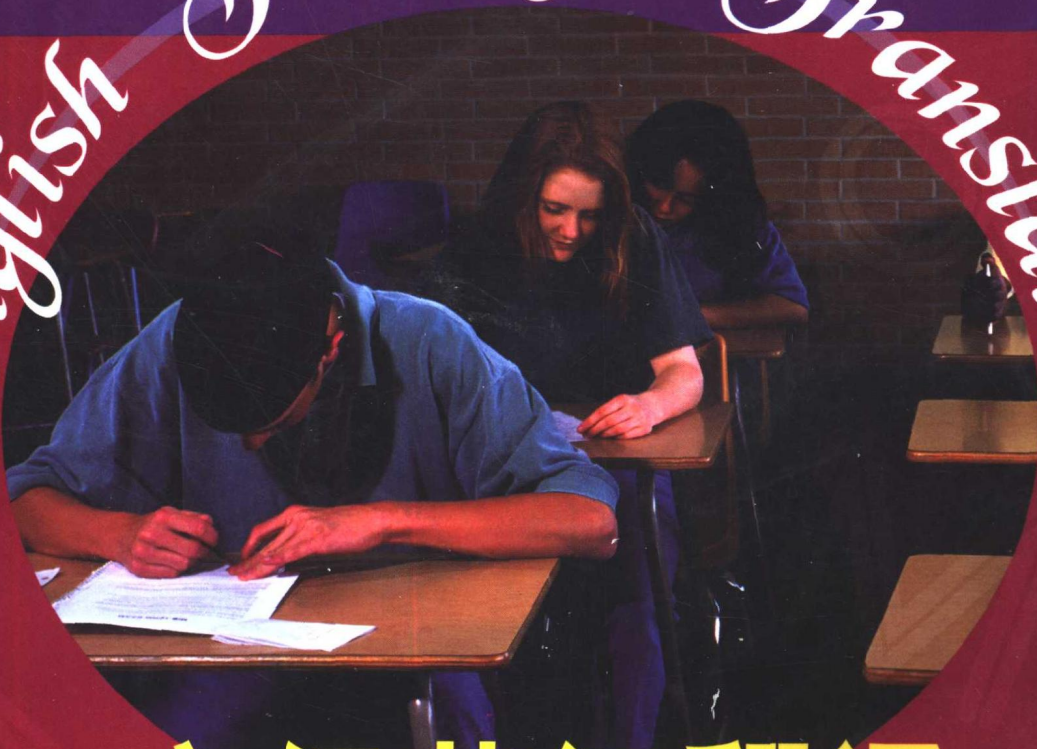


Help Yourself to Advanced English

高级英语自学系列教程

English Through Translation



# 高级英汉翻译

顾曰国 主编

Gu Yueguo (chief editor)

蓝 纯 编

Lan Chun (editor)

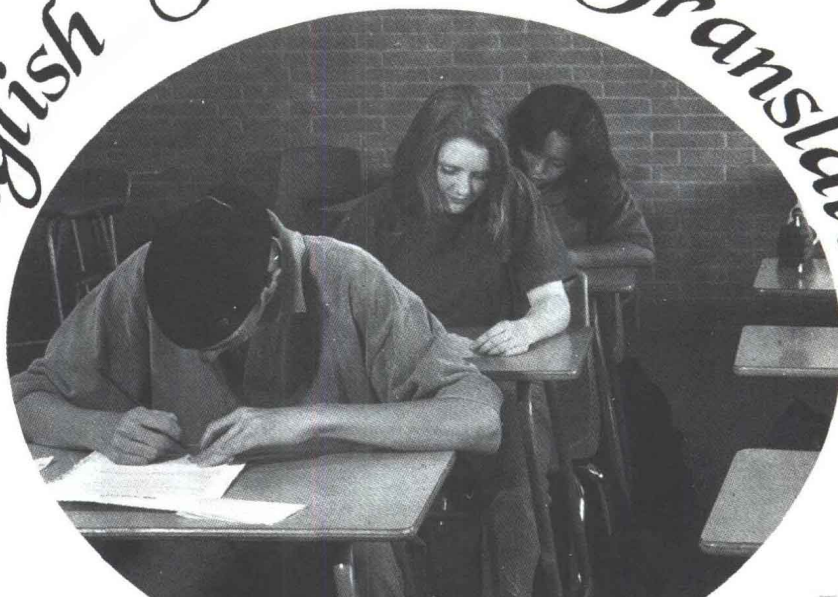
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FOREIGN LANGUAGE TEACHING AND RESEARCH PRESS

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蓝 纯 编

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## How to Study This Course

### *Why This Course?*

Many English teachers seem to share the view that it is very difficult to teach translation. Their argument is that translation is a kind of practical skill—you grasp it through your translating practice, not through memorizing a set of rules of how to translate. That leaves the teachers very little room to preach anything. The conclusion thus drawn is a rather pessimistic one—it is pointless to teach translation for there isn't anything to teach. Just give your students a free hand and let them learn by trial and error.

