

Cross-cultural Pragmatics Strategies in the Translation of *A Dream of Red Mansions*

Zhao Yixin Wang Yafei

School of English Language and Culture, Beijing International Studies University, 100024

School of Humanities and Law, North China University of Technology, 100144

joy11235@126.com, faye791108@163.com

Abstract

As one of the four classics of ancient China, *A Dream of Red Mansions* has strong literary, epochal and cultural characteristics. This paper takes cross-cultural pragmatics as the theoretical framework, analysing the two versions by Yang Xianyi and David Hawkes from the perspective of pragmatic method, pragmatic context and pragmatic subject. The final conclusion is that when translating the more superficial text forms, both translators choose the domestication which points to the target language; when translating the cultural content at the pragmatic context and pragmatic subject level, the two translators generally adopt the strategy of foreignization as the main method and domestication as the auxiliary. The selection of strategies is not only subjected to the limitation of the transmission of pragmatic meaning, but also influenced by the translation purpose of the translators.

Keywords: Cross-cultural pragmatics; Translation of *A Dream of Red Mansions*; Pragmatic strategy; Pragmatic context; Pragmatic subject

1. Introduction

In the context of global integration, our country's political and economic strength is constantly increasing, and exchanges with other cultures are becoming more and more frequent. In the process of cultural exchange, the study of the intercommunication between language and culture is indispensable. As a book that converges profound Chinese utterances and culture, *A Dream of Red Mansions* had been translated into many languages. However, in the process of all the research on the translation of it, few scholars have conducted comparative analyses between different translations from the perspective of cross-cultural pragmatics. Therefore, based on the theory of cross-cultural pragmatics, this paper makes a comparative analysis of the two versions of Yang Xianyi and David Hawkes from three aspects: pragmatic method, pragmatic context, and pragmatic subject. By analysing the deep pragmatic connotation behind the discourse from a dynamic perspective, this paper will provide universal opinions on the cross-cultural theories used on classics, so as to enhance the accuracy of information transmission in cross-cultural practice, promote the understanding and recognition of Chinese culture by the people of other cultures, and enable Chinese culture to "going global".

2. Concept of Cross-cultural Pragmatics

Cross-cultural pragmatics, originated in the 1980s, is the result of the in-depth and horizontal development of linguistics. Due to the commonness and individuality between language and culture, and the actual needs of the internal development of linguistics and social reality, it has developed rapidly. Since 1976, western scholars Keenan (1976, p.257) and Leech (1983, p.144) have proposed research results such as the shelving criterion and

the new application of the politeness principle. What's more, Blum-Kulka has published the book *Intercultural pragmatics*.

Many Chinese and foreign linguists have put forward different views on the research contents of cross-cultural pragmatics. Istvan Kecskes (2004, p.3) believes that cross-cultural pragmatics focuses on the ways in which communicators with different mother tongues, usually representing different cultural backgrounds, use the same foreign language system to communicate in social communication. Besides, He (1997, p.245) holds that cross-cultural pragmatics is the study of communication between people of different cultural backgrounds, and its focus is on cross-cultural comparative studies of language activities in different cultures. Although these views are slightly different, they all emphasize that the research content of cross-cultural pragmatics is to study the communication between people of different cultural backgrounds.

This paper, based on the opinions of the above scholars, holds the view that the contents of cross-cultural pragmatics research are the pragmatic problems embodied in the use of the second language by pragmatic subjects in different cultural backgrounds. As is mentioned above, cross-cultural pragmatics mainly studies two levels of issues. One is the comparison of the surface form, structure, and discourse meaning of different languages; the other is the study of the deep cultural connotation, cultural differences, and pragmatic strategies of languages. Under the guidance of pragmatic core theory, this paper carries out analysis of the translation of *A Dream of Red Mansions* from three levels—cultural carrier, cultural implication, and cultural strategy.

3. Cross-cultural Pragmatics Analysis in Text

As is mentioned above, the three aspects of cultural carrier, cultural implication, and cultural strategy are closely connected and indispensable. Therefore, it's of great difficulty to analyze cases on any level separately. In this case, it tries to find the corpus from the research emphases of each level, and analyses the most focused level in every case.

3.1 From Culture Carrier—Pragmatics Method

The pragmatic method is the dominant culture carried by language, such as phonetic feature, verbal form, lexical meaning, grammatical structure, phraseology and rhetorical devices, etc. (Wang, 2003, p.58), and other superficial forms of a language, which is different from other languages. Therefore, in the process of translating *A Dream of Red Mansions*, in order to maximize the transmission of pragmatic meaning, and reduce the possible cognitive and emotional errors in cross-cultural communication, the two translators select lots of different ways. Nevertheless, any expressions in spoken language are attached to discourses, and will inevitably be affected by the background of the times, the environment and culture, and the speaker's habits. In this paper, the writer searches for some of the most commonly used idioms in spoken languages, focusing on the analysis of the translation strategies adopted by the two translators at the level of pragmatic method.

