



Zero Translation of “Geili” from the Perspective of Nida’s Equivalence Theory

Zéro Traduction de “Geili” de la Perspective de Théorie d’Equivalence de Nida

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Abstract

Nowadays “geili” is one of the most popular word in China. In this paper, we use Nida's equivalence theory to explain the rationality and feasibility of the zero translation of the hot word “geili”. We think that “geili” can not only be translated into “gelivable” (as an adjective) but also be translated into “gelie” or “gely” (as a verb or an interjection). In addition, we try to based on Nida’s equivalence theory to provide evidence for it to be a standard English word.

Key words: Equivalent theory; “Geili”; Zero translation

Résumé

La théorie d'équivalence du Nida d'Eugene réclame “la Traduction consiste dans reproduire dans la langue de récepteur l'équivalent naturel le plus proche du message de source-langue, premier sur le plan du sens et deuxièmement sur le plan du style”. Nous pensons que “geili” peut être traduit non seulement dans “gelivable” (aussi un adjectif) mais est aussi traduit dans “gelie” ou “gely” (qu'un verbe ou une interjection). Par ailleurs, nous essayons d'expliquer la rationalité et la possibilité de la zéro traduction de “geili” fondé sur la théorie d'équivalence de Nida pour fournir de la preuve pour cet être un mot anglais standard.

Mots-clés: La théorie équivalente; Geili; Zéro traduction

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INTRODUCTION

The word Chinese people used most frequently since 2010 was “Geili” (literally it means “giving power or strength”). It was listed in 2010 Top New Words and was also included in “Chinese Language Situation Report” after being examined by experts from National Monitoring and Research Center of Language Resources. “Geili” became very popular during the 2010 Word Cup, for it greatly helped the audience to express their inner feelings. Nowadays it is widely used in online forums, games, and daily talks. Some netizens even translate it into the English word “gelivable”. “Geili” was granted the “official seal of approval” by appearing in the headline of *The People’s Daily* – the official paper of the Communist Party on November 10, 2010. Meanwhile, “geili” also attracted the attention of foreign media such as the *New York Times* and the *Urban Dictionary*.

The objective of this paper is to prove the rationality and feasibility of the zero translation of “geili” based on Nida’s equivalence theory to provide evidence for it to be a standard English word.

1. THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

This paper is based on two theories: Nida’s quivalence theory and zero translation. In the following part, we will introduce the two theories briefly.

1.1 Equivalence Theory

Eugene A. Nida (born November 11, 1914) is a pioneer in the fields of translation theory, and the developer of the equivalence theory. Nida argued that there are two

different types of equivalence, namely formal equivalence and dynamic equivalence (also known as functional equivalence). Formal correspondence “focuses attention on the message itself, in both form and content”, unlike dynamic equivalence which is based upon “the principle of equivalent effect” (Nida, 1964: 159). “Dynamic equivalence is therefore to be defined in terms of the degree to which the receptors of the message in the receptor language respond to it in substantially the same manner as the receptors in the source language” (Nida & Taber, 1982: 24). Dynamic equivalence attempts to convey the thought expressed in a source text (if necessary, at the expense of literalness, original word order, the source text’s grammatical voice, etc.), while formal equivalence attempts to render the text word-for-word (if necessary, at the expense of natural expression in the target language) (http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Dynamic_and_formal_equivalence). They argue “Frequently, the form of the original text is changed; but as long as the change follows the rules of back transformation in the source language, of contextual consistency in the transfer, and of transformation in the receptor language, the message is preserved and the translation is faithful” (Nida & Taber, 1982: 200). Obviously, Nida is in favour of the application of dynamic equivalence, as a more effective translation procedure.

Dynamic equivalence is considered as the most precise and scientific definition of translation. In fact, it sets the following three rules: (1) Translation must be the correct communication of information; (2) Translation must reproduce the style of the original text; (3) Translation must be natural. One can easily see that the three rules above cover totally the nature of translation.

1.2 Zero Translation

Professor Qiu Maoru stated in “Translatability and Zero Translation”, which was published in the *Chinese Translators Journal* in 2001, that “the concept of ‘zero translation’ is introduced both as a translation strategy for overcoming the unbridgeable differences between languages, and as a means of safeguarding the general validity of translatability as the theoretical cornerstone of translation” (Qiu Mao-ru, 2001: 24). The concept “zero translation” coined by Qiu Maoru who defines such kind of translation phenomenon as: “The so-called “zero translation” is not to use the ready-made words in the target language. Here, it includes two implications: (1) SL words are not translated into TL words purposely; (2) The ready-made words in TL are not employed to translate the SL words.” (Qiu Mao-ru, 2001: 26) According to Qiu, zero translation includes three kinds: they are “omission”, “transliteration” and “transposition”.

(i) Omission is employed to deal with the grammatical differences of two languages in translation in order to realize the grammatical transformation. It is used to adjust the sentence structure. Omission can be realized at any level of language;

(ii) Transliteration is employed to translate words instead of sentences. It has been mostly used to deal with loanwords since the beginning of the translation activities.

(iii) Transposition, as a translation procedure, often refers to transferring strategy in coping with cultural differences (Jean Delise, etl, 2004: 272).

