

## **Analysis of Children's Literature Translation from the Perspective of Functional Equivalence Theory**

### **-- A Case Study of the Translation of The Adventures of Pinocchio**

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#### **Abstract**

Children's literature, as a special type of literary work, has an important role in the domain of the literature. Translation of children's literature plays a rather significant and decisive role in building children's world view. Children are distinctive from adults in that they have their unique cognitive style and psychological characteristics. Therefore, this feature requires the translator not to translate children's literature from the adult's cognitive level and way of thinking, nor to overuse childish language and sentence structure, but at the same time not to sacrifice the reading effect of the readers of the target language, which coincides with the viewpoint of focusing on readers' response in the functional equivalence theory proposed by Nida. This paper focuses on analyzing the translation of one of the most famous and the most translated works of children's literature--The Adventures of Pinocchio and examines how functional equivalence theory is reflected in the translated version. Through the following perspectives of equivalence--equivalence about lexicon, equivalence about syntax, equivalence about text, equivalence about style, and equivalence about culture. This article will explore a more rational approach to the translation of children's literature and will demonstrate that functional equivalence theory can be used as a guidance for the translation of other children's literature.

#### **Keywords**

**Children's Literature; Translation; Functional Equivalence Theory.**

### **1. Introduction**

With the development of the times, the reform and opening up and the acceleration of the process of globalization, cultural exchanges between countries have also become closer, and a large number of foreign literary works have been imported into China, and there is a growing awareness of the importance of translation. Nevertheless, among the many foreign literary works introduced into China, children's literature is often neglected in translation because its audience is children. There are abundant excellent foreign children's literature, such as Alice's Adventure in Wonderland and Through Looking-Glass, The Wizard of Oz, The Little Prince, etc. Those literary works not only have far-reaching significance at the level of cultural exchange and intercourse, but also at the contribution to children's physical and mental health development.

The Adventures of Pinocchio, the source text chosen for this article, is one of these excellent works. This book is a fairy tale of a wooden puppet named Pinocchio. The story is about a carpenter who finds a piece of talking wood and gives it to his neighbor Geppetto, who uses it to make a talking and walking puppet named Pinocchio and treats him as his own child. Yet Pinocchio was so playful that he caused a lot of trouble for himself and Geppetto. He skipped school because of his playfulness, and was cheated because of his avarice, but his good nature

did not change during the adventure. Eventually, Pinocchio learned to take responsibility, he became honest, hard-working, kind-hearted, and became a real boy with the help of the fairies. Considering the special nature of children's literature, when translating children's literature, translators often must take into account the obvious special nature of children's language as the language of an exclusive group and the equally special nature of the linguistic environment in which they live. Nida's functional equivalence theory, which advocates reproducing the information of the source language in the most naturally equivalent language and balancing function and form in translation, is very appropriate for the translation of children's literature. Thus, this article will analyze how functional equivalence theory is reflected in the translation.

## 2. Literature Review

Children's literature, as a rather special type of literary work, is often neglected. In fact, the translation of children's literature is undoubtedly a hard nut to crack, because children are different from adults in that they have their own unique cognitive style and psychological characteristics, and it plays a significant part in creating a fantastic spiritual world for children and the translated productions build bridges between different cultures (Tabbert, 2002). Thus, children's literature translation needs to be taken seriously.

Functional equivalence theory is put forward by Eugene A. Nida (1962), one of the distinguished linguist and translator in America. He introduced and distinguished for the first time the concepts of "formal equivalence" and "dynamic equivalence (functional equivalence)" in his work "Toward a Science of Translation". The core concept of Nida's theory is functional equivalence, and this theory has been widely adopted by translators. The introduction of functional translation theory can provide sufficient theoretical guidance to the translation of children's literature in China (Z.H. Li, 2021), Nida's functional equivalence theory advocates the use of the most natural equivalent language to reproduce the information in the source language, balancing function and form in translation, which is very applicable to the translation of children's literature. Although, it is difficult to achieve complete equivalence in translating literature from one language to another, it is possible to achieve maximum equivalence.

