On the English Translation of Xiangsheng from the Perspective of Eco-translatology

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Abstract: Xiangsheng (Chinese cross talk) is a unique comedy art form in China. The English translation of Xiangsheng is to promote cultural exchange between China and other countries. The article first summarized the research status of xiangsheng translation and pointed out the necessity of this research. Secondly, based on Eco-translatology, it analyzed the translational eco-environment of xiangsheng. Thirdly, according to the principle of "multi-dimensional adaptation and adaptive selection", it suggested several appropriate translation methods of Xiangsheng from the three dimensions of language, culture and communication. This is a new attempt to combine Eco-translatology with the English translation of Xiangsheng. The application improved the quality of Xiangsheng translation and will better meet the needs of the target audience.

1. Introduction

Xiangsheng, as a traditional folk comedy art form unique to China, began in the Ming and Qing Dynasties and flourishes in contemporary society. It uses "speaking, imitating, teasing, and singing" as its main artistic means and "baofu" (decisive factor of xiangsheng, similar to punchline, is a way of organizing language to produce humorous effects) is its unique way of comic laughter. There is dankou xiangsheng (monologue talk), duikou xiangsheng (dialogue talk), and qunkou xiangsheng (group talk) according to the number of performers. The most common is duikou xiangsheng. Xiangsheng is not only a concentrated expression of Chinese language humor, but also a treasure of Chinese culture. Therefore, xiangsheng should be one of the important means for Chinese culture to "go global". The purpose of this paper is to study the translation methods of xiangsheng under the guidance of Eco-translatology.

2. Research Status of Xiangsheng Translation

Although xiangsheng has a long history, there are not many translation practices and theoretical studies on it. The early translation practice of it appeared in the form of manuscripts. The translator Sidney Shapiro has ever translated "Yesterday" by Chang Baohua, a xiangsheng master. Some North American scholars, such as Shi Qingzhao, Bai Suzhen, etc., have successfully translated some xiangsheng works [1]. Since the overseas business show by Guo Degang and Yu Qian, the international influence of xiangsheng has continued to increase. In 2016, CCTV4 International Channel added Chinese and English bilingual subtitles to some well-known xiangsheng works [1].

There were not many theoretical studies on xiangsheng translation. Some studies are conducted from the perspective of linguistics, for example, "On Translating humor of Chinese Crosstalk from the Perspective of Relevance Theory" by Zhai Yuxiang [2] ,"On Translating Humor of Xiangsheng from the Perspective of Register Theory" by Lu Feng [3], "Thematic Characteristics in Crosstalk and Its Translation" by Zheng Yuting [4]; and some also start with rhetoric and translation strategies, such as Hu Yue's thesis about the English transladion strategies of "Baofu" in xiangsheng video [1].

From the discussion above we can see that although xiangsheng is popular in China, the research on the translation of xiangsheng subtitles and the theory of xiangsheng translation at home and abroad are far from enough, which leaves much room for us to make further study.

3. Interpretation of Xiangsheng with Eco-translatology

3.1 Translational Eco-Environment of Xiangsheng

Based on the "adaptation-selection" principle from Darwin's Theory of Evolution, Eco-translatology comprehensively and holistically studies translation from an ecological perspective. Eco-translatology believes that translation is "the translator's selection activity to adapt to the translational eco-environment". "Translational eco-environment" refers to "the world presented by the original text, the original language, and the translated language, that is, the interconnected and interactive whole of language, communication, culture, society, and authors, readers, and clients". The translational eco-environment includes both the physical environment and the spiritual environment. It is a collection of multiple factors that restricts the translator's best adaptation and optimization choices [5].

The translational eco-environment of xiangsheng has the following characteristics:

First, of the media, the translation of xiangsheng is transmitted through TV and the Internet;

Second, of translators, the translator groups are native Chinese speakers. Sometimes, they only focus on transmitting the original meanings but fail to remain humorous effect of the original text.

Third, of translation audience, the main xiangsheng audience is overseas Chinese and westerners interested in Chinese language and culture. They are eager to appreciate Chinese humor through xiangsheng. Translation is a means to help them learn Chinese culture.

Through the analysis of translation eco-environment, it is not difficult to find that the major audience of xiangsheng translation has higher requirements for translation quality, which means higher requirements for translator's translation ability. Therefore, guided by scientific translation theories, translators need to learn more about the culture of the target language, improve the quality of xiangsheng translation and finally adapt to the translational eco-environment of xiangsheng.

3.2 Multi-dimensional Adaptation and Adaptive Selection

The core of Eco-translatology is that translators should adapt to the translational eco-environment on a multi-dimensional basis and make different choices to adapt to the translational eco-environment. The adaptive selection translation method is "Three-Dimensional Transformation Method", i.e., based on the principle of "multi-dimensional adaptation and adaptive selection", the translator should relatively focus on the transformations of linguistic dimension, cultural dimension and communicative dimension [6]. The translation principle shows that the more dimensions a translator adapts to the translational eco-environment, the more appropriate the adaptive selection is made according to this, and the more highly integrated adaptive selection of its translation is [6].

