

## The Study of Zhou Jianxin's Translated Version of Emily Dickinson's Poems from the Perspective of Jindi's Equivalent Theory

WU Shanshan<sup>[a]</sup>; CHAI Su<sup>[b],\*</sup>

<sup>[a]</sup>Master Degree Candidate, School of Foreign Languages and Literatures, Lanzhou University, Gansu Province, China.

<sup>[b]</sup>Associate Professor, School of Foreign Languages and Literatures, Lanzhou University, Gansu Province, China.

\*Corresponding author.

Supported by the Fundamental Research Funds for the Central Universities (16LZUJBWZY034).

Received 5 January 2019; accepted 1 March 2019

Published online 26 March 2019

### Abstract

Emily Dickinson is a well-known poet in American literature, writing nearly 1800 poems during her lifetime. Dickinson's poems are studied and translated by scholars and translators in China. Zhou Jianxin is an outstanding professor to study Emily Dickinson. The present author uses Jindi's equivalent theory to analyze Zhou Jianxin's translated version of Emily Dickinson's poem, hoping that this paper will provide a new angle to appreciate Chinese version of English poems and give some inspiration to translation theories.

**Key words:** Emily Dickinson; Jindi's equivalent theory; Zhou Jianxin's translated version

Wu, S. S., & Chai, S. (2019). The Study of Zhou Jianxin's Translated Version of Emily Dickinson's Poems from the Perspective of Jindi's Equivalent Theory. *Canadian Social Science*, 15(3), 103-107. Available from: <http://www.cscanada.net/index.php/css/article/view/10963>  
DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.3968/10963>

### INTRODUCTION

With the increase in cultural exchange among countries, an increasing number of foreign poems has been translated into Chinese. Emily Dickinson, a powerful and persistent figure in American culture, has become widely acknowledged as an innovative poet. There are many

Chinese versions of her poems. But the differences in culture make translation very difficult. Therefore, studying Emily Dickinson's poems is a spotlight in translation.

Based on the previous researches, the author found these problems include three aspects in general: 1) the spirit and mind of Emily Dickinson's poems need to be further explored; 2) translation theories for Emily Dickinson's poems need to be cultivated; 3) the translators, need to be promoted in the bilingual ability in the field of literature. Hence, the present study is to research on the effect analysis of Chinese versions of Emily Dickinson's poems from the perspective of equivalent translation theory.

Concerning the importance of translating in cultural exchange, the present author deems it necessary to analyze the translation effect. So, this research is sure to influence the poem translation in the field of literature and contributes to Chinese and Western cultural exchange. In practice, the present research can help translators better translate Emily Dickinson's poems. In addition, this research can guide readers to understand the English poems and appreciate the difference among many versions. And above all, it is beneficial for the writers to acquire some inspiration, particularly for feministic oriented writers.

### 1. EQUIVALENT THEORY

At the end of the eighteenth century, British literary theorist Alexander Fraser Tytler (1978; 15-16) came up with the principle of "equivalent effect". American translation theorist Eugene A. Nida published *Toward a Science of Translating*. Nida (1964; 159) indicated the relationship between target text receiver and target language message.

As we all know, the dynamic equivalence is his most important contribution to translation. In the translation based on dynamic equivalence, translators focus on

the textual meaning and mind, but not confine their translations to the textual language structure and formal correspondence. And Dynamic equivalence tends to favour a more natural rendering, for instance when the readability of the translation is more important than the preservation of the original grammatical structure. Later, Nida used functional equivalence to replace dynamic equivalence. Functional equivalence is the core of his translation theory. The term "functional equivalence" suggests not just that the equivalence is between the function of the source text in the source culture and the function of the target text in the target culture, but that "function" can be thought of as a property of text. According to Nida, there are four aspects of functional equivalence: lexical equivalence, sentence equivalence, passage equivalence and stylistic equivalence

Jindi is a famous literary translator and theorist in China. Zang Hongbao (2013; 70) states that Jindi combines Chinese traditional translation theory with western scientific translation theory to form his equivalent theory. In his book, he points out that the three important concepts of equivalent theory are recipient, effect and equivalence.

