



Translation Methods of Vernacular Literature Works ——Take Those of Jia Pingwa as an Example

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Abstract: Translation is a cultural exchange, not just a linguistic transformation. Foreign translation of vernacular literature works is also an important way to promote the Chinese folk culture. However, the cultural omission hinders foreign readers from gaining a deeper understanding of Chinese vernacular culture. Therefore, this thesis selects the English translation of *Turbulence* as the object of study, aiming to explore the translation strategies of vernacular language such as the names of people, and the names of Shaanxi snacks present in the work. For the purpose, the translator carefully collates the names of people and special snacks in Shaanxi that appear in the work. Besides, the author will combine the above examples to make an in-depth analysis of the translation when writing the paper. The following conclusions have been drawn: Firstly, when the author of the original wants to highlight the uniqueness of Chinese folk culture, she should use domesticating translation, because this kind of translation strategy can retain the characteristic content of the original. In addition, if the author wants foreign readers to understand the local snacks, the translator should use the direct translation. The direct translation method can give the Western readers a basic understanding of the main ingredients used in the special snacks.

Keywords: Turbulence, Vernacular Language, domesticating translation, direct translation

1. Introduction

In recent years, with the popularity and flourishing of cultural studies, scholars have shifted their understanding of translation in the traditional sense^[1]. Translation is not only a cross-linguistic activity, but also a cross-cultural communication activity. In fact, cultural communication is an exchange between countries, an exchange between translators and authors, and an interaction between authors and readers; this two-way communication should be in a dynamic and balanced state. However, due to the huge differences in customs and geographical and cultural backgrounds between China and the West, there is a cultural omission when translators translate literary works, especially vernacular literature. It not only hinders the communication between readers and authors, but also slows down the pace of Chinese vernacular works going abroad. For the time being, there are many difficulties in translating Chinese literature into foreign languages.

According to the data provided by Wang Peirong, 100,000 books have been translated and published in the West in the last 100 years. At the same time, less than 500 Chinese books have been introduced and published in Western countries. It can be seen that only a few people abroad, such as scholars and translators, understand Chinese literature. This is mainly because the huge cultural differences between China and the West hinder the foreign translation of Chinese literary works. And dialect is the main reason for this problem. To translate vernacular literature well, it is necessary to choose the appropriate methods to translate dialects as they reflect the character and local customs. Besides, they are important channels to understand the local area and appreciate the local culture. The reason why Mo Yan won the Nobel Prize for Literature is largely due to the Swedish sinologist Diana Chen whose profound understanding of the original text and proper translation helped Mo Yan reach the highest podium of the World Literature Prize^[2]. Therefore, proper translation is a key factor for Chinese literature, especially vernacular literature, to go out of the country and into the world.

The translation of Shaanxi literature should be even more so. Shaanxi literature depicts the boldness of northern Shaanxi, the depth of Guan zhong, and the delicacy of southern Shaanxi. Shaanxi vernacular literature tells the local customs and habits while conveying the values of Shaanxi people. Although Shaanxi writers have produced one classic vernacular literature novel after another which have been praised by readers at home. However, the process of English translation of Shaanxi contemporary literature is very slow, and a small number of works are translated into English.

This paper will analyze how the translator Ge Haowen skillfully handles folk languages and what translation strategies he adopts to deal with the folk language. Besides, the analysis of the translation strategies of the English translation will largely serve as a reference for future translators engaged in translating Shaanxi vernacular literature. When translating vernacular literature, translators must have a good command of the foreignization strategy and naturalization, as well as what vernacular cultural terms need to be annotated. It not only helps avoid omissions and misinterpretations of the translated works, but also allows Western readers to understand the connotations of historical allusions and know the local customs of Shaanxi. In addition, the reader can also experience the charm of Shaanxi culture.