4. The Methods of Xiangsheng Translation under the Guidance of Eco-translatology— "Three-Dimensional" Transformations

Professor Hu Gengshen summarizes the "adaptive selection" translation method as "three-dimensional" transformation. His method guides translation process on the whole. In translation practice, the translator should go further and make choices of different methods by combining the characteristics of xiangsheng and the original and target language. Moreover, language, culture, communication and other factors are intertwined and affect each other. For the convenience of analysis, the three dimensions are discussed separately, but the separation is not in line with the reality of translation. The following examples of xiangsheng are from the CCTV4 "Chinese Literature and Art" column, with the English subtitles provided by the column group.

4.1 The Transformation from Linguistic Dimension: Compensation Method

The transformation from the language dimension refers to "the translator's adaptive selection and transformation of the language form in the translation process. This transformation is carried out in different aspects and at different levels" [7]. Xiangsheng translators should be proficient in the original and target languages, familiar with the overall eco-environment presented by xiangsheng

content, make appropriate choices and express humor in appropriate language forms.

The main obstacle to cross-language translation of xiangsheng comes from puns. "The crux of every pun is, of course, a verbal ambiguity. Most involve homophones, homonyms or homographs. If the pun is a key part of a humorous sentence, one should try either to replicate it or else to compensate, by placing at the same point or nearby a TL joke of a similar kind" [8]. In addition, you can try to use other types of rhetoric other than puns to compensate, such as similes, metaphors, parallelisms, exaggerations, etc., and use other forms of verbal humor to compensate for verbal humor that does not correspond to the transformation [8]. The following two examples are excerpts from *Prodigal Son* by Guo Degang & Yu Qian.

Table 1 Example 1.

郭：公主爱上我了。	Guo: The princess fell in love with me.
于：是呀。	Yu: Yes.
郭：这叫下嫁。	Guo: She marries me. **Re (Revision)：** We are together in wedlock.
于：对。	Yu: Yes.
郭：知道什么叫"下嫁"吗？	Guo: Do you know what "marry" (下嫁：xia jia) means? **Re:** Do you know what "wedlock" means?
于：你说。	Yu: You tell me.
郭：就是不让卖了。	Guo: It means "sold out" (下架：xia jia). **Re:** It means "She had a lock on me".
于：没听说过。不是一个"下嫁"。	Yu: I've never heard of that. Different "xia jia". **Re:** I've never heard of that. Different "lock".

In Chinese, "不让卖了" means "下架"(sold out). "下嫁"（Chinese pinyin: xia jia）and "下架" (Chinese pinyin: xia jia) are homophones. Guo tells Yu that "下嫁" means "不让卖了", humorously indicating the princess is like the goods sold out. Translating "不让卖了", the translator uses literal translation plus annotation method, but the homophonic and humorous effects are not conveyed. The author uses the English non-popular word "wedlock" to correspond to the old Chinese word "下嫁", and then uses "She had a lock on me", which means "I have no freedom of love", to indicate "下架" (sold out). Because the two parts have the same word "lock", the effect of humor is produced at the same time with this compensation method.

Table 2 Example 2.

郭：巧了，我正在门口耍剑呢。	Guo: I happened to play the sword at the gate.
于：您在门口耍剑呢还。	Yu: You played the sword at the gate?
郭：我在哪儿耍剑？	Guo: Then where could I play the sword?
于：哪儿耍剑都不行啊。	Yu: You can play it nowhere.
郭：拿着宝剑那个。	Guo: Take the sword.
于：那叫练剑。	Yu: That's playing the sword. **Re:** That's practising the sword.
郭：我正练耍剑呢我正。	Guo: I'm playing the sword. **Re:** I'm practising playing the sword.
于：非得贱不可。	Yu: The humbleness (sword) cannot be avoided. **Re:** What a trouble-making sort / an awkward sort!

In this dialogue, Guo and Yu have a wordplay by using "耍剑", "练剑" and "练耍剑". Sorry to say, the translator makes no difference at all. The author revises the translation. By translating "练剑" into "practising the sword", and "练耍剑" into "practising playing the sword", an alliteration is created in a playful way, which shows the man is too stubborn and asking for trouble. And, "剑" (Chinese pinyin: jian) and "贱" (Chinese pinyin: jian) are homophonic. The translator still uses the method of literal translation plus annotation to translate "贱" into "humbleness" (sword), but even with the annotations, westerners may not recognize the puns, and even can't understand the humor. Not only that, from the perspective of the overall eco-environment of this xiangsheng piece, the character "贱" here does not mean "humbleness", but "ask for trouble". The word "sort" has the meaning of "a person of a particular character or nature", and it is similar in sound to "sword". Therefore, the author still uses the method of compensation. "非得贱不可" is translated into "What

a trouble-making sort / an awkward sort!", which retains the form of pun and conveys the implicit humor.

