

Interlingual Realization: A Systemic Functional Perspective on the *Tao Te Ching* English Translations

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Abstract

This study explores English translations of the *Tao Te Ching* in terms of interlingual realization, a systemic functional perspective on translation involving two sub-processes: de-realization and re-realization. In this model, the translator first de-realizes the source text from source language phonology/graphology to context, finding the intersection of the source language context and the target language context, and then re-realizes it into target text from the target language context to target language phonology/graphology. Two dimensions are to be considered in interlingual realization—stratification and rank. The source text can be re-realized by translation equivalence and translation shift at any stratum or rank of the target language in the target text, where typically translation equivalence at a higher level stratum or rank is valued higher than equivalence at a lower level.

Keywords: realization, translation, the *Tao Te Ching*, stratification, rank

1. Introduction

Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL) is a theory of multiple hierarchical and complementary relations, where realization, instantiation and individuation are theoretical resources of exploring language patterns (Martin & Wang, 2008). Realization is a scale of abstraction, where each stratum gets recorded as another. It consists of two types, namely, realization between strata and realization within stratum. Realization between strata abstracts language into expressive plane and content plane, in which the former includes phonology/graphology, and the latter contains lexicogrammar and discourse semantics. Context is a higher stratum outside language system, consisting of context of situation and context of culture in Hallidayan sense, or register, genre and ideology according to Martin. Lower strata realize higher ones. Realization is a bi-directional dialectical relation (Hasan, 1995): a top-down relation of determination or activating, which is a sort of probabilistic meaning and a bottom-up relation of construal. Stratification of this kind involves metaredundancy: genre is a pattern of register patterns, which are in turn patterns of discourse semantics patterns and so on (Martin, 2009). Realization within stratum is manifested as rank. For example, within the stratum of lexico-grammar, the rank scale is clause, group/phrase, word and morpheme, where higher-ranking units are realized by lower ones (see Figure 1).

Translation studies based on SFL have developed dramatically since the recent thirty or forty years (Li, 2013). Halliday has defined translation as “guided creation of meaning”, regarding translation as a process of seeking equivalence. If meaning is a function in context, then equivalence of meaning is equivalence of function in context (Halliday, 1992, p. 16); he also proposed the systemic functional typology of equivalence according to three vectors of stratification, metafunction and rank, pointing out that different strata, metafunctions and ranks may carry different values in each instance of translation, for example, in the aspects of stratification, context equivalence is valued the most highly (Halliday, 2001). Matthiessen (2001) and Steiner (2001, 2005) involved the hierarchy of instantiation and proposed the instantiation-stratification matrix, regarding translation as the reconstrual of meaning and considering that translation should seek for metafunction and context equivalence.

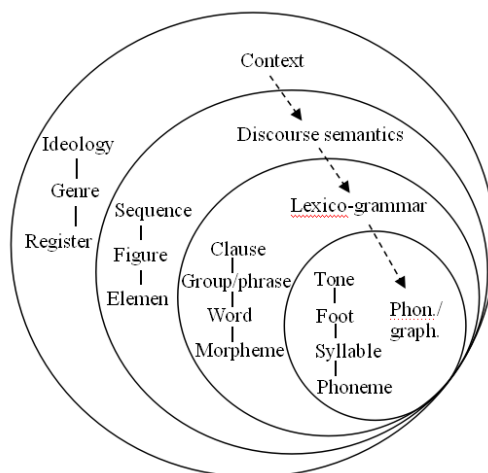


Figure 1. Realization (stratification and rank)

2. Interlingual Realization

Discussing realization in terms of translation necessarily involves bilingual or multilingual exchange, thus we can name it interlingual realization, which consists of two sub-processes: de-realization and re-realization. Specifically, along the realization axis, the translator first departs from source language (SL) phonology/graphology, de-realizing source text (ST) from expressive plane to SL context of culture, finding the intersection of SL context and target language (TL) context, and then re-realizes it into target text (TT), the phonology/graphology stratum of TL.

Translation cannot be located only at one stratum along the hierarchy of stratification—it takes place throughout the hierarchy (Matthiessen, 2001, p. 89). Or rather, we might say that, in most cases, translation takes place within the content system of language, which is above the expression system of phonology (graphology or sign), and within lexicogrammar, within semantics and within context. But there also are circumstances, though rare, that translation may happen within the expression system, say phonological stratum, for example, the translation of poetry. Just as what Catford (1965) discussed, the “phonological translation” and “graphological translation”, and what Matthiessen (2001, p. 89) has added, the translation of sign, or “signal translation”

What we are trying to say is that the nature of translation changes depending on where we locate translation along the hierarchy of stratification. The lower the stratum, the more “literal” it will be, and the higher the stratum, the more “free” it will be, as illustrated in Figure 2.

