

Translation Strategies for English and Chinese Colour Terms

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1. Introduction

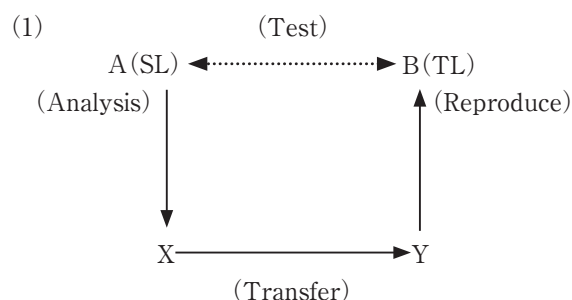
Translation of colour terms involves a series of factors, such as colours, cultural backgrounds, source readers, target readers, source texts, target texts, and so on. We propose that the concept of Dynamic Equivalence (Nida and Ray (1969)) could function as the primary principle for English and Chinese colour term translation and further propose three strategies, that is, literal approach, loan approach, and communicative approach. All the three approaches are aimed at reproducing source colour terms in target versions with optimal dynamic equivalence between two languages.

2. Theoretical Background: Dynamic Equivalence

In *The Theory and Practice of Translation*, Nida and Ray (1969) proposed a reader-response based approach to general translation, namely, Dynamic Equivalence, which is defined in terms of the degree to which receptors of a message in the receptor language respond to the message in substantially the same manner as readers in the source language. This response may never be identical, for cultural and historical settings may vary from case to case. However, appropriate translation may help to accomplish a relatively high degree of response equivalence.

Nida (1964) and Nida and Ray (1969) claimed that Dynamic Equivalence translation is the closest natural equivalent to a source-language message. The core of Dynamic Equivalence translation is composed of the following three parts: a) equivalent, which points toward a source-language message; b) natural, referring to the receptor language; and c) closest, which binds the two orientations together on the basis of the highest degree of approximation. To achieve this goal, Nida (1964) divided translation process into

four phrases, which are analysis, transfer, reproduce and test, as illustrated in the following chart.



Analysis refers to making sure the meaning of a source text, which lies in words, syntax, rhetoric, etc. In other terms, both contents and forms should be taken into consideration in an analyzing process. The direction of *transfer* is from one language to another, which implies a process of changing from one thinking mode to another. The aim of *reproduce* is to transform the deep structure of a source language to the surface structure of a target language. And *test* refers to a comparison between the source and target texts. What is focused upon in *test* is not correspondence between word and grammar levels, but whether correspondence of meanings are achieved between the source and target texts.

3. Translation Strategies

Translation is a process of reproducing the equivalent closest to the source language text in a receptor language, firstly in terms of meaning, and secondly in terms of style and form. In other words, with regard to colour term translation, the first and foremost that should be conveyed is meaning. Target readers, as a dominant factor, determine the final procedure of translating colour terms. Therefore, in addition to the consideration of the content of the original text, the first concern of a translator shall be whether the translated text is intelligible to its readers.

A satisfactory dynamic equivalent translation requires a high degree of intelligibility with target readers. To ensure complete intelligibility on the part of readers, a translator shall take readers' cultural background and decoding ability into consideration and free himself from the form of original text. That is to say, adjustments should be made to shift word order or form if necessary.

To accomplish dynamic equivalence, a wide range of potential methods for translating colour terms have been employed by different translators. Generally speaking, there are three main approaches to colour transfer, namely, retaining the original colour, replacing the original colour with a customized one in the target language, and paraphrasing the colour. Based on the analysis just noted, three main strategies for translating colour terms are proposed: *literal approach*, *loan approach*, and *communicative approach*.

3. 1. Literal Approach

As pointed out by Newmark (2001 : 76), "literal translation is the first step in translation". This method involves using a colour term in the target language which conveys roughly the same metaphorical meaning as the colour term in the source language. To preserve the national character and special colouring in the original work, literal translation of colour terms is supposed to come first, with the condition that colour terms involved share similar metaphorical meanings in English and Chinese. Here is one instance.

