

# A Comparative Study of the Two Chinese Versions of the Catcher in the Rye from the Perspective of Tytler's Three Principles of Translation

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## Abstract

**The Catcher in the Rye is the most famous long novel of the American writer Jerome David Salinger. Since its publication in 1951, the novel has been sought after by the younger generation in the United States, affecting generations of Americans and even global readers. The novel's protagonist Holden used a lot of slang, idiolect and four letter words to express the inner spiritual world of American youth after World War II. This book is a typical example of colloquial writing style whose linguistic features and writing techniques are very unique. It is a modern classic literature. Therefore, the translation of this book is not an easy task. Tytler put forward the three principles of translation and defined that the Translation should give a complete transcript of the ideas of the original work, the style and manner of writing should be of the same character with that of the original and the Translation should have all the ease of original composition. According to the three principles, the translation should achieve the unity of the original idea, style characteristics and the ease in expression, ultimately, the relationship between faithfulness and fluency. This thesis proceeds from Tytler's three principles of translation, taking Sun Zhongxu and Shi Xianrong's two Chinese translations of The Catcher in the Rye as examples, conducting a comparative study from the linguistic and cultural level, and analyzing the similarities and differences of the two versions in Holden's idiolect, High-frequency words, American slang and Four-letter words, to provide some guidance for the translation of The Catcher in the Rye and offer some suggestions for the translation of the colloquial literature.**

## Keywords

**Tytler's Three Principles of Translation; The Catcher in the Rye; Colloquial Literature.**

## 1. Introduction

### 1.1. Research Background

*The Catcher in the Rye* is a famous novel written by Salinger, which tells the 16-year-old Holden's wandering experience in New York one day and two nights after being expelled from the school. During this time, Holden met a variety of people but he almost dislikes everyone and does not follow the expectations of others, thus an anti-heroic image of adolescent was shaped by Salinger. When the book was published in the United States in 1951, it caused fierce discussion in society with some people worshipping it and others questioning it.

After the publication of Shi Xianrong's Chinese translation, this novel has been favored ardently by Chinese readers. Many scholars have conducted in-depth research and analysis on the character of Holden, and the Chinese translation has also received much attention from domestic scholars. There are many articles related to the choice of translation strategies for the two Chinese versions, including literal translation, free translation, domestication and foreignization. Therefore, the previous research paid too much attention to the linguistic level, the growth process and the psychological analysis of Holden, ignoring the cultural and social

pragmatic aspects of language such as Holden's linguistic features, then this paper is complementary to the previous research.

## 1.2. Research Purpose and Significance

The two Chinese versions of Shi Xianrong and Sun Zhongxu respectively are the most popular translations among the domestic readers currently. On the one hand, Shi's translation is full of exotic charm, which makes domestic readers have a deeper understanding of the American culture and the psychological development of young people after World War II, but the translation is a little rigid sometimes. On the other hand, Sun's translation is easy to understand and uses the method of free translation, like a novel written in Chinese but lacks some foreign color. Although these two versions have certain demerits, there is no doubt that the two translations are the most accepted and welcomed by readers. Therefore, this thesis takes the translations of Shi Xianrong and Sun Zhongxu as examples and explores the translation of colloquial style literature from the perspective of Tytler's three principles. The author analyzes the differences of the translation on Holden's language such as his idiolect, American slang and Four-letter words and the thesis tries to provide some practical suggestions for the translation of the oral style literature and the translation of *The Catcher in the Rye* in the future.

## 2. Jerome David Salinger and the Catcher in the Rye

2019 is the 100th anniversary of Salinger's birth. Jerome David Salinger was one of the most important writers after World War II. He published many books in his life, including *The Catcher in the Rye*, *Franny and Zooey*, *Raise High the Roof Beam* and *Nine Stories*. Its only long novel *The Catcher in the Rye* was successfully published in the United States in 1951 and became hugely popular among the American students, causing a worldwide sensation. The book has influenced generations of Americans and even global readers. Obviously, it is also an important book for Chinese readers to know and comprehend the American society and adolescents after World War II.