Well, I shall say these teachers really have a point there when they put much emphasis on the importance of practising in translating. But I don't share their pessimistic view that it is impossible to teach how to translate. I say this because of the following two reasons: On the one hand, over the years, translators and translating researchers have developed their own theories based on their own translating practice, and on the findings of linguistic research and research about human communication. To know a bit of these theories underlying translating practice will certainly benefit us in our future practice. On the other hand, many translators have accumulated a lot of experience in their work. For example, they can tell you how to deal with different genres, how translating a piece of literary work differs from translating, say, a piece of scientific writing, how to leave out those unnecessary pronouns when translating from English to Chinese for they will be redundant in the Chinese version, how to change the position of an attributive clause for attributive clauses usually precede the things they modify in Chinese but follow the things they modify in English, and so on and so forth. To learn something about these techniques will also help us avoid detours in our own translating practice.

That much said, I guess you've already got a general picture of the layout of this

book. Yes, I intend to put two things together: some basic theories underlying translation and some commonly used translation techniques. What sets this book apart from other coursebooks on translation is that neither the theories nor the translation techniques are put there for you to memorize. Rather I hope you can pick them up while completing the tasks I have specifically designed. For example, there is a translation technique known as “changing the positions of some phrases”. To help you better grasp it, two specifically designed tasks are provided. In one task you are asked to compare two versions of Chinese translation of a group of English sentences. One version struggles to keep the order of the original English sentence, and the other version is more flexible in this respect. In the second task you are asked to improve on the English translation of a group of Chinese sentences, which hopefully will help you realize that when translating Chinese into English, we also need to change the positions of some words or phrases.

### ***The Structure of the Book***

Now about the structure of this book: it is made up of 8 units, and each unit consists of 6 activities. Activity 1 introduces you to some of the basic theories about the nature and the procedures of translation, mainly following the framework of Eugene Nida, a very famous translation researcher. Since translation theories and skills are both built upon the differences and similarities between the source language and the target language, Activity 2 of each unit examines one or two language points on which English and Chinese differ. Each of Activity 3 and Activity 4 introduces a translation skill which will help us deal with some concrete problems in our translation and make the translated version sound as smooth and natural as possible. In real life, we are more often required to translate full texts rather than isolated sentences. Hence Activity 5 of every unit provides you with one passage for you to try your hand. And after so much hard practising and thinking, Activity 6 offers a relaxation, usually one or two pieces of very well translated works.

### ***What Is a Unit Like?***

Take Unit 1 as an example: Activity 1 “Paradoxes of Translating” is a brainstorming session about the difficulties one may come across in translation. Through this



brainstorming, you are introduced to 8 fundamental questions raised by Eugene Nida about the nature of translation. Activity 2 “Languages Differ: Differences in Lexicons” calls your attention to the fact that only a very small minority of English words and their Chinese counterparts share exactly the same designative and associative meanings. What’s more, most English words have more than one meaning depending on the different contexts. In the translating process, these different meanings are usually matched with different Chinese words rather than with one Chinese word. This is also true when translating from Chinese to English. To make things even more complicated, many English words and their Chinese counterparts also show a lot of differences in their combinations with other words. All these will leave their marks on our translating practice.

Activity 3 “Translation Skill: Changing the Positions of Some Phrases” has already been introduced above. Activity 4 brings forward another translation skill, which is called “changing words or phrases into sentences”. This is because when translating English into Chinese or vice versa, we frequently come across some adverbs or adjectives or nouns which are very difficult to deal with. In order to convey their meanings, we have to paraphrase them using a sentence.

Activity 5 “A Passage for Practice” provides you with an excerpt from Helen Keller’s autobiography *The Story of My Life*. Activity 6 “For Your Enjoyment” offers a time to relax; two poems, with their translations, are on the menu. The first one is a very well-known poem by the great Song poet Su Shi. It’s translated by Yang Xianyi and Gladys Yang. The second is “Ozymandias” by P. B. Shelley, translated by Wang Zuoliang.

### ***Plan Your Time Well***

OK, that’s what a unit is like. It’s quite a lot, isn’t it? To ensure that you can finish a unit like this, it is essential that you plan your time well in advance. It takes 8 weeks to finish this course, that is, one unit per week. And to complete all the 6 activities of each unit with their various tasks, I estimate 3 to 4 hours’ hard work per week. For example, the time you need to spend on each activity of Unit 1 may

roughly be as follows:

Activity 1	45 minutes
Activity 2	45 minutes
Activity 3	20 minutes
Activity 4	20 minutes
Activity 5	60 minutes
Activity 6	20 minutes
Total	210 minutes

You can use this as a point of reference and plan your time accordingly. Though it's never easy to ask a busy guy to squeeze out 3 or 4 hours every week, I hope when you reach the end of the book, you'll find it's worth the effort. In case you find it an absolute bore or an absolute waste of time, please also let me know.

