

**Translating politeness: Negative politeness in English
and its implications on translating polite conversation
from Chinese to English**

Tin Kei Wong
University of Hong Kong
Hong Kong
w.tinkei@gmail.com

Translation is not only a text-to-text interchange of languages but also a cross-linguistic and cross-cultural activity. The product of this activity is a text that is functionally equivalent to the original. This dynamic equivalence, as termed by Eugene Nida, is particularly significant in the translation of politeness from one language to another because of the functional nature of polite conversation. Using examples of daily polite conversation, this presentation is going to illustrate the problems and suggest some solutions of translating politeness from Chinese to English due to the distinctive politeness strategies of the two languages.

In English, a face-saving act is most commonly performed via a negative politeness strategy, while in Chinese it is the positive politeness strategy which is most preferred. The fact that negative politeness is employed in English is shown by its linguistic features such as indirectness, question forms, hedged expressions and transferred negation. This is related to the Anglo-Saxon tradition, which emphasizes on the rights and on the autonomy of every individual and abhors interference in other people's affairs. However, Chinese tends to employ direct statements and negative politeness is seldom employed.

In this presentation, negative politeness strategies in English will be first introduced. Then, some examples of polite speech in Chinese expressing advice, invitations, requests and opinions are chosen to illustrate the problems if they are literally translated in English. Based on the speech act theory proposed by J.L. Austin, the later

part of the presentation will attempt to suggest how some closely equivalent translations can be rendered to reconstruct politeness in English from the Chinese originals.