

Comparing the Impolite Expressions in the “A Dream of Red Mansion” from the Perspective of Functional Equivalence Theory

Ziqian Zhang^{1,a,*}

¹*ZheJiang University, School of International study, Hangzhou, Zhejiang, China
a. 3190105965@zju.edu.cn*

**corresponding author*

Abstract: The English versions significantly contributed to the influence of *A Dream of Red Mansion*. From the perspective of impoliteness, the paper analyses and compares the translation tactics on the impolite expressions between two English versions, *The Story of the Stone* by David Hawkes and *The Dream of Red Mansion* by Yang Xianyi. This thesis makes a comparative analysis of the two English versions under the direction of Functional Equivalence Theory. The main findings were: 1) Discuss the pragmatic function of the impolite languages in the novel. 2) The application of functional equivalence theory in novel translation. 3) Analyze the translation preference of both translators. The Yang Xianyi prefer foreignization translation and Dr. Hawkes prefer localization translation on impolite expressions. This paper contributes to the further research of the language of *A Dream of Red Mansion* and the translation criticism study of both translators.

Keywords: Impoliteness; *A Dream of Red Mansion*; Comparative analysis; Functional Equivalence Theory

1. Introduction

A dream of Red mansion is the cornerstone, and the highest achievement of Chinese literature enjoys high status both in China and the world. The detailed description of the social relationship and characters provides precise one-hand material and open a window on Qing dynasty history research. They are making it an invaluable masterpiece in both literature and history research. Although there have been over 60 English translation versions, the *Story of the Stone* version by David Hawkes and *A Dream of Red Mansion* version by Yang Xianyi couples is considered the most authoritative ones.

Unlike western literature using interior monologues to shape the character's image, Chinese traditional novels use dialogues to show their personality and express their feeling [1]. To enrich the language, the characters use different rhetorical skills, including analogies, puns, and comparisons. The famous linguist Shen Tianyou commented that the creativity of the dream of the Red Mansion lies in those lively dialogues. Among those conversations, impolite expressions, also refer as banter, are a special language approach that helps characters coordinate social relationships with others and show intimate friendship. This thesis will provide a detailed comparison between Hawkes's and Yang's versions and comment on them with the view of Functional Equivalence Theory [2] [3].

2. The Pragmatic Function of Impolite Languages in the Source Text

The function of impolite expression goes in three different ways: Coordinate interpersonal relationships, construct personal identity and highlight character. According to the requirement of functional equivalence theory, the following functions should be realized in the target language.

2.1. Coordinate Interpersonal Relationship

When the speaker uses the appearance of impolite words, it can close the distance between the listener and the speaker because it gives away a clear signal: We are close to each other. Therefore, even the use of impolite words is not enough to create a rift between us, but to prove that there is a certain understanding between us.

2.2. Construct Personal Identity [4]

The speakers sometimes deliberately use impolite expressions on others to construct their above identity; this is a two-step pragmatic strategy. The first speaker will pretreat the face of the listeners and their equal social interaction rights. Second, listeners do not challenge the speakers, and a harmonious orientation process is completed, the speaker will be used in constructing identity pretend impoliteness strategies. The strategy is not to threaten the hearer's face but to think with the intimate and the hearer. The text can interpret the speaker's intention and achieve a harmonious effect.

2.3. Highlight Character

Cao Xueqin expresses and reveals the thoughts and feelings of the characters and their personalities through the characters' language, for he believes the characters' language is better than the narrator's language in shaping the characters' images and obtaining more realistic beauty effects [5].

3. The Functional Equivalence Theory

The functional Equivalence theory is introduced by Dr. Nida and it is one of the most influential translation theories, including literary translation. The term functional equivalence highlights that the translated message should have a similar impact on target readers and the source language reader. But the difference between the SL and TL is not avoidable. When the contradiction is unavoidable, the translation should be conducted with the following steps [6].

Stage I: Find the best corresponding words in the target language which can embody the true meaning of the source text and be lexical loyal to the source text. This is difficult and sometimes impossible.