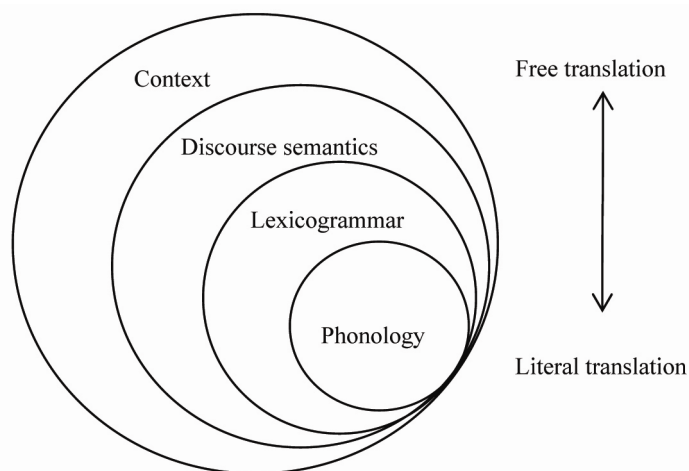


Figure 2. Stratification in relation to “free” and “literal” translation

In SFL, the most evident dimension of language could be considered as its compositional structure, i.e. constituency (Halliday & Matthiessen, 2004, p. 5). That is to say, language is structured in compositional hierarchies, which are called “ranks”, or indeed “rank scales”. Every language features a grammatical rank scale (ibid, p. 9). English, typical for many languages, show four hierarchic constructions including sound (in ordinary speech), verse, writing and grammar. Phonological, graphological and lexico-grammatical constituencies are constituted by a hierarchy of units, also known as ranks. Each compositional layer consists of four different ranks (ibid, p.20):

(1) phonological:

(1a) (sound) tone—foot (rhythm)—syllable—phoneme

(1b) (verse) stanza—line—foot (metric)—syllable

(2) graphological: sentence—sub-sentence—word (written)—letter

(3) lexicogrammatical: clause—phrase/group—word—morpheme

(4) semantic: sequence—figure—element

(5) contextual: ideology—genre—register

Free ←————→ Literal

Concerning the graphological constituency, we can identify a higher unit than sentence, which is “paragraph”. Similarly, within lexicogrammar, a unit above clause may also be discerned, i.e. “clause complex”. Each rank consists of units of the rank below, for example, in phonology (sound), a tone is composed of feet, a foot of syllables, a syllable of phonemes.

In terms of translation, the equivalence at different ranks corresponds to different translation strategies. For example, the higher the rank, the freer the strategies will be, and the low the rank, the more literal it will be. Catford (1965, p. 24-25) acknowledges equivalence at all strata and distinguishes between “rank-bound translation”, where TL equivalents are deliberately at the lowest ranks, i.e. word or morpheme, and “unbounded translation”, in which shifts normally occur up and down the rank. Halliday (2001, p. 16) admits that although equivalence tends to be valued differently according to different strata and ranks, usually more at higher strata and ranks, there may be occasions when equivalence at lower ranks can acquire a higher value.

3. Analysis of the *Tao Te Ching* English Translations

Tao Te Ching, as the most frequently translated Chinese classic only next to the *Bible*, has obtained a widespread and diversified Western audience, appealing to readers on a variety of levels. There are over 130 English translations and re-translations of the *Tao Te Ching* (Xin, 2008, p.17), which are classified according to time into three intensified translation periods: The first period (1868-1905), the second period (1934-1963), and the third period (1972-2004). Below we will use take the *Tao Te Ching* English translation as a case study to illustrate interlingual realization in terms of stratification and rank.