#### a. Recipient

For Jindi (1989; 16-23), his equivalent theory emphasizes the concept of recipient. According to the view of equivalent theory, the translation process is completed when the version is accepted by target readers. In most cases, author and the readers belong to the same social group. So the process of their communicating is natural while the translator's problem is how to make the version "completely natural". The receiver is at the end of information transfer:

- If information only has source but without object, transfer will not be completed. However, in translation, especially in the process of translation, or even in the discussion about translation quality, people always focus on translation itself, but ignoring the effect of the receiver in different degrees, or neglecting the equivalence between the effect of version and the textual effect.

- If translators want to achieve a very good effect to convey the source language message and spirit, they need to take into consideration of the recipient's understanding and feelings.

- If a translator wants to know what effects the author wants to achieve through works, first of all he must be very familiar with the original language and culture, grasping accurate language sense. He also needs to study the original text and the relevant information to achieve empathy between the original author and the reader as if participating in their exchange of ideas. On the other hand, when he uses target language to translate, he is easily disturbed by the original language. At this point, translators must know potential readers fairly well and reduce difference. When putting themselves in second authors' positions and depending on the sense of target

language, the translators can create the versions which have the same effects on target readers.

#### b. Effect

The concept of effect needs to be defined from two aspects: 1) people like to include the impact and response when talking about the effect. The usage in lexical item is indisputable, but there should be a line between impact and response in translation theory. Nida places more stress on response, for that his theories serve for the bible translation, which is a part of the missionary activity. And his ultimate goal is hoping that recipients do religious activities to "response". But in terms of the nature of language behavior, the roles of the translation playing in the recipients and recipients' response and action lead two opposite directions. Therefore, the recipient's response and action is also an important feedback that shows the target readers' understanding and feelings. From this, translators could test the quality of the translation. Although each recipient how to respond and act involves many individual subjective and objective factors, while in the process of translating, effect only stresses impact on recipient not including recipient's response. 2) it's clear that effect emphasizes impact on recipient from above. And we need to stress that effect should include all functions of information what are recipient's understanding and feelings including the main spirit, concrete facts and artistic conception.

#### c. Equivalence

The equivalence in translation is a kind of comprehensive relationship, not mechanically interpreting linguistics, semantics, pragmatics and other aspects of equivalence, but depending on cultural competence and a long-term vision to consider various factors. The equivalence stressing on the effect, is a kind of comprehensive equivalent relationship. Through the three concepts, the principle of equivalent translation is that the same information with two sets of different languages and different recipients need have the same effect. The goal of equivalent translation is: translation and the original text are very different or even completely different in form, but the target readers and source-language readers also successfully receive the same or basically the same facts and main spirits.

---

## 2. EMILY DICKINSON'S POEMS AND ZHOU JIANXIN'S TRANSLATION VERSION

---

Emily Dickinson's poems are unique for the era in which she wrote; they contain short lines, typically lack titles, and often use slant rhyme as well as unconventional capitalization and punctuation. Many of her poems deal with themes of death and immortality, two recurring topics in letters to her friends. Dickinson is also good at using images and dashes.

