



Rewriting in Howard Goldblatt's English Version of *Frog* from the Theory of Dynamic Equivalence

Shuohang Zhang

School of Humanities and Social Sciences, Xi'an Jiaotong-Liverpool University, Suzhou
215123, China

Shuohang.Zhang23@student.xjtlu.edu.cn

Abstract. Nowadays, the rewriting phenomena in the *Frog* English version, translated by Howard Goldblatt, have received extensive attention from the academic community. However, there still remain some drawbacks in response to the question 'Why Goldblatt's rewriting has been successfully promoted the *Frog* English version adopted by western readers?'. This essay will adopt the dynamic equivalence of Eugen Nida to analyze the rewriting phenomena in Goldblatt's version from four aspects: lexical, grammatical, textual, and stylistic. Through the analysis, this essay concluded that the reason why Goldblatt's translation can be accepted by Western readers successfully is that he consistently applies dynamic equivalence as a principle to convey the same reading experience to the target text readers. According to it, this essay suggests that during translating relevant texts, the translators should work by dynamic equivalence to deliver the same reading experience in their translation. So that their translation can be adopted by target text readers successfully.

Keywords: Goldblatt, Rewriting, Dynamic Equivalence, *Frog*

1 Introduction

In 2012, Chinese writer Mo Yan received the Nobel Prize in Literature for the novel *Frog*. Such an event creates new opportunities for Chinese literature to take on the world. Expand the influence of Chinese literary works and the Chinese culture behind these works. An important reason why Mo Yan was able to win the Nobel Prize in Literature for his novel *Frog* is the high-quality translation from Howard Goldblatt. To achieve high-level translation, Goldblatt will adopt a strategy named 're-writing' during the translation process. Such a strategy is one of the strategies of domestication. It adjusts the content that does not conform and is not suitable for the content that targets the readers and fits the cultural context. So that the translation can achieve the requirements and expectations of target text readers. The rewriting strategy that was employed by Goldblatt in the *Frog* English version has triggered a discussion in the field of translation. Scholars such as Hou Xuechang hold the view that the rewriting of Goldblatt is a balance between faithfulness and readability. While scholars like Shen Jiahao and Liu Yunmeng argued that such rewriting is not merely a linguistic transformation, instead, it is a production of the translator himself and external factors.

Although the above research can assist subsequent scholars to have a deeper perception of Goldblatt's rewriting in *Frog*, none of the scholars and references answer the question 'Why Goldblatt's rewriting has been successfully promoted the *Frog* English version adopted by western readers?'.

According to the above research issue, this essay will adopt a research method that combines theory with text: By building a dynamic equivalence theory structure, an in-depth analysis of the rewriting cases in the *Frog* English version will be conducted from four aspects: lexical, grammatical, textual, and stylistic. After that, this essay will answer the reasons for Goldblatt's rewriting in the *Frog* English version. The combination of dynamic equivalence and classic rewriting examples in this work's English translation will assist other scholars in having a clear comprehension of this translation strategy. So that they can select appropriate translation methods during translating Chinese literary works, promote these works to be accepted by more and more overseas readers, and push Chinese culture further into the world.

2 Textual Analysis

The dynamic equivalence translation theory was published by the renowned American linguist Eugene Nida. Such a theory emphasizes that the translation's aim is not strictly adhering to the form; instead, it should arouse the same reaction in target text readers as the source readers [1]. The theory is divided into four dimensions: lexical, grammatical, textual, and stylistic. These perspectives form the pivotal structure of a text, even a whole literary work. Also, they are the analytical aspects for the rewriting in the *Frog* English version. By leveraging these four dimensions, this essay can explore the reasons for Goldblatt's rewriting success and then answer the research question: 'Why Goldblatt's rewriting has been successfully promoted the *Frog* English version adopted by western readers?'.

