

An Investigation of Explicit translation in the True Story of Ah Q Based on SFL Theory

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Abstract. More and more combined studies of translation and linguistics have been conducted. Many papers analyzed Chinese to English translation based on Systemic functional theory (SFL), targeting ancient poems and fiction and a few types of research aimed at poses. Inspired by Halliday's SFL theory, Hu and Zhu in 2008 further developed the metafunctions in SFL into ideational metafunctional explication, interpersonal metafunctional explication, and textual metafunctional explication. To enrich research into the Chinese prose, this paper explores the explicit translation phenomena in the true story of Ah Q, written by the best-known writer Lu Xun, in English versions, translated by Yang Xianyi and Dai Naidie (Yang and his wife) based on the explication concept proposed by Hu and Zhu. Through analysis, first, ideational metafunctional explication phenomena were reflected in cultural information explication, conceptual explication, and discourse explication; interpersonal metafunctional explication was reflected in character relationship and modal explication; textual metafunction explication was reflected in logical conjunction explication. Second, the manifestation process was attributed to translation purpose, linguistic differences, and translators. At last, this paper proposes suggestions for future translation strategies based on SFL theory.

Keywords: SFL; explication; metafunctions; translation.

1. Introduction

Explication is the process of making the translated language that is implicit become explicit in the context [1]. As an important topic in the commonality of translation, the study of explication has become increasingly sophisticated. Numerous scholars have explored and substantiated several aspects of the explication phenomenon, including definitions, classifications, research directions, research methods and strategies, and explorations based on various text types. As time progressed, the field of translation studies became increasingly broadened and began to integrate with other disciplines. A typical case is the integration of translation and systemic functional linguistics. The study of SFL emphasizes the functional element, and this 'function' is further developed to the so-called 'metafunctions': ideational, interpersonal and textual metafunctions. Thus, scholars have focused on applying systemic functional translation research, emphasizing the close connection with translation practice. To adapt to the study of Chinese discourse, Hu and other scholars have further differentiated the meta-function concepts into ideational metafunctional explication, interpersonal metafunctional explication, and textual metafunctional explication [2].

The combination of SFL and explicit translation has been explored by many scholars in a series of studies in China and other foreign countries. For example, Othman (2019) analyzed English to Arabic translation based on the SFL model [3]. Rosa (2017) compared differences of the use of metafunctions in SFL via student and professional translators [4]. For Chinese texts, most of these studies have taken ancient poetry and fiction as samples for analysis and rarely targeted prose, such as *The analects of Confucius*, *A dream in Red Mansions*, *The book of songs* [5, 6]. Plus, most studies of Lu Xun's works are based on translation perspectives, and few combine translation and linguistic perspectives [7, 8, 9].

To fix up the research gap in Chinese prose, the paper will use *The true story of Ah Q* as text and extract sample sentences or words as cases for study. The book is one of the masterpieces of the great Master of Modern Chinese literature, Mr. Lu Xun. In this novel, Mr. Lu Xun successfully created the image of Ah Q, who deceives himself, despises himself, laughs at himself, humiliates himself at the same time, and describes his "spiritual victory method" incisively and vividly; While deeply

sympathizing with backward working people of the lower classes, it ruthlessly exposed and flogged the hypocrisy, domineering and callousness of the ruling class [10]. The tone of the novel is witty and full of satire. The language is simple, concise, plain, vivid, and highly characterized. Without a solid linguistic foundation and high literary attainments in both the original language and the translated language, it is difficult for the translator to reproduce the content and style of the original work in an authentic and subtle way. The paper uses the translation by Yang and his wife, who is well known in the translation field. Their translation, on the premise of being faithful to the original work, as well reproduced the individualized language of the original work and its unique style.

This paper will adopt this concept to study the English version of the book based on the explication concept from Hu and Zhu, mainly to explore the phenomena and motivation of explication translation.

2. Explication of phenomena

2.1 Ideational Metafunctional Information

The "ideational metafunction" is based on one speaker's reflection of the objective external world and the subjective internal world and consists of "experiential" and "logical" functions [11]. The "experiential function" reflects the events, people, time, and place in the objective and subjective internal worlds, while the "logical function" reflects the expression of the logical relations between semantic units. In *The true story of Ah Q*, the ideational metafunction is mainly reflected in cultural information explication, conceptual meaning explication, and discourse meaning explication.

