



Translation Study on the Text of Exploring the Verdant Landscapes of the Tang Dynasty through Dunhuang Murals

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Abstract

Chinese frescoes have a history of more than 2000 years. Through the study of these murals, we gain insight into the cultural spectacle and painting styles of the time. Therefore, this translation research focuses on an article from the official website of the Palace Museum. This article “Exploring the Verdant Landscapes of the Tang Dynasty through Dunhuang Murals” primarily discusses the landscape and other paintings found in the Tang Dynasty murals of Dunhuang, briefly outlining their content. The historical context and painting techniques highlighted in the article have played a crucial role in promoting Dunhuang murals as an intangible cultural heritage, deepening the understanding of foreign readers about this significant aspect of Chinese art.

Subject Areas

Linguistics

Keywords

Dunhuang Murals, English Translation, Chinese Culture, Functional Equivalence Theory

1. Introduction

Dunhuang caves are located in Dunhuang, Gansu province, China. These murals are renowned for their historical, cultural, and artistic significance. Here are some recent studies to show the significant of it. Dunhuang murals are a collection of Chinese style and national style, forming an autonomous Chinese-style Buddhist art. It has a very great historical and cultural value and an important research value [1]. Translation is not only exemplified by the bilingual panels and captions

throughout the exhibition, but is also enhanced in non-verbal aspects, especially those in relation to digital installations and visual design of the exhibition [2]. Through translation, we can unlock the secrets embedded within these murals and make them accessible to a wider audience, both domestically and internationally. Recent literature within the past 3 - 5 years underscores the importance of studying Dunhuang murals and their translation. This article will use functional equivalence by Nida [3] and use translation strategies to carry on this study. Scholars have increasingly recognized the need to preserve and interpret these cultural treasures accurately to deepen our understanding of Chinese history and culture. Many translations may overlook nuanced cultural references or fail to capture the essence of the original murals adequately. As such, there is a pressing need to refine and advance translation studies in this area to ensure accuracy and fidelity to the original content.

2. Research Structure

1) Structure

Based on Eugene Nida's functional equivalence theory, this research focuses on analyzing equivalence at the lexical and syntactic levels, analyzing typical translation cases, and summarizing corresponding translation methods. Translating Dunhuang murals material can conduct by systematic procedure or process of translation, the translation work undergoes three stages: pre-translation, translation, and post-translation. In the pre-translation stage, the original text from the official website of the Palace Museum, prepared bilingual dictionaries and network tools, and collected the necessary background information for the Dunhuang Mogao Grottoes in order to prepare for the translation process. During the translation stage, it is crucial to study and understand the original text in order to grasp its meaning and style. Subsequently, the original text is translated at the lexical, sentence, and textual levels to ensure the accuracy and appropriateness of the translated text in terms of meaning and style. In the post-translation stage, verifying the correct understanding of the original text is an important aspect. Following this, comprehensive proofreading and revision are carried out to ensure correctness in form and completeness in function.

Hence, this research is divided into four parts: The first part includes the functional equivalence theory, the introduction of the author and the feature of the original text, and the tools to be prepared in the early stage of translation. The second part is an overview of the process of translation tasks, translation methods and techniques under the guidance of functional equivalence theory, and the terms encountered at the lexical level are analyzed according to specific cases. At the syntactic level, the methods used include adding translation, merging translation, free translation and so on, and the analysis of specific cases is carried out. The third part is the summary of the translation research, the fourth part expounds the experience and enlightenment gained through this translation

2) Brief description of the theory: Functional equivalence theory

Functional equivalence, also named as dynamic equivalence, was first put forward in 1964. It is in contrast to formal equivalence which focuses more on meaning rather than form. It cares about the receptor's response, and in order to make the source text acceptable for readers, translators can change the form and pattern of the source text and adopt re-creation whenever it is necessary. There are four equivalences in functional equivalence: lexical equivalence, syntactic equivalence, textual equivalence and stylistic equivalence [3]. In the 1960s, American translation scholar Eugene Nida put forward the concept of "dynamic equivalence" in his *Theory and Practice of Translation*, that is, to compare the responses of the source language recipient and the target language recipient, and try to restore the comprehension ability and appreciation level of the source language author in the translated text. Therefore, according to Peter Newmark's text type theory, the text selected by the translator belongs to the informational text: Looking at the green landscape of the Tang Dynasty from the Dunhuang murals, introducing the history and painting style of Dunhuang paintings, etc. Therefore, Eugene Nida's functional equivalence theory is chosen as a guide in this translation practice.

