

# ***Teaching Chinese for Translation***

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# Introduction I

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- Many students graduating from East Asian Studies or Modern Languages or Philologies often end up working as translators, although they have seldom received any training in translation theory or practice. Therefore, they may not be suitably prepared for such an activity.

## Introduction II

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- The main features that distinguish teaching a foreign language for translation from non-specific approaches are (Berenguer 1997):
  - unequal treatment of the four language skills;
  - need for previous command of the lexical and morphological language structures;
  - a textual approach to language;
  - development of complementary skills.

# Introduction III

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- Main objectives of teaching a foreign language for translation:
  1. to increase sociocultural knowledge and skills;
  2. to work on the concept of equivalence;
  3. to develop students' reading comprehension;
  4. to develop and consolidate linguistic knowledge emphasizing contrastivity;
  5. to develop sensibility towards translation;

## **1. Sociocultural knowledge and skills I**

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- Contrastive analysis should go beyond linguistic structures and move to the cultural ground.
- Good translators should have a deep knowledge of the Chinese language and culture, but it is also very important to make sure students are aware of the specificities of their own language and culture.

## 1. Sociocultural knowledge and skills II

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- Many of the difficulties students experience when learning Chinese come from the ethnocentric tendency consisting in applying our vision of the world and our own cognitive categories to different linguistic systems which makes them look anomalous and illogical to us.
- Learning a foreign language does not only mean learning to use it adequately to situation and context, but also learning a new conceptual system, different from the mother tongue, which implies learning to perceive reality through new lenses (Berenguer, 1997: 73).

## **1. Sociocultural knowledge and skills III**

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- Understanding all the meanings activated in a text-internal context is important but not enough. In fact, we need to resource to the text-external context, which includes the whole culture surrounding the act of production and reception of a given text. This will allow us to understand the meaning and the intention behind the words, i.e. not what is said but what is meant.

## 2. The concept of equivalence I

- According to the concept of equivalence we work with, we can reach many different conclusions about translatability of Chinese words and expressions.
- Translators' concept of equivalence is dynamic, broad, flexible and changing.
- Equivalence is understood as gradual and not as mutually excluding dichotomies (i.e. expressions may be more or less equivalent).

## 2. The concept of equivalence II

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- Classifiers / measure words are the prototypical example of a Chinese lexical category without clear equivalents in Western grammars.
- Most Chinese language teachers work with a more restricted concept of equivalence than that used in Translation Studies (basically equivalence word by word).

