



# On C-E Translation of Essays from the Perspective of Reception Aesthetics

**Tingting Zhao**

Ludong University, Yantai, Shandong, China.

**How to cite this paper:** Tingting Zhao. (2023) On C-E Translation of Essays from the Perspective of Reception Aesthetics. *Journal of Humanities, Arts and Social Science*, 7(10), 1925-1929. DOI: 10.26855/jhass.2023.10.001

**Received:** September 22, 2023

**Accepted:** October 18, 2023

**Published:** November 13, 2023

\***Corresponding author:** Tingting Zhao, Ludong University, Yantai, Shandong, China.

## Abstract

The key elements in the translation process include the source text and its author, the translator, the target text, and the target readers. The entire process of translation can be broadly divided into two stages: the translator's interpretation and expression of the source text, and the target reader's interpretation of the translated text. Between these two stages, there is an internal connection established by the target text. It is this connection that enables the intended readers to comprehend and value the original text. Reception Aesthetics studies the reception of a text through research that focuses on readers. Based on Reception Aesthetics, this thesis discusses the strategy for translating essays from Chinese to English (C-E), with an emphasis on analyzing the role of reception factors in the C-E translation process of essays. According to Reception Aesthetics, the translator should consider the target readers' ability to understand in C-E translation of essays. They should employ various translation strategies to ensure that the translated text is well-received by the target readers, allowing them to fully appreciate the aesthetic qualities of the translated text.

## Keywords

Reception Aesthetics, translation, essays, the target reader

## 1. Introduction

As a cross-cultural communication, translation is inevitably influenced by various factors, one of which is the target readers. As an information receiver, the target reader is the object that the target version finally serves. The status and role of the target reader should be given enough attention in translation research and practice.

However, traditional translation theoretical pursuits, either in China or in the West, stressed the establishment of and compliance with translation criteria, and traditional studies have thus focused mainly on the comparison of the source and target text, taking "fidelity" as the highest criterion. In the Chinese translation circle, in traditional terms, statements about the target readers are just sporadic remarks based on the translators' translation practice, but not based on profound and systematic study.

In the West, although many scholars had noticed the importance of the target readers in translation, the dominant theories put the target readers in a position subordinate to that of the author and the translator and just regarded them as passive a receptor. Since the 1960s, Nida's theory of "reader's response" has become the most influential concerning the study of target readers. It raised the response of the target readers to the standard of translation. However, his theory is too idealistic. In many cases, the equivalence of the response of the target readers to the target text and that of the source text readers to the source text is too hard to realize. Also, in the 1960s, Reception Aesthetics, which has an intrinsic correlation with hermeneutics on one side, and with literary translation on the other, soon swept across the whole European and American literature circle (Jauss, 1982). Breaking down the

text-centered linguistic system and stressing the openness of a text and the reader's role in interpreting a text, it has great significance on the study of target readers.

## **2. Basic Concepts of Reception Aesthetics**

According to traditional views of translation, the author and the original text are regarded as sacred and inviolable but the translators and the readers are deemed as passive and insignificant receptors. With the development of translation studies, scholars began to pay more weight to reader-centered translation research, where the reader and the translator are receiving increasing attention from translation scholars. It is in this background that German Reception Aesthetics comes into being in the field of translation.

Reception aesthetics (reception theory) is primarily a literary theory that appeared in the 1960s with Robert Jauss and Wolfgang Iser as two of its representatives. Based on the theory of Phenomenology and Hermeneutics, reception theory focuses on the reader's and the text's status and role in the whole process of literary reception activities. According to reception theory, the reader is a decisive factor and an active subject in the history of the reception of the text. The reader's pre-understanding or horizon of expectation and aesthetic ability affect directly the understanding and reception of the text. Through its indeterminacies and blanks, the text appeals to the reader's cooperation and finally reaches the actualization of the communication between the reader and the text. By emphasizing the reception of the reader and the interaction between the text and the reader, this theory shifts from the paradigm of the relationship between the author and the text to the interaction between the text and the reader. The German receptionists have such a great influence that Holub (1984, p. 7) observes that "from Marxists to traditional critics, from classical scholars and medievalists to modern specialists, virtually every methodological perspective and area of literary endeavor had responded to the challenge raised by reception theory".