①Source text:

…… “‘癞蛤蟆想吃天鹅肉’，……” (... “‘Laihama Xiangchi Tianerou’...”) (Cao, 2018, p.438)

Translations:

“A toad hankering for a taste of swan” ... (Yang, 2003, p.209)

“A case of ‘the toad on the ground wanting to eat the goose in the sky’. ... (Hawkes, 1986, p.111)

②Source text:

“卧榻之侧，岂容他人酣睡？……” (“Wota Zhice, Qirong Taren Hanshui?...”) (Cao, 2018, p.3048)

Translations:

“As the old saying goes: How can an outsider be allowed to sleep beside one's bed? ...” (Yang, 2003, p.2305)

“No one but me is allowed to snore in this bed room! ...” (Hawkes, 1986, p.515)

In case ①, Yang used “A toad hankering for a taste of swan” to literally translate this locution, using the

word “hanker” to express Ping'er's disdain and contempt, and “swan” to correspond to Xifeng's beauty and nobility. However, Hawkes does not translate “天鹅”(Tian'E) as “swan” but instead used goose in the English proverb “a wild-goose chase” (meaning “absurd pursuit”). He used “goose” instead of “swan” to make western readers understand Jia Rui's unrealistic fantasy.

In case ②, this locution originated from the first Song emperor. Later generations use this sentence as an allusion and a metaphor for the inviolability of one's own sphere or interests. Here, it is Xiangyun's ridicule and comfort to Daiyu. Xiangyun compares the men of the Jia's to “enemies on the bed”, and boosts Daiyu's morale through such heroic words. Yang used “sleep beside one's bed” to express this meaning vividly in the translation, while Hawkes used “snore in this bedroom” to translate 酣睡(Han Shui), which is actually a confusion between the words “酣睡”(Han Shui) and “鼾睡”(Han Shui) in Chinese. “酣睡”(Han Shui) refers to sleep blissfully and soundly, which means deep and quiet sleep; but “鼾睡”(Han Shui) refers to a deep sleep with snoring. In this sentence, “a sleeping snorer” can roughly convey the pragmatic connotation of “deep sleeping” in the original text, but if the readers go deeper, they will find that this translation has lost the profound semantic meaning that the enemy sleeps unsuspectingly in the original locution.

On the whole, two translators use strategies belonging to the category of domestication. Both choose words that are more in line with the cognition of western languages for the purpose of making western readers more accurately understand the semantics of the original text.

3.2 From Culture Implication—Pragmatics Context

The pragmatic context is the environment of language use, emphasizing the unity of the pragmatic subject and the discourse entity. The study of the pragmatic context needs to explore the cultural connotations contained behind the language, such as the cultural tradition and thinking mode under different language use backgrounds. This paper takes the euphemism “death” as examples to analyze the different strategies adopted by the two translators in various pragmatic contexts.

①Source text:

“……我也想不到能够看父母回首。……” (“...Wo Ye Xiangbudao Nenggou Kan Fumu Huishou....”)
(Cao, 2018, p.2022)

Translations:

“...I never thought I'd be able to be there when she breathed her last...” (Yang, 2003, p.1549-1550)
“...When I went to tell Her Ladyship that she'd passed away, ...” (Hawkes, 1986, p.587)

②Source text:

…… “贾娘娘薨逝。” (...“Jia Niangniang Hongshi.”) (Cao, 2018, p.3650)

Translations:

...“The Imperial Consort Chia has passed away.” (Yang, 2003, p.2983)
...“Her Grace the Jia Concubine has passed away.” (Hawkes, 1986, p.980)

In case ① and ②, “回首”(Hui Shou) and “薨逝”(Hong Shi) are unique euphemisms for “death” in ancient China. If the translator simply interprets “回首”(Hui Shou) as “looking back” or “retrospect” without considering the context, it will result in a lack of semantics and make readers wonder about the pragmatic meaning. Luckily, both translators here combined the contextual content to determine that it is a pathos of death. In addition, the connotation of these two words not only reflects the awe of death itself but also reflects the status of the characters. For example, “回首”(Hui Shou) is a euphemism derived from the Weizhou dialect, referring to the death of civilians; but “薨逝”(Hong Shi) stems from the stipulation on the terms of death in Book of Rites. In Chinese feudal society, the death of the emperor is called “崩”(Beng); the next level is the death of prince-level figures, called “薨”(Hong). As a noble concubine, Jia Yuanchun has a prominent position, so in the original text, her death is replaced by “薨逝”(Hong Shi). Since western culture emphasizes “All men are created equal”, the euphemism for death does not reflect the social status of the character. Under such a

cultural context, both translators use the same English euphemism “passed away” to play down the identity differences but focuses on the transmission of the meaning of “death” itself. Among them, because Yang is more familiar with the local culture, he replaces the death of Xiren’s mother with “breathed her last”, which is more in line with the feudal era context that emphasizes the status and hierarchy in the original text.