## 3. The Overview of Children's Literature and Children's Literature Translation

Compared to other literary works, children's literature has both characteristics and commonalities, and there are certain difficulties in defining the relevant concepts, making it tough to strike a consensus. The definition of children's literature varies among scholars. According to Swedish educator and children's literature scholar Gote Klingberg, children's literature is "literature produced by children specially for children." Finnish translator Ritta Oittinen further described children's literature as "literature produced and intended for children or as literature read by children" (Oittinen,2000:61). And one of the renowned and prominent children's literature author Pu Manting pointed out that "children's literature refers to literature that is suitable for the psychological characteristics, aesthetic requirements and receptiveness of children of all ages and helps them grow up healthily." In sum, we can discover some similarities from these explanations above. Firstly, they agreed on the fact that children's literature has its own unique characteristics. Secondly, children's literature plays a vital role in the education of children and is decisive for children's development. And last but not the least, children's literature should focus on child-centeredness.

The creation and translation of children's literature should, first of all, consider the characteristics of the target audience. The specificity of children's literature is reflected in its stylistic features and depends on its specific target audience, i.e., children and young teenagers.

Because of the distinctive target readers, children's literature is quite different from adult literature. One of the important differences between children's literature and adult literature is that children's literature has its own unique stylistic features, which is the primary factor to ensure the acceptability of children's literature. Taking the largest audience group for children's literature: children aged seven to eleven as an example. As claimed by the research in the field of Children Psychology, children between the ages of seven and eleven are in a stage of increased perception of external things, their thinking at this stage also gradually began to transition from the main form of concrete images to the main form of abstract thinking, but this abstract thinking to a large extent still with a greater degree of specific image. At the same time, children's attention gradually develops from unintentional attention to intentional attention, but intuitive and concrete things, such as colors, shapes and images, are still more likely to attract their attention ("Introduction to Children's Literature",1999). In general, children's literature has a stronger sense of rhyme and rhythm than adult literature and has higher requirements for the spoken language in terms of style.

Everything has its commonality and individuality. As a unique genre in literature, children's literature is bound to have its own unique characteristics that are different from other general literature. In addition to the properties mentioned above, children's literature is broad in theme, clear and meaningful in topics; then, children's literature often has characters with strong images and distinctive personalities; moreover, the narrative and descriptions in children's literature are extremely child-friendly.

In the field of literary translation, children's literature translation is one of the important branches. The basic principle of translation is accuracy, that is, the translator must follow the meaning of the original text when translating, and truly and clearly reflect the style and ideas of the original text when choosing the words and phrases to be used in the translated text. Since children's literature has the features noted previously, it makes translating children's literature a more difficult and toilsome task. The essential problem of children's literature translation is the creation of children's interest which means the artistic reflection of the mood and interest of children's language and actions in literature, which is usually a general term for the emotional tone and interest in children's literature, in line with the psychological characteristics of children (D.R. Xu, 2004). This requires translators of children's literature to use reasonable methods to select words and phrases that meet children's reading habits and language habits on the basis of expressing the ideas of the original text to the greatest extent possible, so that children will be interested in and resonate with the text when they read it, making it easier for them to understand. Nevertheless, there are often differences in expression between the source language and the target language, and the source language and the target language are in different cultures, which results in many cases that the meaning of the original text cannot be directly transferred to the translated text, thus, some changes are usually needed to achieve functional equivalence.

Nida's functional equivalence emphasizes reproducing the information of the original text through reciprocal language, so it is very appropriate to translate children's literature from the perspective of dynamic functional equivalence. Adopting functional equivalence in translating children's literature can not only reduce the translation difficulty of translators, but also reduce mistranslation and omissions. This article will take the bilingual edition of *The Adventures of Pinocchio* by China Translation Press as an example to analyze the embodiment of functional equivalence theory in its translation.

#### **4. Functional Equivalence Theory**

The theory of "functional equivalence" was developed by Eugene A. Nida, leading American linguist, translator, and translation theorist, based upon "the principle of equivalent effect"

proposed by Rieu and Phillips and his study of Bible translations in order to have a standard for reducing differences between the source and target languages, but he originally introduced the term "dynamic equivalence". He distinguished for the first time the concepts of "formal equivalence" and "dynamic equivalence (functional equivalence)" in his work "Toward a Science of Translation".