3.1 Stratification

3.1.1 Phonological Stratum

Translation, as noted previously, mostly takes place in the content plane of the hierarchy of stratification, and rarely in the expressive plane. However, our corpus the *Tao Te Ching* is recognized widely as poetry in style, philosophical poetry, to be more specific. Therefore, translation at the phonological stratum is possible. But, even so, it is a possibility at a very low degree, because two languages fairly unlikely to have similar articulation system, especially languages like Chinese and English, unless quoting the pronunciation of the source language (like Ellen Marie Chen’s (1989) translation, quoting very frequently of the pronunciation of Chinese, and examples will be seen below). Hence, what we called the equivalence at the phonological stratum is relative equivalence in terms of rhyme, which is the primary feature of poetry. We selected Ellen Marie Chen’s (1989) translation to show the more exact equivalence, and James Legge’s (1891) translation to show the more relative one, both giving priority to the poetic nature of the text, to analyze translation at the phonological stratum.

Most of the translators have agreed the style of the *Tao Te Ching* as poetry, and some of them even mainly concerned for such style in translation, for example, Guin (1997, p. ix) stated in the her introduction:

The *Tao Te Ching* is partly in prose, partly in verse; but as we define poetry now, not by rhyme and meter but as a patterned intensity of language, the whole thing is poetry. I wanted to catch that poetry, its terse, strange beauty. Most translations have caught meanings in their net, but prosily, letting the beauty slip through. And in poetry, beauty is no ornament; it is the meaning. It is truth. We have that on good authority.

For phonological equivalence at an exact sense, we can see Chapter 1 “故常无欲，以观其妙；常有欲，以观其徼。” in Chen’s (1989) translation, where she quoted pronunciations of some of the key concepts at the end of each line, remaining the original rhyme:

Therefore, always (ch'ang) without desire (wu-yü),
 In order to observe (kuan) the hidden mystery (miao);
 Always (ch'ang) with desire (yu-yü),
 In order to observe the manifestations (chiao).
 Alternate,
 Therefore, by the Everlasting (ch'ang) Non-Being (wu),
 We desire (yü) to observe (kuan) its hidden mystery (miao);
 By the Everlasting (ch'ang) Being (yu),
 We desire (yü) to observe the manifestations (chiao).

For phonological equivalence at a relative sense, we can see, for example, in Chapter 6 “谷神不死，是谓玄牝。”

玄牝之门，是谓天地根。绵绵若存，用之不尽。”, the original rhyme is in the pattern of AABBC. Most of the translations choose to re-realize its meaning instead of its rhyme, for example, Feng & English’s (1972) translation:

The valley spirit never dies;
 It is the woman, primal mother.
 Her gateway is the root of heaven and Earth.
 It is like a veil barely seen.
 Use it; it will never fail.

This might because, on the one hand, that it is difficult to do rhyming, and on the other hand, even harder to preserve its original meaning and at the same time maintaining phonological equivalence. Let’s see James Legge’s translation, which is widely acknowledged as one that is good at rhyming:

The valley spirit dies not, aye the **same**;
 The female mystery thus do we **name**.
 Its gate, from which at first they issued **forth**,
 Is called the root from which grew heaven and **earth**.
 Long and unbroken does its power **remain**,
 Used gently, and without the touch of **pain**.

This translation follows the AABBC pattern of rhyme by same/name, forth/earth, remain/pain, but in order to create such rhyme, Legge is not so faithful in re-realization by adding something that does not exist in the original. For example, “aye the same” “from which at first they issued forth” and “and without the touch of pain”, which all do not exist in the ST. The translation adds more meaning to the original, which is not equivalent in the discourse semantic stratum in a strict sense. Besides, in terms of the lexicogrammatical stratum, it is also

non-equivalent, as the ST uses the word order of “Subject ^ Predicator”, while the TT uses the pattern of emphasis which is “Predicator ^ Subject”, as in “from which grew heaven and earth”. In contrast, let’s see another translation by an anonymous translator, who translates better than Legge, because there are no additional meaning for the purpose of rhyming, and at the same time, kept the original rhyme pattern AABCC:

The Goddess Dale is deathless

The Nature’s access

Whose birth

The root of the heavens and the earth.

