

A Corpus-based Analysis of “Three Beauty” Theory in Xu’s Translation of The Analects

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Abstract: Corpus-based translation research has been widely concerned in the field of linguistics and translation studies. This research method improves the objectivity and scientificity of translation analysis. The Analects is a collection of essays in the form of quotations in the Spring and Autumn Period of ancient China. It is one of the classic works of the Confucian school and has a great impact on the traditional Chinese culture. Based on the self-built English translation corpus of The Analects, the data statistics and comparative analysis of Xu Yuanchong’s translation are carried out from three levels of vocabulary, sentence and text using the corpus statistical software AntConc (4.2.0), and the embodiment of Xu Yuanchong’s “Three Beauty” Theory in his English translation is illustrated by using the method of combining qualitative and quantitative analysis.

Keywords: Corpus; Lun Yu; Xu Yuanchong; Three Beauty Theory

Introduction

The Analects of Confucius is a collection of quotations from the words and deeds of the famous ancient Chinese thinker Confucius and his disciples, in 20 volumes and 11, 705 Chinese characters, which is one of the classic works of Confucianism in ancient China, the first of its kind in the genre of quotations. It embodies Confucius' thoughts on morality, ethics, education and politics. As a traditional classic work of China, it is of high research value in its foreign translation, which provides a chance for readers to comprehend traditional Chinese culture. More than 40 years ago, the original version named Four Books translated by Matteo Ricci in Latin. In 1809, the earliest English version was published in India by the British missionary George Marshman. Since then, many translators home and abroad have joined in the study on translations of the Analects.^[1]

At present, many Chinese scholars have created corpus to study the translation of The Analects of Confucius, they only focus on the comparison in different translation styles (Cai Yonggui, Yu Xing) or the study of the high-frequency characteristic words translation (Fan Min^[2]). But they rarely interpret the application of translation theory in the text based on the analysis data of the corpus. Xu Yuanchong, a renowned translator at home and abroad, was awarded the International Federation of Translators (FIT) Northern Lights Award for Excellence in Literary Translation in 2004, the first Asian translator to receive this award since its inception. His “Three Beauty” Theory is of great research value to the translation academia, and is also a great guide to the current translation of Chinese classics out of China. This paper therefore uses the statistical software AntConc (4.2.0) to quantify Xu Yuanchong's English translation, based on corpus research, to objectively clarify the application of the “Three Beauty” Theory in the translation process through data analysis, and to provide guidance for future research on the translation of Chinese classics abroad.

1. Research Methodology

The self-built corpus of this study includes Thus Spoke The Master by Xu Yuanchong, The Discourses And Sayings of Confucius by Kaw Hong Beng, and Chinese original version. After a series of procedures such as OCR font recognition, EmEditor cleaning, and sentence alignment, the data statistical software AntConc (4.2.0) was used to conduct a metrological study of the collated corpus in an effort to be objective and scientific in the analysis. A combination of quantitative and qualitative methods was used in the study to elucidate the application of “Three Beauty” Theory in Xu's translation.

2. Quantitative Analysis of the “Three Beauties” Theory

2.1 Beauty in Sense

“Beauty in Sense” is to preserve the mood of the original work and to convey its deeper meaning.^[3] In the process of translation, the translator does not directly adopt a word-for-word translation method, but moves the reader through the liberal translation. In the process of translating Chinese classics, the flexibility of the use of word types can be quantified through the standardisation of class symbols and form symbols, which is seen as a manifestation of communication. Type refers to the number of different words in the corpus, while token refers to the total number of words in the corpus. The Type-Token Ratio(TTR) is the ratio between class tokens and morphological tokens. The number of class tokens and types does not reflect the essential character of the text separately, but the normalised ratio of the two reflects the essential character of the text, i.e. the variability of word usage^[3]. The data given by statistical software is as follows.

	Translated by Xu	Translated by Kaw
Type	2714	3196
Token	22923	33514
Standardised Type-Token Ratio(STTR%)	36.50	31.72

2.2 Beauty in Sound

“Beauty in sound” means that the translation should be catchy, with rhyme and rhythm, reproducing the beauty of the sound of the original text. The Analects are combined with words in rhyme. Xu Yuanchong also brings the sense of rhythm in the original text to life in his translation. A search of the parallel corpus at“君子坦荡荡，小人长戚戚”.