2.1.1 Cultural Information Explication

Language is the carrier of culture, and in the process of translation, the most important thing is the processing of cultural information. Cultural information explication means the translator processes the original language, which contains cultural factors, to avoid cultural differences that make it difficult for the reader to understand. This brings the original text closer to the target language.

E.g.1. 否则也如孔庙里的太牢一般，虽然与猪羊一样同是畜生，但既经圣人下箸，先儒们便不敢妄动了。 p.35

Translation: Or, alternatively, it may have been like the case of the sacrificial beef in the Confucian temple: although the beef was in the same category as the pork and mutton, being of animal origin just as they were, later Confucians did not dare touch it since the sage had enjoyed it.

In ancient times, when emperors or vassals were sacrificed to the gods and goddesses, beef, sheep, and pigs were all prepared as "太牢". According to the meaning of the text, "太牢" in the original text mainly refers to "beef", and beef would be used as the "sacrifice" in the ritual. For the clearness of the text, the translator translated "太牢" as "sacrificial beef".

2.1.2 Conceptual Meaning Explication

Due to the distinct ways of expressing Chinese and English, a concept that is clear in Chinese may be blurred in English. An obvious difference between Chinese and English is that Chinese plurals have no clear signs, while English can indicate singular and plural by changing word forms. Therefore, when translators translate, the Chinese singular and plural are usually "explicit" in order to clearly express the content of the text.

E.g., 中国的男人，本来大半都可以做圣。 p.50

Translation: The majority of Chinese men could become saints and sages.

The term "中国的男人" does not specify whether it is "one man" or "many men". However, according to the usage of Chinese, the original context means more than one man. Therefore, the translator uses "The majority of Chinese men" to make the plural form explicit.

2.1.3 Discourse Meaning Explication

Discourse meaning explication is mainly due to the different ways of thinking in the original language and the translated language, different understanding of the same thing, or different ways of

saying the same concept. Therefore, when translators translate, they usually use direct translation and retranslation to process some words with ambiguous concepts into expressions that conform to the way of thinking of the source language.

E.g., 但对面走来了静修庵里的小尼姑 P.42

Translation: Just then, however, a little nun from the Convent of self-improvement came walking towards him.

“尼姑”, in Chinese Buddhism, is similar to the status of nuns in Western Christianity and Catholicism. In this translation, the author directly translates “尼姑” as “nun” in English in order for the reader to better understand the meaning of nun. Similarly, “庵” in Chinese refers to a Buddhist temple where nuns live, but the author also translates “庵” as “Convent” for the English readers’ understanding.

2.2 Interpersonal Metafunctional Explication

The interpersonal explication phenomena are mainly manifested in the interpersonal relationships implied in the original text, and in the tone, emotions, and attitudes of different characters in the text. The interpersonal metafunctional explication is mainly exhibited in the manifestation of characters’ relationships and modal meaning.

2.2.1 Character relationship explication

Traditional Chinese ideology emphasizes the concepts of respect for seniority and the distinction between men and women. The relationship between two people can be seen from the names used to refer to them, such as respecting each other or hating each other.

E.g., 赵太爷: 阿Q你这浑小子! 你说我是你的本家么? P.6

Translation: Ah Q, you miserable wretch! Did you say I belonged to the same clan as you?

The word “小子” is not positive or negative in English. But when Master Zhao said “浑小子”, he meant to despise the villain. Therefore, to clearly indicate the “difference between the noble and the inferior” between Master Zhao and Ah Q, the translator uses “miserable wretch”, two negative words, to show Master Zhao’s contempt for Ah Q.

2.2.2 Modal Explication

Modal is one of the mechanisms of communicating the interpersonal function of language. It may communicate personal wishes, duties owed to others, opinions about current events, and so forth [12]. Chinese modal meanings are often “invisible” in Chinese words and phrases, so translators need to translate the invisible modalities through explicit means.