The Chinese versions of Emily Dickinson's poems appeared at the first time in 1980s. Nowadays, eleven versions have published in China. Zhou Jianxin (2011; 77) states that Jiang Feng's version has a far-researching influence on readers. Zhou Jianxin (2013) also claims that the serial number of his *The Poems of Emily Dickinson 1-300* is completely according to the serial number of Thomas H. Johnson's *The Poems of Emily Dickinson: Including Variant Readings Critically Compared with All Known Manuscripts*. Compared with the eleven versions, the present author prefers Zhou Jianxin's translated version. His version is more suitable for young readers to understand. In addition, Zhou Jianxin, as an expert researching on Emily Dickinson, in the long-term translation practice and the poetry creation, adhering to the standard of "rigorous contrast, beautiful language and appropriate express", who will want to translate and publish all Dickinson's poems over the course of his life. *The poems of Emily Dickinson (1-300)*, as a book collection of Zhou Jianxin translating Emily Dickinson's poems, which collects many poems that many readers appreciate. And Zhou Jianxin's translated version is more faithful and more rigorous in fitting the implication of original poems when compared with other translation versions. As we all know, Emily Dickinson's poems are concise, delicate and implicative, especially not stick to one certain pattern, while Zhou Jianxin's translated version exactly makes Dickinson's poems more incisive and vivid. In addition, this book includes 300 poems, many of them are obscure for readers to understand and are also first time to be translated into Chinese. In a word, this feature makes the book different and special compared with several other Chinese versions.

### 3. THE STUDY OF ZHOU JIANXIN'S TRANSLATED VERSION OF EMILY DICKINSON'S POEMS FROM THE PERSPECTIVE OF JINDI'S EQUIVALENT THEORY

In *To Explore Equivalent Translation*, Jindi mentioned many times that translation should convey main spirit of original text, the specific facts and artistic conception, who thinks there are three main factors which have an effect on the readers and are the most important standard to measure whether the readers can get the same contents as the original-text readers. And the present author chooses that three main factors (the main spirit, specific facts and artistic atmosphere) in the effect concept as the foundation to analyze translation examples in Zhou Jianxin's translated version. The analysis standards are as follows: 1) Whether the expression of translation is in line with the Chinese habit and gives the specific facts of original poems; 2) If the translation conveys the main spirit of the original work and the author's intention; 3)

Does the translation present the artistic conception, beauty and artistry of the original text; 4) Has the translation achieved an equivalent effect in style and content.

#### 3.1 Word Equivalence

Word is a single distinct meaningful element of writing, used with others to form a sentence. In poem translation, word plays an important role which could have a great influence on the whole poem. The function of vocabulary is to indicate the subjective and objective things. The corresponding relationship between the two words should be studied by whether different words indicate same things or not. To find out the relationship between the two words, which is mainly to prevent and correct the mechanical equivalence in our minds. To make the translation more faithful, translators also should choose a proper word to convey original-text meaning.

#### Example 1

The wave with eye so pensive, looketh to see the moon,  
Their spirits meet together, they make their solemn vows.

Translated Version:

海浪眼含悲愁，仰望天上的月亮，  
如今他们心心相通，共结海誓山盟，（Zhou, 2013; 1-3）

The present author introduces Jiang Feng's translated version, who translates the two lines as "大海波涛，睁大忧郁的眼睛，遥望月亮，他们的精神与精神相遇，他们庄严盟誓，" (Jiang, 2016; 5). The word "pensive" means thinking a lot about something especially when you are worried or sad. "悲愁", the expression reflects both sadness and melancholy. Jiang Feng translates "pensive" into "忧郁的". "忧郁" is a mental expression, which means that people will have a low spirit, lose passion for life and lose hope for the future. From following line, "wave" looks "moon" with a sad mood, not losing passion. So "悲愁" is more accurate to describe "wave". Emily Dickinson uses "spirits meet together" to express that wave and moon can understand each other. Jiang Feng translates "spirits meet together" as "精神与精神相遇", which is literal translation. "相遇" emphasizes the result of meeting, not including mutual understanding. But in Chinese, "心心相通" translated by Zhou Jianxin means that two people have the same thoughts. Obviously, "心心相通" is similar to the meaning of original poem. In addition, Zhou translates "make their solemn vows" into Chinese "共结海誓山盟" while Jiang Feng translates it as "庄严盟誓". In English, "vow" refers to a solemn promise typically to marriage or a monastic career. In Chinese, "盟誓" is a kind of ritual held to consolidate internal unity and fight against the hostile forces during the Spring and Autumn period, which is inappropriate to express "vows". "海誓山盟" originates from Poems of the Song Dynasty, which means the promises when a man and a woman fall in love, which is suitable. By comparing the two versions, Zhou Jianxin selects appropriate words to achieve equivalence in the meaning and form. Chinese readers could comprehend the charm of original poem.

