

Fuzzy Language Translation in the Character Portrayal: With Special Reference to Yang Bi's Translation of *Vanity Fair*

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Abstract

The application of fuzzy language is one significant feature in character portrayal in novels. This paper aims to analyze fuzzy language translation in the character portrayal of *Vanity Fair* translated by Yang Bi. The three-character principle of translation formulated by Liu Zhongde functions as the yardstick to evaluate the translation referred to in this paper. The approach of domestication and the flexible reshuffling of the fuzzy Sentences are the two aspects expounded in this research.

Key words: Fuzzy language; *Vanity Fair*; Character portrayal; Domestication; The flexible reshuffling of the fuzzy sentences

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INTRODUCTION

Language fuzziness is one of the key elements of human languages. Bertrand Russell holds in his paper "Vagueness" that all language is more or less vague (Wu, 1999, p.98). Just as Joanna Channell (2000, p.X VIII) indicates, ordinary language leaves room for people to be vague, to avoid precision and the commitment associated with it. Wang Peizhuang maintains in the preface to *Fuzzy Linguistics* written by Wu Tieping that language fuzziness is the intrinsic property of non-artificial languages

(Wu, 1999, p.1). Accordingly, for the sake of effect of expression, it is not unusual for novelists to apply fuzzy language in their works.

To make this research meaningful, this author narrows down the focus and concentrate on the translation of fuzzy language in character portrayal in *Vanity Fair*. Moreover, the three-character principle of translation formulated by Liu Zhongde, which is currently accepted as a practical criterion in evaluating the translated materials, will be the yardstick of the evaluation of the translation referred to in this paper.

1. LIU ZHONGDE'S THREE-CHARACTRE PRINCIPLES OF TRANSLATION AND THE CHARACTER PORTRAYAL IN *VANITY FAIR*

Whenever the translation criterion is under discussion, the three-character principle-- "faithfulness, expressiveness and elegance" formulated by Yan Fu is often hailed as the one and only maxim all translators are supposed to observe. According to Liu Zhongde, nevertheless, Yan Fu's principle does not seem to be one hundred percent applicable to the translation works today. Liu keeps the first two characters of Yan Fu's translation principle. He holds that what he means by being faithful to the content of the original amounts to what Yan Fu means by "the translation conforming to the original in meaning" (Liu, 1991, p.25). That is to say, the translator ought to convey the author's ideas faithfully and accurately. He has no right to alter the meaning of the original to suit his own taste. When faithfulness is achieved, it is time for the translator to render his translation as expressive as the original. That is to say, the translation should be readable and understandable. It's just as Yan Fu said, "Without expressiveness, mere faithfulness would mean work to no avail"(Liu, 1991, p.25). Liu substitutes "closeness"

for “elegance”, because in his eyes elegance is actually one of various styles. A French naturalist, Buffon (1707-1788) makes the well-known statement that style is the man, meaning that style varies with authors (Liu, 1991, p.26). In this respect, it is unreasonable for translators to make all their translations elegant in style. Therefore, Liu employs the word “closeness” as an indispensable ingredient for his own three-character principle, for this term is a neutral one which may be applied to all kinds of style.

To tremendously enhance the effects of expression, Chinese novelists are masters in employing fuzzy language in their works. The greatest Chinese classical work *Dream of the Red Mansion*, among others, exhibits its superb application of fuzzy language in describing the two protagonists, which is proclaimed as the most classic.

宝玉：面若中秋之月，色如春晓之花，鬓若刀裁，眉如墨画，鼻如悬胆，睛若秋波，虽怒时而似笑，即嗔视而有情(Cao, 2005, p.20).

黛玉：两弯似蹙非蹙笼烟眉，一双似喜非喜含情目。态生两靥之愁，娇袭一身之病。泪光点点，娇喘微微。闲静似娇花照水，行动如弱柳扶风。心较比干多一窍，病如西子胜三分 (Cao, 2005, p.21).

