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## Research on application of nida theory in traditional Chinese medicine translation

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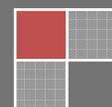
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### ABSTRACT

Nida's translation theory has been wide spread in China for long. The equivalent translation theory from Nida has produced significant influence to the translation society in China and many translation works are made to certain extent with help or inspiration from his theory. Nida proposed the ideas of dynamic equivalence and believed that the translation should be a representation of the source text in another language with closes and nature words and the documents translated should meet reader's needs and that the reaction of readers of the translations should be the same as readers of the source text. These opinions are also applicable to traditional Chinese medicine translation, because as a medical science, it is obviously unwise to use the traditional free translation method. With Nida's theory of equivalence, the vocabularies, terms and medical records and medical treatment can be accurately represented. Through brief introduction to Nida's theory, this paper aims to study the application of Nida's theory in traditional Chinese medicine (TCM) translation, especially from views of treatment to terms in TCM, studies in various disciplines and basic qualifications of translators.

### KEYWORDS

Nida's theory; Traditional chinese medicine; Translation.

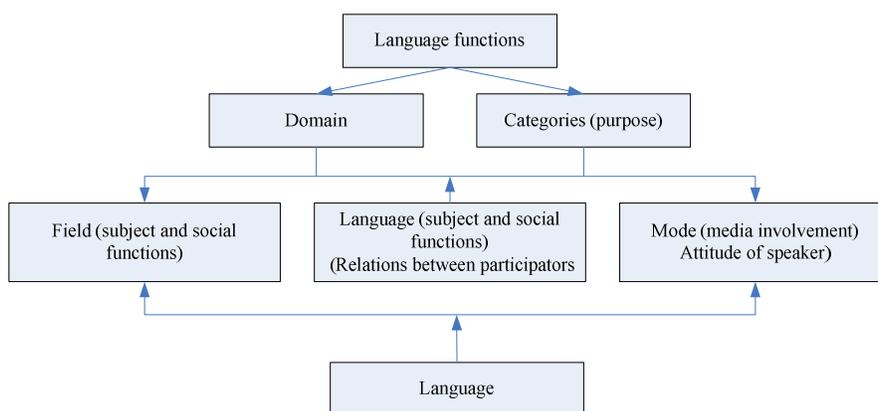


## INTRODUCTION

Traditional Chinese medicine is a precious gift from our ancestors and has a long history. Through development of thousands of years, our great ancestors left us with many important works on TCM which are of great significance to our researches on TCM theories and clinical practices. With increasingly frequent international communications, TCM has been widely known by foreign readers than ever. They are also interested in the magical and ancient medical science and have strong desire for learning. This requires that we do our best to spread TCM, therefore, translations of important TCM documents become very necessary. TCM is a medical science which requires that the translation must be accurate, authentic and readable, so that foreign readers can accurately understand the inherent meanings. As such, Nida's theory is of great significance for such purpose. Nida's theory attaches great importance to dynamic equivalence and judges a translation by remarks from readers. His opinions are of great guiding significance to TCM translation.

## OVERVIEW OF NIDA'S TRANSLATION THEORY

Eugene A. Nida was a famous linguist, translator and translation theorist in the United States. The translation theories proposed by Nida has profound influence on the translation society in China and are widely applied. The famous "dynamic equivalence" theory of Dr. Nida helps us to improve our practices and understanding of the equivalent meaning in translation and is of great guidance to the researches on translation theories and practices. Its knowledge framework is basically as follows Figure 1:



**Figure 1 : The knowledge framework of nida's translation theory**

The core philosophy of Nida is to completely revivify meanings of works and terms as well as reference style, to find out the closest and the most appropriate language and to represent it in an equivalent manner, thus realizing the closest context and style of the source language without changing meanings of the source text. The key word to Nida's theory is "equivalence" and it is of the greatest importance to realize the closest and natural equivalence. Nida believed that whether a translation is successful or not should be judged by the acceptance of readers to the translation, because language itself is a tool for communication and has its social features, only translation in accurate and natural words can win recognition and approval from the public. To be successful, a translation must be equivalent to the source text in terms of content, vocabulary information, culture, social background and language style, to realize perfect reflection of the source text in another language. On basis of the conversion, Nida determined the grammar in translation and proposed the ideas of translating on basis of in-depth understanding of language structure, especially in terms of treatment to core sentences.

The key to Nida's translation theory is to find out the closest, the most appropriate and natural words and languages, through studies and analysis on the target language, to realize equivalence to the source language. Such equivalence is in the first place based on accuracy and conformity to the content and ideas in the source text and is to represent the source text in closest form and style without changing the ideas and content. If a translation wins extensive acceptance from readers with the same reactions as to the source text, then we can assume that the translation is successful and has realized "dynamic equivalence". According to Nida' theory, the "dynamic equivalence" is actually quite different from normal "free translation" in that dynamic equivalence does not give translators the freedom of creativity at will, but it requires that the translator must firstly assure the equivalence, which means that the translation must accurately reflect the meanings of the source text. Nida also made specific explanations on equivalence selection in translation, for example, content is superior to words, dynamic equivalence is superior to formal equivalence and translation acceptable by readers is superior to normal translation. Strict equivalence is required, in formulas in some disciplines, for example, in mathematic formulas  $(x+y)^2 = x^2 + 2xy + y^2$ ,  $A^{-1} = \frac{1}{A}$  inverse/the inverse of A; in physics formula  $F = dP/dt$ , --F is defined as the derivative of momentum with respect to time.