### Example 2:

Besides the Autumn poets sing  
A few prosaic days

Translated Version:

在诗人歌咏的秋天之外  
还有一些日子单调平淡(Zhou, 2013; 139-140)

Jiang Feng translates these two lines into “在诗人歌咏的秋季以外 还有散文似的几天”(Jiang, 2016; 53). In this poem, “prosaic”, related to the prose, means that something is not fanciful or imaginative. Emily Dickinson uses “prosaic days” to describe her feeling. Zhou Jianxin renders “prosaic” into “单调平淡”, which exactly expresses the days are dull and ordinary, conveying the poetic feeling. Jiang Feng just translates the word as “散文式的” literally, which could make readers confused. Zhou Jianxin's translated version is much better to convey the meaning of original poem.

### 3.2 Image Reproduction

Image is the soul of a poem. The use of various images is an important way for the poets to express their feelings. In many cases, the image is the emotional sustenance of the poet, and is also an important carrier of a poem. The artistic conception of poem is a very important element, which can often add more mysterious and beautiful colors to poem. The artistic conception of the poem is reflected by the image. Hence, image reproduction could make target language absorb elements of source language, which could enhance the expression and appeal target language. The approach to reproduce imageries is mainly foreignization.

### Example 3:

A flake of Dew——A Bee or two——  
A Breezes——a caper in the trees——  
And I'm a Rose!

Translated Version:

一瓶朝露——两只蜜蜂——  
一缕清风——一阵雀跃在林——  
我是一枝玫瑰!(Zhou, 2013; 31)

“Rose” in this poem is used to describe Emily Dickinson. Being an amazing artist, she creates a lot of flowers and garden imageries in her works. The imagery of “Rose” symbols an unmarried young girl. Before marriage, the girl likes the flower, which is nourished by the morning “Dew”. In Emily Dickinson's life, there are dew and breeze, which make her happy and satisfied. “Breeze” symbols the interesting scene in nature and “caper” implies Dickinson's cheerful spirit. In Chinese, people also use “玫瑰” to describe beautiful girls. And “朝露” is a familiar imagery in Chinese culture, which is a metaphor of transient things or pure things, first appeared in the Warring States period. So “一瓶朝露”, “一缕清风” and “一阵雀跃” could be used to convey the images and spirit of original poem.

### Example 4:

Gathered from many wanderings——  
Gethsemane can tell  
Thro' what transporting anguish  
She reached the Asphodel!

Translated Version:

根据多次漫游的体悟——  
客西马尼可以记述  
凭藉怎样深彻的痛楚  
她抵达当春花的住处!(Zhou, 2013; 162-163)

“Gethsemane” is a Bible image. It is an urban garden at the foot of the Mount of Olives in Jerusalem, most famous as the place where Jesus prayed and his disciples slept the night before his crucifixion. Zhou Jianxin uses “客西马尼” not “蒙难地”, in order to reproduce the Bible image. The image of “Asphodel” refers to grave. In ancient Greek mythology, Asphodel is a kind of flower shaped like a narcissus planted in heaven and paradise, which blossoms all the year round. Ancient times, “Asphodel” is a plant growing near to the tomb, which could nourish the dead according to tales. Actually, in this poem, “She reaches the Asphodel” means that she passes away. “当春花的住处” could reproduce the image of “Asphodel”.