Stage II: If the corresponding expression which can take meaning and culture into account at the same time is not available to the translator, the translator need to make a difficult decision, they should give up to achieve formal equivalence, and turn to convey the semantic meaning and culture value of the original text by rearranging the form and structure of the original text in the translation practice.

Stage III: Sometimes simply rearrange the form and structure is not enough to embody the semantic meaning, aesthetic and cultural values of the source text, so the translators may need to give a “punch” to the source text, forget the surface meaning of the source text and pursue the deeper meaning hidden in the lines, and use complete different metaphors which is familiar to the target readers. This technique focuses on the equivalence of meaning which is risky because the translators subjective understanding might bias their decisions.

Nida's translation theory demands the processing of cultural differences should be closely related to the representation of the source language in the target language from semantic to stylistic. Only

when the translated text reproduces the language style and innermost spirit of the source language from language form to cultural connotation can the text be regarded as a successful work [6].

4. Comparative Analyze Impolite Expressions Translation under Functional Equivalence Theory

Scalar Both Dr. Hawkes and Mr. Yang are competent bilingual speakers, and it is inevitably they all tried their best to find the proper corresponding words. However, due to the huge gap between the target language and source language, the translator must make a difficult choice, one is to turn to some other way to illustrate the meaning of the original text or be faithful to the semantic form of original text, even though this might create obstacles on readers' understanding. Especially impolite expressions are non-formal in Chinese, creating more barriers to finding the proper alternative word in English.

There are some following examples to illustrate the different translation strategies of both translators when they handle different types of impolite expression.

4.1. Use Criticize Words for Praising Someone

Use criticize words for praising someone (正话反说) is a frequently used language skill, because in Chinese culture, direct praise will not always work out for a person on temper, especially when he or she enjoys a higher social status. Because this will be recognized as flattery, which might stir others up and worsen the situation. Therefore, in this example, Hsifeng uses an unusual way to address the crisis [7].

She criticized Jia mother, the supreme authority in Jia mansion, which is unexpected because, under the restriction of etiquette, this is utterly unacceptable. It not only shows that Hsifeng has vision and courage but also dares to send herself under the old lady's anger. It also shows her superior language art, which is just right and effectively alleviates and reverses the tension at that time.

Example 1:

凤姐儿道：“谁教老太太会调理人，调理的水葱儿似的，怎么怨得人要？”

Hawkes' version: 'You shouldn't be so good at training your girls,' said Xi-feng. 'When you've brought up a beautiful young bulrush like Faithful, can you blame other people for wanting her?'

Yang's version: 'Who told you, madam, to train your girls so well? If you bring one up as fresh as a sprig of young parsley, you can't blame people for wanting her.'

In Hawkes' translation version, the 水葱儿 is translated into "beautiful young bulrush like Faithful", which is totally different from the original meaning of the text. This can be seen as a betrayal of the original text, however, 水葱儿, is a concept totally isolated from the daily life of some western readers, and others can not connect this metaphor with young and pretty-looking girls. Hawkes chooses the stages III technique and reshapes the source text completely.

In Yang's version, the 水葱儿 is translated into "young parsley," which is an intended misinterpretation. This Chinese word refers to a special water breed plant called *Scirpus tabernaemontani* in Latin. Translating in this way inevitably puzzles readers and ruins the harmony of the language. To avoid the situation, the translator chooses a similar species to illustrate the good-looking, tall and proportioned girl to meet the equivalence requirement.

Therefore, as the analyzed examples, both versions more or less change the lexical meaning of the original text. Yang's version focuses more on the original metaphor and Hawkes' does not.

4.2. Intimate Insult

Some characters, such as Hsifeng and Baoyu, use intimate insults, including curses and dirty words to troll around their friends. This is not a humiliation but a way to show the intimate relationship between the speakers and listeners. In the example listed below, the speaker Hsifeng has a very close relationship with the listener Ping'er, Ping'er is the servant and assistant of Hsifeng.

原来你这蹄子禽鬼

Hawkes' version: So it was you up to your tricks, you little monkey!

Yang's version: So it was just one of your tricks.

