresponding words and phrases in target language; in syntactic level, the translator breaks the rules of source language, replaces the long and complex sentences which includes sentences of different patterns with brief and short sentences and active ones, and then rearranges the order of them in order to make the translated text conform to the language habits of the target readers; in textual level, the target text is as logic as the source text and the sentences are connected in a proper way, making the whole text coherent and cohesive; in stylistic level, the target text remains the style of being subjective of the source text. To make the translation achieve functional equivalence with the source text as far as possible, both in form and meaning, a translator should understand the ideas and intention of the author whose work he is translating, have a good command of the knowledge of both the source language and target language, avoid word-for-word translation and translate on the basis of the language habits of the target readers.

However, there are still some limitations in this paper. First of all, *The Theory of Moral Sentiments* was written in Britain about two centuries ago while times are changing and the actual national conditions of the two countries differ. Therefore, the views in this book should be treated in a dialectical way and learned from reasonably according to the actual situation. In addition, the cases of language features in Song Deli's Chinese version of *The Theory of Moral Sentiments* analyzed in this paper are not enough. Finally, the language features involved are not comprehensive.

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