Holden, the hero of *The Catcher in the Rye*, is a 16-year-old teenager. The novel tells the story of Holden's three days' wandering in New York after being dismissed from school in the first-person narration. In the period of three days, he met a variety of people who were very hypocritical and phony. He was almost disgusted by everyone and did not like to follow the expectations of others. Salinger portrayed Holden to be a rebellious and precocious anti-hero image. His words were filthy, casual and free. He was an idealist, but the American society after World War II did not meet his ideals. He hated the hypocrisy of the world and would like to be a catcher in the rye. The kindness, sensitivity and love that young people possess are hidden under his anger against society. In the novel, he used many slang, four letter words and idiolect, which is a unique feature of his language. Therefore, the translation of his words is a difficult and significant task for translators.

*The Catcher in the Rye* can be regarded as a portrayal of the author's personal life, a reproduction of his personal experience or an autobiography of himself. It can be said that each character in the book is part of Salinger and a fragment of his true personality. The author used the innocence of the children's world to contrast the filth and hypocrisy of the adults' world. This book reflects the outlook on life and morality of American youth after the World War II, which has aroused the resonance of young people, especially welcomed by American students. Meanwhile, *The Catcher in the Rye* is very popular among Chinese readers. There are about three to four Chinese translations on the market. The translations of Shi Xianrong and Sun Zhongxu have been revised many times, and they have the most sales and are most popular among readers. Shi Xianrong is a fruitful translator. He translated many literature works while

Sun Zhongxu is an amateur translator. Therefore, in the translation of *The Catcher in the Rye*, these two translators adopted different translation strategy and method.

In addition, this book has also received much attention of domestic scholars. Based on the research papers from CNKI, with search conditions of theme, *The Catcher in the Rye*, there are 742 relevant thesis and journal articles from the year 1982 to 2019. Among them, 524 articles are about the character analysis of Holden, 25 articles about the psychopathological analysis and the growth process of Holden, 14 articles about the symbolism in the novel, 13 articles about the theory of eco-criticism and only 19 articles about its Chinese version and translation strategies. Therefore, the study of its two Chinese versions is not adequate.

Through the CNKI search, the author found that many scholars mostly compared the two translations from the perspective of translation strategy, functional equivalence and critical discourse analysis. Although these studies have achieved good results, they also have many limitations. On the one hand, Holden's language is very distinctive, so the study of his language such as slang and four letter words is ought to deserve more public attention and focus. On the other hand, the two renditions of Sun Zhongxu and Shi Xianrong are very valuable while the studies of these two versions are few. Furthermore, the author has found that there is no comparison between the two translations from the perspective of Tytler's three principles of translation, and these principles can help to solve many problems in literature translation, especially in dealing with cultural elements. As we all know, Tytler's three principles include three aspects, that is, content, style and expressiveness. Therefore, this thesis will analyze the two translations of *The Catcher in the Rye* in the aspects of idiolect, High-frequency words, Four-letter words and American slang from the perspective of Tytler's three principles.

### 3. Tytler's Three Principles of Translation

#### 3.1. Introduction of Tytler's Three Principles of Translation

In 1789, George Campbell firstly came up with the three principles of translation. The three principles George Campbell described goes like: "Translation is to give a representation of the sense of the original, to be in a consistency with the genius of the language which he writes, the author's spirit and manner, and to take care the quality of an original performance, as to appear natural and easy" (Campbell 1789, cited in Venuti 1995:75). First of all, accurately reproduce the meaning of the original work; secondly, under the premise of conforming to the target language, transplant the spirit and style of the original as much as possible; finally, make the translation have the characteristics of original works, and appear natural and smooth.