Likewise, fuzzy language is widely used in the portrayal of characters in English works. Possibly that is the reason why the belief is so universally acknowledged that one thousand readers could have one thousand Hamlets. As for the portrayal of characters in literary works, the translation of *Vanity Fair* by Yang Bi, will be specially referred provided for. *Vanity Fair*, William Makepeace Thackeray's great novel, is embedded in social and historical reality and exposes the weakness of human nature and the society of the 19th century England. The novel is noteworthy for its satirical feature and ironical tone. In her Chinese translation of *Vanity Fair*, Yang Bi successfully grasps the key note of the novel, and faithfully and vividly presents the reader the 19th century English upper-class involving the landed aristocracy, city merchants, social climbers, etc. Yang Bi's translation is the first complete version of *Vanity Fair* in China and she has done the translation with great success. One part of the second chapter will be sampled to analyze the fuzzy language translation of the character portrayal in the novel.

William Makepeace Thackeray portrays in his masterpiece *Vanity Fair* a host of characters, among whom Rebecca Sharp or Becky in short is most wonderfully depicted. As a matter of fact, Becky has much more appeal than any other characters in the novel for most readers, as Thackeray acknowledged:

I like Becky in that book. Sometimes I think I have got myself some of her tastes. I like what are called Bohemians and fellows of that sort. I have seen all sorts of society--dukes, duchesses, lords, and ladies, authors and actors and painters--and taken altogether I think I like painters the best, and Bohemians generally (Thackeray, 2014).

Born with no advantages, in a society that values rank and wealth, Becky makes her way to the highest level of society through her own resources, with determination, intelligence, hard work, and talent. She is resourceful and bounces back from every reversal. At the same time, her behavior and character are morally indefensible; she constantly manipulates others, she lies, she cheats, she steals, she betrays Amelia, and perhaps she even commits a murder. As the novel progresses, some readers feel that she becomes more dangerous and villainous. To depict such a key figure of the novel, Thackeray does not devote too much ink to describing her appearance. Instead, he attaches great importance to the portrayal of Becky's character. Despite a few strokes of the pen put to delineate Becky's looks, nevertheless, readers are still able to create a vivid image in their mind. The study of Yang Bi's version is inclined to engender readers' endearment of her wonderful rendering. The present author will analyze her fuzzy language translation techniques from the following respects: the approach of domestication, and the flexible reshuffling of the fuzzy sentences.

2. FUZZY LANGUAGE TRANSLATION IN THE CHARACTER PORTRAYAL IN YANG BI'S TRANSLATION OF *VANITY FAIR*

2.1 Domestication

The truth that Yang's translation is so smooth and vivid is largely due to Yang's good command of her mother tongue, especially her mastery of expressions like three or four-character idiomatic phrases, idioms and phrases frequently used in oral Chinese. To be more specific, the translator is expert at employing appropriately the approach of domestication. To illustrate the phenomenon, this author excerpts the following sentences from the second chapter:

...of such an eagle in the Chiswick dovecot caused a great flutter in the breast of Miss Pinkerton,.... (Thackeray, 1981, p.49)

The pompous vanity of the old schoolmistress, the foolish good-humor of her sister, the silly chat and scandal of the elder girls, and the frigid correctness of the governess equally annoyed her; and she had no soft maternal heart, this unlucky girl, otherwise the prattle and talk of the younger children.... (Thackeray, 1981, pp.50-51)

...his conversation was a thousand times more agreeable to her than the talk of such of her own sex as she now encountered. (Thackeray, 1981, p.50)

In the above quoted sentences, the underlined parts are rendered as four-character idiomatic phrases “心慌意乱”，“痴呆混沌”，“一丝不苟”，“咕咕呱呱”，and “说长道短” respectively. Such expressions have powerfully enhanced the expressive force and added to the literary color. Additionally, all the fuzzy Chinese expressions accurately

convey the meaning of the original. By no means are the renderings far-fetched and deviate from the culture of the source language.

In terms of the application of three-character expressions, the following sentences are worth quoting:

This infatuated young man used sometimes to take tea with Miss Pinkerton, to whom he had been presented by his mamma,.... (Thackeray, 1981, p.49)

But she had the dismal precocity of poverty. (Thackeray, 1981, p.49)

The pompous vanity of the old schoolmistress, the foolish good-humor of her sister, the silly chat and scandal of the elder girls, and the frigid correctness of the governess equally annoyed her; (Thackeray, 1981, pp.50-51)

Yang Bi translates the five underscored fuzzy words into three-character Chinese phrases as “昏了头”, “阴沉沉”, “空架子”, “虚面子”, and “老古板”. Such three-character phrases, which are fuzzy in meaning, provide readers with rich and lifelike images. Thus, the spirit of the original is successfully displayed.