- (2) 这些绿生生的蔬菜，看着就让人欢喜。

(*Southern Weekend*, 2000/4/12)

These *fresh and green* vegetables can allure you at first sight.

Green is often used to refer to the colour of trees and grass, endowed with the metaphorical meaning of "life and health" both in English and Chinese. "绿生生" literally means "being fresh and robust" in Chinese, associating with the colour and state of fresh vegetables, burgeons, and so on. When it is rendered literally as fresh and green in English, a similar sense could be generated since *green* also has the metaphorical meaning of life and health in English.

- (3) Low efficiency, high risks, complicated ownership and excessive local government interference have put 86% of them *in the red*.

(*China Daily*, 2003/1/22)

低效率，高风险，再加上复杂的所有权和当地政府的过度介入使他们当中的86%都存在赤字。

In (3), "in the red" is literally translated as "赤字". In English, the meaning of deficit of *red* comes from a tradition that deficit should be written in red. And in Chinese, *red* gets the meaning of deficit through cultural communication. As a result, there is a subtle difference between English and Chinese in terms of the meaning of deficit of *red*. However, generally speaking, readers may not even be aware of the distinction.

More examples for literal translation of colour terms between English and Chinese are as follows:

- (4) In fact, the whole issue is not quite as *black and white* as it seems.

(*Newsweek*, 2002/11/13)

事实上，整件事情并非像看上去那样的黑白分明。

- (5) 凤姐听见，说：“了不得！你听听，他该挫磨孩子。你过去把那黑心的养汉老婆下死劲的打他几下，把姐姐抱过来。”

(Cao Xueqin, *A Dream of Red Mansions*, Chapter 103)

"This is the limit!" cried Xifeng. "Listen to the way she's taking it out on the child! Go and wham that *black-hearted* bitch, and bring Qiaojie in here."

(Translated by Yang Xianyi & Dai Naidie)

In summary, the literal approach refers to faithful reproduction of cultural connotations of a source colour term in translation, on the basis that target readers can apprehend the translation in a similar way as source readers. If a colour term has a correspondence equivalent in a target language, both in terms of meaning and colouring, literal rendering is surely preferable.

3. 2. Loan Approach

Plenty of metaphorical meanings are embodied in English and Chinese colour terms. Sometimes those metaphorical meanings are realized by using different colour terms in English and Chinese. To put this in other words, English and Chinese may use different colour terms to express similar meanings. A good example is found in the matching pair of "黄袍加身" and "to be raised to the purple".

If two colour terms in English and Chinese share a similar connotative meaning, it is advisable that the

original colour be substituted by a counterpart colour in the target language; and this approach is termed as *loan approach*. In fact, this kind of substitution has won special favour with Eugene Albert Nida, as he observes that substituting the source term with a familiar target term can assist target language readers in generating the same response as source language readers, so as to achieve Dynamic Equivalence. Concrete examples are in the following.

(6) You'll be *green-eyed* over the cards.

(Maccentral. Com, 2000/3/9)

你会对这些卡片感到很眼红的。

"Green-eyed" refers to "being jealous". Rendered literally, it would be "有绿眼睛的" (green-eyed) in Chinese, which implies something or somebody with green eyes, for example, a fly. In this way, target readers may misunderstand the text. In fact, in Chinese, "红" (*red*) is endowed with the figurative meaning of "envy", so *green* here should be replaced by *red*, that is, "红眼" (red-eyed) for valid colour transfer.

(7) 有些黄色笑话的内容让人哭笑不得。

(Beijing Evening News, 2001/1/9)

People find them both funny and annoying at some *blue jokes*.

Chinese use "黄" (yellow) to mean "indecent". For example, "黄色笑话" means a joke full of ungraceful expressions. If being translated literally, it may be misunderstood by target reader as a joke related to the yellow colour. In fact, "黄色笑话" finds its English counterpart in the colour of *blue*, which is endowed with the same meaning of "indecent" as the Chinese "黄色". Thus, "blue joke" achieves its dynamic equivalence by being translated into yellow in Chinese. Here are more examples:

(8) He gave her a *black look*.