In the year of 1706, Alexander Tytler proposed the three principles of translation in his masterpiece *Essay on the Principles of Translation*, which are similar to George's standards. He defined these three principles as:

1. That the Translation should give a complete transcript of the ideas of the original work.
2. That the style and manner of writing should be of the same character with that of the original.
3. That the Translation should have all the ease of original composition. (Tytler 2007)

The above-mentioned three principles of Tytler make the quality of translated works have a standard to follow, which is a big step in translation theory. This set of principles marks the beginning of a new era in translation theory research in western world. Tytler's three principles of translation is "the first systematic study in English of the translation processes" (Bassnett, 1980). Therefore, Tytler's three principles can be said to be the beginning of the construction of the translation theory system. Based on Tytler's three principles of translation, Eugene Nida proposed "functional equivalence" (Sun Zhili, 2013), a reader-centered translation standard and then the theory of translation standards sprang up like mushrooms. At the same time, there are many similar translation theories in China, such as Yan Fu's "faithfulness, expressiveness

and elegance” (Tan Weiguo & Ouyang Xiling, 2011), Fu Lei’s “spiritual conformity” and Qian Zhongshu’s “sublimed adaptation”.

### 3.2. Relation between Tytler’s Three Principles of Translation

Generally speaking, translation has to solve two major problems, that is, faithfulness and fluency. Tytler argues that faithfulness includes two aspects: being faithful to the original ideas and maintaining the original style and manner. From the linguistic level, different languages have different characteristics, including the differences of words, phrases, sentences, grammatical structures and patterns. From the literary level, different literary works have different styles and artistic methods. Therefore, the translation of literary works has many obstacles and constraints, especially the translation of idioms, which is very difficult for translators. Maintaining the original style is Tytler’s major contribution to translation theory, and it is more difficult to achieve the equivalence of style than to transcribe the ideas of the original work. The literary style of *The Catcher in the Rye* is unique and colloquial because Holden’s language is full of Four-letter words and slang, which is very difficult for the translator to perfectly reproduce the original style and linguistic features. In general, having all the ease of the original means that the language should be smooth and natural instead of being rigid.

Although Tytler put up with these three principles at the same time, he emphasized faithfulness firstly and then fluency or ease. The first is to totally convey the original meaning and content and the translator cannot add or delete casually; the second is to dutifully display the style of the original composition and cannot change the original style intentionally; and the third is to faithfully reflect the ease of the original instead of being rigid for the target readers.

### 3.3. Studies of Tytler’s Three Principles of Translation

Based on the research papers from CNKI, with search conditions as “theme: Tytler’s three principles of translation”, the author has found that there are 65 articles about these principles from 1996 to 2018 and most of them are about the contrast study between Tytler’s three principles of translation and Yan Fu’s “faithfulness, expressiveness and elegance”. More significantly, the author has found that there are only 4 articles studying the translation contrast of literature works from the perspective of Tytler’s three principles, which is too few for such a significant translation theory, because Tytler’s three principles of translation have important guiding significance for literary translation. If the translator can follow the standard of the three principles of translation, it will ensure the faithfulness and fluency of the translation, better convey the original ideas to the target readers, and better achieve the cultural interflow between China and the West; if not, the translation will not successfully convey the original ideas or keep the fluency and the ease of the original composition, let alone maintain the style and the manner of the original. Therefore, this thesis makes a comparative study of the two versions of *The Catcher in the Rye* based on Tytler’s three principles.

## 4. Comparative Study of the Two Versions based on Tytler’s Three Principles

Tytler argues that the translator should convey the ideas of the original completely and accurately, and cannot distort, add or delete information of the source language text. Then the translator cannot change the style and manner of the original. Finally, the translation must be fluent and easy to understand. The smoothness of the translation should be consistent with the smoothness of the original text.

Style is the use of language, meaning “how a particular writer says things” (Cuddon, 1979). He argues that the style includes the writer’s choice of words, figures of speech, devices, and every conceivable aspect of his language and the way in which he uses it. His words means that if the original is written by colloquial and informal language, then the translation cannot be

translated into the written or formal language; the original text is crude and inferior, the translation cannot be noble or elegant; the original shows the Western color, then the translation cannot be changed to the oriental color but to maintain the exotic atmosphere.