2.2 The Flexible Reshuffling of the Fuzzy Sentences

It is widely acknowledged that Yang's translation is quite natural with no traces of translationese. Besides Yang's mastery of the source and target language, another important reason lies in the fact that she can organize the sentence flexibly by using different techniques. The following sentence is worthy of note:

She was small and slight in person; pale, sandy-haired, and with eyes habitually cast down: when they looked up they were very large, odd, and attractive; so attractive that Reverend Mr. Crisp, fresh from Oxford, and curate to the Vicar of Chiswick, the Reverend Mr. Flowerdew, fell in love with Miss Sharp; being shot dead by a glance of her eyes which was fired all the way across Chiswick Church from the school-pew to the reading-desk. (Thackeray, 1981, p.49)

她身量瘦小，脸色苍白，头发是淡黄色的。她惯常低眉垂目，抬起眼来看人的时候，眼睛显得很特别，不但大，而且动人。契息克的弗拉活丢牧师手下有一个副牧师，名叫克里斯泼，刚从牛津大学毕业，竟因此爱上了她。夏泼小姐的眼风穿过契息克教堂，从学校的包座直射到牧师的讲台上，一下子就把克里斯泼牧师结果了 (Yang, 1957, p.13).

Taken as a whole, the above sentence is a long fuzzy one. Thackeray first concentrates on the depiction of Becky's appearance, with specific description of her eyes. In the latter part of the sentence, the novelist turns to a typical example to demonstrate to readers how attractive the protagonist's eyes are. To render such a long sentence, the translator skillfully divides and puts it into four short Chinese sentences. Though the fuzzy word “odd” runs parallel with another two fuzzy words “large”, and “attractive”, the translator, based upon her comprehension, reshuffles their original order and renders them as “眼睛显得很特别，不但大，而且动人”. Not only does such

a rendering read smoothly, but it comes very natural. Moreover, it is appropriate to translate “odd” into “很特别” and “attractive” into “动人”. To render the latter part, that is, “so...that” structure, the translator does not fall into the stereotype of translating it literally into “如此...以致”. She changes the original narrating order by first introducing “Mr. Crisp” into readers. Subsequently, she uses the phrase “竟如此” cleverly illustrating the cause and effect relationship of the context. This rendering can be labeled as classic, for it not only faithfully conveys the idea, but also reproduces the light and humorous style of the original work. In the latter part, two figures of speech, namely, simile and hyperbole are made use of. The glance of Becky's eyes is assimilated to the Cupid's arrow, which can shoot and fire. The expression that Mr. Crisp can be “shot dead” by a glance of Becky's eyes is certainly an overstatement. When referring to Yang's translation, readers will marvel at her reproduction, for instance, “shot dead” is rendered as “结果”, and “fire” as “射”. Additionally, the Chinese phrase “一下子” further enhances the touch of humor. Apparently, four (Chinese sentences) never equals one (English sentence). Nevertheless, the translator proficiently disassembles the long fuzzy English sentence. Based upon her proper understanding, she dissolves it into four Chinese sentences, which read smoothly and resemble the Chinese original. To further elaborate this point, another instance is worthwhile referring to:

The pompous vanity of the old schoolmistress, the foolish good-humor of her sister, the silly chat and scandal of the elder girls, and the frigid correctness of the governesses equally annoyed her; and she had no soft maternal heart, this unlucky girl, otherwise the prattle and talk of the younger children, with whose care she was chiefly intrusted, might have soothed and interested her; but she lived among them two years, and not one was sorry that she went away (Thackeray, 1981, pp.50-51).