Functional equivalence theory emphasizes the effective performance of the communicative function of translation and requires that the translation and the source text should meet the requirements of equivalence in terms of information content and form. Functional equivalence is the core concept of Nida's theory. Nida defined functional equivalence as "the closest natural equivalent to the source-language message" (Nida, 1964). In this definition, "equivalent" points to the source text; "natural" relates to the target language; and "closest" emphasizes the maximum of approximation. Nida also pointed out that language is closely related to culture, when cultural factors intervene, translation would be more difficult, and translators should be more prudent. Discrepancy between cultures may cause more obstacles for the translators than discrepancy in language structure.

Nida's definition of translation indicates that translation is not only about lexical equivalence but also about semantic and stylistic equivalence, and that the information conveyed by translation is not only superficial lexical information but also deep cultural information. To summarize, there are four aspects of equivalence within Nida's functional equivalence theory: lexical equivalence, syntactic equivalence, textual equivalence, and stylistic equivalence (J.Z. Guo, 2000:67). In addition, this article will also discuss the equivalence in terms of culture.

## 5. Functional Equivalence Embodied in the Translation of the Adventures of Pinocchio

### 5.1. Equivalence in Terms of the Lexicon

It is well acknowledged that lexicon is the most fundamental element for language, picking the appropriate words and phrases to express the meaning conveyed by the source text is a crucial task for children's literature translators. It should be noted that, the range of vocabulary acquired by children is relatively narrow, their knowledge at this stage is insufficient, and their daily language is relatively simple. Thus, translations of children's literature should incline towards the use of more concise and clear words and phrases. According to functional equivalence theory, the translator is expected to find the closest equivalent words in the target language to the original text so that the children can understand it more easily.

#### *Example 1*

And the others added maliciously: "Geppetto seems a good man! But with boys he is a regular tyrant! If that poor puppet is left in his hands he is quite capable of tearing him in pieces!"

又有人不怀好意地接上去说：“杰佩托这家伙，看着挺老实，对孩子可真凶！让这个可怜的木偶落到他手里，他准把木偶剁成碎片！……”

If this phrase is translated for adults audience, "and the others added maliciously" can be easily translated as "还有人添油加醋", but due to the limited language accumulation of children, they may be incapable of understanding "添油加醋", this phrase is more appropriate and concise to be translated as "又有人不怀好意地接上去说". And the direct translation of "regular tyrant" is "十足的暴君", but in Ren's translated version, he translated "regular tyrant" as "对孩子可真凶". Children may be unfamiliar with the word "暴君", but can easily accept and comprehend the sentence "对孩子可真凶".

It is worth noting that, in realizing lexical equivalence in the translation of literary works, translators should not only confine themselves to the accurate extraction of lexical connotations, but sometimes need to make specific analysis in the context.

#### Example 2

“And you, my love!” said the little man, turning in a flattering manner to Pinocchio, “what do you intend to do? Are you coming with us or are you going to remain behind?”

“那你呢，我的宝贝？.....”赶车的十分客气地向皮诺乔转过来问。“你打算怎么样？跟我们去还是留下？.....”

“My love” is usually translated as “亲爱的” or “我的爱人”, however, in the context of this text, “my love” is spoken to Pinocchio by the coachman, and also in the above article, the coachman said to Candlewick some similar expressions. Thus, the translator should not translate “my love” directly as “亲爱的”, but rather as “我的宝贝”. From this, it can be concluded that translators who are not acquainted with the context and fail to translate words and sentences accurately with the information in the text are at high risk of committing such errors.

Another feature of children’s literature is the extensive use of onomatopoeia, which can create child interest, and translators should pay attention to this kind of words. On the one hand, English and Chinese will differ in the choice of onomatopoeia for the same thing, the translator needs to modify the onomatopoeia of the original text appropriately according to the features of Chinese expressions.

#### Example 3

Whilst he was saying this with great emotion, he thought that he heard music in the distance that sounded like fifes and the beating of a big drum: Fi-fi-fi, fi-fi-fi; zum, zum, zum.

他正在这样激动地说着这番话，忽然听见远处有音乐声，又是吹笛子，又是敲鼓：的的的，的的的.....咚，咚，咚，咚。

The assassin also jumped, but not having measured the distance properly—Splash! Splash! They fell into the very middle of the ditch.