Lan Chun  
Beijing, 2002

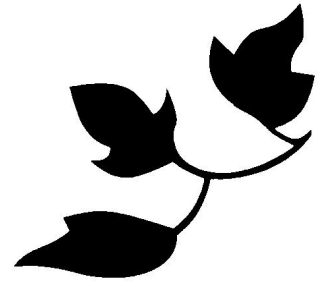
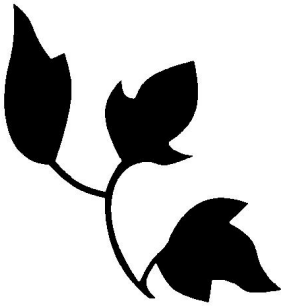
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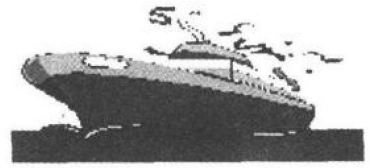
# Unit 1

## Start with Paradoxes



# Guide to Unit 1

## Start with Paradoxes



### Activity 1 Paradoxes of Translating

### Activity 2 Languages Differ: Differences in Lexicons

Task 1 Words Sharing the Same Designative and Associative Meanings

Task 2 Words Not Sharing the Same Meanings

Task 3 English Words with More Than One Meaning

Task 4 Chinese Words with More Than One Meaning

Task 5 Co-occurrence with Other Words

### Activity 3 Translation Skill: Changing the Positions of Some Phrases

Task 1 Comparing the Two Versions

Task 2 Translating Chinese into English

Feedback

Feedback

Feedback

Feedback

Feedback

Feedback

Feedback

Feedback

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# Guide to Unit 1

## Start with Paradoxes



### Activity 4 Translating Skill: Changing Words or Phrases into Sentences

Task 1 Filling in the Blanks (1)

Task 2 Filling in the Blanks (2)

### Activity 5 A Passage for Practice

### Activity 6 For Your Enjoyment

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## Activity 1

### Paradoxes of Translating

Hello, everyone! Welcome to this coursebook on translation! I am Mrs. Guide. I shall see you through the book and pop up from time to time when I feel there is a point that needs explanation.

Let me start by asking you a few questions. I'm sure most of you have had the experience of translating English into Chinese or Chinese into English. Some of you may even have the experience of teaching translation to your students. Now have you ever come across any difficulties when doing translation? Very probably yes.

**Could you pause for a while and write down those difficulties in the space provided below?**

1. \_\_\_\_\_
2. \_\_\_\_\_
3. \_\_\_\_\_
4. \_\_\_\_\_

I have also asked some of my students in Beijing about what they find most difficult in translating. Their answers are summarized along the following lines. Please go through the points listed below and see if you share those problems with them.

1. Generally speaking, I think if you are good at both English and Chinese, I don't suppose it is too difficult to translate between the two languages. However, I do find that sometimes my English vocabulary is not large enough so that I have to resort to my dictionaries again and again in order to understand an English passage or to find a suitable English counterpart for a Chinese word.
2. To me, the most difficult thing in translation is to understand the original

sentence or passage thoroughly. I think you should not only comprehend the literal meaning but all the implied meanings as well before you can translate. Sometimes I seem to have understood the original passage, but I still can't come up with a satisfactory translation. I suppose that's still because I haven't grasped the original meaning completely.

3. I find those long English sentences with a lot of clauses very difficult to deal with. When I translate them into Chinese, I do not know how to organize the Chinese sentences. Sometimes I manage to convey the meanings of all the clauses, but it seems I have lost the main structure of the original sentence. But if I try to keep the main structure, that will result in a very Europeanized Chinese sentence. I really hope there can be a translation handbook which teaches us how to tackle complicated long sentences.
4. I sometimes doubt if translation is possible at all. I mean when you translate English into Chinese or vice versa, you are not only involved in two languages, but in two vastly different cultures as well. Even a term as commonplace as 白开水 may need a lot of explanation in translating because it is certainly much more than "a glass of water". And how can you translate *corn flakes*? 玉米片? Not really. My point is that it's not enough just to be able to speak English and Chinese. You need also be familiar with the English culture and the Chinese culture so that you can paraphrase some terms when necessary.

At this point, perhaps you are saying to yourself "That's exactly how I feel towards translation". Now that we have had a review of our own laymen's understanding of translation, it's high time for us to turn our eyes to translation researchers and see what they've got to say.

