

Analysis of the Translation of Local Culture in Mo Yan's Works by Skopos Theory

Siyan Ma^{1,a,†}, Yuezhu Qiao^{2,b,*,†}, and Fangfei Yang^{3,c,†}

¹*Pan Tianshou College of Architecture and Art Design, Ningbo University, Fenghua Road, Ningbo, China*

²*College of Foreign Languages, Hubei University, No. 368 Youyi Avenue, Wuhan, China*

³*College of Humanities and Arts, Tianjin University, 135 Ya Kwun Road, Tianjin, China*
a. 1747515062@qq.com, b. qiaoyuezhu@stu.hubu.edu.cn, c. yangfangfeisy@163.com

**corresponding author*

†These authors contributed equally.

Abstract: Mo Yan's works present the Chinese local culture, which have a profound cultural significance and have had a far-reaching impact on the international scale. However, for many English-speaking readers, some of the words in Mo Yan's works with a special Chinese local culture are difficult and complex to understand. Because of this, an inaccurate translation may cause readers to be biased. This article uses the Skopos Theory as a guideline and takes Howard Goldblatt's English translation as examples to analyse the translation of local culture in several of Mo Yan's masterpieces, so as to achieve the purpose of spreading local culture in translation. The study found that most of Howard Goldblatt's translations of the words related to local culture in Mo Yan's works conformed to the Skopos Theory, appropriately combining Chinese local culture with western culture to promote readers' understanding and provide an effective way for foreign readers to understand Chinese local culture.

Keywords: Mo Yan's novel, local culture, Howard Goldblatt's translation, Skopos Theory

1. Introduction

The works of the famous contemporary Chinese writer Mo Yan have a distinctive local flavour and a strong regional custom atmosphere. This writing style, rich in folk characteristics, has been widely analysed and celebrated in China. While Chinese and foreign civilizations differ greatly, Howard Goldblatt combines the two to translate several of Mo Yan's works, spreading the local culture with Chinese characteristics overseas and thus improving China's cultural soft power. The words and phrases in his works involve Chinese songs and proverbs, the names of people, places, and festivals, which makes it difficult to translate and may even cause comprehension problems for foreign readers unfamiliar with Chinese local culture. Therefore, a reasonable analysis of the various local elements of Mo Yan's works can allow translators to understand and respect the culture when translating and be more flexible in the interaction between the Chinese and foreign cultures. Currently, the translation of Mo Yan's works has been extensively researched in many fields by academics, such as Xiao Shudan, who viewed from an ecological translation perspective to construct a model of Chinese literary translation to facilitate the dissemination and promotion of Mo Yan's novels [1]. Liu Yiqiu, who studied readers' acceptance strategies of Mo Yan's novels from a reception aesthetics perspective [2].

However, there is still a blank in the study of the translation of Mo Yan's works with Skopos Theory. Therefore, this paper focuses on the way in which Skopos Theory is reflected in the translations and the dissemination of vernacular culture. Based on this, this paper attempts to analyze how the three principles of Skopos Theory can build a bridge between Chinese works and foreign readers and to better convey Chinese local culture with Howard Goldblatt's translation of Mo Yan's works.

2. Theoretical Approach

2.1. Introduction to Skopos Theory

"Skopos Theory" was first proposed by Hans Vermeer, a German linguist who believed that translation should first consider the source language and the target language and that the translation activity or translation itself can be purposeful [3]. It has three fundamental principles, namely the Skopos rule, the Coherence rule and the Fidelity rule. The Skopos rule is the primary principle of Skopos Theory, which means that when translating the context and culture of a language, the translation must be done in the way the recipient expects it to be done, with the aim of the translation determining the whole process and the methods used in translation. The Coherence rule is easy to understand and means that the translation should be smooth and coherent, so the reader can understand and accept it. Fidelity rule refers to The translation's content should be faithful to the author. The extent and format of this faithfulness should be related to the purpose of the translation and the translator's understanding of the source text. Of the three rules, the first one is the Skopos Rule, which is universally applicable; Coherence Rule and Fidelity Rule are the special rules, which are subordinate to the Rule of Purpose, while the Fidelity Rule is dependent on the Coherence Rule. This theory realizes the transformation of translation theory from static language translation characteristic theory to dynamic functional translation analysis method and provides a new perspective for people to explore translation theory and practice. The adequacy of the translation is even more important when using the purpose theory in translation. The word "adequacy" here does not mean "equivalence", but rather that the translation process is guided by the principle of purpose and the principle of fidelity, and the standard for evaluating the translation is whether it is appropriate or not. The subjects involved in these three basic principles are primarily the reader, the translator and the text itself. As intermediary, the translator takes into account both the reader's ability to understand, the reader's regional culture and the meaning that the text itself is intended to convey.