Ranges of them in existence

Free to be filled hence

3.1.2 Lexicogrammatical Stratum

There are TTs that are equivalent to ST concerning lexicogrammar (either in terms of lexis or grammar), but shift regarding meaning. First let’s see examples of lexical equivalence. In Chinese idioms, we prefer to use specific number to represent an unspecified large quantity, in the *Tao Te Ching* for example, numbers like “five” “six” “ten thousand” “hundred” have appeared in Chinese concepts like “wu se (五色, five colors literally)” “liu qin (六亲, six relatives literally)” “wan wu (万物, ten thousand things literally)” “bai xing (百姓, hundred families literally)”. Actually, they do not mean specific numbers of five, six, ten thousand or one hundred, but general ones to stand for many. There are two strategies in translating these concepts, one is literal, and the other is free. For example:

Chapter 5: ^{tiān dì bù rén} 天地不仁, ^{yǐ wàn wù wéi chǔ gǒu} 以万物为刍狗; ^{shèng rén bù rén} 圣人不仁, ^{yǐ bǎi xìng wéi chǔ gǒu} 以百姓为刍狗。

Ellen Marie Chen (1989):

Heaven and earth are not humane (jen),

They treat the **ten thousand beings** as straw dogs (ch'u kou).

The sage is not humane (jen),

He treats the **hundred families** as straw dogs (ch'u kou).

Chang Chung-yuan (1975):

Heaven and earth are not benevolent:

They treat **ten thousand things** indifferently.

The wise is not benevolent:

He treats **men** indifferently.

He Guanghu et al. (1985):

Heaven and Earth cannot be called benevolent letting **all things** emerge or perish of themselves.

The sage cannot be called benevolent letting **all people** live or die by themselves

Chapter 12: ^{wù sè lìng rén mù máng} 五色令人目盲; ^{wǔ yīn lìng rén ěr lóng} 五音令人耳聋; ^{wǔ wèi lìng rén kǒu shuāng} 五味令人口爽;

Ellen Marie Chen (1989):

The **five colors** blind a person's eyes;

The **five musical notes** deafen a person's ears;

The **five flavors** ruin a person's taste buds.

Chang Chung-yuan (1975):

Numerous colors make man sightless.

Numerous sounds make man unable to hear.

Numerous tastes make man tasteless.

He Guanghu et al. (1985):

Iridescent colors cause blindness.

Beautiful music causes deafness.

Delicious food causes loss of taste.

Chapter 18: 六亲不和, 有孝慈;

Ellen Marie Chen (1989):

When the **six relations** are not in harmony,

There are filial piety (hsiao) and parental love (tz'u).

Chang Chung-yuan (1975):

As soon as **the members of a family** are no longer at peace,

There is a demand for filial piety and love.

He Guanghu et al. (1985):

When **a family** falls into dispute,

Filial piety and parental affection to children will be advocated.

According to the above examples, we can see that Ellen Marie Chen's translation is most equivalent to ST in terms of lexicogrammar by using literal translation of these numbers, whereas the translation of He Guanghu et al. is the most unequivalent at lexicogrammatical stratum by translating the genuine meaning of these numbers, and Chang Chung-yuan's translation rests in between.

Following, let's look into examples of grammatical equivalence, reflecting most evidently in syntactic structures. We will take P.J. Maclagan's (1898) translation as an example. According to Wang (2001), the most prominent feature of his rendering is its word-for-word translation method. Besides keeping the same sentence structure of the original, transliteration is also used frequently in dealing with keywords (Wang, 2001). For comparison, we will also look at Arthur Waley's (1934) translation:

Chapter 38: 上德不德, 是以有德; 下德不失德, 是以无德。

P.J. Maclagan (1898):

The highest Teh was (as if) no teh, and there was teh.

The lowest Teh would not resign teh, and so there was no teh.

Arthur Waley (1934):

The man of highest "power" does not reveal himself as a possessor of "power";

Therefore he keeps his "power".

The man of inferior "power" cannot rid it of the appearance of "power";

Therefore he is in truth without "power".

Chapter 50: 出生入死。

P.J. Maclagan (1898):

Exit, life; Enter, death.

Arthur Waley (1934):

He who aims at life achieves death.

Even though Maclagan's (1898) translation is more equivalent at the syntax level, the meaning is quite hard to catch for TL readers with separate words without logical relation, which is distorted at the semantic level. However, Waley's (1934) is opposite, meaning is kept although with lexicogrammatical shift. Therefore, Waley's translation is valued higher than Maclagan's.