E.g., 所以他往往怒目而视, 或者大声说几句“诛心”话, 或者在冷僻处, 便从后面掷一块小石头. P.52

Translation: In order to correct such people, he would glare furiously, pass loud, cutting remarks, or, if the place were deserted, throw a small stone from behind.

The word “或” in the original text indicates a neutral tone, implying that Q might do so. In English, “或-or” is just a kind of conjunction. Therefore, the translator uses a retranslation here to make the modal verb “would”, which indicates “possibility”, explicit.

2.3 Textual Metafunctional Explication

Textual metafunctional explication means that the translator makes the relationship between implied sentences or semantics in the source text explicit for better comprehension and understanding by the reader.

2.3.1 Logical Conjunction Explication

There must be some logical relationships between sentences and words in a language, and logical connectives reflect the relationships between these sentences and words. In Chinese, most of the sentences are “meaningful”, and the logical relations are implied in the sentences. English, on the

other hand, focuses on "morphology", using connectives to transform and clarify logical relations. Therefore, this article brings out the hidden logical connectives in Chinese.

E.g., 他再三再四的请我上湖北, 我还没有肯. P.124

Translation: Time and again he asked me to go to Hubei, but I've yet agreed.

Although there is no clear logical connection in the original sentence, the translator has added "but", to make the "transitive" relationship explicit, which shows intended meaning of the original text.

3. Reasons for explication

3.1 Translation Purposes

Translation purposes refer to the tendency of explication exhibited by the translated text language due to the influence of the translation process. When the translator interprets and paraphrases in the target language, these paraphrases usually include the translator's reasoning, modification and understanding of the meaning of the source text. So, when translating from Chinese to English, translators usually clarify the translation method and then flexibly use various translation techniques to follow the principle of translation fidelity, such as explication translation mentioned above, in order to accurately translate the implied information in the Chinese text into a translated text that conforms to the English expression habits.

3.2 Linguistic differences

Since English is an adherent language rich in morphological changes, it usually expresses its grammatical meaning by employing variable morphemes such as affixes and suffixes. In contrast, Chinese is a language mainly based on meaning, and its means of expressing grammatical meaning are word choice, word order, function words and compound words, without adding any additional components, and its formal structure is straightforward, with little consideration of grammar and logic in expression. Since Chinese and English have different forms of expressing grammatical meanings, translators should clarify the information implied in the context. Otherwise, it will cause reading trouble for the translated language readers.

3.3 Translators

As the main body of translation activities, the translator's translation purpose, attention attached to the readers of the target language, translation style, and the use of translation strategies and methods all influences the trend of explication and the degree of explication. As a critical element in the translation process, the translator, in general, should have a solid grasp of the source language, target language, and literature if he wants to translate the text well. If the translator's knowledge reservation is not rich enough to complete a specific translation task, not only the quality of the translation will be affected, but also the dissemination of the ideological content of the source language text, causing reading problems for the readers of the translated language. Yang and his wife attach much importance to the understanding of the translated text in the process of translation, so when proverbs, dialects, and other contents are rich in cultural characteristics, they can accurately and imaginatively express their connotations to the readers of the translated language, and at the same time reduce the reading burden of the readers.

4. Conclusion

This article mainly explores the phenomenon and motivation of the explication translation of *The true story of Ah Q* under systemic functional linguistics. In the book, the explication translation strategy is adopted for different words, such as culturally loaded words, pronouns, modal words, which not only fully conveys the ideas of the original text, but also keeps the style and tone consistent with the original text, fully reflecting the principle of functional equivalence of translation theory. As

“invisibility” is one of the major features of Chinese, future translation activities should attach great importance to the explication of implied meanings in Chinese context to present clear, comprehensive, and impressive translation works.

Translation, in a sense, is the primary guarantee of cultural exchange between different languages and nationalities. Whether it is interpretation or translation, it ensures mutual communication and understanding between people who hold different languages and cultures. In particular, the study of the translation of Chinese literary products contributes to the inheritance and development of Chinese culture. To promote Chinese culture, it is necessary to give full play to the role of translation as a bridge for cultural communication [13]. As the messenger of cross-cultural communication, the translator should not only import foreign culture to the local community but also export it to the outside world, eventually realizing the shared prosperity of Chinese culture and other cultures worldwide.

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