## **3. Strategic Analysis for C-E Translation of Essays based on Reception Aesthetics**

In the following, the author will explore the strategy of C-E translation of essays based on Reception Aesthetics through analyzing examples.

### **3.1 Necessity for Aesthetic Consideration in C-E Translation of Essays**

Today in the highly developing high-tech cross-cultural context, translation is found indispensable anytime anywhere across the world. However, what kind of translation is most desirable to the readers nowadays? Will the readers be easily satisfied with the translated semantic content of the source text only or will they demand to know more than this? Obviously, with cross-cultural communication dominating the present world, the readers will of course not be satisfied with the semantic content only but will demand to learn more about the foreign culture, appreciate the foreign taste, and accept the foreignness to promote cross-cultural communication.

In some E-C translation cases, the translated version can take more foreign flavor and will not cause too much trouble for the target reader's understanding. However, in C-E translation, it would be more difficult to transfer Chinese culture to the target Western readers, because it seems that their reception of Chinese culture is not as easy as the Chinese reader's reception of Western culture. In C-E translation, more adjustments are needed in dealing with the heavily cultural-loaded words. With the increase in cross-cultural communication, foreign readers will know more about China and their understanding of Chinese culture will deepen, which would cause a change in their horizon of expectation. In that case, it may be unnecessary to do more explanation about the Chinese cultural elements, which will have been accepted probably by foreign readers, while not dulling their interest in reading and limiting the free space of imagination. During the process of C-E translation of essays, the translators should always bear English readers' reception ability of Chinese culture in mind and adjust their translation strategy flexibly to the aesthetic requirements of English readers.

### **3.2 Major Aesthetic Consideration in C-E Translation of Essays**

In the following, the author will discuss English readers' aesthetic requirements in three aspects, namely language, culture, and emotional requirements.

#### **3.2.1 English Readers' Characteristics of Language Aesthetics**

There exists an interactive relationship between the translator, the target text, and the target readers. The aesthet-

ic features of the target text are first reflected in its language. Therefore, to make the translated versions of Chinese essays accepted by the target readers, the translators should try to satisfy the English readers' aesthetic requirements in language. The comparative study between Chinese and English shows that they are quite different in many aspects, one of which is the linear vs. spiral contrast. English discourse shows the logical characteristics of linearity, while Chinese presents the feature of spirality. This is the reflection of the different thought patterns between the Chinese and the Western people. By linearity, it means that Western people tend to put the topic or main idea first, and then develop the topic in the whole following paragraph or essay.

Therefore, in the process of C-E translation, to make the translated version easy to understand for the English readers, the translator should transform the Chinese spiral expression into the English linear expression in consideration of the English readers' linguistic aesthetic taste. Meanwhile, the translators should apply the language style that conforms to the linguistic aesthetic tendencies of the English readers.

### 3.2.2 English Readers' Characteristics of Cultural Aesthetics

Translation means intercultural communication using which one culture can be transmitted into another, so the cultural special characteristics unavoidably influence translation. The limitedness of equivalence in translation between the original language and the target language is almost caused by the differences between the two cultures and how to convey the cultural meaning is often difficult for a translator.

Different nations have different historical backgrounds and different lifestyles, but different nations also get the same living experiences when they are in the process of struggling with their natural environments. The same experiences must be reflected in their languages, so there are some corresponding expressions both in English and Chinese. When the translators translate such expressions, they could translate directly or word for word, because they are nearly the same in meaning in both a literal and a real sense. For example: Pour oil on fire (huo shang jiao you); Walls have ears (ge qiang you er); Constant dropping wears the stone (dishui chuan shi), etc.