#### 4.1. Linguistic Level

Salinger used Holden's tone to tell about the three day's experience of wandering around New York after being expelled from school. Holden's language is very distinctive and he uses a lot of slang and filthy words, which is very casual and informal, and his vocabulary is very small and lacking. Holden's language can express his dismissal from the school and dissatisfaction with society in a way. Because Holden used lots of idiolect in the novel, the translation of Holden's language is a little hard. The author cites two examples to prove the difficulty in translating Holden's idiolect, with Shi's version as target text 1 and Sun's version as target text 2.

##### 4.1.1. Idiolect

Idiolect is defined as "the way that a particular person uses language" (Hornby, 2014). First of all, Holden's personal language is very characteristic. For example, when he calls someone, he always adds "old" in front of the name. In addition, he always has phrases such as "at all" at the end of each sentence. Both of them are part of his personal language, showing his emotion and personality to the readers, but the translator sometimes just omitted them, making the translation lost the original features.

Example 1:

Source text: After Old Sunny was gone, I sat in the chair for a while and smoked a couple of cigarettes.

Target text 1: 老桑妮走了以后，我在椅子上坐了一会儿，抽了两支烟。

Target text 2: 桑妮这妞儿走后，我在椅子上坐了一会儿，抽了两根烟。

Analysis: In the novel, there are many names such as Sunny, Maurice, Phoebe, Ackley and so on. Holden always puts "old" in front of their names. This is not because how old they are, but a style of Holden's speech. The two translators adopted different strategies in the translation of "old". Shi adopted the method of literal translation, directly adding the word "old" before the name of each person, but Sun directly deleted it. The author argues that it is not appropriate to delete it directly, because it reflects the characteristics of Holden's language feature and his dissatisfaction with society, showing his lack of vocabulary and the use of colloquial speech. Therefore, the author thinks that Sun's translation did not maintain the style of the original composition in view of maintaining the same style and manner of the original work.

Example 2:

Source text: They were all right after Jesus was dead and all, but while He was alive, they were about as much use to Him as a hole in the head. All they did was keep letting Him down.

Target text 1: 耶稣死后，他们倒是挺不错，可耶稣活着的时候，他们起的作用，简直等于是在他的脑袋里打了个窟窿眼儿。他们只会泄他的气。

Target text 2: 耶稣死后他们还不错，可是耶稣在世时，他们对他不仅没用，反而碍事，所作所为总是让他失望。

Analysis: First of all, Holden has his own unique language habits. There are always some modal particles at the end of each sentence, such as “and all”. In the treatment of “and all” in this sentence, both of them omitted “at all” which belongs to Holden’s idiolect. However, they just deleted it, it was a failure to express Holden’s linguistic feature to Chinese readers. Therefore, both of them did not maintain the manner and style of the original. The author thinks it can be translated as “耶稣死后，他们倒是挺不错呢”。The author argues that “and all” can be substituted as “呢” instead of deleting it.

Moreover, from the perspective of Tytler’s three principles, it can be found that Shi’s translation of “as a hole in the head” is too literal, and even a bit like a word-to-word translation. “在他的脑袋里打个窟窿眼儿” does not completely convey the original content even though it accords with Holden’s linguistic habits. The author thinks that Shi’s version is rigid, not expressing the original ideas accurately, while Sun made a flexible adjustment and adopted a method of free translation. He translated as “不仅没用，反而碍事”，concurring with the ease of the original, fluent and simple to understand for target language readers.

#### 4.1.2. High-frequency Words

High-frequency words refer to common noun and verb in a way. Common noun is defined as “a word such as table, cat, or sea that refers to an object or a thing but is not the name of a particular person, place or thing” (Hornby, 2014). In addition to the idiolect, the two translators also have very different translation choices for High-frequency words, mainly the difference between domestication and foreignization. If the words are chosen properly, the translation can not only reproduce the original meaning, content and style, but also better shape Holden’s characters. Therefore, the translation of High-frequency words also requires careful consideration.

##### Example 1:

Source text: “Life is a game, boy. Life is a game that one plays according to the rules.”