两个杀人强盗跟着也跳，可是没算准距离——卜龙通！.....落到沟里去了。

On the other hand, translators sometimes need to add some onomatopoeia for purpose of engaging children’s interest and make translated work more comprehensible.

#### Example 4

And, as his stomach cried more than ever and he did not know how to quiet it.

肚子继续咕噜咕噜响，越响越厉害，他又不知道该怎么办才能叫它不响。

In general, the choice of words in children's literature is often rich in childishness, and the equivalence of vocabulary in the translation of children's literature is an aspect that is highly negligible by translators, and at the same time, a reasonable choice of translation vocabulary also imposes high expectations on the translation level and cultural level of translators.

## 5.2. Equivalence in Terms of the Syntax

Because of the difference in subject-predicate structure, ways of thinking, and the presence of subordinate clauses, English sentences tend to be longer compared to Chinese ones. Hence, from the perspective of syntax and considering the language habits of the target readers of

children's literature, translators should appropriately split the long sentences of the original text into several short sentences in accordance with the meaning of the sentences, which is more conducive to children's interpretation of the meaning that the original text conveys. Before translating the long sentence, the translator should firstly decompose the composition of the original sentences and analyze the meaning of the source text, and secondly clarify the characteristics of the original text in terms of expression and language habits. Finally, when translating, the translator should not only reflect the characteristics of the original text in the translation, but also consider the Chinese expression habits, and strive to reflect the meaning of the original text smoothly and accurately in the translation.

#### Example 5

Encouraged by this first victory he used his nails to such purpose that he succeeded in liberating himself from his assailants, and, jumping the hedge by the roadside, he began to fly across the country.

皮诺乔旗开得胜，胆子大了。他挣脱杀人强盗的爪子，跳过路旁的树丛，开始在田野上逃走。

Example 5 is a relatively complex compound sentence. In Chinese, the adverbial modifier usually appears between the subject and the predicate, while in this example, the adverbial modifier "encouraged by this first victory" is located before the core word "he". Besides, this is a long sentence which is difficult to understand, so the translator has to adjust the structure of this sentence appropriately and split the long sentence into short sentences, so that the rewritten sentence is more in line with the reading and language habits of Chinese children.

Moreover, both in English and Chinese, the attribute is indispensable for the composition of a sentence. What's different is the regular position of the attribute in the sentence. There exist many definite clauses in English texts, while in Chinese texts, the attribute is often preceded by the word it modifies. The translator should change the position when translating.

#### Example 6

The fairy, who was waiting at the door of the house, took the poor puppet in her arms and carried him into the little room that was wainscoted with mother-of-pearl.

等在门口的仙女抱起可怜的木偶，把他抱进一间墙上镶嵌着珍珠的小卧室...

Translators have to deal with the syntactic and expressive conflicts between the source text and the target text, achieve syntactic equivalence, and adopt a more flexible approach to handle the differences in expressions between different languages under the guidance of functional equivalence theory to achieve a smoother transition between the two, thus providing readers with a higher quality translation.

### 5.3. Equivalence in Terms of Text

Textual equivalence is extremely crucial in the translation of literary works, and translators should pay more attention to this equivalence. In the functional equivalence perspective, textual equivalence can also be called discourse equivalence. A discourse is a unit of language use. Therefore, we cannot only analyze the language itself, but also look at how the language embodies meaning and function in a particular context. Nida stressed that "a natural translation must be in accordance with the context of the particular message" (Nida, 1964). Context generally consists of background context, situational context, and cultural context.

If the translator overlooks these, the translation will most likely deviate from the meaning conveyed in the original text and produce semantic errors, causing difficulties to the target

readers. In 5.1, I have already discussed the effect posed by context on lexical equivalence. Whereas functional equivalence is not only concerned with word matching, but it also underlines that there has to be sufficient equivalence and consistency between the source text and the translated text in terms of overall structure and ideological connotation. As a result, the translator need to analyze the source text from a broader perspective, giving more attention to the cultural overtones and linguistic features presented in the source text, so that these features can be perceived by the target reader in the translation text.

#### Example 7

Whilst he was building these castles in the air he had arrived in the neighborhood of the field ...  
幻想着这些空中城堡，皮诺乔已经来到了那块地的附近.....

