

教育部人文社会科学重点研究基地
北京外国语大学中国外语教育研究中心·学术著作系列

奈达翻译理论研究

A STUDY ON NIDA'S
TRANSLATION THEORY

马会娟 著



外语教学与研究出版社
FOREIGN LANGUAGE TEACHING AND RESEARCH PRESS

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北京 BEIJING

(京)新登字 155 号

图书在版编目(CIP)数据

奈达翻译理论研究(英文本)/马会娟著. —北京:外语教学与研究出版社,2003

ISBN 7-5600-3920-0

I. 奈… II. 马… III. 英语—翻译 IV. H315.9

中国版本图书馆 CIP 数据核字(2003)第 110662 号

奈达翻译理论研究 (英文本)

马会娟 著

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责任编辑:周渝毅

出版发行:外语教学与研究出版社

社 址:北京市西三环北路 19 号(100089)

网 址: <http://www.fltrp.com>

印 刷:北京外国语大学印刷厂

开 本:850×1168 1/32

印 张:8.25

版 次:2003 年 9 月第 1 版 2003 年 9 月第 1 次印刷

书 号:ISBN 7-5600-3920-0/G·1947

定 价:11.90 元

* * *

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总 序

中国外语教育研究中心决定将其专/兼职研究员近几年的个人科研成果及课题成果组成学术著作系列，由外语教学与研究出版社（外研社）出版。外研社社长李朋义同志请我讲讲这套系列学术专著的来龙去脉以及其性质、特点，为丛书做个总序。

我先简要介绍一下中国外语教育研究中心的基本情况。北京外国语大学中国外语教育研究中心成立于2000年3月。学校投入百万余元装修了近300平方米的办公用房和图书资料室，累计购买了数十台计算机和其他各种科研设备。当年7月，中心通过了教育部专家组的检查验收，9月教育部正式下文，批准中心为全国高校人文社会科学100个重点研究基地之一。

中心的研究人员构成主要是北外外国语言研究所、英语学院、高级翻译学院和应用英语学院的多名教授、副教授，中心同时还聘请了本校日本语研究中心和俄语学院的两位教授，北京大学、社科院语言所、解放军外国语学院、华南理工大学、南京大学等单位的几位教授为兼职研究员。大部分研究员具有博士学位，其中有几位是剑桥大学、香港中文大学和其他国外知名大学毕业的博士。研究人员实行流动管理，带科研项目进入中心，完成项目后可以离开，有新的项目可以延聘。专职和兼职研究员各保持在8-10人左右。

该中心的总体任务是，除语言基础研究外，还系统研究中国外语教育中的各种问题：从外语政策、规划到发展策略，从外语教育理论到教育实践，从教材编写到课程设置，从课堂教学到测试评估，从中小学外语教学到高校的专业外语和公共外语教学。中心的发展目标是建成外语教育的科研攻关基地，外语研究人才的培养基地（硕士生、博士生和博士后），资料图书和信息交流基地，为有关部门提供相关咨询的基地。中心力图成为全国第一的外语教育问题研究机构。

目前，中心承担一项国家社会科学基金项目 and 六项教育部的重大项目，与加拿大合作开展一项国际研究，其中包括中国高校外语教学改革现状与发展策略研究、英汉平行语料库的创建与应用研究、英语能力测试的理论研究和试题开发、高校英语教师教育与发展研究、二语习得理论研究、网络技术在外语教育中的应用、英语学习词典的研编等。这些项目，有的已经发表；

有的已经完成，成果不久即可问世；有的将写出咨询报告。目前中心招收硕士研究生 40 余名，博士生 20 余名，博士后 1 名。这些学生在校期间必须参加中心的部分研究工作，必须有论文发表；博士生和博士后的研究成果必须达到出版水平。

从建立之日起，中心就与外研社有着密切的合作关系。外研社给予中心大力支持，中心通过外研社的研究发展中心为社里提供咨询服务、项目策划、作者联系、稿件终审等。3 年来，中心协助外研社举办了多期大学英语教师的暑期培训班（共约 3 万人），中心研究员每期都提供几个学术报告，同时也对教师进行问卷调查和小组访谈，双方都收到良好效果。更值得一提的是，中心与外研社合作，设立“中国英语教育研究基金”，外研社提供 50 万元科研经费，每年都组织课题的招标活动，课题内容与中心重大项目相联系，中心负责审查批准立项的项目，培训主持人，最后对报告进行终审等。项目的研究报告将与中心的主题报告同集出版。同时，中心与外研社达成协议，中心的一切科研成果，由外研社独家出版。