Unlike cultural similarities, cultural differences exist, definitely, and universally. We know that culture is complex, which includes knowledge, belief, and rich traditional culture; the people of China and English-speaking countries receive different educations, different religious beliefs, and traditional customs. Thus, there will be lots of cultural differences, which will also be reflected in language. Therefore, the cultural difference means much to the Chinese-English translation, which should be taken into adequate consideration for proper treatment.

Because of some reason, there are lots of different customs, conventions, and practices between China and Britain. A typical example is the attitude towards the dog. Dog is on the whole a despicable image in Chinese culture. However, the dog represents an image of a devoted friend of human beings in Western culture. Lots of English words related to dogs have no associated despicable meaning. On the contrary, people often draw a human being's image as a dog. For example, You are a lucky dog (ni shi ge xing yun er); Every dog has his day (fan ren jie you de yi ri); Old dog will not learn new strikes (lao ren xue bu liao xin dong xi); Sick as a dog (bing de li hai); Dog- tired (lei ji le).

So as a translator, if he wants to produce a good English version of the original Chinese essay, translating the custom information properly is very important. Custom differences may be ignored by the translator, and sometimes, he doesn't pay enough attention to them and doesn't know how to deal with them or can't deal with them properly, then the color of the source language will be lost or the translation by him may lead the reader to misunderstanding of the original in form or meaning. Then how to deal with the custom difference? Firstly, translators must recognize that cultural knowledge can be learned, so translators ought to enlarge their knowledge constantly, and read lots of books about the English nations' culture. Secondly, the translator should employ ways of explanation, for it is a kind of translation method that is used often, and also effectively. As a translator, he ought to shorten the distance between the authors and the readers when he is doing the translating work.

### 3.2.3 English Readers' Emotional Requirement in Reading Translation

There is a series of terms that can be used to describe a variety of styles in essays: plain, elegant, terse, ornate, direct, natural, clear, smooth, concord, exuberance, unity and vigorousness, etc. Every prose writer has his or her style (of course the writer's particular piece of work can have its specific style); for example, Liu Baiyu is more direct in expressing his emotions and readers can always be struck by the explosive force of his diction; Yang Shuo expresses his emotions rather indirectly and his words are mostly exquisite, fine and smooth, while Bing Xin's essays are gentle and graceful, which makes readers feel familiar. Before a translator starts wording and phrasing for his English version, he ought to grasp the style of the original prose and keep it as a guiding standard while trans-

lating. For example: *jiu zai yi guo ta xiang, you shi nan mian yao huai nian zu guo de. huai nian ji le, wo ye ceng xiang; yao neng hua yi fu hua er, hua chu zu guo de mian mao te se, shi ke gua zai yan qian, you duo hao.* (yang shuo: <cha hua fu >)

Living abroad for a long time, I sometimes felt homesick, so much so that I longed for a painting of our motherland to hang in my room. (Translated by Zhang Peiji)

Reading the original and the translation, we can feel the sincere and pure emotions of the writer, and the tide of his emotion did not gush out even though it seemed at its extreme (*huai nian ji le*). The writer blocked the tide of his emotion and kept using simple words and short sentence patterns. The translation put the content of the two sentences into one, only giving the gist of the original without arousing readers' sympathy as the ST does. Nearly all the information in the part "*hua chu zu guo de mian mao te se, shi ke gua zai yan qian, you duo hao*" is omitted by the free translation method. In the author's opinion, literal translation can be more faithful to the style of the original work here.