If we analyze this sentence literally, the translation of this sentence would be “当他在空中建造这些城堡的时候，他已经来到了田野的附近”。However, when taking the context into consideration, it can be easily realized that the main character here is not really building these castles but imagine them. As mentioned above, the fox said to Pinocchio that in the "Field of Miracles" the gold coins buried in the ground will grow trees that bear gold coins, so Pinocchio began to imagine that with the money he wanted to build a fancy castle. The translator can only accurately understand the connotation of the source text and produce a better translation that brings out the essence of the original work to the greatest extent by integrating the context and profoundly comprehending the relevant content of the original text when translating.

Textual equivalence occupies a prominent position in literary translation. It reminds the translator not to simply comprehend the literally meaning of the text but to read throughout the full text. Functional equivalence theory provides the translator a good perspective to deal with text translation.

#### 5.4. Equivalence in Terms of Style

Different types and forms of literature differ drastically in terms of their style, for example, poetry, drama, and prose are some common literary styles. Under the theory of functional equivalence, the linguistic features of different texts vary considerably. Before translating a literary work, the translator must first orient himself to the style of the source text, deeply analyze the stylistic features of certain text, and obtain an understanding of the author's creative thinking and language habits. Due to the special target audience of children's literature, authors of children's literature are prone to utilize some methods to make their works' styles more friendly to children. As mentioned in section 3, the psychological characteristics of children are very different from those of adult. Consequently, in children's literature translation, the style of the translated text should in line with the style of the source text. What needs to be emphasized is that Chinese and English are roughly equal in their rhetorical expressions, and it is effortless to find that many of the rhetorical devices commonly used in English have their counterparts in Chinese. Therefore, the rhetorical style of the translation should be consistent with the original text as far as possible. This enables the target language readers to get the same reading experience as the source language readers to the maximum extent.

We can classify the text styles in *The Adventure of Pinocchio* into the following three categories for analysis: format style, pragmatic style, and cognitive style. The first category is the most obvious one, here is the example:

#### Example 8

HERE LIES  
THE CHILD WITH THE BLUE HAIR  
WHO DIED FROM SORROW

BECAUSE SHE WAS ABANDONED BY HER  
LITTLE BROTHER PINOCCHIO

这里安眠着  
天蓝色头发的仙女  
由于她的弟弟皮诺乔  
将她遗弃  
她因悲伤而溘然长逝

In this example, this quote from the original text is an epitaph for a fairy carved on a marble tablet. The quotation is also written in capital letters in the middle, which makes it distinctly separate from the rest of the text and draws the children's attention to it, and then leads them into the atmosphere of melancholy that the author intends to create. And in the translated version, the translator has properly adjusted the order of the sentences to make them more comprehensible to Chinese children but kept the formatting consistent with the original text. At the same time, the translator also bolded and enlarged the phrase "天蓝色头发的仙女" because children's attention is more easily attracted by unique graphics, which allows children readers to quickly grasp the focus of the passage and immerse themselves in the text.

One of the features of *The Adventures of Pinocchio* is that the author uses a plenty of dialogue to connect different characters and make the work more understandable to children. The translator can apply a pragmatic approach to take dialogue in a text into account and use it to convey the stylistic features and meaning of the original text to the reader.

*Example 9*

*"I implore you to pardon poor Harlequin."*

"我求您开开恩，放了可怜的花衣小丑!"

This line is a sentence in the dialogue between Pinocchio and the showman. Through the context of this dialogue, we can realize Pinocchio's terror and the boss's supremacy and brutality, meanwhile, this sentence also shows the relationship between the two characters and their status. In addition, Pinocchio's words also concern Harlequin's fate. For this reason, the translator chose to translate the phrase "I implore you" as "我求您开开恩" to accentuate Pinocchio's menial plea and the showman's supreme authority.