女校长最爱空架子和虚面子；她妹妹脾气好的痴呆混沌；年纪大些的学生喜欢说些无聊的闲话，讲讲人家的隐私；女教师又全是一丝不苟的老古板。这一切都同样叫她气闷。她的主要责任是管小学生。按理说，听着小孩儿咕咕呱呱，倒也可以消愁解闷。无奈她天性缺少母性，和孩子们混了两年，临走没有一个人舍不得她 (Yang, 1957, p.15).

To translate such a complicated fuzzy sentence, the translator has managed to make the complexity into simplicity by changing the English phrases into the subsentences in China. Thus, the phrases “the pompous vanity of the old schoolmistress”, “the foolish good-humor of her sister”, “the silly chat and scandal of the elder girls”, “the frigid correctness of the governesses”, and “the prattle and talk of the younger children” are all changed into Chinese sentences. Afterwards, the translator inserts some phrases, for instance, “这一切”, “按理说”, and “无奈”. It is evident that the translator has adopted the technique of the necessary addition. In the first place, they function as cohesive devices, fastening and binding sentences together to make text. In the second place,

the addition of such phrases adds to the humorous and light narration, to a larger extent, achieving the aim of closeness to the style of the original.

2.3 A Case Study of Yang's Translation Strategy

Finally, some space is spared to analyze translation strategies employed in Yang Bi's translation. As far as fuzzy language strategies are concerned, the following instances are worthwhile noting:

By the side of many tall and bouncing young ladies in the establishment, Rebecca Sharp looked like a child. (Thackeray, 1981, p.49)

利蓓加·夏泼在学校里许多又高又大、蹦蹦跳跳的同学旁边，好像还没有长大成人。(Yang, 1957, p.13)

But she never had been a girl, she said; she had been a woman since she was eight years old. (Thackeray, 1981, p.49)

她说自己从来没有做过孩子，从八岁起就是成年妇人了。(Yang, 1957, p.13)

In the above two sentences, besides the word "young", the other underlined words are all categorized into the class of the fuzzy words. According to *Webster's Online Dictionary*, the definition of woman is: an adult female person (as opposed to a man). Then the definition of lady, also according to *Webster's Online Dictionary* is:

a polite name for any woman.

As there is no clear boundary to clearly identify an adult and a child, and a lady or a girl, the underlined words are all labeled as fuzzy ones. In translating these words, the translator adopts flexible strategies. Based on the context, she renders "young ladies" into Chinese as "同学", which is more precise and reasonable than the rendering of "年轻的女士们". Besides, the meaning of the fuzzy word "young" has been omitted. As a rule, a translator should not subtract randomly any meaning from the original work. However, it does not mean that he ought to keep himself away from omitting any words in order to convey the meaning of the original correctly, accurately and concisely. Conversely, for a faithful representation of the original, the technique of omission can be called forth. In many a case an affirmative statement in English is usually translated into a negative one in Chinese. Concerning the translation of "child", the translator uses the technique of negation and renders into Chinese as "还没有长大成人". Moreover, in view of the Chinese rendering of "child", it becomes reasonable to subtract the meaning of the word "young" in translation. In the second sentence, it is certainly justified to render "girl" into Chinese as "孩子". To render the word "woman", the translator employs the technique of addition, adding two Chinese characters "成年" before "妇人". This rendering highlights the maturity of the protagonist. After

all, the characters of the novel inhabit the infinitely more fascinating and dangerous vanity fair where the only standard is worldly success. Growing up poor in London, Becky Sharp defies her poverty-stricken background and ascends the social ladder. In the novel, Becky is portrayed as a strong-willed and cunning young woman determined to make her way in society. Her maturity in mind is well-fitted for the fight and struggle in this *Vanity Fair*. As a result, such renderings fully exhibit the translator's accurate comprehension and faithful reproduction.

CONCLUSION

The above analysis of Yang's translation of character portrayal in *Vanity Fair* convinces the reader that Yang's version faithfully and expressively conveys the meaning and the idea of the original. Additionally, her translation is fairly close to the original style of the novel. No wonder that her version reads smoothly as if it came from the pen of a Chinese novelist. While marveling at Yang Bi's amazing command of both the source and target languages, readers should profoundly apprehend that the three elements "faithfulness", "expressiveness", and "closeness" can be integrated as a whole through a translator's appropriate approaches as well as his mastery of languages.

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