The following is a typical example presenting Liu Baiyu's style:

*Wo yi ge ren zou dao jia ban shang, zhe shi jiang feng lie lie, shang xia qian hou, yi pian hei sen sen, er wu shu dao qiang lie de tan zhao deng guang, cong chuan ding she xiang jiang mian, tian kong jiang shang yi pian yun wu mi meng, dian guang shan shan, feng sheng yu sheng, ...shi de, wo men de quan bu sheng huo bu jiu shi zhe yang zhan dou, hang jin, chuan guo hei ye zou xiang li ming de ma?* (liu bi yu: <chang jiang san ri>)

I am on deck alone in a high wind, surrounded by impenetrable darkness; but the powerful searchlights on our vessel cast innumerable beams down on the river. Sky and water are misted over, lightning flashes, the wind howls, and the waves roar... Our whole life, surely is this: battling, steaming ahead through the night towards dawn. (Translated by Zhang Peiji)

The style of essays of Liu Baiyu is intense and unrestricted in emotion. He not only uses four-character words (and also three-character words) to describe scenery, foreshadowing the incoming explosion of emotion but frankly expressing himself. In the translated version, adjectives and verbs (some are onomatopoeia) vividly depict the same image. So, though restricted to the sign system of the target since there is no four-character word structure in English, the translation well delivers the connotation and emotion of the original, and the last self-revealing sentence is as natural as that in the original. When translating Chinese essays, a translator should try his best to make his translated version arouse the same emotions of English readers as that of Chinese readers.

#### 4. Conclusion

This paper is an attempt to explore the question of C-E translation of essays from the perspective of Reception Aesthetics. The reception theory is illuminating in exploring the important role of the reader's participation in the reading of a text and the interactive relationship between the author and the reader. With fresh viewpoints, it furnishes translation studies with a new perspective and research method. Based on reception theory, this thesis points out that in the process of translation, the translator always keeps his target readers in mind when making various decisions in translation. In this sense, it can be said that the target reader cooperates with the translator in constructing the target text.

Readers' reading of a text is based on their horizon of expectations which are decided by their ideology, ethics, intuition, aesthetic taste, and reception ability. Therefore, to make his version accepted and understood by the target readers, the translator needs to take the target reader's horizon of expectations into consideration, having constant communication and dialogue with the target readers in the process of translation. The horizon of expectations of the target readers has synchronic as well as diachronic divergences. The interaction between the translator and the target reader causes the appearance of retranslation, which is beneficial for the improvement of translation quality. Moreover, as a receptor of the product of translation, the readers look at translation from a special perspective. Criticism by the target readers is complementary to criticism by the bilingual experts and the translators. The translator should always bear the target readers' acceptability of Chinese culture in mind and decide his translation strategies flexibly to the target readers' aesthetic requirements.

#### References

- Bassnett, S. (2004). *An Introduction to the Poetry (2nd edition)* [M]. Basingstoke: Palgrave.
- Chen Wenhui. (2018). *An Overview of Reception Aesthetics and Translation Studies in China* [J]. Yunnan: Journal of

---

Kunming University of Science and Technology (Social Sciences).

Holub, R.C. (1984). *Reception Theory: A Critical Introduction* [M]. London: Routledge.

Jauss, H.R. (1982). *Toward an Aesthetics of Reception* [M]. Minneapolis: University Minnesota Press.

Liu Yunhong. (2022). *Translator's Subjectification in the Becoming of Literary Translation* [J]. Beijing: Foreign Language Teaching and Research.

Luo Xinzhang. (1984). *Essays on Translation* [C]. Beijing: The Commercial Press.

Nida, E. (1993). *Language, Culture and Translation* [M]. Shanghai: Shanghai Foreign Language Education Press.

Ren Weidong. (2022). *Reception Aesthetics: A Keyword in Critical Theory* [J]. Beijing: Foreign Literature.

Song Xuezhi & Zhao Binbin. (2022). *A New Perspective of "Similarity in Form" and "Similarity in Spirit" in Literary Translation* [J]. Beijing: Chinese Translators Journal.

Wang Baorong & Zhou Enqi. (2021). *A View of Current Studies on Chinese-Literature Translation and Dissemination Modes* [J]. Hunan: Foreign Languages and Cultures.

Zhang Peiji. (2002). *Selected Modern Chinese Essays* [M]. Shanghai: Shanghai Foreign Language Education Press.