这套学术著作系列包括四种科研成果形式。首先是中心承担的重大科研项目的成果，或者以专著形式，或者以系列论文形式，总之是围绕一个课题而展开的。这种研究的优点是：全部为实证研究，是有组织、有计划、规模较大的调查研究；全部是有学术意义的课题，有极大的探索性；这类成果也包括给教育主管部门的咨询报告，为决策者出谋划策。其次就是专/兼职研究员们自选课题的科研成果。这些项目虽然没有在科研主管部门立项，但都是研究员们最感兴趣的课题，有的是多年积累沉淀的最后结晶，有的是把当年的博士论文继续修改、完善，使之与当今研究接轨的成果。第三类是，我们自己培养的博士生和博士后的成果，修改之后，通过评审，达到出版水平，也被纳入这个系列。第四类是学术会议论文集。中心每年举行一次学术研讨会，通过评审的优秀论文由中心编辑加工并加上适当的评介后结集出版。因此，这套系列专著的内容将十分广阔丰富，既有理论性很强的成果，也有突出实用性的成果，形式多样。我们的学术著作丛书是个开放的系列，首批已经成形的有 9 种，但随着中心研究工作的深入和发展，将会有更多有价值的专著问世。

我非常高兴地向读者推荐这套学术著作系列，我相信它会对语言研究者、外语教育研究者、外语教师、语言学硕士生和博士生及对我国外语教学有兴趣者，都有一定的参考价值。

我谨代表中国外语教育研究中心向外研社表示诚挚的谢意。

刘润清

2003 年 3 月于北京

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This book is developed from my six years of study at the English Department of Nankai University. Numerous people have lent me a helping hand in completing this research. My greatest debt is to professor Liu Shicong. He made insightful suggestions that contribute in important ways to the framework of this book. He took a lot of time from his busy schedule to read the whole of different manuscript versions and make extensive comments on the entire manuscript. To him, I owe much more than words. I am also deeply grateful to teachers at the English Department of Nankai University. During the six years of study, I benefited a great deal from their enlightened lectures. My gratitude goes to professor Lin Kenan at Tianjin Foreign Studies University. It was through him that I got to know the latest developments of western contemporary translation studies. I express my thanks to Dr. Zhu Chunshen at Hong Kong City University and Mr. Panchen Huantao in Hong Kong Bible Society. They helped me obtain some useful Biblical materials. Finally, I need to thank professor Chen Guohua at Beijing Foreign Studies University. Without his help and support, this book could not readily come out.

中文摘要

本书对奈达的翻译理论作了较为全面、系统的研究，对译界对它的研究状况和接受情况进行了梳理、分析，澄清了译界对奈达理论的种种错误认识，探讨了译界围绕奈达理论进行的论争及其根源。

本书以奈达理论指导下的《现代英文圣经》和《现代中文圣经》中的诸多译例论证了奈达理论对翻译实践，尤其是对外汉翻译实践的指导意义，证明了我国译界认为奈达理论不适合外汉翻译的观点是错误的。

本书对奈达理论和金隄理论的异同之处及其原因进行了深入探讨，对金译《尤利西斯》的得与失进行了分析，证明了奈达理论能够指导英汉文学翻译实践。

本书对奈达理论在汉英文学翻译实践中的局限性进行了有益探索，指出了奈达理论在文学作品的美学价值的再现上存在不足，并从美的形式特征和非形式特征两个方面阐明文学翻译如何再现原作美学价值的问题。

English Abstract

This book makes a systematic research on Nida's translation theory, clarify some misunderstandings concerning his theory, disclose its true nature and explore its validity and limitations in literary translations. Examples from Today's English Version (TEV) and Today's Chinese Version (TCV) of the Bible, which were translated, following Nida's translation theory, demonstrate that Nida's theory, contrary to some popular wrong assumptions, is applicable to translation practice between foreign languages and Chinese. A comparative study of Nida's theory and Jin Di's theory is made to reveal the similarities and differences between the two theories, and the reasons for their discrepancies are also explored. Examples from Jin's Chinese translation of *Ulysses* are examined against the principle of "equivalent effect". This book also explores the limitations of Nida's theory in literary translation, pointing out that his theory fails to address the issue of transference of aesthetic values of literary work into another language. Attempts have been made to amend Nida's theory in respect of transferring aesthetic values of literary work by means of "formal aesthetic markers" and "non-formal aesthetic markers", with the aim of making it more suitable for literary translation between Chinese and English.