## NIDA'S THEORY BASED TCM

Nida's theory is also extensively applied to TCM translation and is of guiding significance.

Nida believed that the perfect dynamic equivalence is to let readers have perfectly the same reaction between readers of the translation and the source text, which means a perfect translation realizes equivalent effect on readers. Chinese scholars believed that when words and terms of TCM is translated into English language, equivalence should be sought as far as possible. That is to say, while readers understand the meaning of the target translation, they also understand the connotation and extension reflected by the English language, which means that the words and meanings in source text need to be properly treated to realize equivalence to the largest extent. There are many common places shared by TCM and western medicine, therefore, in the translation process, the words and terms in TCM should be directly translated by using corresponding medical terms in western medicine. Such specialized medical terms in the translation are easier for readers to accept and understand, so that the translation can be spread and used more extensively.

Nida once said, "Translation with vague and misleading meanings cannot be remedied by using capitalized words." Chinese scholars also believe it is unwise to completely abandon the existing words and terms and to create a new set of words and terms in the translation, simply because TCM and western medicine belong to two medical systems. Both TCM and western medicine are both developed to study human body and to cure diseases and share the same purpose. Since all roads lead to Rome, both TCM and western medicine has many common places and common terms in their respective studies. For example, existing terms of western medicine with respect to organs and pathology description may be borrowed to translate TCM after appropriate processing. However, special attentions should be paid to words with indications of Chinese philosophy and cultural characteristics. As shown below TABLE 1:

**TABLE 1 : Words with indications of Chinese philosophy and cultural characteristics**

Translation in English (transliterating + paraphrasing)
Seven Pyau
Few: Superficial Pulse
Kong
Wha: Slippery pulse
She: Full pulse
Hyen: Long-tremulous pulse
Kin: Short-tremulous pulse
Hong: overflowing pulse

In terms of specific use of words in translation, Nida believed that "rude words" should be avoided, therefore, in the translation process, special cares must be taken to avoid words with rude meanings or cultural taboos in translation of TCM. For example, in many translations with respect to TCM, "WU-JI-BAI-FENG-WAN" is translated into "black cock and white phoenix pill" which, in the social context in English language, people believe is related to "sex", so words like "cock, bitch and fuck" should be avoided in the translation. This is a basic code of ethics.

In terms of translation of words and terms, Chinese scholars also studied the translation of TCM by borrowing western medical terms, on basis of the translation equivalence theory of Nida and have worked out some methods and skills. Some TCM terms formed by four Chinese characters, for example, may be translated by creating new words or omitting certain words, to make adaption to the translation. They believed that in translation of TCM, special analysis should be made to the Chinese and English languages and the context, and then the translator may uncover the in-depth meaning of each word or term, in order to accurately reflect the true meaning of the four-character term in Chinese.

The philosophy in Nida's theory is to find the closest and the most appropriate and natural word and language, through studies and analysis on the target language, in order to realize equivalence to the source text. Even so, in the translation of TCM, we should not follow the theory blindly, but should use the theory and philosophy in a dialectical manner. The following TABLE 2 translations may appear occasionally and are obviously improper and inadvisable.

**TABLE 2 : Translations may appear occasionally and are obviously improper and inadvisable**

Ventus	Replete
clusa	algor
orbis rendlis	Vic terlius Pedis
fons scateus	cepacoulicus
orbis	inanis

When Nida translated the Bible, he once said he would expect "natural equivalence", but the historical background should not be misinterpreted, since it was directly related to facts. In TCM translation, this is a reference we can take. That is to say, we can translate TCM in the same way as we translate the Bible, in which process, we should adequately and accurately understand the meanings of TCM and pay special attentions to the historical environment and relations of TCM, to maintain its special characteristics. Besides, Nida also believed that in translation of classical works, it is not scientific to maintain the expressions of ancient words and that language should also develop as time goes on. Considerations must be taken of the service object of the translation. Since the translation is mainly read by modern readers whose languages are much different from those in ancient times. Although the idea does make sense, it is not applicable to translation of TCM. As a medical science, TCM itself stresses on its nature as a science, so it cannot be treated literally to cater for modern language forms and styles. TCM translation should follow the principles of "less literature, more science and basis of Chinese traditions", which is to say, the translation should reflect the old medical knowledge of the Chinese people on an as-is basis.