Target text 1: “人生的确是场球赛，孩子。人生的确是场大家按照规则进行比赛的球赛。”

Target text 2: “人生的确是场比赛，孩子。人生的确是场比赛，你得遵守比赛规则。”

Analysis: In this conversation between Holden and Spencer, the two talked about “life is a game”. However, for the word of “game”, Shi and Sun’s translation is very different. Shi translated it into a “球赛”, and Sun translated as “比赛”. The author thinks that “球赛” is more appropriate. Because in the following, Holden mentioned the two sides “the other”, “球赛” is a game involving two parties, and “比赛” can have three parties, four parties or even more. Therefore, the author thinks that Shi’s translation is better, which conveys the ideas of the original completely and accurately.

##### Example 2:

Source text: It kept getting darker and darker, and we could hardly see the ball any more, but we didn’t want to stop doing what we were doing.

Target text 1: 天越来越黑，黑得几乎连球都看不见了，可我们还是不肯歇手。

Target text 2: 天色越来越黑，球都几乎看不到了，可我们还是不想停下来。

Analysis: In this example, Shi used the strategy of domestication while Sun used foreignization. Obviously, “歇手” is a Chinese culture-loaded word. It comes from *Amazing Tales* (《二刻拍案惊奇》), which means stopping what is being done. Translating “stop doing what we were doing” into “歇手” is slightly wrong. Imagine how the 16-year-old Holden can say such a Chinese culture-loaded word, so the author argues Sun’s translation is more proper, conveying the students’ love to the rugby and reproduce the exoticism.

## 4.2. Cultural Level

In the novel *The Catcher in the Rye*, the protagonist used a lot of American slang, and four letter words which became a distinctive feature of the book. However, because of the difference between two cultures, it is a little difficult for translators to make the translation have all the ease and style of the original work, especially if the deviation happens, such as the translation of American slang and Four-letter words.

### 4.2.1. Slang

Slang is a kind of “very informal words and expressions that are more common in spoken language, especially used by a particular group of people, for example, children, criminals, soldiers” (Hornby, 2014). If the translation of the slang used by Holden is pertinent, Holden’s characteristics and personalities can be conveyed accurately to the target readers.

Example 1:

Source text: He didn’t feel like horsing around. He was shaving and all. “Wuddaya wanna make me do--cut my goddam head off?”

Target text 1: 他没心思逗趣。他正在一个劲儿地刮胡子。“你要让我怎么着——割掉我的混账脑袋瓜儿？”

Target text 2: 他不太想逗乐，因为他正在刮胡子。“你想让我怎么着——把我他妈的头给割掉？”

Analysis: First of all, “horse around” is an American slang that means joking, laughing and pushing each other. In the translation of this phrase, the two handled very well, but the author thinks that Shi’s translation is better. He translated “horse around” into “逗趣”, which is functionally equivalent to the original speech style and expresses the western culture, while Sun translated it into “逗乐” which belongs to Beijing dialect. Therefore, the author thinks that Sun’s translation lost the original taste.

Second, in Sun’s translation, he translated the logical conjunction of “because”, which is unnecessary. Because Chinese emphasizes parataxis, the logical relation is hid in the sentence meaning.

Example 2:

Source text: “You know. The mummies--them dead guys. That get buried in them toons and all.” Toons. That killed me. He meant tombs.

Target text 1: “你知道。木乃伊——死了的人。就是葬在粉里的。”  
粉。真笑死了。他说的是坟。

Target text 2: “你知道，木乃伊——那些死人，就是埋在风墓里的。”  
风墓，逗死我了，他指的是坟墓。

Analysis: In Holden's conversation with two children, Holden said the sentence "That killed me" which is an American slang, meaning "very interesting". It is wrong to translate word by word and the two translators translated it as "真笑死了" and "逗死我了" respectively, which is very right and in line with Tytler's three principles.