2.1 Lexical Equivalence

In *Frog*, there are numerous words and expressions of daily life and local customs in rural areas of China. These words contain Chinese cultural characteristics and form the narrative foundation of this novel. For Western readers, due to the lack of Chinese culture, especially the deep understanding of Chinese rural areas, it is very difficult for them to comprehend the real meaning and emotion that these words are intended to convey. As a result, the translator was required to show these meanings by using familiar expressions in the target language so that the distance between translation and the target text readers can be shortened [2]. During the translation of this Chinese literary novel, for some culturally loaded works that related to Chinese rural areas, like daily expressions and local customs terms, Goldblatt did not adopt a foreignization strategy. Instead, he rewrote them by adjusting the cultural terms in the source language in order to ensure target text readers can understand them easily [3]. With the guidance of familiar cultural concepts, Western readers can comprehend the real meaning and emotion naturally. Also, they can gain the same reading experience and reaction as Chinese readers. Based on that, such translation achieves dynamic equivalence and

promotes translation adapted by western readers successfully at the lexical level. For instance,

Source Text (ST): 疯骡起初还尥蹶子，但一会功夫便浑身颤抖，前腿跪在地上，脑袋低垂，嘴巴啃着泥土，撅着屁股承揍 [4].

Target Text (TT): The mule reacted by kicking out, but then began to quake as its legs buckled and its head hit the ground, mouth in the dirt, rump raised ready for another hit [5].

In this sentence, the word that rewrote by Goldblatt was '尥蹶子'. The original meaning of this Chinese term is a description of an animal like a mule or horse, jumping up and kicking backward with its hind legs. Meanwhile, in Chinese rural areas, people usually use this word to condemn people who are irresponsible. In the original text, this word was a verb, which shows the movement of the mule. During translating this word, Goldblatt based on the needs of readers, exercises the translator's subjectivity and combines the meaning and the context to select appropriate rewriting [6]. Goldblatt first judged the meaning of the word by combining the content and context of the text: he was trying to figure out whether the true meaning of this word referred to the state of a mule, horse or other animals kicking backward or was a condemnation of some irresponsible people. After identifying the meaning of this word in the context of the text was describing the rebellious state of a mule that was frightened and alarmed after being whipped by its owner, Goldblatt interpreted this word at a cognitive level and built the image that this word shows to readers: The mule kicked backward, resisting its master.

Then, Goldblatt adopted a rewriting translation approach, after achieving the explanation and interpretation of this word. He remained the core action while omitting the specific details and formed the target text 'Reacted by kicking out'. Such handling enables his translation to make the balance between cultural broadcast and readability come true [7]. This translation delivered a reading experience to target text readers accurately and also lowered the level of comprehension difficulty. It enables English readers to build the same reading image in their minds as the Chinese readers when reading this word. Ensure they gain the same reading reaction so that they can know relevant plots further, and this factor promotes target text readers' acceptance of the *Frog* English version. While handling the culturally loaded words related to folk customs, Goldblatt also used a similar translation strategy with the daily expressions. He also interpreted the pivotal meaning of these words at the cognitive level and built relevant reading experience and images about these words. Finally, he transferred these folk custom terms into similar expressions in the target culture to convey the same reading experience as the Chinese. This ensures the fluency, fidelity of reading experience, and promotes the translation accepted by Western readers more easily.

2.2 Syntactic Equivalence

To promote the target text, readers can accept *Frog* better. In the translation process, Goldblatt also rewrote some sentences. For instance, he adjusted the arrangement order of sentence components. Such sentence rewriting conveys the meaning of culturally loaded words accurately and suits the target text readers' reading habits. So that the entire translation plot can develop fluency, and this syntactic equivalence makes

English readers gain the same reading experience as the Chinese readers. It promotes the adoption of the target text readers to this rewritten literary work. Take the example of the sentence:

ST: 母亲念叨: 这个袁腮, 说是为你挑了个黄道吉日, 看看, 都快水漫金山了 [4].