Now take the translation of “zheteng” for example, which was once employed by President Hu Jintao. In the conference held on December 18 to commemorate the 30th anniversary of the reform and opening-up policy, President Hu said that, “As long as we don’t waver, don’t slack off and don’t ‘zheteng’ (in Chinese, get sidetracked), and as long as we firmly push forward reform and opening-up... we are certain to be able to successfully realize this grand blueprint and achieve the goals we are striving for.” (<http://english.peopledaily.com.cn/90001/90782/90873/6570469.html>) Here “zheteng” is the typical zero translation.

2. TRANSLATION OF “GEILI”

Language is always developing and it needs to be updated to absorb folk wisdom. It is cyber words that make language lively. “Geili” is such a word and is widely used on the Internet and in people’s daily lives. Besides, many people try to translate it into English. To tell whether the translation is proper, it is better to know the Chinese meaning of “geili”. The following are the explanations given by the network class designed by the Computer and Information Management Center at Tsinghua University (Qian Shuxin, 2011: 149):

Geili (给力gěi lì):

- ① adj. helpful, useful; cool, awesome.
- ② int. cool, great.
- ③ verb. give power or strength.

In addition, there is a question about “geili” in the Great 2010 Quiz published in the *Global Times* (http://special.globaltimes.cn/2011-04/607669_4.html). The Internet buzzword geili (pronounced “gay lee”) received the official seal of approval with an extremely unexpected appearance in the official newspaper of the Communist Party of China. On November 10, geili was featured as “Jiangsu Province Geili a Strong Cultural Province” in a headline on the front page of the *People’s Daily*.

What is the literal meaning of geili?

- A. Giving power
- B. Becoming and very welcoming
- C. Gay
- D. Very far from finishing the job

The answer to the question is A.

The Beijing New Channel School translates “geili” into “brilliant /awesome” (<http://www.hudong.com/wiki/%E7%BB%99%E5%8A%9B#5>), which expresses the meaning of “geili” to some extent, but fails to catch the Chinese flavor. Therefore, it cannot be considered as a perfect translation.

According to Jin Huikang, something unique with the Chinese characteristic should be transliterated based on its pinyin to fully preserve the characteristics of traditional Chinese culture and the styles of the Chinese language (Jin Huikang, 2003: 66). Now let's take the translation of "geili" in the *New York Times* for example.

"Geili" is created from two Chinese characters "gei" and "li." Literally, it means "giving power," but is now widely accepted as an adjective describing something that's "cool."

A test of a Chinese jargon word's trendiness is if users translate it into a foreign language, according to its pronunciation. "Geili" has been transformed into the English-sounding "gelivable," and "ungelivable," and the French "très guéilile." (<http://schott.blogs.nytimes.com/2010/11/18/geili/>)

Here "geili" is translated into "gelivable", while its antonym "bugeili" is translated into "ungelivable". "Geilivable", combining the pinyin geili (giving strength) with the English suffix for adjectives, literally means "giving power" or "cool". Different suffixes and prefixes were then added to the word. "Hengeilivable" means "very cool", and "ungeilivable" means "dull, not cool at all". Though it looks like an English word, it follows the rules of English word formation. In addition, it reflects the Chinese characteristics. In this sense, it is zero translation to translate "geili" into "gelivable". Meanwhile, it conforms to Nida's translation theory of formal equivalence.

David Tool, a professor with the Beijing International Studies University, said it's very interesting to combine Chinese with English to create new words, "English is no longer mysterious to the Chinese people. They can use the language in a flexible way according to their own experiences." (<http://english.cntv.cn/20101227/104477.shtml>).

As it is supposed to be an adjective rather than a verb or an interjection, "geilivable" can not fully replace "geili". Therefore, we suggest translating "geili" into "gelie" or "gely" when it is used as a verb or an interjection, which is not only based on the Chinese pinyin "geili" but also looks like an English word.

Interestingly, once they are coined, "gelivable" and "ungelivable" are included in the *Urban Dictionary*. It explains them as follows:

Gelivable: A Chinglish word, be able to excite, make someone feel cheerful. ge- in Chinese means give, li-means power, strength or energy.

Ungelivable: Coined by the Chinese internet users recently to describe the feeling that something is not as good as expected and not giving you the "YES! THIS IS IT!" moment. (<http://www.urbandictionary.com/define.php?term=gelivable>)

It can be concluded that "gelivable" is accepted by English speakers, and the receptors of the message in the receptor language respond to it in substantially the same

manner as the receptors in the source language. Therefore, it conforms to Nida's translation theory of dynamic equivalence.

Through the analysis above, the zero translation of "geili" conforms to Nida's equivalence translation theory – "Translating consists in reproducing in the receptor language the closest natural equivalent of the source-language message, first in terms of meaning and secondly in terms of style" (Nida Taber, 1982: 12).

CONCLUSION

Although "Geili" (给力) is translated into "gelivable" ("gelie" or "gely") based on its pinyin, all the meanings of this word can be well expressed. This is the amount of meanings that the transliteration can cover (Yue Feng, 2000: 53). As "geili" becomes more popular in China, "gelivable" and "gelie" (gely) will enter the English language, like gongfu, taijiquan, kowtow, coolie, Fuwa, jiyayou, long time no see, etc.

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