(Kingsoft E-Dictionary)

他给了她个白眼。

(9) 宝钗独自行来, 顺路进了怡红院。不想一入院来, 鸦雀无声。

(Cao Xueqin, *A Dream of Red Mansions*, Chapter 36)
Baocai's route took her past the *House of Green Delight*. The courtyard was silent as she entered it. Not a bird's cheep was to be heard.

(Translated by Yang Xianyi & Dai Naidie)

To sum up, colour terms are artistic expressions. If literal translation tends to be inadequate and needs to give way to other solutions, the proposed loan approach, whereby a translator borrows a target colour term with a similar connotation to replace the original one, is one possible choice. In this way, the cultural barrier between a source colour term and target receptor could be successfully circumvented.

3.3. Communicative Approach

Communicative approach can be adopted when a match cannot be found in a target language or when it is inappropriate to use a colour term in a target language due to differences in cultural traditions or linguistic expressions. Thus, non-colour wording of a target language is employed to paraphrase the source-language colour for valid transfer. See the following examples:

(10) He comes from a *blue-blooded* family.

(Newsweek, 2003/3/4)

他来自于贵族世家。

"Blue-blooded" means "aristocratic" in English. If the word is literally translated as "蓝血的", it may make target readers think that the colour of blood is blue, for example, the blood of an extraterrestrial life. There is no colour term in Chinese to express the meaning of "aristocratic", so the colour form has to be abandoned, with "blue-blooded" paraphrased into "贵族的".

(11) 是他自己的过失吗? 他抵死不承认的! — "运气不好!" 他又叹一口气, 在肚子里说。然而为什么二十多年来专走红运的他会忽然有此打击?

(Mao Dun, *Midnight*)

Was it his fault? No; that was something he would never admit! "It's just my bad luck," he told himself with another sigh. Yet why should *his luck*, which had stood him in good stead these twenty years and more, suddenly desert him now?

In Chinese, *red* symbolizes good luck, happiness, success, etc. For example, "红运" refers to "good luck". But, in English, *red* is generally associated with negative meanings, such as violence, danger and so on. If "红运" is literally translated into "red luck", it may confuse

English readers and be taken as bad luck, which is opposite to the original meaning in Chinese. Therefore, the communicative approach is adopted here to render it as “his luck, which had stood him in good stead”. Similar examples are as below.

- (12) The university publisher called the project *a white elephant*. (Oxford Today)
大学出版商把这个项目看作累赘。

- (13) 他不说“是”，也没说“不是”，只是微微笑着。
这使得张素素老大不高兴，向李玉亭白了一眼。
(Mao Dun, *Midnight*)

He neither agreed nor disagreed with her, but merely smiled cryptically, which did not please her at all. She *glanced at him resentfully*.
(Translated by Yeh Chienyu)

Communicative approach is also called as free translation or paraphrase. It reproduces the content without the form of the original. In this way, the themes and plots are usually preserved, but the original exciting form or colourful image is deleted by being paraphrased into non-figurative target language. In terms of colour, when there is no corresponding colour term in a target language to replace the one in the original, translators may have to abandon the form or image of the original to achieve dynamic figurative effect.

4. Summary

In this paper, Eugene Albert Nida's theory of Dynamic Equivalence has been applied to the translation of colour terms between English and Chinese. The proposed translation strategies are *literal approach*, *loan approach*, and *communicative approach* with the major aim to achieve dynamic equivalence, or

in other words, to give target readers the same feeling as source readers.

The realization of dynamic equivalence in colour term translation is in reality a dynamic process of choosing the best translation from various alternatives. Since the cultural and linguistic factors in English and Chinese colour terms are definite, and only the factors of target readers and target texts are changeable, a translator needs to satisfy the requirements of target receptors and comply dynamically with the source text so as to make his translation a natural dynamic equivalent of the original.

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