

A Comparative Study on the Translation of Sayings in Two English Versions of Luotuo Xiangzi

Yuqian Qiao¹, Da Chen²

1.Chengdu College of University of Electronic Science and Technology of China, Chengdu 611731, China;

2.Xihua University, Chengdu 611743, China

Abstract: Taking the two English versions of Lao She's Luotuo Xiangzi, the earliest and most complete translation, as the research texts, this paper extracts several sayings from Luotuo Xiangzi. It analyzes and compares them with the corresponding versions in the two English versions to study the standard features and differences in the translation process between the two versions.

Keywords: Translation Strategy; Luotuo Xiangzi; Evan King's Version; Howard Goldblatt's Version; Comparative Study

1. Introduction

1.1 An Introduction to Luotuo Xiangzi

Luotuo Xiangzi is the first professional work created by Lao She, which depicts the tragic fate of rickshaw driver Xiangzi against the background of old Beijing in the 1920s. The world of Xiangzi was under the control of the Northern Warlords; People lived in poverty. China was in darkness, with deformity and imbalance in the old community. Although the working people have certain freedoms, they must struggle for a living. Luotuo Xiangzi has few characters, but the story is vivid and tortuous. The protagonists are only Xiangzi, a rickshaw driver, and Hu Niu, the daughter of a car factory owner. Xiangzi was a strong rural boy, he is honest, decent, and powerful; He wants to drive a car alone. He was dragging his car along. He is strong, but he can do nothing.

Once Luotuo Xiangzi was published, it aroused significant repercussions in the domestic literary world. Fan Jun (1979) mentions in *On the Realism of Luotuo Xiangzi*: "the novel is an excellent realistic work in the history of modern Chinese literature. It typically shows Lao She's achievements and contributions in improving the level of literary works which reflect the lives of the urban poor." (Fan, 1979, p.27).

Luotuo Xiangzi is also famous in the other part of the world. With the publication and dissemination of the English version, Luotuo Xiangzi has been translated into English, Japanese, German, Italian, Polish and other languages.

1.2 An Introduction to the English Versions of Luotuo Xiangzi

In 1945, Evan King translated Luotuo Xiangzi into English and published it in the United States, "it became a 'Book-of-the-Month-Club' in the US and the best-seller of the year" (Hu, 1977, p.114). Readers from English-speaking countries began to understand Lao She. However, Evan King's *Rickshaw Boy* is also controversial. "He translated this novel without the authorization of Lao She. Some important aspects have deviated from the original work" (Sun, 2013, p.41). Despite these problems in this edition, it is undeniable that more foreign readers know this writer from China.

Howard Goldblatt's version *The Rickshaw Boy: A Novel* was published by Harper Collins Publishing Group in 2010. In the preface of *Rickshaw Boy: A Novel*, Howard Goldblatt states that he planned to translate twenty years ago; the main reason for his retranslation of Luotuo Xiangzi was that the previous translations were "unsatisfactory" (Howard, 2010, p.xii).

There is a long-time lag between the two English versions of Luotuo Xiangzi selected in this paper. The two translators come from different social and cultural backgrounds; they are ideal materials for comparative study.

2. A Comparative Study on the Translation of Sayings in Two English Versions of

Luotuo Xiangzi

Luotuo Xiangzi is famous for his fluent and simple Peiping dialect. Fundamentally speaking, dialects express the same thing in different ways, with rich pronunciation, phonology, vocabulary, and grammar. Dialect in Luotuo Xiangzi make the novel lovely, fresh, appropriate, and vivid. It is not easy to translate these proverbs with distinctive national characteristics into English accurately in translation. Taking the two English versions of Luotuo Xiangzi, Evan King, and Howard Goldblatt as examples, this paper compares some of the proverbs and analyzes the two different translations.

Literal translation refers to retaining the metaphor, image, and national color of Chinese Proverbs based on conforming to the standardization of the target language without too hot causing errors or misunderstandings.

Free translation is the primary method of translating Chinese proverbs, but it is not the only method. The effect is inferior, or because some anecdotes or legends involved in proverbs are unfamiliar to foreigners, footnotes or explanations must be added after literal translation.

2.1 A comparison of the English translation of sayings with cultural characteristics

Example 1:

ST:周瑜打黄盖，一个愿打，一个愿挨

King: It was like Chou Yü and Hwang Kai in the story of "The Three Kingdoms." Chou struck his friend Hwang to prove to an enemy general that they were no longer friends; One was happy to strike and the other to be attacked, so what could be wrong with it, whatever the bystanders thought (King, 1945, p.105).