Therefore, the research significance of this paper is mainly reflected in the following aspects: firstly, this paper will mainly analyze and study the translation strategies of such works to let readers understand the characteristics of the source language culture while experiencing the collision and impact of ideas brought by foreign cultures; secondly, in-depth



analysis of translations can provide some useful suggestions for translators to translate vernacular literature works. It will promote Chinese vernacular literature works to gain more foreign audiences while letting more and more foreigners feel the profundity and charm of Chinese language and Chinese culture.

Communicative translations are easy to understand. The translations using the semantic method are more difficult to understand in some vernacular literature works. This is entirely due to the fact that semantic translation and communicative translation serve different audiences. The audience of semantic translation is the author of the original text, so the semantic method must respect the author of the original text. While the audience of communicative translation is the readers of the translated language, which can ensure the readers can understand and read better. In a word, semantic translation should be faithful to the original text, which is similar to direct translation to a large extent while communicative translation should conform to the linguistic habits of the incoming language, which is similar to free translation^[iii]. However, when translated, these two kinds of translations often match each other. Therefore, only by respecting the characteristics of the text and the readers of the translated language and other factors while using different translation methods can the translator have higher social value and academic value.

2. Literature Review

For decades, scholars have been debating on direct translation versus free translation among many different translation methods. In 1981, Peter Newmark, a well-known British translator, proposed a new translation theory of semantic translation and communicative translation in his book *Approaches to Translation*^[iv]. Given different cultural backgrounds, it is difficult for translators to find exact equivalents when translating many folk languages, historical names, and place names in English. Over the years, not many translators have been able to be faithful to the original text while conforming to the linguistic characteristics of the translated language and taking care of the readers' feelings. In particular, the translation of the Shaanxi dialect, which is very characteristic of the region in the paper, has caused many obstacles for translators. The proposed translation theory opens up a new way of thinking for literary translation, especially vernacular literature translation.

2.1 Previous Research on Semantic and Communicative Translation

Communicative and semantic translation can be applied to the following text types: news reports, official correspondence, news reports, novels, etc. However, according to the author's search on the Internet, the research direction is mainly divided into speeches of government officials and heads of state when they attend conferences and speeches or documents. And some scholars also carry on researches from those aspects. For example, Yin Chunhong applies the theory to the exploration of the English Translation of the Government Work Report^[v]. The conclusion in this journal is that because of their unique seriousness, strong political color and high sensitivity, the combined use of semantic translation and communicative translation plays an important role in the translation of political papers.

Communicative and semantic translation can be applied to scientific and technical papers: e.g. Wang Xiaojin applies the theory to the Discussion of Scientific and Technical English Translation^[vi]. From the paper, the conclusion is that the strong professional character of technical English imposes high quality requirements on its translation. To make a translation of scientific and technical texts of high quality, it is necessary to combine semantic translation and communicative translation. Only in this way can we present high-quality scientific and technical translations.

There are 1064 relevant articles in CNKI until December 31, 2021, of which 236 are on literary translation, accounting for about 20%. These studies mainly focus on the following research direction: firstly, the application of the theory in the translation of biographical literature; secondly, the use of the theory in the use of culturally loaded words, etc. However, there are only a few papers published on CNKI with the use of semantic and communicative translation in vernacular literature, not to mention the research of papers related to vernacular languages. There are some criticisms of the theory. For example, Yang Shizhu once pointed that semantic and communicative translation is limited to the traditional translation dichotomy. Nevertheless, he believed that this theory can be applied to certain cases although it is simplistic^[vii].

2.2 Previous Studies on Folk Language Translation

As China's comprehensive national power improves, Chinese culture and Chinese literature have gradually begun to attract widespread attention from the West in recent years. And the folk language in Chinese literature is the most representative of Chinese cultural characteristics. Therefore, the author believes that the study of English translation about the folk language in literary works will become a popular research topic to a certain extent. Before Zhou Lingshun proposed the new term "folk language" in 2016, many scholars had conducted studies on the English translation of folk language, such as the translation strategies of dialects^[viii].