The last category is cognitive style which is easily to be neglected. Cognitive factor plays an important part in children's literature, characters' thinking patterns in children's literature is beneficial to create certain atmosphere and stimulate children's cognitive abilities. The translator must keep the original cognitive style of the source text in his translation, so that target readers can experience the same as the reader of the source language. Here is a representative example:

*Example 10*

*On the walls of the houses there were inscriptions written in charcoal: "Long live playthings, we will have no more schools; down with arithmetic," and similar other fine sentiments, all in bad spelling.*

所有的墙上都可以读到用炭写的最好玩的东西，像：“完具万水！”（应该是“玩具万岁！”）“我们不在要学小！”（应该是“我们不再要学校！”）“打到算树！”（应该是“打倒算数！”）等等，等等。



This example shows an exotic scene in the “Land of Boobies”. Children living in this place do nothing but play day in and day out. Through their flawed graffiti on the walls, the author illustrates the foolishness and ridiculousness of the children here because of their lack of learning. For the sake of assuring the effect and cognitive style of the original text being transferred in the translation, the translator employed a couple of misspelled Chinese characters, e.g., 完具万水, 算树, etc., to make the translation equivalent to the original, so that the translation also achieves the same purpose of expression as the original text.

In a word, during the translation of children's literature, the translator should have a good grasp of the stylistic characteristics of children's literature, to ensure the stylistic equivalence between the translation and the original text, so that children in China can get the same feeling as children in the source language.

### 5.5. Equivalence in Terms of Culture

According to Nida, language is closely related to culture, when cultural factors intervene, translation would be more difficult, and translators should be more prudent. He also pointed that translation in the true sense should be intercultural translation, not translation at the linguistic level of the source text and the translated text. There are many specific expressions in foreign children's literature that are unique to the culture of the source language, which can make the text more challenging for Chinese children to read. To deal with this trans-cultural problem, the translator can add some annotations to make the translation more readable.

#### *Example 11*

“Seven, like the seven deadly sins,” said Pinocchio, with a shout of laughter.

“七个什么, 七个大罪(根据天主教的戒律, 七大罪是傲慢, 淫欲, 嫉妒, 激怒, 吝啬, 贪吃, 怠惰.),”皮诺乔大笑着说。

The most dominant religion in the West is Catholicism, so the seven deadly sins are well known to readers of the source language, but they are a very foreign concept to Chinese children. Annotating this concept can help readers understand the text as well as help them learn about the foreign culture.

## 6. Strategies for the Application of Functional Equivalence Translation Theory in Children's Literature

### 6.1. Faithfulness Principle Oriented

Faithfulness is a vital principle of translation, with abundant supporter in the field of literature translation. Against the background of translating children's literature, this poses additional challenges. German expert of translation Christiane Nord (1989) further expanded this principle into her “the principle of function plus loyalty”. She held the view that the translator should strive to make the language style of the translation smooth and easy to understand, so that it is not only close to the original meaning of the author, but also can show a certain sense of literary beauty, as far as possible to maintain the style of the translation and the original style, to bring the reader a richer reading aesthetic interest.

### 6.2. Enhancing the Childishness of the Translated Language

The target readers of children's literature are children, so when translating children's literature, translators should always keep in mind that children are the main focus, never forget that the readers are children, stand in the children's perspective as much as possible, and keep close to the psychological environment of children. At the same time, the translator's criteria for

choosing the language of the translation should be to avoid obscure words and phrases that are beyond the cognitive scope of children, and to choose words and phrases that are easy to understand and vividly interesting.

### 6.3. Giving Priority to Domestication

Domestication and foreignization are a pair of translation concepts proposed by Venuti (1995). Domesticating translation means to make the translation conform to the expression of the target language, to make the translation understandable, and to eliminate the unfamiliarity of the target language readers to the translation, while foreignizing translation is the opposite. No matter what kind of translation they are, their essential purpose is to communicate, to let the readers of the translated language understand the meaning of the original text. Children are young and have a limited level of cognition. Translating children's literature should take these characteristics of the target readers into account. The emotional needs of children, the children's cognitive level, and the educational measures for children cannot be separated from the specific cultural context. This determines that the translation of children's literature should be mainly domesticated.

However, in fact, foreignization and domestication are not mutually exclusive but rather complementary and mutually reinforcing translation.

## 7. Conclusion

The translation of children's literature may seem simple, but it is in fact a hard nut to crack. Unlike other literary works, children's literature requires the translator not only to translate the original text by equivalence, but also to restore the childlike interest expressed in the original text in the translation. Through the study of the translation of *The Adventures of Pinocchio*, we can conclude that functional translation theory plays an extremely crucial role in the translation of children's literature. The application of functional translation theory can effectively improve the scientific nature of children's literature translation and provides a new development path and theoretical basis for children's literature translation.

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