

## Book Review: Translating As A Purposeful Activity—Functionalist Approaches Explained [1997] Christiane Nord (Author)

An Excellent Work Worth Reading in Thought, Expression, and Logic

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**摘要：**Christiane Nord 写的 *Translating as a Purposeful Activity---Functionalist Approaches Explained* (1997) 是一本关于德国功能翻译流派及理论的优秀书籍，不论是从著书思想上、语言表达上、还是行文逻辑上都是值得研究的一部关于功能理论的著作。本文将从著书思想上、语言表达上、以及行文逻辑这三方面进行本书的宣介和评价，希望能对后续研究产生借鉴意义。

**关键词：**书评；翻译；功能翻译理论；

**Abstract:** *Translating as a Purposeful Activity--- Functionalist Approached Explained* (1997) by Christiane Nord is an excellent book on the German school and functional translation theory. This is a functional theoretical work that is worth studying in terms of writing ideas, language expression, and writing logic. This paper will publicize and evaluate this book from the three aspects of writing thought, language expression, and writing logic, in the hope that it will provide a reference for subsequent studies.

**Key words:** Book review; Translation; Functional translation theory;

## I. Introduction

*Translating as a Purposeful Activity-- Functional Approach Explained* is a classic piece of paper (Nord 1997). This book is an analysis and addition to the theory of translation. Translation is accompanied by cross-language and cultural communication. There is a big challenge, namely how to translate the original well, which plagues translators. Faced with a wide variety of texts, translators wish to find the principles, theories and paths of translation that suit them from different perspectives. This book provides readers with the methodology and guidance of the German functional School, which is popularly commended by translation researchers all over the world (Wu and Tian 67).

When it comes to the German functional translation school, Christiane Nord is recognized as an important figure in this school. She was born in 1943 in her hometown of Eberswalde, Germany. At the University of Heidelberg, she studied Spanish, English and romantic literature, earning her bachelor's and doctorate degrees in 1967 and 1983, respectively. In 1993 she obtained a certificate in Applied Translation Studies and Translation Teaching from the University of Vienna. She has also taught at many universities, such as the University of Heidelberg (1967-1994), the University of Vienna (1991-1992), and the University of Hildesheim (1994-1996). The Dean of the School of Translation and Professional Communication at the University of Applied Sciences in Magdeburg, Germany, was her position from 1996 to 1998. From 1998 to 2000 she served as Vice President. Nord is a translator, teacher, and translation researcher. She has published more than 80 papers on translation teaching and research, mainly covering text analysis, translator training, translation function classification, etc. (Wu and Tian 67).

This book has been published many times by the publishing house, and each revision has brought readers a better reading experience and inspired the thoughts of translation researchers. The book was first published in 1997 by St. Jerome's Press. It was republished by Routledge, Oxfordshire, New York, in 2014 after a gap of seven years, and was first published in hardback in 2015.

Nord and the book had a profound impact on the field of translation. For example, Zhang Meifang (2003) argues that this book has high reference value and learning value for translation learners, but some theories in the book still have shortcomings. For example, in terms of teleology, her main argument is that 'the purpose of translation determines the process of translation' or that 'the purpose justifies the means of translation'. But the "purpose" does not give a clear scope (Wu and Tian 67). Wang Ruru (2010) mainly reviews the goal-directed behavior - analysis theory of functional translation. In addition, the book addresses his views on functionalist theory in the teaching of translation, pointing out that functionalist theory has a huge practical and structural function in the teaching of translation, and to some extent acknowledging the outstanding contribution of this book. Li Quandong (2012) also introduced and evaluated this book. His view that function+loyalty is an ethic of translation rather than a principle does support Nord's proposal of the function+loyalty principle as a strong complement to the practicality and handle ability of Skopos theory.

There are altogether 8 aspects in this book, which is comprehensive and innovative. Although there are some flaws in this book, it cannot be denied that Nord has an excellent performance in thought, language and logic when writing this book. I started with some translators and their theories, and finally put forward some of

my own views.

## **II. Deep thoughts**

At the height of Nord's thought, this book is an excellent guide to translation theory. This book can show that Nord has a thorough grasp of all aspects of translation, especially the translation theories and thoughts of the German functional school. There are two specific reasons.

