Original Paper

Translation Strategy Study on the Functional Equivalence Theory: Taking *Translations of Security: A Framework for the Study of Unwanted Futures (Chapter 1)* as an Example

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Abstract

This study applies Nida's Functional Equivalence Theory to translating Chapter 1 of Translations of Security: A Framework for the Study of Unwanted Futures, a conceptually dense academic text. To bridge the English-Chinese typological gaps, a multi-tiered strategy was employed: lexical solutions ensured conceptual fidelity, syntactic adjustments enhanced naturalness, and textual techniques optimized cohesion and coherence. The research validates the theory's efficacy for academic texts, establishes unified Chinese security-studies terminology, and demonstrates how theoretical adaptations localize Western critical scholarship.

Keywords

Functional Equivalence Theory, Translation strategies, Translations of Security: A Framework for the Study of Unwanted Futures

1. Introduction

Berling et al.'s *Translations of Security: A Framework for the Study of Unwanted Futures* (2021) redefines security studies through its core concept, critiquing traditional Securitization Theory by proposing an interdisciplinary framework. The first chapter examines how security sectors transcend conventional boundaries when addressing emerging challenges like terrorism and climate change, moving beyond traditional theoretical binaries.

Textually, the work integrates complex terminology from political science, sociology, and Science and Technology Studies (e.g. "de-territorialized networks"). Its academic complexity arises from nested case studies, non-linear arguments, and distinctive rhetorical devices, including metaphors like "trading

zone" and critical interrogatives. This conceptual density, interdisciplinary scope, and meta-theoretical reflection create exceptional demands for translation accuracy, consistency, and adaptability.

2. Overviews of Functional Equivalence Theory

Nida's Functional Equivalence Theory (FET) prioritizes consistent functional effects between source and target texts, requiring target readers to respond similarly to the translation as source readers did to the original. Defining translation as "the closest natural equivalent", FET emphasizes dynamic transformation over literal rendering while balancing meaning, accuracy, and cultural values.

Functional equivalence in translation entails achieving four interconnected dimensions. First, lexical equivalence demands contextually faithful meaning transfer, using semantically adjusted substitutions when necessary. Second, syntactic equivalence requires deep source-text analysis and strategies like literal/free translation for cross-linguistic functionality. Furthermore, textual equivalence focuses on holistic paragraph reproduction beyond formal correspondence, ensuring structural unity. Finally, stylistic equivalence conveys genre-specific cultural connotations and aesthetic values. Collectively, these dimensions prioritize natural, receptor-oriented communication over rigid formal alignment.

3. Case Analysis Under the Guidance of Functional Equivalence Theory

3.1 Translation by Functional Equivalence at the Lexical Level

The basic meaning of the original phrase is changed to make it appropriate for the target language situation to expand the terms of the source. By using this method, source content is rendered naturally, and the target-language expressions that would otherwise seem unnatural or confusing are avoided. Semantic expansion allows translators to precisely express intended meanings while maintaining communicative effectiveness when conventional definitions are insufficient for a direct transfer.

Example 1:

ST: <u>TRANSLATIONS OF SECURITY</u>: A FRAMEWORK FOR THE STUDY OF UNWANTED FUTURES

TT: <u>安全传译</u>：一个针对"非理想未来"的研究框架

The translation of the book's title is a typical example of the extension of terminology. The phrase "translations of security," as the core conception of the book, is a new academic idea proposed by the author, which is totally different from the traditional meaning of "translation." Thus, "translations of security" should not be simply translated into "翻译" to avoid the ambiguous understanding of this term.

To correctly express the term conception, the translator extended the meaning of this terminology, giving it a new academic name, "传译". Under the guidance of functional equivalence theory, lexical equivalence between English and Chinese is achieved by free translation, and the translation is accurate and in line with the context.

3.2 Translation by Functional Equivalence at the Syntactic Level

English employs hypotaxis with tight logical connections and syntactic economy, while Chinese uses parataxis with looser inter-clausal relations. This structural contrast necessitates adding cohesive elements during translation for clear meaning transfer. Considering distinct language habits, restructuring achieves conciseness and reader-friendliness by adapting to target conventions.

Example 2:

ST: Similarly, the Paris School was a political move at a given time and place with an aspiration to bring out from the shadows a newly intensified set of struggles between agencies of protection, all mobilizing new technologies in a fluid political situation where boundaries and domains were redrawn.

TT: 类似的，巴黎学派（the Paris School）也代表了特定时空下的政治意图。当时政局多变，各类安全机构纷纷运用新技术，导致边界领地重新划分，彼此斗争日益激烈。而巴黎学派则期望将自身从这场困斗中解脱出来。

The translator segmented the lengthy English sentence into three concise Chinese sentences for clarity. While the original English presented core information first ("the Paris School was a political move") followed by background ("in a fluid political situation"), the Chinese version restructured this. It begins with the temporal context ("当时政局多变"), states the political intent ("特定时空下的政治意图"), and then introduces the main action ("而巴黎学派则期望"). This front-loaded background aligns with typical Chinese narrative patterns, easing reader comprehension.

Furthermore, the original implied causality between institutional actions ("all mobilizing new technologies...") and shifting boundaries was made explicit in Chinese. The translation added "导致", clearly stating the logic relations between the clauses. This specifies the actors and overtly links the actions to their consequence, matching Chinese preferences for clear cause-effect expression.

3.3 Translation by Functional Equivalence at the Textual Level

Linguistically, repetition involves recurring use of lexical or structural elements. Due to cultural distinctions, English and Chinese differ significantly: English commonly employs pronouns for reference, while Chinese prefers repetitive expressions. Consequently, translators frequently convert English pronouns (demonstrative, possessive, relative) into corresponding Chinese nouns through reiterative techniques.

Example 3:

ST: In this book we have taken pains to develop a perspective centred on translations as such, not pre-conceiving what happens in these translations in any substantial manner, but still making past conceptualisations a central concern.

TT: 在本书中，我们悉心构建了一个以传译本身为核心的视角，这个视角既不预先设想传译过程中实质性发生的事情，而是聚焦于过往的概念化。

This example vividly illustrates the application of reiterative translation to address the referential differences between English and Chinese. In the source text, the noun phrase "a perspective centred on translations" is introduced, followed by two parallel clauses implicitly referencing this perspective

through syntactic continuation ("not pre-conceiving..."/ "but still making..."). English relies on grammatical cohesion to maintain reference without lexical repetition.

On the other hand, the target text strategically employs explicit noun repetition to conform to Chinese preferences. For example, he core concept "视角" is explicitly repeated as "这个视角" after the comma, replacing the English syntactic linkage with a clear lexical anchor.

4. Conclusion

This study confirms Functional Equivalence Theory's efficacy for translating theory-dense interdisciplinary texts through three key insights. First, strategic compensation resolves linguistic asymmetries: English grammatical explicitness (e.g., conjunctions) converts into Chinese lexical-semantic devices like functional markers and structural segmentation to accommodate contextual logic and paratactic preferences. Second, terminological innovation achieves equivalence where literal translation fails, as exemplified by "安全传译" for "translations of security", standardizing domain terminology through semantic extension. Third, prioritizing reader response over formal correspondence negotiates fidelity-naturalness equilibrium via part-of-speech shifts and controlled redundancy, ensuring cultural coherence while managing cross-linguistic tensions.

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