2.2. Methodology

Several of Mo Yan's classic works, such as *"Life and death are wearing me out"*, *"Red Sorghum"* and *"Frog"*, have a strong regional flavour and vernacular culture. This characteristic feature of his work is closely related to his personal life experience. Therefore, vernacular culture can be better understood by understanding Mr. Mo Yan's life experiences and the representative fragments of this basic essential classic work. Mr. Howard Goldblatt's translation of Mo Yan's works is the most authoritative. Read the original text of Mo Yan's works and combine it with his translation of Mo Yan's works, relate it to the knowledge of purpose theory, and read a lot of literature relevant to the analysis of translation of Mo Yan's works and purpose theory while studying the theory, the writers consider the accuracy of his translations in relation to the theory and draw out the excellent points. The study of vernacular culture is categorized and analyzed, conclusions and recommendations are finally drawn.

3. Analysis of the Translation of Mo Yan's Work by Howard Goldblatt

3.1. Mo Yan and Local Culture

Mo Yan, who lived in the countryside for more than 20 years, is the first Chinese writer to win the Nobel Prize in Literature. Experiential is the most important characteristic of his rural writing. The long life experience deeply imprinted the lifestyle, customs and characters of the countryside into his creations, so the flavor of the vernacular has been almost unconsciously integrated into Mo Yan's novels. There he not only found the hard work of farming but also felt the joy of harvest. he saw the ignorance in the countryside but also felt the untold sincerity and purity. Mo Yan's personal experiences and perceptions have cultivated his unique way and perspective of perceiving the world, and have allowed these very local flavors of our country's regional culture to shine through in his works.

3.2. Selecting Howard Goldblatt's Translation to Analyze

When Stephen Sparks interviewed Howard Goldblatt, he said, "I'm often asked whether I translate for the author or for the reader, and my answer is clear, the author writes for the reader, and then I translate for the reader [4]."In translating Mo Yan's works, Howard Goldblatt always keeps in touch with him to understand the meaning of the original text to the greatest extent possible and to better reflect the accuracy of the translation. At the same time, Howard Goldblatt attaches importance to the culture of the target language in which the English-speaking readers live, and restores the meaning of the source text to the greatest extent possible without abandoning the environment of the translated language, so that neither the foreign readers will have difficulties in understanding nor the local meaning intended by the original text will be lost. As a renowned American sinologist and translator, he has an in-depth knowledge of both Chinese culture and the culture of English-speaking countries, which is a great advantage of Howard Goldblatt translation. As English emphasises hypotaxis and Chinese emphasises parataxis, the translator must strike a high balance between the two languages to cater for the target audience, and Ge's translation achieves this goal very well.

4. The Embodiment of Skopos Theory in the Process of Howard Goldblatt's English Translation

4.1. Translation of Names with Local Flavor

Example 1:

Source Original: 跟着我家的老伙计刘罗汉大爷去河边捉螃蟹的情景 [5].

Target Translation: Arhat Liu, named after Buddhist saints, took him crabbing on the riverbank [6].

In translating the personal name "刘罗汉", Howard Goldblatt's adopted the method of "phonetic translation + meaning". In order to be faithful to the original text and to let foreign readers understand the different surname culture in China, the surname "刘" is directly translated by phonetic translation, while the name "罗汉" is translated by paraphrasing in order to let the target language readers receive the meaning of the person's name and better understand the content of the article. The "罗汉" is a Buddhist term, is the shortened form of "Arahan", which means "kill thieves, no life, should provide" and so on. Its connotation is rich and unique, which can represent the people's simple and kind, sincere and hardworking characteristics in Gaomi. Therefore, the way to use the "Luohan" Sanskrit "Arhat" is more accurate. In his translation of "Liu Luohan", Howard Goldblatt not only conveys to the reader the concept of the name, but also implies the culture and spirit of the name, with the purpose of conveying the spirit of the Chinese vernacular. At the same time, "Arhat Liu" is easier to understand

than "Liu Luohan" and more closely related to the character setting and the structure of the text. This not only maintains the cultural undertones of the name in the text, but also provides the reader with another clue to understand the character.

4.2. Translation of Customs and Traditions with Local Flavor

Example 2:

Source Original: 以他模仿着寡妇尖细的嗓音，呜呜的哭着，诉着：二狗，二狗好狠心呀！两手一撒归了西呀 [7]！

Target Translation: In the high-pitched voice of widow, he began to sob and voice her grief: Dog Two, Dog Two, how could you do that with your arms out-stretched, you return to your Maker [8].