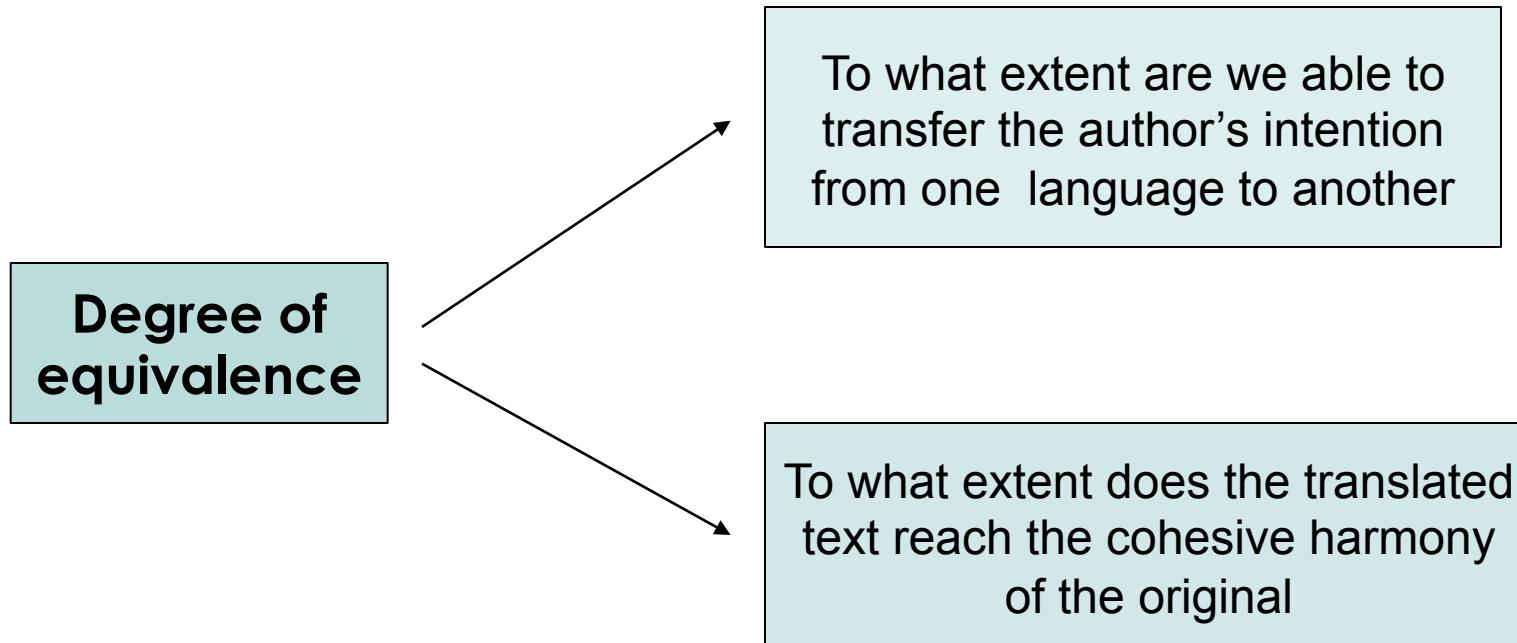
## 2. The concept of equivalence III

- 只手操纵着方向盘，不一会儿就成了个雪人，脸色发紫，眼睛又红又肿，**泪水一道道**流下来，在腮边结成了冰。〔唐栋《兵车行》〕
- He used one of his hands to operate the steering wheel and quickly became a snowman, his face turned purple, his eyes red and swollen, shedding **two continuous lines of teardrops** that soon froze on his cheeks. (Tang Dong, The military vehicle)

## 2. The concept of equivalence IV

- 姑娘：（固执的）我看见大团大团的雪落下来，城市，大团大团的雪，无声无息一片洁白落下来（……）。〔高行健《逃亡》〕
- Girl: (Insistently.) I see **huuuge snowflakes** falling from the sky and the city **covered in pure white**. **Huuuge snowflakes** falling in silence... (Gao Xingjian, Fleeing)

## **2. The concept of equivalence V**



## 2. Reading Comprehension I

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- Since Chinese and Spanish are structurally very different, good grasp of textual analysis tools is fundamental to understand a text. We should introduce and emphasize them from the very beginning.

## 2. Reading Comprehension II

- Specific objectives of this language skill aim at:
  - understanding and grasping basic writing conventions,
  - acquiring reading strategies (such as adapting different reading strategies, activating extralinguistic knowledge, and applying linguistic knowledge to text understanding),
  - identifying and understanding Chinese language coherence and cohesion mechanisms,
  - identifying and understanding how different genres and textual types work,
  - identifying pragmatic and semiotic traits of a given text,
  - identifying linguistic variation and,
  - developing a critical attitude towards texts (i.e. becoming a critical reader).

### 3. Emphasizing contrastivity I

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- This objective, intimately related to sociocultural skills, consists in developing/ acquiring knowledge about different writing conventions as well as contrastive lexical and grammar knowledge.
- There are lexical, grammatical and pragmatic features some languages do not explicitly codify as linguistic forms, whilst in other languages they are embodied in given lexical or grammatical forms.
- Contrastive analysis allows us to identify the mechanisms and linguistic resources each language uses to express quantity, cohesion, and so on.

### 3. Emphasizing contrastivity II

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- It is common practice in the Chinese as a foreign language classroom to present some Chinese grammar categories as unique, with no equivalents in the Western languages and thus lacking translation.
- The translation unit is never the word or the phrase, but the whole text and, thus, translation problems cannot be established prospectively, taking the original text or language as a departing point, but retrospectively, basing on the meta text or language.
- Someone with a background in Translation Studies will claim anything can be translated; we just need to find the right way in the target language to express the same meaning.

## 5. Developing sensibility towards translation

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- Generally speaking, foreign language students tend to unconsciously, naturally and spontaneously translate from the foreign language to their native language. Within this context, we should teach them there are cases without immediate word-by-word solution but that might be compensated somehow along the translation of the whole text.
- The best way to prepare students for translation problems posed by linguistic categories without direct equivalents (different kinds of complements, given grammar categories, etc.) is reflecting in the foreign language classroom on the different existing ways of transferring them to the target language and text.

# Conclusions

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- Teaching language for translation is an area of research within Translation Studies, which includes both Foreign Language and mother tongue and, therefore, it goes much further from merely doing translation exercises in the classroom.
- This approach has many positive attributes which, if included in Chinese second language teaching, can provide students and teachers with interesting new resources, which put into practise transversally can improve their translation proficiency in the middle run.

# 谢谢！

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