This book shows the comprehensiveness of Nord's thinking. It not only summarizes the views of the early functional school from the historical dimension, but also reviews the thoughts and theories of famous translators, and expounds the application of relevant theories in various aspects.

This will facilitate the reader's comprehensive knowledge and insight because of the comprehensive presentation of translation theories in this book. It is clear that this book reflects the author's approach to the functionalist school and view of translation. It systematically sorts out the principles and methods of functional translation through a large number of examples. At the same time, it also introduces the relevant translation theories and translation terms. An overview of the early history, and in particular of early translation thought, is given first. Some representative figures and ideas are cited, such as Katharina Rice and the functional scope of translation criticism, Hans Vermeer's teleology and extrapolation, and Husta Holtz-Mantari's theory of the act of translation in translation training. She then discusses the specifics of translation and behaviour theory and the basic concepts of purposive theory. She argues that translation is an interaction between people, and moreover it should be a purposeful cross-cultural interaction. Next, she also focused on explaining functionalism in translation training and the application of functionalism in literary translation and interpretation. Finally, the author makes a reasonable criticism on the current situation of translation in this aspect, and looks forward to the future of "function plus loyalty".

In addition, the book reflects the critical nature of Nord's thinking. For example, in the last part of the book, when the theoretical basis of functional theory and the applicability of teleology are criticized and questioned, Nord introduced the principle of function + loyalty, improving on the deficiencies of functional theory and providing an outlook on it (Li 144). It can be seen that she has her own thinking and understanding of the theory of functional teleology, moderately critically accepting and developing the theories of previous scholars, rather than accepting them all unchangeable. Functionalism has been criticized and questioned mainly for its theoretical basis and applicability to teleology (Li 144). Nord summarizes this in ten terms :1) Not all actions have intent; 2) Translation does not always have a purpose; 3) Functional theory goes beyond the limitation of translation itself; 4) Teleology is not original; 5) Functional theory is not based on empirical conclusions; 6) Functional theory leads to the emergence of mercenary translators; 7) Functional theory does not respect the original text; 8) Functional theory does not respect the original author; 9) Functional theory does not apply to literary translation; 10) Functional Translation theory is characterized by cultural relativity (Nord, *Doing Something in Translation: A Theoretical interpretation of Functional Translation* 146-161).

### III. Readability of expression

As a famous translator, Nord has solid language skills, so she writes this book with fluency. For example, in the collocation of long and short sentences, Flexibility and the skill in fact-based expression, the rhetorical use, the humour in language and other aspects of the grasp of the basic blue fire, the specific analysis is reflected in the following examples.

(1)The theorists of equivalence tend to accept non-literal translation procedures more readily in the translation of pragmatic texts (instructions for use, advertisements) than in literary translation. Different or even contradictory standards for the selection of transfer procedures are thus set up for different genres or text-types. This makes the equivalence approach rather confusing. (Nord, *'Translating as a Purposeful Activity. Functionalist Approaches Explained'* 1997:8)

This example can be seen in Nord's rational use of long and short sentence strategy in writing this book. For example, the above paragraph is the combination of long and short sentences, which further explains the "pragmatic texts" by using parentheses. In this way, the use of equivalence theory can be fully and appropriately explained, so as to avoid the difficulty of understanding by readers because they are all long sentences, or they are all short sentences and feel bored.

(2)The family is sitting at the breakfast table. Ben, the two-year-old baby, seems very excited and exclaims, pointing at his father, who is munching his toast: "Dada, mumumum, zzzzzz!" Then the father asks, What's he saying?" Mother: "You've just eaten a fly!" (Nord, *'Translating as a Purposeful Activity. Functionalist Approaches Explained'* 1997: 15)

Humor is also the first characteristic of her book, as the example above shows. For example, in Chapter 2, Nord first uses a series of examples (specifically five examples) to explain the role of intermediaries in the translation process. The first example is a cross-speech situation. The mother's humorous answer brings the reader a sense of relief, and also shows the comprehensive thinking of Nord, that is, she considers not only the general situation, but also the special situation in life. She does it in a humorous way that will impress the reader.

(3)This is why Vermeer calls his theory Skopostheorie, a theory of purposeful action. In the framework of this theory, one of the most important factors determining the purpose of a translation is the addressee, who is the intended receiver or audience of the target text with their culture-specific world-knowledge, their expectations and their communicative needs.