2.1. Pre-Translation

2.1.1. Information of the Author

The author of the article, born in Zhaotong, Yunnan, holds an on-the-job doctoral degree and serves as a research librarian and Secretary of the Party Committee of the Dunhuang Academy. He has made significant contributions to the prosperity and development of cultural undertakings and industries. A large number of landscape paintings in Dunhuang murals can accurately restore the original appearance of the green landscapes in the Tang Dynasty, providing a solid foundation for the study of the history of Chinese landscape painting. The original text takes the landscape paintings in Dunhuang murals as an example and analyzes four popular composition methods of landscape paintings in the Tang Dynasty: three-mountain composition, pyramid-shaped composition, left-right contrast composition, and que-shaped composition. Additionally, the author analyzes the expression methods of trees and water in Tang Dynasty landscape images, as well as the application of colors, expounding on the basic characteristics of green landscape paintings in the Tang Dynasty. Investigating the author's background clearly can help the interpreter make an in-depth analysis of the article. The author's writing style is closely related to his own experiences, making it necessary to thoroughly investigate the author's background.

2.1.2. Features of the Article

Dunhuang is not only an important town on the ancient Silk Road, but also an important node that cannot be ignored in the modern Belt and Road. Dunhuang culture has always been based on traditional Chinese civilization, while constantly absorbing the achievements of civilizations of other regions and nations. Most studies of Dunhuang focus on frescoes and grottoes, and Dunhuang ancient architecture itself as a carrier of culture, but also the crystallization of the continuous

integration of multiple cultures. The translated text involves a lot of professional knowledge, with many introductory languages and heavy information. At the same time, in the lexical level, the text contains a large number of allusions, idioms. In the syntactic level, it contains vivid narration of history and culture. This translation practice is an exploratory attempt based on the communication concept of Dunhuang culture, combined with the characteristics of informative text, under the guidance of functional equivalence theory.

2.2. Preparation before Translation

First, the original text is read and analyzed, and before translation, the technical terms and difficult points of the text are screened and analyzed, and parallel text reading is carried out. In this paper, functional equivalence theory is selected for translation. Preparation of translation tools: Lu Gusun Chinese-English Dictionary, Youdao Translation Dictionary, Terminology Online, How Net Database, cnki Translation Assistant, linguee webset. Pre-translation preparation is very important before translating each text, which is related to the translator's translation efficiency and translation effect, so pre-translation preparation is very important in the translation process.

2.3. Translation Case Study

2.3.1. Lexical Analysis-Terminology Translation

In the process of translation, it is found that there are too many related technical terms in this article, covering the fields of painting and religion. Functional equivalence requires four aspects of equivalence and word equivalence is one of the principles. Terminology translation has a certain degree of professionalism and has a great impact on the accuracy of translation. Therefore, terminology translation is crucial.

Example 1:

Source text: 莫高窟唐代前期的壁画中，凡采用山水为背景的经变画，都是以山水景物布满画面，并于其中展开人物活动。

Version 1: In the mural paintings of the Mogao Grottoes in the early Tang Dynasty, all the Buddhist scripture with landscape as the background are filled with landscape scenes and people's activities are carried out in them.

Version 2: In the early Tang Dynasty, in the mural paintings of the Mogao Grottoes, all the Sutra paintings with landscape as the background are filled with landscape scenes and people's activities are shown in them.

During the translation process, it was found that “^{jīng biàn huà}经变画” could be translated as Buddhist scripture or Sutra paintings. In the article “The Space of Dunhuang Tang Dynasty Sutra Paintings” in the CNKI translation assistant, it was discovered that the term “^{jīng biàn huà}经变画” was translated as Buddhist scripture. Using both the CNKI translation assistant and the Youdao Neural Network translation assistant, it was found that in “The Explanation of the Mantra Images of the Five Guardian Mothers in Cave 3 of Guazhou Yulin Cave” and “The Art of Sutra Paintings in the Sui

Dynasty in Dunhuang,” both core journals of Peking University, “^{jīng biàn}经变” was translated as Sutra. Interestingly, the second core journal happened to be authored by Zhao Shengliang, the author of this translation task. Therefore, the translation of “^{jīng biàn}经变” as Sutra in Translation Two is chosen as the final translation for this task. This aligns with the overall tone of the original text and adheres to functional translation theory in the aspect of word equivalence.