From the translation we can see that Howard Goldblatt translated the source text with the reception habits of the target readers in mind, and wisely made a conversion of religious thought. In China, it is believed that when a person dies, he or she will go to the "West" where the Buddha lives, and in ancient times, the place of execution was located at the West Gate or West Market. Therefore, a person's death is called "归西了". English-speaking people believe in Christianity, and they believe in "God created man" and "original sin". Therefore, the phrase "return to your Maker" can better combine the meaning of the original text with the cultural background of the target readers. However, simply translating into "return to the West" with the Chinese way would be difficult for the target readers to understand, even with footnotes. From a perspective of Skopos Theory, the translator considers the ease of translation from the standpoint of foreign readers, making the translation of "归了西" easy to understand without losing the meaning of the original text itself, and translating it appropriately.

4.3. Translation of Objects with Local Flavor

Example 3:

Source Original: 鲁立人随即发布命令，让哑巴和区小队的队员.....把十几个捆绑的像粽子一样的人押上了土台子 [7]。

Target Translation: Lu Liren stepped up and ordered the mute and his urine...to drag the prisoners up to the stage like a string of pinecones [8].

In modern Chinese grammar, "like" is a typical metaphorical phrase structure. In the example sentence, the subject is "people" and the metaphor is "dumplings", emphasizing that people are tied up tightly and cannot move. So, it is enough to translate this state. However, "粽子" is a unique food in Chinese culture, which may be difficult for foreign readers to understand. But Howard Goldblatt takes "pinecones", which are similar in appearance to 粽子, as a metaphor to make readers know that people cannot The state of being unable to break free. Compared with the direct translation of "zongzi" or "rice dumplings", "pinecones" is more in line with the culture and environment of foreign readers and can better connect and represent foreign readers. At the same time, there is no special cultural meaning to be exported, so the substitution of metaphors is not harmless and does not contradict the principle of fidelity of Skopos Theory.

Example 4:

Source Original: 抻饼，煮鸡蛋，羊角葱，豆瓣酱 [9]。

Target Translation: Wheat cakes, hard-boiled egg, yellow onions and fermented bean sauce [10].

“抻饼” is a special snack in Mo Yan's hometown Gaomi, which can be eaten alone or with vegetables, small onions and bean paste. According to Wechsler's dictionary, "wheat cakes" is a type of pancake made of flour and a dessert. It can be eaten alone or with jam. Although the two are foods from different cultures, there is a high degree of consistency in the way they are eaten and prepared.

By substituting a familiar object for an unfamiliar one, the translator has made the word '抻饼' much more acceptable to English-speaking readers. It can be seen that Howard Goldblatt has paid attention to the connection existing in the two cultures when translating and adopting expressions more familiar to English-speaking countries, for example "wheat cakes". That is, he changes its shell and respects its content, and also maintains coherence while ensuring fidelity to a certain extent. In this way, he achieves the purpose of his translation.

4.4. Translation of Songs with Local Flavor

Example 5:

Source Original: 许宝许宝，见蛋就咬！咬不着蛋，满头大汗。许宝许宝，是根驴屄。吊儿郎当，不走正道…… [11]

Target Translation: Xu Bao Xu Bao, sees an egg and takes a bite! Without an egg to bite, he sweats all night. Xu Bao Xu Bao, a donkey dick of a sight. A scoundrel who won't stand up and fly right. . . [12]

In the original text, the song made up by the elementary school students rhymes with "ao" in Chinese. However, readers of the translated language expect to read the same rhyming, catchy songs in their language. Mr. Howard Goldblatt paid attention to this purpose in his translation, which ends each sentence with "t" and the words "bite", "night", "night" and "right" aim to rhyme neatly [13]. The translation of this song not only satisfies the reader's purpose but is also faithful to the original text. This faithfulness is not only reflected in the accurate translation of the original content but also the structure of the sentences and the rhetorical techniques, so that the reader can read the content while reading it in a catchy manner. Such a translation harmonizes the contexts of the two languages. It allows the translation to maintain the vernacular cultural characteristics of the original text, enabling readers to understand better and accept Mo Yan's work.

4.5. Translation of Dialect with Local Flavor

Example 6:

Source Original: “爷儿们，我喊一二三，喊三时猛劲儿，别孬种，要命的时刻塌了腰 [7]。”

Target Translation: On the count of three, lift with all your might. It is life or death, so don't cave in on me. All right [8]?

“孬种” usually refers to a person who is timid and fearful, or of poor moral character, showing a person's incompetence. It is usually used in the colloquial language or dialect of the people of northern China in their daily lives. Here Howard Goldblatt uses the free translation, employing the simple phrase "cave in" to convey the original word's meaning, maintaining fidelity and clarifying the connotative meaning of the source text. It also achieves coherence so that the communicative intention of the original language corresponds to the cognitive expectations of the readers of the translation and is easier for the target language readers to understand and accept without creating a communicative barrier. Overall, this sentence achieves the translation purpose sought by the translator.