### 3.3 Style Equivalence

Style could be defined as a manner of doing something or a way of painting, writing, composing and building that have characteristic of a particular period, place, person, or movement. Literary style mainly focuses on the exploration of thematic meaning and artistic effect of original text. Translators should shoulder responsibility to retain the effect of original text in the target text in poem translation. Only translators adhere to the original style can they reproduce both the content and the form of the original works. Emily Dickinson has created her unique and irreplaceable style. She never confines herself in certain regulations. Her uniqueness and oddness form her own style which is free and creative. So translators should consider many factors to reproduce the style of the original poems.

### Example 5:

South Winds jostle them——  
Bumblebees come——  
Hover—hesitate——  
Drink, and are gone——

Translated Version:

南风吹起——  
大黄蜂飞抵——  
盘旋——犹豫——  
吸吮, 离去——(Zhou, 2013; 101)

Emily Dickinson writes most of poems in short stanzas. The language of her poetry is simple and strange. Emily uses rhyme “them” and “come”. “起” and “抵” are also in end rhyme. In addition, Zhou Jianxin's translate nouns to nouns and verbs to verbs. Several simple Chinese words reproduce the style of the original poem.

### Example 6:

The berry's cheek is plumper——  
The rose is out of town.

The maple wears a gayer scarf——  
The field a scarlet gown——

Translated Version:  
草莓的脸颊鼓胀——  
玫瑰离开了小镇。

枫树围上亮丽的围巾——  
田野披挂鲜红的衣裳——(Zhou, 2013; 22-23)

In this poem, Emily Dickinson uses personification to describe the nature, which shows readers a fascinating scene. “the berry”, “the rose”, “the maple” and “the field” are personified and endowed with vitality. A wonderful picture comes to readers' minds, there are “berry's plumper cheek”, “maple's gayer scarf” and “scarlet gown” of the field. Emily uses personification to make these things vivid and special. In the translation version, Zhou Jianxin follows the steps of the personification. “脸颊鼓胀的草莓” and “离开小镇的玫瑰” naturally embody personification of the poem. “枫树围上亮丽的围巾” and “田野披挂鲜红的衣裳”, the two sentences are full of magic colors and peculiar imagination. Therefore, Zhou Jianxin's translation version reproduces the style of original poem by manifesting the charm of personification.

### CONCLUSION

Emily Dickinson was a best-known American poet and she was one of the foremost authors in American literature. Her poems are popular in the world. Zhou Jianxin is an outstanding scholar to study Emily Dickinson. The

present author chooses his translation version as specific text to contrast with original poems. This paper mainly introduces Jindi's equivalent theory and uses the theory to analyze the translation effect through three main factors. And he doesn't only confine translation in formal equivalence. He sometime makes creation, conveying the spirit of original poems. In conclusion, the thesis aims at studying the translation effect of Emily Dickinson's poems based on the Jindi's equivalent translation theory, and the thesis analyzes Zhou Jianxin's translated version of Emily Dickinson's poems, hoping that the research will provide a new angle to appreciate Chinese version of English poems and give some inspiration to translation theories.

### REFERENCES

- Jiang, F. (2016). *The anthology of Emily Dickinson's poems*. Beijing, China: Foreign Language Teaching and Research Press.
- Jin, D. (1998). *To explore equivalent translation*. Beijing, China: China Translation and Publishing Corporation.
- Nida, E. A. (1964). *Toward a science of translating*. Leiden: E. J. Brill.
- Tytler, A.F. (1978). *Essay on the principles of translation*. Amsterdam: John Benjamins. B.V.
- Zang, H. B. (2013). To study applicability of Jindi's equivalent theory in literary translation from Jindi's translation version of Ulysses. *Journal of Mudanjiang University*, (3), 70-72.
- Zhou, J. X. (2011). Comment on 11 Chinese versions of Emily Dickinson's poems. *Yilin (Academic Edition)*, (1), 78-86.
- Zhou, J. X. (2013). *The poems of Emily Dickinson 1-300*. Guangzhou, China: South China University of Technology Press.