Example 2:

When translating the term “^{cūn fǎ}皴法,” which is a painting technique: 皴法 [cūn fǎ] is a technique in Chinese painting. It is a method used to depict the veins and textures of rocks, peaks, and tree bark. When painting, the outlines are first sketched, and then light dry ink is used for side-strokes. There are various methods to depict rocks and peaks, including “披麻皴” (pī má cūn), “雨点皴” (yǔ diǎn cūn), “卷云皴” (juǎn yún cūn), “解索皴” (jiě suǒ cūn), “牛毛皴” (niú máo cūn), “大斧劈皴” (dà fǔ pī cūn), and “小斧劈皴” (xiǎo fǔ pī cūn).

source text: ^{táng dài dūn huáng bì huà zhōng yǐ kāi shǐ yùn yòng cūn fǎ lái miáo huì shù mù tè bié shì jìn jǐng zhōng de dà shù shù gàn de wén lǐ yòng cūn fǎ biǎo xiǎn}唐代敦煌壁画中，已开始运用“皴法”来描绘树木。特别是近景中的大树，树干的纹理用皴法表现。

Version 1: In Dunhuang murals of Tang Dynasty, “wrinkle method” [4] has been used to depict trees. Especially the trees in the foreground, the texture of the trunk with texturing method to show.

Version 2: In Dunhuang murals of Tang Dynasty, “Texturing method” has been used to depict trees. Especially trees in the foreground, their trunk usually painted with texturing method.

Analysis: In the Youdao Neural Translation Assistant, “^{cūn fǎ}皴法” was translated as “wrinkle method,” while Translation Two translated it as “Texturing method.” According to the data from CNKI, in the journal “Analysis of Changes in the Aesthetic Orientation of Chinese Landscape Painting from the Development of Cunfa,” “^{cūn fǎ}皴法” was translated as “Texturing method.” After conducting research, it was found that there is a specific paper studying the translation of “^{cūn fǎ}皴法,” which translated “^{cūn}皴” as “wrinkle.” After extensive screening, it was discovered that “texture” is commonly used to describe the texture of a painting, and it is fit for the principle of word equivalence, not only make translation more smoothly but express the accurate meaning of it, so “wrinkle method” was ultimately selected.

2.3.2. Sentence Analysis: Allusions

In the case of allusions, the original text is translated step by step. First, the intra-lingual translation is carried out, and then the inter-lingual translation is carried out to carry out translation analysis. Idioms and allusions are the essence of Chinese language and the crystallization of Chinese culture. The translation of allusions is not only a process of language conversion, but also a process of cultural transmission. In the process of studying translation theory and practicing translation, the author finds that functional equivalence plays a vital guiding role in the study of English translation of idioms and allusions, and cultural functional equivalence is especially helpful to accurately express the meaning of idioms and allusions [5].

Source text: 如《绘事微言》载：画院有金碧山水，自宣和画院已有之。汉书不云有金碧气无土沙痕乎。盖金碧者，石青石绿也。即青绿山水之谓也。后人不少，误于青绿山水上加以泥金，谓之金笔山水。夫以金碧之名，而易以金笔之名，可笑也。

Intralingual translation: 如《绘事微言》记载，画院有金碧山水，自宣和画院成立就有了。汉书没说有金碧气无土沙痕。原来金碧就是石青石绿。也就是青绿山水的意思。后人不懂，误给青绿山水上添加泥金色，就叫金笔山水了。你用金碧之名，而轻易的妄自定论金笔的意思，真可笑。

Interlingual translation: For example, *The Words of Painting* recorded that: The painting Academy has the blue green landscape paintings, which has been available since xuanhe painting academy. Han Shu didn't write there is no trace of color of soil and sand but full of golden color. Blue green Landscape actually is painted with azurite blue and mineral green. That is traditional landscape painting characterized by the prominence of blue and green colours. Later generations do not know their mistake that they use "nijin" coating material made of glue and powdered gold or other metals, called the golden landscape. you simply use the name of "jinbi" but not understand the true meaning of it, that is ridiculous.