Howard: Like Zhou Yu pretending to hit Huang Gai, one ungrudgingly gives; the other cheerfully takes (Howard, 2010, p.48).

This sentence is a symbolic proverb from the classic Chinese Romance of the Three Kingdoms. In 1945, western countries knew little about Chinese culture. When translating this sentence, King chose the "free translation" technique to give the target language readers a general understanding of the source of this sentence. However, such translation is a bit troublesome at present. Because many foreign readers have a deeper understanding of Chinese classical literature now. Howard translated the sentence's meaning without explaining the source.

Example 2:

ST:眼不见心不烦。

King: what the eyes do not see will not vex the heart.

Howard: out of sight, out of mind.

This proverb comes from A Dream of Red Mansions, which means that as long as you don't see or see something, you won't worry about it. King adopts the literal translation method, and Howard adopts the free translation method. Howard's translation is more concise, using the corresponding idioms in the English world. King's translation translates "见" and "烦" into "see" and "vex" respectively, retaining more of the original form. However, because this proverb is short and straightforward, both translation methods can better convey the importance of the original text.

Example 3:

ST:肉包子打狗，一去不回头。

King: I take a roll of meat and beat the dog with it, and still he runs away from me and won't come back!

Howard: Throwing a meaty bun at a dog ensures it'll never return.

This saying means that there is no return for investment, or things can never be taken back after they are taken out. In this translation, the two translations facilitate literal translation. Compared to Howard's version, King's tends to be more literal; Howard's is briefer. In this sentence, Howard's performance is concise enough to make readers understand its meaning.

Example 4:

ST:一条绳拴着俩蚂蚱，谁也跑不了。

King: like a couple of crickets tied to one string: neither can run away from the other.

Howard: like a pair of grasshoppers tied together by a string, neither of us can get away.

This idiom refers to two grasshoppers strung together by a rope, neither of which can run alone. It is a metaphor for two people whose fates and interests are closely linked. Both the two translators used literal translation to explain this saying. This sentence in the original text was what Hu Niu said to Xiangzi. When her father disagreed with her marriage to Xiangzi, Xiangzi backed out. Hu Niu said this to clarify their interests and let Xiangzi stick to it. The two versions of the translation are very close to the original text in terms of structure, words, and meaning, and the meaning is conveyed clearly.

Example 5:

ST:跳进黄河也洗不清。

King: He might jump into the Yellow River and still on wash himself clean of the suspicion.

Howard: He could not wash away the suspicion even if he jumps into the Yellow River.

This proverb means that innocent people affected are notorious and unable to confess. It is difficult to get rid of the relationship and avoid suspicion. Both translators adopted the literal and free translation method, explaining the allusions and their meaning. And the translation of the two versions is similar in terms of sentence structure and usage.

2.2 The Translation Strategies of Two English Versions

Both King and Howard adopt the strategy of “domestication” and the method of “free translation.” However, there are differences between the two translations. King mainly adopts “interpretation” as well as “addition” and “omission” techniques. Howard mainly adopts the method of “habitual translation.”

Five paragraphs in the classification of Peiping rickshaw drivers have been deleted at the beginning of the novel’s first chapter. In addition, there are many other deviations in Evan King’s version, such as manipulation, addition, and omission. From this point of view, the translator plans to follow the target language norms and make the stories in translation develop towards “acceptable” from the beginning.

In Howard’s translation, he mainly adopts the “domestication” strategy to make the translation more accessible for English readers. Compared with King’s translation, Howard’s translation is more faithful to the covenant in terms of writing style, story ending, and characterization.

It can be found that Howard retains the theme, plot development, and characterization but deletes some cumbersome descriptions of psychological activities and the surrounding environment. In his translation, Xiangzi is still a hardworking and straightforward Chinese farmer who has fallen and failed in reality and setbacks. Compared with King’s version, this version has natural characteristics. Therefore, Howard’s version is more “acceptable.”

3. Conclusion

In the follow-up study of the two versions, a self-built bilingual parallel corpus will be adopted, which can be used as a Chinese corpus, a bilingual parallel corpus corresponding to the English. It lays a foundation for the scientific and in-depth study of the two English versions.

The study of modern Chinese literature can better spread Chinese culture, literature, and art and provide a new form for language learning. Through the preliminary research on the translation of sayings in Luotuo Xiangzi, it can be roughly understood that the two translators adopted different translation methods to translate the idioms in the novel to increase the readability of their works. Howard’s translation is more documentary from the perspective of faithfully conveying the plot in Luotuo Xiangzi. From the standpoint of western readers’ acceptance, King’s foreignization translation is more popular with readers.

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