**The following 8 questions are mainly based on Nida (1993), who is a very famous translation researcher and whose theory we shall refer to again and again in this coursebook. Please think over the questions below and write down your understandings in the space provided. (Nida's own views are provided in the Feedback that follows.)**

English Through Translation

1. Translating is a complex and fascinating task. In fact, some scholars have claimed that it is probably the most complex type of event in the history of the cosmos. And yet, translating is so natural and easy that children seem to have no difficulty in interpreting for their immigrant parents. These children normally do very well until they have gone to school and have learned about nouns, verbs, and adverbs. Why?

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2. Most people assume that literalness in translating means faithfulness to the text. Because of the many discrepancies between meanings and structures of different languages, some people have insisted that translating is impossible. What do you think?

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3. What do you think of the view that paraphrase should be avoided in translating?

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4. There is a widespread view that a translator should first produce a more or less literal rendering of the source text and then proceed to improve it stylistically. Do you agree?

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5. For many people the need for human translators seem paradoxical in this age of computers. Since modern computers can be loaded with dictionaries and grammars, why not let computers do the work?

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6. In your view, what are the most difficult texts to translate?

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7. Some people imagine that the greatest problem in translating is to find the right words and constructions in the target language. What do you think?

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8. Do you think that a person who knows two languages well can be a good translator or interpreter?

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1. Because they then try to match the words and grammar rather than the content.
2. Those who insist that translating is impossible are usually concerned with some of the more marginal features of figurative language and complex poetic structures. The use of figurative language is universal, but the precise figures of speech in one language rarely match those in another. Yet translating is simply doing the impossible well. In fact, though some famous authors insist that translating is impossible, they do not hesitate to have their own writings translated.
3. In fact, all translating involves different degrees of paraphrase, since there is no way in which one can successfully translate word for word and structure for structure. For example, the Chinese saying 他下海了 is literally "He went down to the sea", but is more appropriately translated as "He became a businessman". Since languages do not differ essentially in what they can say, but in how they say it, paraphrase is inevitable. What is important is the semantic legitimacy of the paraphrase.
4. Style is not the frosting on the cake, but an integral part of the text right from the beginning. It must be built into the text right from the beginning. It is usually better to aim first at a stylistically satisfactory rendering of the source text and then review it carefully to "tighten it up" by analyzing and testing the correspondences. A few errors in the



correspondences of lexical meaning are much more excusable than missing the spirit and aesthetic character of the source text.

5. Computers can perform certain very simple tasks, providing there is sufficient pre-editing and post-editing. But the results of machine translating are usually in an unnatural form of language and sometimes just plain weird. The human brain is not only digital and analogic, but it also has a built-in system of values which gives it an incalculable advantage over machines. Human translators will always be necessary for any text which is stylistically appealing and semantically complex — which includes most of what is worth communicating in another language.
6. You might think that the most difficult texts to translate are highly literary productions. However, those texts which say nothing, i.e. the type of language often used by politicians and delegates to international forums, prove to be more difficult to deal with than literary writings. At least this is what a group of professional translators at the United Nations headquarters in New York have insisted. The next most difficult type of text is one filled with irony or sarcasm.
7. The most difficult task for the translator is to understand thoroughly the designative and associative meanings of the text to be translated. This involves not only knowing the meanings of the words and the syntactic relations, but also being sensitive to all the nuances of the stylistic devices. As one struggling translator summed up his problems, “If I really understood what the text meant, I could easily translate it.”
8. Knowing two languages is not enough. It is also essential to be acquainted with the respective cultures.

Now how did you feel after going through the above 8 questions? You might feel a bit disappointed for there seems to be nothing particularly exotic and exciting in Nida's saying. At the same time, you might also feel a bit confused, for the above 8 questions do not present a very clear and well-organized picture of translation. Well, do not worry too much at this stage. In the rest of the book, we shall take a closer look at the nature and the procedures of translation. Our focus, however, will be on introducing some useful translation skills and on practising translating ourselves. We shall also spend some time examining those language points on which English and Chinese differ, hence are difficult to deal with in translation. One such

point is presented in Activity 2 below.

## Activity 2

### Languages Differ: Differences in Lexicons

Since translation theories and skills are both built upon the differences and similarities between the source language and the target language, in each unit of this coursebook, we shall examine one or two language points on which English and Chinese differ. First of all, Chinese and English show a lot of discrepancies in their lexicons, especially in word meanings and word combinations.

#### ***Task 1 Words Sharing the Same Designative and Associative Meanings***

Some English words and their Chinese counterparts share exactly the same designative and associative meanings. These are mainly some proper names, technical terms and the names of some everyday objects.

**Can you give their Chinese equivalents? Can you think of more examples?**

the United States \_\_\_\_\_

cognitive linguistics \_\_\_\_\_

the Indian Ocean \_\_\_\_\_

AIDS \_\_\_\_\_

helicopter \_\_\_\_\_

skyscraper \_\_\_\_\_



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