Analysis: During intralingual translation, minimal adjustments were made to the sentence structure. Chinese, being highly flexible, primarily focuses on conveying meaning, while English is a positional language. Bassnett has analyzed and criticized this difference, emphasizing that interpreting formal correspondence as mathematical equivalence may impede theoretical development. In his book "Chinese Grammar Theory," Mr. Wang Li proposed two fundamental organizational methods of language: positional and semantic. The positional method relies on forms, such as changes in word forms and vocabulary connections, to organize language symbols from "dispersed" individual words to "collective" word groups and even discourse. Conversely, semantic relies on meaning and inherent logical relationships to organize language. While positional and semantic methods often coexist in a language, each emphasizes different aspects. Wang Li pointed out that "Chinese often employs the semantic method, where the connection between components is not necessarily required, while Western languages often utilize the positional method, where the connection between components is indispensable in most cases." [6] Therefore, during translation, some sentence structures were adjusted to align with the language habits of the target readers and to adhere to the theory of functional equivalence.

For example, when translating the first sentence, the two short Chinese sentences "画院有金碧山水，自宣和画院已有之" were merged into one sentence, and the second short sentence became a subordinate clause of the first sentence. By adding "which," the implied language was connected with a positional method. The translation reads: "The painting Academy has the blue green landscape paintings, which has been available since xuanhe painting academy." In the final sentence: "夫以金碧之名，而易以金笔之名，可笑也," the method of free translation was employed, "you simply use the name of 'jinbi' but not understand the

true meaning of it, that is ridiculous.” This translation allows readers to better understand the intended meaning of the original author.

Added translation

Example 2:

Source text: 右上角是危崖耸立，绘二人骑马一远一近行进。透过山崖，可见远方曲折流淌的河流。中部两座高峰之间，有一道瀑布涌泻而下。

Version 1: In the upper right corner is a standing cliff, in the painting, you can see two people ride horses and they are far away from each other. Through the cliff, the winding river in the distance. A waterfall is cascading between the two central peaks.

Version 2: In the upper right corner is a cliff standing, drawing two people riding a far and a near. Through the cliff, the winding river in the distance. A waterfall cascaded down between the two central peaks.

Analysis: When translating this sentence, it was considered that not adding a subject during translation would avoid making the translation overly cumbersome and lengthy. Instead, the method of amplification translation was used to increase readability. By adding a subject, “you can see,” and treating the verb “绘” as a locative adverb, the relationship between the author and the reader was brought closer. While not adding a subject makes the sentence concise, the target readers may feel a sense of detachment while reading. Adding a subject, however, imbues the sentence with a sense of immersion, allowing readers to feel as if they are experiencing the scene firsthand, thus narrowing the distance between the reader and the author. Therefore, Translation One was chosen as the final rendition.

3. Conclusion

During the translation process, the translator encountered numerous challenges, significantly enhancing their professional competence. While facing these difficulties, the translator often felt the arduousness of the translation process. However, through diligent efforts to address these issues, the translator gained knowledge previously inaccessible in this field. In academic courses, teachers repeatedly emphasize the importance of translators’ qualities. A good translator not only possesses excellent translation skills but also maintains professional ethics. They do not haphazardly translate upon receiving translation tasks, turning a blind eye to the quality of the translated text while focusing solely on quantity. Therefore, after receiving translation tasks, the improvement in the translator’s competence primarily manifests in establishing the correct translation philosophy. They understand that translation is akin to conducting research, requiring meticulousness and responsibility to both the translated text and the readers of the translated language. By cultivating a sense of responsibility, translators enhance their own abilities. A proper translation philosophy will better guide individuals engaged in translation practice.

4. Discussion

The mural contains the crystallization of Chinese culture, through this translation practice, the author has gained a deeper understanding of the art of translation. The question of how to translate is guided by translation theory and requires profound contemplation. Murals embody the essence of Chinese culture, and culture and language are intertwined. Translation involves not only transferring language but also transmitting culture. By engaging in translation activities, we bridge the gap between cultures and foster the advancement of human civilization. Therefore, in future translation endeavors involving mural materials, translators have the opportunity to showcase the richness and allure of Chinese culture, thereby facilitating cultural exchanges between nations.

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Conflicts of Interest

The author declares no conflicts of interest.

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