3.1.3 Discourse Semantic Stratum

There are cases where TT is equivalent in terms of meaning, that is, at the discourse semantic stratum, but shifts in terms of lexicogrammar. For example, in Chapter 6 “谷神不死，是谓玄牝。”，most of the translators re-individuate “谷神 (gu shen)” and “玄牝 (xuan pin)” into “Valley Spirit” and “Mysterious Female”, which seems equivalent at the lexicogrammatical stratum, but quite difficult for the readers to understand, or even inclines to mislead the audience from the true meaning. Through de-realization to the Chinese context of culture, in which Lao Tzu is an atheist, and hence “gu shen” is not deity, but the great Tao constituted by the texture and property of Tao. As the status of Tao is similar to nihility, it is so called “gu (谷 valley)” as a metaphor, and as Tao is subtle and infinite, it is called “gu shen” (Valley Spirit as the literal translation) as an analogy. “pin (牝)” refers to the female reproductive organ, and “xuan pin (玄牝)” gains the connotation of gestating mysteriously, which means that Tao gives birth to everything but is never seen how. That is why such metaphor is made. In Gu Zhengkun’s (1995) translation, he found the correct intersection of SL context and TL context, and re-realized it into:

The Tao never dies;

It is a deep womb.

The re-realization of “Tao” and “deep womb” not only avoids tactically the misunderstanding brought to TL readers by using the word “spirit”, but also exerts vividly Tao’s maternity of breeding, which is much closer to the naive materialism of the author Lao Tzu.

3.1.4 Context Stratum

In terms of genre, the context stratum, there are discussions about whether the *Tao Te Ching* belongs to the monologue or dialogue type of article. Compared with the *Analects of Confucius*, which is Quotation (or Recorded utterances or Saying) in genre, marked by the expression of “(孔)子曰 (Confucius said)”, and dialogues in some of the chapters like questions by the students and answers by Confucius, the *Tao Te Ching* has no such explicit dialogue characteristics as the *Analects of Confucius* has. But it could also be classified as Quotation invisible of the marked words like “老子曰 (Lao Tzu said)”. Such omission is reasonable because the *Tao Te Ching* is written by Lao Tzu himself, unlike the *Analects of Confucius*, which is composed by Confucius’s students in the tone of their teacher. For the dialogue feature, we could define it in a broader sense, viewing the addresser and addressee as “present” or “absent”. The *Analects of Confucius* thus belongs to the present one, while the *Tao Te Ching* belongs to the absent one, reflected in the text by the great number of rhetorical questions which imply communication with potential readers.

However, there is a translation making such marked words visible, that is Shi Fu Hwang (1987), who add “Lao Tze says” at the beginning of each chapter, making it explicitly a Quotation. This could be viewed as an attempt to maintain genre equivalence by shifting at discourse semantics stratum, for example, in Chapter 1 Understanding The Tao:

Lao Tze says,

The Tao is that on which one can always tread.

That on which one cannot always tread is not the Tao.

And fame is that of which one can always remember.

That of which one cannot always remember is not fame.

3.2 Rank

As for rank, we will illustrate the corpus in terms of the chapter title. There is actually no chapter title in the original version by Lao Tzu, but for the sake of easier learning so as to grasp the main idea of each chapter, Heshang Gong made the first trial to add chapter titles. His titles are listed below in the order of chapters:

1. 体道; 2. 养育; 3. 安民; 4. 无源; 5. 虚用; 6. 成象; 7. 韬光; 8. 易性; 9. 运夷; 10. 能为; 11. 无用; 12. 检欲; 13. 厌耻; 14. 赞玄; 15. 显德; 16. 归根; 17. 淳风; 18. 俗薄; 19. 还淳; 20. 异俗; 21. 虚心; 22. 益谦; 23. 虚无; 24. 苦恩; 25. 象先; 26. 圣德; 27. 巧用; 28. 反朴; 29. 无为; 30. 俭武; 31. 偃武; 32. 圣德; 33. 辩德; 34. 任成; 35. 仁德; 36. 微明; 37. 为政; 38. 论德; 39. 法本; 40. 去用; 41. 同异; 42. 道化; 43. 通用; 44. 立戒; 45. 洪德; 46. 俭欲; 47. 鉴远; 48. 忘知; 49. 任德; 50. 贵生; 51. 养德; 52. 归元; 53. 益证; 54. 修观; 55. 玄符; 56. 玄德; 57. 淳风; 58. 顺化; 59. 守道; 60. 居位; 61. 谦德; 62. 为道; 63. 恩始; 64. 守微; 65. 淳德; 66. 后己; 67. 三宝; 68. 配天; 69. 玄用; 70. 知难; 71. 知病; 72. 爱己; 73. 任为; 74. 制惑; 75. 贪损; 76. 戒强; 77. 天道; 78. 任信; 79. 任契; 80. 独立; 81. 显质

