

A Study on Explicitation in *The Travels of Lao Ts'an* from the Perspective of Systemic Functional Linguistics

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Abstract: This paper analyzes explicitation in Harold Shadick's translation of Liu E's novel *Lao Can You Ji*. It categorizes explicitation into ideational, interpersonal, and textual functions. Cultural and linguistic disparities, text types, and translator choices influence techniques like literal translation with annotations, explanatory translation, free translation, and addition used in the translation. Translators enhance clarity by incorporating subjects and connectors to convey attitudes and emotions, which play a crucial role in novel translations.

Keywords: *The Travels of Lao Ts'an*; Explicitation Translation; Systemic Functional Linguistics

Introduction

Lao Can You Ji, written by Liu E in 1906, is a prominent denunciation novel that exposes corruption in the late Qing dynasty, acclaimed by Lu Xun.

Explicitation, introduced by Vinay and Darbelnet (1995:342), makes implicit information explicit in the target language. Mona Baker (1993:243) views explicitation as a universal translation characteristic, leading to increased explicitness compared to the source text. Scholars differ in categorizing explicitation; Klaudy (2004:82-83) proposes four types, but clarity is questioned. Becher (2011:86-87) uses systemic functional linguistics for classification.

In China, Huang Guowen and Yu Juan (2015) categorize explicitation into semantic and contextual based on systemic-functional linguistics. Hu Kaibao and Zhu Yifan (2008:72-80) categorize explicitation based on Halliday's metafunctions with clear boundaries. Ideational function clarifies cultural and pragmatic meanings, agent-patient relationships, and conceptual meaning. Interpersonal function makes character relationships, evaluative meanings, and modal meanings explicit. Textual function clarifies relationships between sentences using logical connectors, explicit pronoun translations, and additional components.

Harold Shadick's 1952 translation of *The Travels of Lao Ts'an* exhibits many explicitation phenomena. Thus, based on Halliday's framework, the paper aims to explore the translator's explicitation strategies and motivations, address research gaps in translated works, and contribute to the application of this linguistic approach.

1. Explicitation of Ideational Function Information in *The Travels of Lao Ts'an* from the Perspective of Systemic Functional Linguistics

1.1 Cultural information explicitation

Example 1

Chinese Version: “他们不是比他**西施**, 就是比他**王嬙**;不是说他沉鱼落雁, 就是说他闭月羞花。”(Liu E 2005:306)

English Version: “...and yet if these men didn't compare them with **Hsi Shih**, then they compared them with **Wang Ch'iang**; if their beauty did not 'make fish sink and birds fall,' it obscured the moon' and shamed the flowers.” (Harold Shadick 2005: 307).

(1. Hsi Shih (or Hsi Tzu) was a famous beauty employed by Fan Li, minister of KouChien, Prince of Yiieh, as a decoy to debauch Fu Ch'ai, the Prince of Wu, at the end of the fifth century B.C. The story is a frequent subject for poetry and drama. See n. 4, below.

(2. Wang Ch'iang (also known as Chao-chiin) was a beauty in the harem of the EmperoYian Ti of Han (reigned 48--33 B.C.). According to tradition the court painter Mao Yenshou put a blemish in her portrait because she would not give him the customary bribe. She, therefore, found no favor with the Emperor and was promised to a Tartar Chieftain. The Emperor discovered her true beauty too late. See ch. x, n. 4)

Hsi Shih (Xi Shi) and Wang Ch'iang (Wang Zhaojun) are two of “Four Beauties of ancient China”, symbolizing beauty and virtue, respectively. Harold Shadick adopts transliteration with annotation to preserve phonetic and cultural characteristics, providing background

knowledge and maintaining authenticity, enhancing readers' understanding of the cultural context.

1.2 Agent and patient explicitation

Example 2

Chinese Version: “那父女两个连连叩头说:‘青天大老爷!实在是冤枉!’”(Liu E 2005:384)

English Version: “The father and daughter then kowtowed without stopping and said, Most Just Sir, **we** really are wrongly accused!” (Harold Shadick 2005: 385).

English has form-oriented nature, requiring subjects in most sentences. However, Chinese prioritizes semantic coherence, allowing subject omission if it's not necessary. In the original text, the omitted speaker “我们” (we) can be inferred as the wrongly accused father and daughter. Harold Shadick's amplification clarifies this, improving English syntax and readability.

3. Explicitation of Interpersonal Function Information in The Travels of Lao Ts'an from the Perspective of Systemic Functional Linguistics

3.1 Evaluative meanings explicitation

Example 3

Chinese Version: “宫保说:‘这个道理,我也明白。只是这夹堤里面尽是村庄,均属膏腴之地,岂不要破坏几万家的生产吗?’”(Liu E 2005:334)

English Version: “The Governor said, ‘Yes, I understand the argument; but this strip of land between the dikes is dotted with villages; it is all flat and fertile land. Surely we don't want to destroy the livelihood of several tens of thousands of people.’” (Harold Shadick 2005:335).