TT: Yuan Sai said he'd picked a fine, auspicious day for you to get married, Mother complained, but what we got was flooded streets [5].

The grammatical structure of this English sentence is different with the Chinese syntax. In the translating progress, Goldblatt rewriting this sentence and adjusted the component order in this sentence: In Chinese sentence, the author Mo Yan put the subject '母亲' at the beginning of this sentence, after the subject is the verb '念叨' and then is the content that the mother keeps talking about, which is also the key point of the entire Chinese sentence. Such sentence structure suits the reading habit of Chinese readers while it does not conform to the reading habit of English readers who prefer to directly read the key information. Therefore, in the rewriting process of this sentence, Goldblatt considered English readers' reading habit, made sure that the target text can deliver the reading experience faithfulness and then enable the target text readers have the same reading reaction with Chinese readers: He ignored the limitation of grammatical structure, and judging the core function of this sentence is not merely to make a simple statement, but to convey and express the mother's complaint and sense of loss. Therewith, he put the translation of this sentence's crucial information '这个袁腮, 说是为你挑了个黄道吉日' at the beginning of this sentence to convey and emphasize the pivotal content and induce the reading image.

After translating the important content, Goldblatt placed the person who conveys this key information, that is, the protagonist's mother, at the end of the key content. Finally, when dealing with the last message part '看看, 都快水漫金山了', the translator used an adversative word 'But' to show the hidden emotions of the mother, who was disappointed by Yuan Sai's unreliable behavior, are clearly and explicitly presented to the English readers in the original Chinese text. The reason why Goldblatt selected this translation strategy is that there are significant differences between Chinese grammatical structure and English syntax: Chinese often consists of short and flowing sentences, while English emphasizes complete syntax and logical coherence [8]. This syntax difference of Chinese forces readers to understand the meaning and emotion behind this language, and it brings a reading barrier to English readers. To achieve the fidelity of delivering the reading experience, particularly the reading experience behind the language, Goldblatt, based on a strong comprehension of the source text, used the word 'But' to deliver the mother's disappointment about Yuan Sai to English readers. This translation approach enables English readers to gain the same reading experience as Chinese readers, and it strengthens the visual effect of the scenes in the original text, creating a panoramic and non-distanced aesthetic experience for the readers of the target language [9]. This promotes the target text readers' reading experience of the Frog English version and leads to the adaptation of this translation ultimately.

2.3 Textual Equivalence

Apart from the rewriting at the lexical and syntax level that helps the target text readers to accept the *Frog* English version successfully, Goldblatt also rewrote this literary work at the textual level to meet the requirements of target text readers. In the *Frog* English version, Goldblatt add the list of character relationships, to list the major characters that in this novel and introduce the identity, information of the character and the relationship between this character and other characters.

However, in the Chinese version, there was no character relationships list. Such rewriting is based on the reading habit of English readers that usually will read the first page of the book to determine whether it is worth of reading. Due to this reading habit, Goldblatt rewrote the textual part in the translating progress. He listed the major characters' information and their relationships, formed a 'characters list' and put it on the first page of this novel to stimulate the readers' reading interest. So that they can accept the translation successfully. Meanwhile, this character list can help readers to sort out the main character's relationships and clarify the relevant development threads, make sure the English readers can focus on the major plot, theme and emotion of the literary work. Such rewriting from the textual level ensures the readability of the text, enables the English readers can generate the same reading reaction as Chinese readers and adopt this English translation.