Xu’s version: An intelligentman, said the Master, is carefree while an uncultured man is careworn.

Kaw’s version: Confucius remarked, "A wise and good man is composed and happy; a fool is always worried and full of distress."

A comparative analysis shows that Xu's translation of "坦荡荡" is translated as "carefree" and "长戚戚" is translated as "careworn". He has chosen to translate these two abb-style words with the same prefix and opposite meanings, so as to convey the original meaning in a simple way and to read them with a sense of rhythm. In contrast, Kaw uses two adjectives to explain Chinese phrases respectively, making the translation a little lengthy and losing the rhythm of the original.

2.3 Beauty in Form

“Beauty in Form” refers to the translation corresponds to the formal structure of the original. The sentence structure, length, number of lines and sentences should be as close as possible to the original, preserving the visual beauty that the original brings to the reader.

At sentence level, for example, “学而时习之，不亦说乎？有朋自远方来，不亦乐乎？人不知而不愠，不亦君子乎？”

Xu: Is it not a pleasure to meet friends coming from afar? Is he not an intelligentman, who is careless alike of being known or unknown?

Kaw: Confucius remarked, "It is indeed a pleasure to acquire knowledge and, as you go on acquiring, to put into practice what you have acquired. A greater pleasure still it is when friends of congenial minds come from afar to see you because of your attainments. But he is truly a wise and good man who feels no discomposure even when he is not noticed of men."

Three consecutive rhetorical questions are used in original text to form a prose structure, and Xu Yuanchong's translation also takes the form of rhetorical questions with prose, fitting the original text. In contrast, Kaw merely conveys the meaning of the original text, treating the original rhetorical questions as affirmative sentences. Thus, formal beauty could be found in Xu’s translation.

At the level of the discourse, the translated work should correspond to the structure of the number of sentences in the original text in order to reflect the "Beauty in Form" in the translation. A search of AntConc for keywords reveals that Xu Yuanchong's translation has a neat overall structure at the discourse level. The number of sentences in the original and the translation were counted using the corpus search tool (the more the ratio tends to be close to 1, the more closely it corresponds to the sentence structure of the original), and the results are as follows.

	Original Text	XuYuanchong’s Translation
Total Number of Sentences	1427	1498
Ratio of Original Sentences to Translated Sentences	/	0.95

3. Conclusion

This study combines the corpus research method with a quantitative analysis of Xu Yuanchong's English translation. Through the cleaning and alignment of the corpus, the statistical software AntConc is used to analyse and objectively and scientifically interpret the "beauty of meaning, form and sound" embodied in the translation of The Analects of Confucius. The application of "Three Beauty" Theory to the translation is explored from the perspective of computer-assisted linguistic research, with the aim of being objective and scientific and avoiding subjectivity. Through qualitative and quantitative analysis, it can be seen that Xu Yuanchong's translation has well practised the principles of the "Three Beauty" Theory. Firstly, in terms of content, Xu's translation conveys the intent of the original work and conveys the core of the text to the target language readers in an accurate way. At the same time, words and phrases in Xu's translation is flexible, avoiding monotony and making the translation as varied as possible, making it vivid and imaginative. In terms of phonetics, the Analects contains many four-character words, and the combination of long and short sentences makes for a rhythmical and rhythmic reading. Xu Yuanchong pursues simplicity in wording and symmetry in form, and the translated work is harmonious in sound and rhythm and reads with phonetic beauty. Finally, the form and structure of the translation match that of the original work, and in the process of translation it is necessary to follow the structure of the original as closely as possible. The quantitative analysis shows that the overall structure of Xu Yuanchong's translation conforms to the original text and has formal beauty. Thus, when the translated text is highly compatible with the original in terms of mood, rhythm and structure can the goal of mutual cultural appreciation be achieved. This study has some reference value for the globalisation of Chinese classics and the mutual appreciation of Chinese and foreign cultures nowadays.

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