Among our English e-versions at hand, there are 21 contain the translation of chapter titles, namely: James Legge (1891), I. W. Heysinger (1903), D. T. Suzuki & Paul Carus (1913), Dwight Goddard & Henri Borel (1919), Aleister Crowley (1923), Alan B. Taplow (1982), Henry Wei (1982), Stan Rosenthal (1984), R. L. Wing (1986), Shi Fu Hwang (1987), Ursula K. Le Guin (1997), William Martin (1999), Lok Sang Ho (2002), Roderic & Amy M. Sorrell (2003), Wayne L. Wang (2004), Bram den Hond, Chad Hansen, David Tuffley, Peter Merel 1, Peter Merel 2, Shrine of Wisdom.

For example, the title of Chapter 52 “归元” (gui yuan, literally in English: return origin), which is a verbal group in Chinese, with “gui” as the Head, and “yuan” as its postmodifier, belonging to the rank of group/phrase in lexicogrammar. Its diversified translations are listed below in Table 1:

Table 1. Different translations of “gui yuan”

No.	Translator	Year	Translation of “gui yuan”	Rank belongs to
1	James Legge	1891	Returning to the Source	clause
2	I. W. Heysinger	1903	Returning Home to the First Cause	clause
3	D. T. Suzuki & Paul Carus	1913	Returning to the Origin	clause
4	Dwight Goddard & Henri Borel	1919	Return to Origin	clause
5	Aleister Crowley	1923	THE WITHDRAWAL INTO THE SILENCE	group/phrase (nominal group)
6	Alan B. Taplow	1982	MOTHER AND CHILDREN	group/phrase (nominal group)
7	Henry Wei	1982	Return to the Origin Kuei Yuan	clause
8	Stan Rosenthal	1984	RETURNING TO THE SOURCE	clause
9	R.L. Wing	1986	Returning to Insight	clause
10	Shi Fu Hwang	1987	Learning The Absolute	clause
11	Ursula K. Le Guin	1997	Back to the beginning	clause
12	William Martin	1999	Look to the Beginning	clause
13	Lok Sang Ho	2002	Guard and Stay With Mother Nature	clause complex
14	Roderic & Amy M. Sorrell	2003	Source: If we understand the origin, we see the outcome	clause complex
15	Wayne L. Wang	2004	Minute and Soft	group/phrase (nominal group)
16	Bram den Hond		Restraint	word
17	Chad Hansen		So What?	(minor) clause
18	David Tuffley		Returning to Insight	clause
19	Peter Merel 1		Restraint	word
20	Peter Merel 2		Clarity	word
21	Shrine of Wisdom		“The Discriminating Teh.”	group/phrase (nominal group)

According to the above data, there are two translations re-realize the verbal group “gui yuan” by clause complex, twelve by (infinite) clause, four by group/phrase (nominal group), and three by word. Although the English versions are diversified across ranks, there is a degree of faithfulness for these translations: the most faithful ones are versions translated by clause, like 1-4, 7-9, 11-12, 18; the next faithful ones are by clause complex, like 13, 14; translations by group/phrase and word are far from the meaning of the ST. Therefore, the verbal group in Chinese is better translated by the clause rank in English. However, the infinite clause using verb-ing form in the translation could be viewed as an attempt to achieve nominalization, which from another perspective, could be seen as a downward rankshift to the group/phrase rank scale (grammatical metaphor), which corresponds to the verbal group rank of the ST.

4. Conclusion

This paper proposed interlingual realization, a new systemic functional perspective on translation, involves de-realization and re-realization, meaning that in the translation activity, translators experience the process of moving from SL phonology/graphology to SL context, finding the intersection of the SL context and the TL context, and then moving from TL context to TL phonology/graphology. During re-realization, translation equivalence and translation shift may be achieved at any stratum or any rank of the TL, but typically, equivalence at a higher stratum or rank is valued higher than that at a lower level. In the case study of the *Tao Te Ching*, we looked at the translation equivalence and shift achieved at phonological stratum, lexicogrammatical stratum, discourse semantics stratum and context stratum, verifying that equivalence at the higher discourse

semantics or context stratum is much more highly valued than equivalence at phonological or lexicogrammatical stratum. The exploration of the translation of the chapter title in terms of rank tell us that the ST can be re-realized through expressions at different ranks, but typically, translation re-realized by expressions at a certain rank scale between two languages is higher than any other.

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