The direct translation of the original text is "you shameless pervert". In contrast, Hsifeng's true meaning of this insult should be "you a deep card", because in the context of that time, Ping'er successfully accomplished the mission given by Hsifeng. The Manchu people, the rulers of the Qing Dynasty, were nomadic people of hunted and fished in the northeast. Their daily life were closely related to herbivores (especially horses, sheep and cows), so they used the word to represent children or young people (with derogatory connotations) [9]. The meaning was similar to the word "wretch" in English. Therefore, it is used for swearing in public and for intimacy in private.

Hawkes' version replaces this with "you little monkey", which is accurate enough to illustrate the deeper meaning of the source text. In comparison, Yang simply discards this part of the content to avoid an awkward situation. Therefore, he can maintain the seriousness of literary translation. Yet this choice also hinders readers to understand the image of Hsifeng. These languages play an important role in shaping Hsifeng's outgoing and lively image without adhering to feudal etiquette. This curse word of Hsifeng is the side description of her vigorous character and her low level of education.

4.3. Idiom

In the language description of a Dream of Red Mansions, in many cases, the characters in the text are not convenient to call their names directly, so they choose the way of referring to them. This use of idiom highlights Cao Xueqin's profound literary foundation, and also puts forward high requirements for the translator.

In the translation of the idioms, the most common type of difficulty is the replacement of metaphors. The function of figurative image in different contexts is to "express abstraction in concreteness and enlighten the unknown or difficult to know". Some of time, foreignizing translation is not suitable as the followed example

Such as: “只许州官放火，不许百姓点灯” [10]

Version I: Only state officials are allowed to set fire to the wall and not allow people to light lamps. Despotism rulers do as they please and deny the people the slightest freedom.

Version II: One man may steal a horse while another may not look over the hedge

The first one is to choose the literal translation and explain the meaning to assist understanding. This way is safer in the essay or an exhibition material,

The second one chooses to shift the metaphors which are familiar to western readers, shorten the length of the text, and enhance the flexibility of languages. Similarities can be observed in the following examples.

第三十回：谁知两个人倒在一处对赔不是了。对笑对诉，倒像‘黄鹰抓住了鹞子的脚’，两个都扣了环了。

Hawkes' version: I found the two of them together apologizing to each other. It was like the kite and the kestrel holding hands: they were positively locked in a clinch!

Yang's version: I found they'd already asked each other's forgiveness and were clinging together like an eagle sinking its talons into a hawk.

To deal with these two problems, the two translations use different metaphors respectively. Hawkes transforms the two metaphors of Chinese native raptors “黄鹰” and “鹞子” into the phenomenon of the kite and the kestrel, which is more familiar to Western readers. Kestrel is a kind of raptor to feed on small birds, often the flying kite as prey, and in the attack on the kite, will be entangled in the talon and can not move, very exquisite description of the image that Bao Dai two people entangled, but difficult to give up the feelings [11].

4.4. Summary

Both the translator try to balance the faithfulness to the original text and functional equivalence to the target readers, but still, some difference lies in their translation styles. Translators have subjective initiative in the process of translation. Hawkes tends to make substantial revisions of the original text to reproduce the charm and odor of the original text. He uses free or conversion translation and tries his best to replace the different Chinese cultural characteristics with British cultural habits and expressions. In contrast, Mr. Yang tent to translate in a racier and suppler way and use literal translation to keep the style of the original as much as possible.

5. Conclusion

The thesis analyzes the impolite expressions functions in the novel, introduces the procedures of applying functional equivalence theory, and compares the translation strategies between Hawkes' and Yang Xianyi's version under the guidance of functional equivalence theory. A Dream of Red Mansions, regarded as the peak of Chinese classical novel literature, strives to reflect all of the author's observations of human nature in character creation. The characters in this novel are not like ordinary ones, formulated and labeled. Instead, translators should carefully understand the characters from between the lines of the novel. However, due to the objective difference between Chinese and English culture and the author's different cultural backgrounds, both translators revise the original meaning of the source text in their way. Still, they all obey the rules of functional equivalence. So translation criticism should not simply evaluate the superiority or inferiority of the translation.

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