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CHAPTER ONE INTRODUCTION

1.1 REASONS FOR FURTHER RESEARCH ON NIDA'S TRANSLATION THEORY

Eugene A. Nida (1914-) is a distinguished American translation theorist as well as linguist. His translation theory has exerted a tremendous influence on translation studies in western countries. His works on translation set off the study of modern translation as an academic field (Snell-Hornby 1988: 1; Heylen 1993: 4; Baker 1998: 277), and he is regarded as the most influential one among all contemporary translation theorists (Newmark 1993: 133).

Nida's influence upon Chinese translation studies is greater still. Before his theory was introduced into China in the 1980s, people mainly focused attention on traditional Chinese translation theories, especially Yan Fu's three-character principle of translation, i. e. faithfulness, smoothness and elegance. Since Nida's theory was grounded solidly on contemporary developments of linguistics, communication theory, information theory, semiotics and anthropology, Chinese translation scholars took great interest in his theory. In fact, Nida and his theory have been a hot topic in China for almost two decades. In the beginning, Nida's theory was extensively introduced and much discussed among translation scholars, and was given a high profile for its new perspective on translation. As time went by, his theory was questioned and challenged. In recent years, his theory was strongly criticized, and even considered as outdated and having outlived its usefulness (see 2.2).

It is evident that Nida's translation theory has undergone dramatic ups and downs since it was introduced into China. This phenomenon is very interesting and has provoked a series of reflections on the part of the Chinese translation scholars. Why is there such a big change in Chinese translation scholars' attitudes towards Nida's theory? Are the criticisms against his theory justified? What are the demerits for which his theory is being severely criticized? Is his theory really useless or outdated for Chinese translation studies, as some scholars have so argued?

All these questions about Nida's theory are of great significance in the sense that, to some degree, they determine how Nida's theory will be received in the future Chinese translation studies. Something cautions us against taking leave of his theory without further consideration. I think, Nida's translation theory needs to be further researched, the reasons being as follows:

(1) The scope of the applicability of Nida's translation theory needs to be further discussed.

Nida's translation theory is closely related to his experience of Bible translating. Due to this reason, many scholars express doubts about the applicability of his theory to translation in general. There are mainly three kinds of opinions:

In the first place, some scholars hold that Nida's theory can only guide Bible translation, but is of little use to general translation practice. Edwin Gentzler, an American translation theorist, claims that Nida does not provide a general theory of translation, and his "dynamic equivalence" is only an outgrowth of religious translating. In his view, Nida's theory merely serves as "a Bible for Bible translation" (1993: 55-60; see 2.4.3). Chang Namfung states that Nida's theory has a special purpose for Bible translating for evangelism and consequently it is not applicable to translations of all types of texts. In Chang's opinion, Nida's theory is not even fit to guide other kinds of Bible translating, such as those for literary appreciation or for historical study (1999: 45). Similarly, Wang Dongfeng asserts that Chinese translation scholars have exaggerated the significance of the applicability of Nida's theory to translation in general. In his view, Nida's theory is only useful for Bible translating, but is unsuitable for translations of other types of texts, especially of literary texts (2000: 203; see 2.2.3).

Secondly, some people state that Nida's theory can be applied to non-literary translation, such as technical translation, but not to literary translation. Some argue that Nida puts too much emphasis on content and meaning, and ignores the significance of form and style, which play a decisive role in literary translation (Liu Yingkai 1997; Wang Dongfeng 2000). Some insist that the concept of "translation equivalence" in Nida's theory is too rigid to be applied to literary translation, for literary translation has no absolute rule to follow and depends on the creativity of the translator (Gao Jian 1994; Luo Xinzhang 1994; Wu Yicheng 1998). Still others maintain that Nida's theory of "readers' response" is very subjective so that it is not practicable for literary translation (Qian Linsheng 1988; Lin Kenan 1988; see 2.2.2).