In example 3, the original sentence has a rhetorical tone. “生产” refers to the villagers' “livelihood,” not literal “wealth” or “reproduction. Shadick uses domesticating translation, rendering it as “livelihood.” He adds “Surely” and “don't” to convey the Governor's hesitant attitude.

3.2 Modal meanings explicitation

Example 4

Chinese Version: “我所以常挨打,也不怪俺这妈,实在是自己的过犯。”(Liu E 2005:342)

English Version: “I don't blame our mistress for all the blows I have received. **It must be** because of my own wickedness.” (Harold Shadick 2005:335).

In example 4, the original text serves as a subordinate element expressing a reason. “实在是” conveys the meaning of “truly.” Harold Shadick uses a literal translation, emphasizing the reason by translating “实在是” as “must be.” According to the perspective of SFL, “must” carries a strong sense of obligation when expressing modal meaning.

4. Explicitation of Textual Function Information in The Travels of Lao Ts'an from the Perspective of Systemic Functional Linguistics

4.1 Adding logical connectors

Example 5

Chinese Version: “老残听了,又大失所望。在省中已无可为,即收拾行装,带着许明,赴齐河县去。”(Liu E 2005:462)

English Version: “**When** Lao Ts'an heard this, he was again greatly discouraged. There was now nothing for him to do in the city, **so** he packed his things **and** returned to Ch'ihohsien with Hsi Ming.” (Harold Shadick 2005:463).

Logical connectors are elements used in discourse to express various logical relationships (temporal, causal, conditional, etc.). In example 5, the original text lacks conjunctions, but English requires them for coherence. Shadick uses “when” to introduce Lao Ts'an's state and “so” for the causal relationship, ensuring readability for foreign readers.

4.2 Translating demonstrative pronouns

Example 6

Chinese Version: “现在我已遂了你的愿了,既杀了公公,总是个凌迟!你又何必要坐成个故杀呢?你家也有儿女呀!劝你退后些罢!”(Liu E 2005:388)

English Version: “I have already satisfied your wish. Since I have killed my father-in-law, am liable to the slow death! Why must you try to make it into an intentional murder? You have boys and girls in your own family! I implore you to **withdraw your insinuation.**”

(Harold Shadick 2005:335).

In this sentence, wrongly accused Mrs. Chai-Wei falsely confesses to protect her father from torture, while Kang Pi attempts to frame her for intentional murder. This angers Mrs. Chai-Wei, leading her to urge Kang Pi to “退后.” The translation clarifies that “退后” refers to Kang Pi’s malicious speculations and insinuations, which may be unclear to foreign readers unfamiliar with the contextual background. Harold Shadick’s explicit clarification reduces comprehension difficulties.

5. Motivations for explicitation in *The Travels of Lao Ts’an*

5.1 Explicitation caused by cultural and linguistic differences

Eugene A. Nida (2004) points out linguistic differences between English and Chinese, necessitating the addition of logical connectors in English while preserving the original structure. Hu Kaibao and Zhu Yifan (2008) emphasize the impact of cultural disparities on target language readers. In Harold Shadick’s translation of *The Travels of Lao Ts’an*, he employs explanatory techniques, paraphrasing, and annotations to enhance semantic meaning and readability. Conceptual function is clarified to grasp cultural and pragmatic meanings, and context-based explanations are used for abstract vocabulary and pronouns.

5.2 Explicitation caused by text types

Katharine Reiss categorizes texts into expressive, informative, and operative types. Shadick’s translation focuses on expression and information transmission, using explicitation to convey attitudes, emotions, and cultural values for foreign readers’ understanding.

5.3 Explicitation caused by translator

Explicitation can be attributed to the translator’s consideration. Shadick’s translation reflects his admiration for Chinese culture, aiming to remain faithful to the original while ensuring readability. He enhances coherence by reconstructing clauses, and clarifying implied meanings, while providing additional information and explanatory translations to improve reader comprehension.

6. Conclusion

6.1 Major Findings

This study examines explicitation in Harold Shadick’s translation of *The Travels of Lao Ts’an* from the SFL perspective. Shadick employs various strategies like literal translation with annotations, explanatory translation, paraphrasing, and supplementary translation. He adds connectors, specifies agents and recipients, clarifies pronouns, and includes evaluative adverbs to enhance readability while remaining faithful to the original text.

Explicitation in translation is motivated by language and cultural differences, text types, and translator’s choices. In his Shadick’s translation, he adds subjects and logical connectives to maintain coherence and adhere to English conventions. Consideration of cultural backgrounds necessitates conveying information through explanatory translation, paraphrasing, and annotations. Text type influences explicitation, clarifying expressive elements, allusions, and rhetorical devices to aid cultural understanding. Shadick also emphasizes explicitation of evaluative and modal meanings in interpersonal communication to highlight characters’ viewpoints.

6.2 Limitations and suggestions for the future study

This paper still has limitations. Though it explores an unique genre of travel literature with scarce research and parallel texts, the author’s knowledge of late Qing dynasty history is limited, and comprehending classical expressions and meanings in poetry and allusions poses challenges. Today, the focus should be on studying *The Travels of Lao Ts’an*, explicitation research from the SFL perspective, and the translation of Liu E’s works.

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