### **APPLICATION OF NIDA'S THEORY IN TRANSLATION OF VARIOUS TCM DISCIPLINES**

Some scholars once studied by using the "dynamic equivalence" theory of Nida and worked out a set of translation skills for gynecology in TCM. They believed that the equivalence of meaning is superior to that of forms, and if the translator rigidly adhere to forms in the translation, it may well result in misunderstanding of TCM as a medical science, thus making the translation a complete failure. For this reason, in order to accurately represent the TCM theories and knowledge, the translator must give up restrictions in forms and make the translation readable in English by adaption to words, sentences, orders and logic, so that readers in English language can understand TCM on basis of their own language customs. The "naturalization" process of language is the dynamic equivalence in true sense. In practices, the translator must reorganize and restructure the sentences on basis of TCM theories by borrowing existing terms of western medicine, to make the translation more accurate and better adapted to readers.

On basis of the principle of dynamic equivalence, some scholars believed that the translator should materialize the abstract expression in Chinese and translate ancient language into modern language by adding some reasonable explanations and borrowing some existing medical terms from western medicine. All such efforts are aimed to realize equivalent reactions of readers. Some other translators studied the translation of important medicine instructions and they believed that the translation should follow a principle that the format and content of translation should agree to that in the source language, to realize the goals of instructions.

Therefore, the so-called "equivalence" in such circumstances should not be understood as literal equivalence. In translation, the translator must remember that the translation is used to serve readers. The translator should pay special attentions to help readers understand the meanings and methods as well as other facts in relation to TCM. This requires that the translator take flexible actions to revivify and represent the themes and ideas of TCM in English language.

### **REQUIREMENTS ON TRANSLATORS**

A translator must firstly be very familiar with the source language to accurately tell the meaning and feelings of a word in various context; secondly, the translator must be proficient in the target language; thirdly, he/she should understand the style and category of the translation and should have some studies on the subject; and finally, the translator should have abundant imagination and literature capability, to think and cope with words from views of the original author. Translators of TCM should have special qualifications: for example, the translator should have certain professional qualities, political conscience and professional ethics, to represent the theories and in-depth meanings in TCM on as-in basis; he/she should master both source and target languages and have sturdy literature capacity and understanding of social culture in the two language background; he/she should have in-depth understanding of ancient expression and medical terms in TCM and have some knowledge of the ancient Chinese philosophy and literature; and he/she should have certain basic knowledge of TCM, clinical experiences as well as theories and application of western medicine. The translation should be fluent, professional, accurate and in-depth and can perfectly represent the source language.

### **UNDERSTAND NEEDS OF READERS**

Nida believed, "dynamic equivalence requires appropriate adjustment to the translation, to meet needs of various readers." That is to say, the translator should make in-depth adjustment to the words and theories to meet needs of readers. In this paper, we can take the translations of Inner Canon of Huangdi as an example. The English translation and Chinese reference in different versions reflected the features, so that the theories of TCM can be well presented and the difficulty and emphasis of the translation can be adjusted on basis of the reader group. There are a number of translation versions of Inner Canon of Huangdi, and it is just the serious, realistic and responsible attitudes of translators that produce good influence on the promotion and development of TCM.

Nida's theory falls in three stages: descriptive linguistics, communication theory and social semiotics. The second stage, namely communication theory, requires that the translator must consider the needs and feeling of readers. With spreading and practices of TCM, there will be more and more translation works, then it will be a task for translators to work out suitable versions to various reader groups. TCM translation is a part of translation of medical science, so in the translation

process, the first thing is to specify information, which is to say, readers can clearly understand the information conveyed in the article. Then it can realize the final goal of conveying the essence of TCM in English language by use of proper words and by borrowing medical terms in western medicine. In such a way, it promotes the transmission and application of TCM and bring it further.

## TREATMENT TO TRADITIONAL CULTURE

### (1) Treatment to Traditional Culture in TCM Translation by Social Semiotics

In the preceding sections, we mentioned the three stages of Nida's theory. The stage of social semiotics has guiding significance on treatment to traditional Chinese culture in TCM translation. Social semiotics requires attentions be paid to the important roles of social culture in translation. The translator should convey the social culture behind the words and sentences. In translation practices of TCM, we often use three specific methods: transliterating, paraphrasing and their combination.

### (2) Treatment to Traditional Culture in TCM Translation by Domesticating Method

Nida believed that when the translator encountered information with respect to the cultural background in the source language, he/she should make longer description in the translation than in the source language. That is because in different language environment, providing longer description helps readers understand the translation by embodying the traditional culture underlying the source text in words, so that readers can better understand the underlying culture of TCM. This opinion is totally agreed to by some Chinese scholars. In the translation of words or sentences concerning the Chinese culture or allusion, the translator should make additional explanation or provide the source and information of such allusion.

## CONCLUSION

Nida's theory is playing significant roles in TCM translation and is of guiding significance to medical translation. Nida's theory of equivalence has important influences on the entire translation process of TCM from words and terms to application in various disciplines and from qualities of translators to reactions and needs of readers. Nida's theory represents the traditional and mysterious medicine science of TCM in English language, so it has great significance to both promotion of TCM and communication between Chinese and western medicine. But no matter how many advantages there are in Nida's theory, we cannot follow blindly but should use it in a dialectical manner to combine it with our translation practice.

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