Rhetoric is also present in this book, which is a common device in her writing. For example, in this paragraph, Nord identifies the recipient and the expected audience of the target text as "the addressee". Because the recipient and audience of the target text do have the same role and function as the recipient, this statement is very vivid and easy for readers to understand. Due to the use of similar rhetoric, many professional terms are more vivid and specific, and at the same time, it also adds to the fun of readers.

(4)Reiss excludes these cases from the area of 'translation proper' and suggests they be referred to as 'transfers' (Übertragungen) (1971:105). In such situations the functional perspective takes precedence over the normal standards of equivalence. The translation critic can no longer rely on

features derived from source-text analysis but has to judge whether the target text is functional in terms of the translation context (Nord, *'Translating as a Purposeful Activity. Functionalist Approaches Explained'* 1997: 9).

(5) It goes without saying that all the types of translation mentioned may be justified in particular circumstances (Nord, *'Translating as a Purposeful Activity. Functionalist Approaches Explained'* 1997: 10).

(6) Hans J. Vermeer has gone much further in trying to bridge the gap between theory and practice (Nord, *'Translating as a Purposeful Activity. Functionalist Approaches Explained'* 1997: 10).

Idiomatic character is reflected in the slang and jargon of vocabulary. These segments include some authentic expressions and translated terms. For example, "no longer", "source-text analysis", "in terms of", "It goes without saying that", "to bridge the gap". These representative expressions enable the reader to capture key messages quickly and accurately, which further deepen their comprehension of the Functionalist Theory of Translation.

#### IV. Logical rigor

The author's writing logic is also particularly rigorous. In addition to the profound skills of Nord in language expression, we can also find the logical evidence of this academic leader's meticulous thinking, such as the coherence between sentences, arguments, arguments, interpretation of arguments, and so on. This article is illustrated by a detailed example below.

(7) In the Netherlands, one of the centres of translator training is located at Utrecht University, where we also find a young representative of the third generation of functionalists (Nord, *'Translating as a Purposeful Activity. Functionalist Approaches Explained'* 1997: 133).

(8) Yet there is a moral responsibility not to deceive them (cf. Nord 1991:940) Of course, it may be difficult to know exactly what readers expect of a translation, since this is a field where extensive empirical research remains to be done. For the time being, though, translators must rely on conjectures and on the scarce feedback they get from their clients and readers (Nord, *'Translating as a Purposeful Activity. Functionalist Approaches Explained'* 1997: 125).

Nord's main use of coherence is a few connectives and clauses. As in the example above, she often uses conjunctions and clauses in her writing, such as "where, Yet, Of course, since, though". Of course, she also uses other cohesive words in the book, which has the advantage of making the passage flow more naturally. The logic is also clearer because there are obvious progressive or turning conjunctions to remind the reader at all times.

In terms of arguments, especially the elaboration of the main points, Nord's expression is more clear, novel and persuasive. She draws on Karl Buhler's research ideas and agrees with Rice's text style. In addition, she is committed to teleology and functional theory. The idea of "function plus loyalty" has been suggested before. At that time, she mainly aimed at Hoss-Mantrey's argument on translation. Hawes-mantrey argues that the intrinsic value of a text is entirely subordinate to its purpose, and sees the text as a pure tool for achieving a communicative function. The translator is only responsible for the target context and, furthermore, the target text can be completely independent of the original (Zhang 63).

## V. Conclusion

This paper mainly introduces and evaluates the book from three aspects: the thought of Nord's writing, the details of his language expression, and the logic of his writing. Through this book, the reader can see that her thinking is both comprehensive and critical. The language is fluent and idiomatic. The logic is novel and clear, and it is a valuable translation for readers.

All in all, this book has a certain guiding role for future studies of functionalism in translation schools and theories. After reading this book, I have three feelings, that is, the idea, language and logic of this book are excellent and worth reading. After reading this book, I have been deeply impressed. To be specific, this book has deep thoughts, idiomatic language expression and strict logic. This paper analyzes these three aspects. However, my academic accomplishment is limited and my own knowledge is not comprehensive, so it is inevitable to take partial and complete, and add corrections. I hope it will have some guiding significance for the subsequent related research.

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