The implicit expression of some negative images in Chinese and English is common, but due to the differences between historical development and traditional culture, readers’ cognition of these images is not the same. The metaphorical connotation in Chinese is often deeper than those in Western culture. In translating, Yang mainly uses foreignization to embody the cultural implementation in Chinese, while Hawkes is used to using domestication, which makes the pragmatic meaning of the original closer to the Western cultural concept that is easy for the Western readers to understand.

3.3 From Culture Strategy—Pragmatics Subject

The initiative and creativity exerted at the pragmatic subject level are important pragmatic strategies for the successful realization of cross-cultural communication and the key to the successful inheritance of culture. In dialogues, the pragmatic subject is not only the receiver of pragmatic meaning, but also the sender of pragmatic meaning. In the process of Chinese-English translation, the translator’s cultural structure, personal habits, and preferences play a key role in the implementation of pragmatic strategies and directly affect the cross-cultural pragmatic effect. This paper explores how the two translators construct pragmatic meaning in poetry translations.

Source text:

彩线难收面上珠，湘江旧迹已模糊；(Caixian Nanshou Mianshang Zhu, Xiangjiang Jiuji Yi Mohu);
窗前亦有千竿竹，不识香痕渍也无？(Chuangqian Yiyou Qiangang Zhu, Bushi Xianghen Zi Yewu?)(Cao, 2018, p.1230)

Translations:

No silk thread can string these pearls; Dim now the tear-stains of those bygone years;
A thousand bamboos grow before my window—Is each dappled and stained with tears? (Yang, 2003, p.947)

Yet silk preserves but ill the Naiad’s tears: Each salty trace of them fast disappears.

Only the speckled bamboo stems that grow; Outside the window still her tear marks show. (Hawkes, 1986, p.351)

In this poem, Daiyu uses the legends of Ehuang and Nvying to describe herself, and uses the allusion of Xiang Fei bamboo to reflect her sentiment, expressing her sadness and feelings about her relationship with Baoyu. Yang’s translation takes the same measures as the original poem, and doesn’t specify the protagonist of the poem, but only creates a melancholic atmosphere through “pearls, tear-stains of those bygone years”, etc. The overall translation does not make much adjustment to the original poem, and is very close to the original in terms of form, structure, and word order. The communication between the original researcher and the original reader, including the original language and cultural characteristics are reproduced in the translation. The usage of such a strategy is related to the background when Yang himself translates *A Dream of Red Mansions*. It was in the 1970s, a critical period for China to establish diplomatic relations with Asia, Africa, and Latin America. His translation of *A Dream of Red Mansions* originated from the task assignment of the country, and also undertook the important task of promoting China’s excellent culture through the translation. Therefore, Yang is as faithful to the original as possible when translating, revealing the cultural elements contained in the original text between the lines, and annotating key points in order to convey Chinese cultural factors to the greatest extent.

Hawkes made great adjustments to the original poem in his translation. He replaced the stories of Ehuang and Nvying in the relics of Xiang River in the original poem with “Naiad’s tears”, the goddess of water springs

in Greek mythology. Also, he adjusts the order of the original poem, changing the last question in the original poem to an affirmative sentence. This strategy guarantees the complete transmission of the content of the original poem, but reduces the cultural information contained. This is because Hawkes' purpose of translation is to make readers feel the joy of reading. Therefore, his translation focuses on conveying the meaning, using a lot of authentic English expressions and literary rules, but sometimes ignoring the cultural factors.

The translation of poetic images can best reflect the translator's personal characteristics. The purpose of translation often determines the translator's strategy. Yang mainly uses foreignization for the purpose of spreading excellent Chinese culture, so he keeps Chinese unique culture in some places. On the other hand, starting from his personal interests, Hawkes mainly uses domestication to integrate the values of Chinese text into the cultural values of his own country, coordinate the concepts and characteristics between the translation and the original text, and make the readers enjoy a more fluent reading experience from a more familiar perspective.

4. Conclusion

This study makes a brief analysis of the above examples and draws the conclusion. It can be seen from the above conclusion that when translating the more superficial text forms, both translators choose the domestication which points to the target language; in the face of the cultural content at the pragmatic context and the pragmatic subject level, the two translators generally adopt the strategy of foreignization as the main method and domestication as the auxiliary part. The specific emphasis of the choice of strategies is not only limited by the transmission of pragmatic meaning, but also influenced by the translation purpose of the pragmatic subject.

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Biography

Zhao Yixin, Master Degree, School of English Language and Culture, Beijing International Studies University. Research interests: Translation theory, Discourse Analysis.

Wang Yafei, Doctor of Education, Associate professor of North China University of Technology. Research interests: English education, Teacher professional development.