2.4 Stylistic Equivalence

The root reason for Goldblatt's *Frog* English version can be accepted by western readers successfully is because Goldblatt rewrote the entire literary form of the text. From the perspective of literary form, *Frog* is a literary work that intervene history and political. It based on the story of the protagonist's aunt, reflect the historical progress that China implemented the family planning policy to control the rapid growth of the population. This historical progress involving a large amount of policy formulation and political background which makes the entire novel full of Chinese ideology. However, this Chinese ideology has difference with western ideology, some of them may have conflict with each other

Therefore, when translating between the two distinct cultures of China and the Western world, the pivotal question for Goldblatt to consider is how the original Chinese text can be translated into the target text and style in the best way to conform to the ideology of Western society and be accepted by Western readers [10]. As a result, based on this stylistic situation, and the acceptance level of western readers, Goldblatt rewrote the style of this literary in the translation process to minimize the interruption of ideology to the western readers, highlight the literary qualities of the original work, and deliver the reading experience of *Frog* to target readers' faithfulness. So that Western readers can avoid the influence of ideology and generate the same reading reaction as Chinese readers. Due to the rewriting of Goldblatt at the style level, the ideological sensitivity can be lower than the original text, so that the Western reader can accept this translation.

3 Conclusion

In conclusion, this essay combined Nida's dynamic equivalence theory and analyzed the classical rewriting in the text from lexical, grammatical, textual, and stylistic equivalence. Through this analysis, this essay considers that the reason for Goldblatt's Frog English version can be accepted by Western readers is that he stands with the Western readers and delivers the same reading experience and reaction as Chinese readers based on dynamic equivalence theory. From the above analyze and conclusion, the essay suggest that translator should base on dynamic equivalence in the rewriting progress and also seek the balance between source text and target text. So that the translation can ensure high quality and be accepted by western readers.

References

1. Ursa, A. I.: American Movie Title Translation and Functional Equivalence: A Romanian-French Comparison. *Incursiuni În Imaginar* **16**(2), 224-242 (2025)
2. Jin, J. Y., You, W. Y.: A study on the Translation style of Goldblatt's English version of the Liquor country. *Journal of Hubei University of Technology* **40**(3), 74-79 (2025)
3. Nisrina, A. S., Yuliasri, I.: Translation Ideology in the Indonesian-English Translation of Culture-Bound Words in Okky Madasari's Novel Entrok. *IDEAS: Journal on English Language Teaching and Learning, Linguistics and Literature* **13**(2), 4600-4610 (2025)
4. Mo, Y.: *Frog*. Beijing: People's Literature Publishing House (2015)
5. Mo, Y.: *Frog*. In: Goldblatt, H. (Ed.) Penguin Group: Hamish Hamilton (n.d.) (2014)
6. Yan, S., Dan Dan, W.: The Analysis of the Translation Model of Chinese literary works from the perspective of Transliteration Theory-Taking the English version of 'Deadly Fatigue' By Howard Goldblatt. *English Square* (11), 42-45 (2025)
7. Cui, Y. J.: The exercise of the translator's subjectivity from the perspective of ecological translation studies: Taking the English translation of Goldblatt's Red Sorghum as an example. *Modern English* (13), 109-111 (2025)
8. Wei, S.: A study of Goldblatt's translation from the perspective of the translator's subjectivity. *Journal of Mudanjiang Education College* (2), 13-15 (2025)
9. Pan, L. L.: Re-discovery, re-understanding and rebirth: Howard Goldblatt's re-translation of the Field of Life and Death and the reconstruction of aesthetic consciousness. *Journal of Dalian University* **47**(1), 67-74 (2026)
10. Ting, Z.: Howard's English Version of The Garlic Ballads from the Perspective of Ideology. *Journal of Heze University* (6), 98-101 (2015)

Open Access This chapter is licensed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial 4.0 International License (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc/4.0/>), which permits any noncommercial use, sharing, adaptation, distribution and reproduction in any medium or format, as long as you give appropriate credit to the original author(s) and the source, provide a link to the Creative Commons license and indicate if changes were made.

The images or other third party material in this chapter are included in the chapter's Creative Commons license, unless indicated otherwise in a credit line to the material. If material is not included in the chapter's Creative Commons license and your intended use is not permitted by statutory regulation or exceeds the permitted use, you will need to obtain permission directly from the copyright holder.