When analysing the translation of names, customs, objects, songs and dialects with a local flavour in Mr. Mo Yan's work, it is clear that Mr. Ge Haowen has stepped outside the framework of the local Chinese culture and selected the closest imagery or entity for translation between the English and Chinese cultures. This is not a 'betrayal' of the original text, but rather makes the translation more clever and flexible, maximising the meaning of the original text and achieving the purpose of the text 'for whom it is intended'. Thus, Mr. Ge Haowen uses a novel and creative way of expressing the local culture of Mo Yan's novels, achieving a deep bilingual integration of Chinese and English.

5. Conclusion

Mo Yan's novels embody a rich and colorful local culture. In his translation, Fully aware of the Chinese and Western cultural differences in terms of language environment, values, and so on, Howard Goldblatt translates Mo Yan's folklore vividly to Western readers so that they can better understand Chinese local culture. By analyzing the translations of several classical works of Mo Yan using the theory of the purpose, Howard Goldblatt's translated works can enable the target language readers to accept and understand the culture of the target language. And it is faithful to the content of the original text so as to better spread China's vernacular culture. The translations of many excellent translators reflect the Skopos Theory. The flexible application of the three principles of Skopos Theory in translation makes the translation more readable and acceptable and at the same time, enables the target language readers to understand the decadent and unique traditional culture of China, which is needed for translators to focus on when translating. At the same time, not only in novels with vernacular characteristics, but also in translating literary works with a broader Chinese culture, the translator should also consider the reader, the source text and the cultural environment in which the reader lives, not only respecting the content of the source language text and ensuring the readers' understanding, but also ensuring the coherence of the translation, achieving the transmission of the existing meaning and the reader's acceptance of different cultures, so that readers from different countries and languages can appreciate the spiritual power behind the literature.. A two-way view of the problems in translation is essential in order to achieve a thoroughly considered translation process and a reasonably rigorous translation outcome.

References

- [1] Xiao Shudan. A study on the translation of Mo Yan's novels in the English-speaking world under the threshold of ecological translation [J]. *English Square*, 2022(22):3-8. DOI:10.16723/j.cnki.yygc.2022.22.028.
- [2] Liu Yiqiu. A Study on the Translation Strategy of Mo Yan's Novel from the Perspective of Acceptance Aesthetics [D]. Jinan University, 2019. doi:10.27166/d.cnki.gsdcc.2019.000066.
- [3] KATHARINA REI, HANS J. VERMEER. TOWARDS A GENERAL THEORY OF TRANSLATIONAL ACTION SKOPOS THEORY EXPLAINED TRANSLATED FROM THE GERMAN BY CHRISTIANE NORD ENGLISH REVIEWED BY MARINA DUDENHOFFER [M]. ROUTLEDGE TAYLOR & FRANCIS GROUP. 2013.
- [4] Wang Yuna. Experimental Analysis of Ge Haowen's Strategies for Translating Mo Yan's "Plump Breasts and Fat Ass" from the Perspective of Purpose Theory [J]. *Journal of Mudanjiang Education College*, 2014(04):22+65.
- [5] Mo Yan. *Red Sorghum* [M]. Beijing: China Youth Press, 2004.01.
- [6] Mo Yan ; translated from the Chinese by Howard Goldblatt.. *Red sorghum* [M]. Viking. 1993.
- [7] Mo Yan. *Big breasts and wide hips* [M]. Hangzhou: Zhejiang Literature and Art Publishing House, 2019.06.
- [8] Mo Yan ; translated from the Chinese by Howard Goldblatt.. *Big breasts and wide hips: a novel* [M]. Arcade Pub.. 2004.
- [9] Mo Yan. *Frog* [M]. Hangzhou: Zhejiang Literature and Art Publishing House, 2019.07.
- [10] MOYAN. *FROG* [M]. TRANSLATED FROM THE ORIGINAL CHINESE EDITION, HOWARD GOLDBLATT. 2014.
- [11] Mo Yan. *Life and death are wearing me out* [M]. Hangzhou: Zhejiang Literature and Art Publishing House, 2022.01.
- [12] Mo Yan ; translated from the Chinese by Howard Goldblatt.. *Life and death are wearing me out: a novel* [M]. Arcade Pub. 2008.
- [13] Shi Hongmei. An analysis of the translation technique of vernacular sentiment in the English translation of Mo Yan's "Fatigue of Life and Death" in a cross-cultural context [J]. *Journal of Beijing Printing Institute*, 2020, 28(02):95-97. DOI:10.19461/j.cnki.1004-8626.2020.02.026.