After Zhou Lingshun once proposed the concept of folk language in 2016, a large number of articles on the English translation of folk language emerged. There are about 204 relevant articles in CNKI until December 31, 2020. These studies mainly focus on translators' behavior in translating folk languages, such as principles of Chinese-English translation and folk language strategies, translation criticism of folk languages, and translation of folk languages from different theoretical perspectives. However, there are few articles that use semantic translation and communicative translation to parse folk languages. Therefore, the author will analyze the English translation about dialects in Shaanxi vernacular literature from the perspectives of semantic translation and communicative translation.

3. Methodology

3.1 Research questions

This paper aims to answer the following questions.

The first question is what kind of translation strategy should a translator adopt when translating folk language in the vernacular literature?

The second question is what kind of translation methods should a translator adopt when translating folk languages in the vernacular literature?

3.2 Research aim

The author hope will summarize the strategies and methods of Chinese-English translation about the folk language in vernacular literature by analyzing the English translations about folk language in the selected examples. At the same time, the author also wishes to provide some suggestions for the translation of vernacular literature works in Shaanxi.

4. The Link Between Dialect and Food Culture and Regional Culture

4.1 Dialect and Regional Culture

Many writers have lived for a long time in an environment with a strong regional culture, so there are a lot of vernacular languages in their works, which can highlight the obvious regional characteristics. Dialects are an integral part of regional culture, and they also represent the local regional culture. A large number of dialects in a literary work are to give readers a clear understanding of the geographical background of the novel. At the same time, readers can also understand the real environment in which the story takes place. The language in Shen Congwen's novel reveals to readers between the lines that the story takes place in a small town in western Hunan; Lu Xun's *Hometown* implies that the novel describes the customs and people in the eastern part of Zhejiang; the dialect in Mo Yan's novel suggests that the story takes place in Gaomi, Shandong. Jia Pingwa, a writer of Shaanxi vernacular literature, uses dialects extensively in many of his books so the strong local cultural flavor can be found in the vernacular language. *Turbulence* is a mirror of Shangzhou's folk culture. It is also a small folk museum that records not only Shangzhou's folk customs but also the customs of the Qin region. Here is an example:

Example 1:

牛月清说：“这么晚了，你老还收破烂”？

老头并不看，吹了一个烟圈：说：“这么晚了，有破烂嘛”！柳月就吃吃笑。

牛月清说：“瓜女子，笑个什么”^[ix]？

“Isn't it a bit late to collect scrap?” Niu Yueqing asked.

Without looking at her, he blew a smoke ring and said, “It's at night that I can pick up them!” Liu Yue burst out laughing.

“Silly girl, why do you laugh?” Niu Yueqing said.

Different regions have different dialects for the word silly. For example, in Shanghai, Shanghai people use 十三点 to describe those who are silly. It is the most frequently used word by Shanghai people. 十三点 is used to blame people, but it will not hurt the feelings between two people. It seems to be a curse word, but it will not really blame each other. People in Shaanxi use the word 瓜 to describe a person, such as 瓜娃子 and 瓜女子. This word is also one of the most frequently used words in Shaanxi dialect.

Besides, people usually use the word 囡囡 in Jiangsu and Shanghai, which is mostly used to describe girls who are not yet married. It is used to express the endearment for girls. While in Shaanxi, locals call young girls as 女娃 because in modern Chinese, the word 娃 refers to a small child while it also meant a beautiful woman in ancient times.

4.2 Dialect and Food Culture

The author Wang Zengqi wrote in an article that "eating is also culture". At the same time, he also mentioned that Chinese works of fiction rely on the Chinese culture, and that literary works based on the Chinese culture, especially the vernacular culture, must have a strong regional flavor and deep national color^[x]. If a work wants to contain the local characteristics, the author must portray the local village life and food culture in detail in the text.

When readers read the literary works written by Shaanxi writers, they can find traces of local cuisine in Shaanxi. Jia Pingwa's extensive use of dialect in many of his works is to give them a strong local flavor. He refers to the local food of Shaanxi in many of his works 锅盔、麻食、西府浆水面、辣子 in order to bring his novels closer to people's daily lives.