Besides, there is another problem to notice. The children said "tomb" as "toon" because of pronunciation problems. The translations of two versions are appropriate and the translators also know that it is a word game. The pronunciation of "tomb" and "toon" is similar. In Shi's version, he translated them as "坟" and "粉" separately, which could make the target language readers understand the intention of the writer of the original composition and produce the equal readers' response, while Sun translated "toon" into "风墓". The author thinks it will confuse the readers, because there is no such expression or image in Chinese culture. Therefore, the author supports that Shi's translation is better, which not only expresses the contents and the style of the original work but also reproduces the ease and fluency of the source language text.

#### 4.2.2. Four-letter Words

Holden is a 16-year-old boy who has just been expelled from school. He speaks vulgarly and has poor vocabulary. There are a lot of Four-letter words in the novel, such as God damn it, scam, hybrid and bastard. The author takes two examples to analyze the merits and demerits of two translators in translating these four letter words.

Example 1:

Source text: It was icy as hell and I damn near fell down.

Target text 1: 天冷得像在地狱里一样，我差点儿摔了一跤。

Target text 2: 地面全他妈结了冰，差点儿他妈的摔了一跤。

Analysis: In the translation of the first half, Shi chose the method of literal translation and translated it as "像在地狱里一样" to reproduce the original idea, but in the latter part of the sentence, "damn" was directly omitted, which fails to maintain the original manner and does not maintain the style of the original. The author argues it is not proper, because Holden is a boy full of Four-letter words, translating it as "他妈的" is more in line with Holden's character. Therefore, the author considers that Sun's translation is better, but the only defect of his qualities is that he omitted "as hell", not conveying the original content accurately.

Example 2:

Source text: The leading man can't go on. He's drunk as a bastard.

Target text 1: 那位领舞的不能上场。他醉得像只王八啦。

Target text 2: 主演上不了场。他醉得像一摊烂泥。

Analysis: The two translators took the method of free translation for the word "bastard". In English, it is an insulting word, meaning an unpleasant or despicable person. Here, Shi translated it as "王八". Although there is no direct relation between "bastard" and "王八", Shi paid attention to the gesture of the drunk people tending to motion irregularly, so Shi's translation accords with the situation and context. As for Sun's version, he translated into "烂泥" which is a Chinese slang, so from the cultural level, he took the strategy of domestication, which produces the equivalent function for the target language readers just as for the source



language readers. “烂醉如泥” is an idiom, and “烂泥” vividly conveys the state of being drunk. Both of them translated very well, but if considering Holden’s speech features, the authors argues that Shi’s version is more proper. Because Holden’s language is full of insulting words and Shi’s version maintains the style and manner of the original. Therefore, Shi’s translation conformed to Tytler’s three principles while Sun’s version failed to keep the same style and manner of the original.

## 5. Conclusion

*The Catcher in the Rye* is famous for Holden’s unique linguistic features. In the novel, he used a lot of idiolect, American slang and four letter words which are the main study of the article. This thesis compares and analyzes the two Chinese translations of *The Catcher in the Rye* in linguistic and cultural level from the perspective of Tytler’s three principles and draws some conclusions. The author finds that Shi Xianrong uses the method of literal translation to reproduce the original atmosphere and the rendition is full of exotic flavors; while Sun Zhongxu adopts the method of free translation and the rendition is simple and clear, which is easy to strike a chord with readers. Whether the two translators adopt the translation strategy of domestication or foreignization, they basically follow Tytler’s three principles of translation, trying to accurately convey the original ideas, maintain the style and reproduce the smoothness of the original work. However, because of cultural differences and the accept ability of the target language readers, the translator will make some changes when translating.

In the process of translating, the importance of Tytler’s three principles is not the same, the most important is to convey the original ideas, then the style of the original, and finally is the ease or fluency. This thesis does not aim to pick which rendition is better but to compare the different translation methods adopted by different translators in order to meet the requirements of Tytler’s three principles and the effect of its implementation. Therefore, this thesis makes a comparative study from the cultural and social pragmatic aspects of language such as Holden’s linguistic features to make the readers can understand the original text more thoroughly and get a better reading experience.

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