Thirdly, some Chinese scholars argue that Nida's theory may be fit to guide translation practice among Indo-European languages, but is useless for translation between Chinese and English (Wu Yicheng 1994; Liu Miqing 1994; Luo Xinzhang 1994 and Sun Zhili 1997). In their opinion, Nida's theory is useful for translation among Indo-European languages because it is based on these languages, but it is not applicable to translation between Chinese and English, for the Chinese language is quite distinct from Indo-European languages and has its special characteristics (Sun Zhili 1997: 11; Wu Yicheng 1997: 72; see 2.2.3).

From what is cited above, we can see that translation scholars hold divided opinions about the scope of the applicability of Nida's translation theory. This situation is very disappointing, for it discourages translators from applying Nida's theory to translation practice. There is a real need for the study of the scope of the applicability of Nida's theory.

(2) Some hot debates over other aspects of Nida's theory are still going on without getting to a satisfactory end.

In addition to disagreements listed above, there are some controversies over other aspects of his theory. Whether Nida's theory of "readers' response" could be regarded as a translation criterion, for example, has been argued about for a long time among translation scholars. Some insist it is workable (Jin Di 1998; He Wei 1999; Qin Hongwu 1999), while others proclaim it is impracticable (Qian Linsheng 1988; Lü Jun 1998). The proponents believe that the reader in the receptor language plays a crucial role in determining whether a translated text is adequate or not, and the opponents argue that when reading a translated text each reader's response is so different and subjective that his response cannot be used as a translation criterion.

Another example is the debate about Nida's naturalization method in translating. Some scholars claim that Nida's preference for naturalization is a cultural hegemonism (Venuti 1995; Wang Dongfeng 2000; see 2.2.3 and 2.4.3), and his theory has had a negative effect on the study of Chinese translation (Liu Yingkai 1997; see 2.2.3). In their view, the main purpose of translation is to make culture exchange across different languages and, therefore, Nida's emphasis on naturalization would prevent new language expressions and foreign cultural elements from entering into the receptor language. Other scholars hold that Nida's naturalization method is legitimate and adequate, for it shows Nida's consideration for receptors and his respect for the receptor language (Qin Hongwu 1999; Chang

Namfung 1999).

Among all these debates, some criticisms of Nida's theory are justifiable, but some are not. [For instance, Chang Namfung has convincingly proved that the criticism against Nida's naturalization method is untenable (1999)]. Furthermore, quite a few arguments are fragmentary and incomplete, and tend to impede us from understanding some fundamental translation problems from the correct perspective. Although attempts have been made by scholars to further explore these debates, no agreement has been reached up to now. By further discussing these aspects of translation involved in the debates, not only can we see clearly the strength and weakness of Nida's theory, but also clarify some essential translation problems, such as criterion and method of translation.

(3) There are some misunderstandings and misconceptions concerning Nida's theory, which have led to confusions and fruitless contentions among Chinese translation scholars.

Many Chinese translation scholars are familiar with Nida's theory, but this does not mean that his theory is correctly and fully understood. As a matter of fact, there are quite some misunderstandings and misconceptions about certain aspects of his theory. In an article "Value Judgments in Chinese Theoretical Translation Studies: As Reflected in the Reception of Nida's Principle of Equivalent Effect" (1999), Chang Namfung summarizes four kinds of misunderstandings regarding Nida's theory in China:

"Dynamic equivalence" is only an ideal translation criterion.

Nida's theory is unfit to guide translation practice between Chinese and English because it grows out of translation experience among Indo-European languages.

Nida takes "readers' response" as a translation criterion in evaluating translation.

Nida does not respect the cultural factors in the source language and his maintenance of complete naturalization in translating is a kind of cultural hegemonism.

Chang's arguments indicate how seriously Nida's theory has been misunderstood in China. In fact, misunderstandings in connection with Nida's theory are not merely restricted to these four aspects given by Chang. There are also misconceptions concerning "dynamic equivalence", "science of translation", and the relationship between Nida's "kernel sentence"/"deep structure" and Chomsky's transformational generative grammar (TG grammar), etc.

Take "dynamic equivalence" for example. Some Chinese scholars regard Nida's "dynamic equivalence" the same as the concept of "equivalence" in western