秦川烩麻食. 麻食 is made from flour and made into the shape of a shell. Although it is a home-style cooking on the dinner table of Shaanxi people. Its history can be traced back to the Yuan dynasty. Locals also refer to 麻食 as poor and rich dish. That is to say that the rich can eat while the poor can also eat.

5. Translation Methods of Folk Languages

After analyzing the cultural connotations behind the names of local special snacks in Shaanxi, the author will try to propose translation strategies for Shaanxi vernacular literature in this section. Different dialects require different translation strategies, so this section will explore different translation strategies for dialects.

5.1 Alienation

In the case of Jia Pingwa's work *Turbulence*, the work contains many local customs and local culture of Shaanxi since he wants to promote the folk culture of Guanzhong in Shaanxi while making foreign readers to experience the local folk customs and traditions as well as the development and changes of Chinese society.

炕 is familiar to those who have lived in the northern region for a long time. It is used for sleeping, just like the wooden beds used by southerners. Beds are very common in China and other countries so there is no doubt to understand them. However, 炕 is missing in Western culture^[xi]. It is omitted from Western culture because it is a unique piece of furniture in northern China and represents the distinctive Chinese vernacular culture. Therefore, the translation method of transliteration plus explanation is adopted. 炕 refers to the kang which is equivalent to the bed. By doing so, the reader can also understand this vernacular word better. This method reflects the profoundness of Chinese culture, highlighting the uniqueness of northern Chinese folk culture and faithfully reflecting what Jia Pingwa wants to show to his readers in *Turbulence*.

5.2 Literal translation

The translator applies the direct translation to local snacks which was referred in the work *Turbulence* so as to give the reader some idea of the ingredients used in the food. For example, 西府浆水面 is a local snack of Baoji. In the past, Baoji was also called Xifu. It is necessary for the translator to explain the water in this noodle is not the same as what we drink every day. The water has a sour taste so it can replace the vinegar. In summer, people in the countryside often pickle fresh celery in a jar. After a few days, the water becomes a fermented soup. Therefore, 西府浆水面 should be translated as Xifu Style Noodles with Fermented Celery Soup^[xii].

5.2.1 Literal translation with annotation

Names are a sign of mutual distinction between people; they are closely related to the society and culture of a country. Culturally, the names of Chinese and Western people are also very different and have their own characteristics. In a Chinese name, the family name comes in front of the given name because the ancient people have a deep family concept, and the family name can distinctly represent the blood relationship of people. However, the first name comes in front of the last name in the foreigner's name in that Westerners admire individualism and value themselves. Translators should pay attention to this detail when translating Chinese names, which can reflect Chinese values and facilitate foreign readers' understanding of traditional Chinese customs.

When Howard Goldblatt translated 陈世美, which appears in *Turbulence*, he directly used pinyin, thus translating it as Chen Shimei and added an explanation afterwards. The name Chen Shimei has its historical allusion. It is a character in the traditional Chinese opera *Qin Xianglian*. In the play, he is a negative character who abandons his wife and children. In modern times, people call a man who betrays his wife Chen Shimei. Western readers do not know this word, so translators should add an explanation to clarify it. Chen Shimei should be translated as Chen Shimei in the play, who abandoned his wife for another woman^[xiii].

6. Conclusion

This thesis focuses on the study of folk language in the English translation of Jia Pingwa's *Turbulence*. It not only summarizes the translation methods of folk language, but also promotes Shaanxi literary works to go global. The author hopes to bring some insights to the translators engaged in the English translation of Shaanxi literature. However, due to the author's limited knowledge and ability, there are some limitations.

This thesis is only a dissection of the translation methods of vernacular languages such as names of people and snacks on the basis of Howard Goldblatt's English translation. Vernacular languages have unique regional characteristics and a long history and culture so the translator's dissection of the English translation of vernacular languages is incomplete. And the creation of *Turbulence* is based on the geographical background of Shangzhou, Shaanxi, which does not represent the whole Shaanxi. Therefore, this analysis is not comprehensive, and the conclusions obtained by the author can only be used as a reference.

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