The key point of the above two translations is translating puns, because puns have rich cultural connotations, and each has its own sound, form, and meaning, which poses huge challenges to translators. Obviously, the method of literal translation plus annotation can not reproduce the effect of humor, we'd better adopt compensation method, transforming the original pun, so as to obtain translations with a higher degree of integration and adaptation.

4.2 The Transformation from Cultural Dimension: Liberal Translation, Amplification, Literal Translation Plus Annotation

The transformation from cultural dimension is "The translator pays attention to the transmission and interpretation of bilingual cultural connotations in the translation process. This transformation is concerned with the differences in the nature and content of the original culture and the translated culture, thus avoiding misinterpreting the original text from the perspective of the target language's culture. Translators, while translating the source language, pay attention to adapting to the entire cultural system to which the language belongs" [7].

Humor is rooted in culture, and translating humor, translators should pay attention to the cultural background and the acceptability of the target language readers. In order to make the audience fully appreciate the humor, feasible translation methods are liberal translation, amplification, and even literal translation plus annotation to supplement cultural and background information. In the following, the first example is an excerpt from *On Rules* by Yue Yunpeng & Sun Yue, and the second is also from *Prodigal Son* by Guo Degang & Yu Qian.

Table 3 Example 3.

孙：一盘花生米，二两老白干，三两猪头肉。	Sun: One plate of peanuts, two liang of Lao bai gan, three liang of pig's head. Re: One plate of peanuts, two ounces of Lao bai gan liquor, and three ounces of pork head meat (bath chap).

The above example is about Yue and Sun discussing the rules of ordering food at restaurants. "Lao bai gan" is a kind of liquor in China, which is only transliterated, but the target audience may be puzzled. It is necessary to use amplification method, adding the term "liquor". "Pig's head meat" is not food on the westerners' table. Europeans and Americans usually only eat pork. Translating it into "pig's head" is more frightening. The author uses liberal translation, translating it into "pork head meat" or "bath chap", which is easy to accept. "两" (Chinese pinyin: liang) is a unit of weight in Chinese. Transliterating it into "liang" does not give audience the impression of weight. One "两" is approximately 1.76 ounces. These two are close in weight. Therefore, with literal translation, translating "两" into "ounce" is easier to meet the perception of the audience.

Table 4 Example 4.

郭：郑板桥还写了字。	Guo: Zheng Banqiao also wrote some words. Re: Zheng Banqiao (a famous writer, calligraphist and painter in the Qing dynasty) also wrote some words.
于：写的什么？	Yu: What did he write?
郭：难得胡来。	Guo: It's good to be wrong. Re: It's good to be wrong. (Zheng Banqiao's original is "It's good to be silly.")

"Zheng Banqiao" may be unfamiliar to the target audience. It is necessary to use literal translation plus annotation method to supplement his identity information. By imitating Zheng Banqiao's saying "难得糊涂" (A wise man pretends to be silly. Chinese pinyin: hu tu), Guo said "难得胡来" ("胡来" means "to mess up", Chinese pinyin: hu lai), which is a parody, and also the laughing point. Without commenting here, the audience cannot understand the laughing point.

4.3 The Transformation from Communicative Dimension: Liberal Translation

The transformation from communicative dimension requires the translator to focus on the level of communication in addition to the transformation of linguistic information and cultural connotations, and to pay attention to whether the communicative intention in the original text is

achieved in the translation [7]. Let's see the excerpt from *I Love Chatting* by Zhou Qun, Hou Zhenpeng & Chi Yongzhi.

Table 5 Example 5.

周：我这人特别爱聊天。	Zhou: I like chatting very much.
侯：……您聊天有一特点：云山雾罩,天上一脚,地上一脚	Hou: Chatting with you is like — like a mountain covered with clouds, we are all in a muddle.

If "天上一脚,地上一脚" is literally translated into "one foot in the sky, one foot in the land", the target audience may be confused. Since "云山雾罩,天上一脚,地上一脚" indicates what Zhou said is irrelevant to the topic. It can be translated into "we are all in a muddle" with the method of liberal translation, and due to the help of "like a mountain covered with clouds", it not only realizes the communicative function, but also conveys the intention of humor.

5. Conclusion

With the development of the times, world exchanges and ties have been increasingly strengthened, and the country's requirements for cultural export have become increasingly urgent. The overseas commercial performance from De Yun She Performance Group was successful, and the Sino-US Fulbright scholar Jesse Appel (Chinese name: Ai jiexi) was apprenticed to famous xiangsheng master Ding Guangquan and has performed both Chinese dankou xiangsheng in China and stand-up crosstalk in the US, which shows that the ecosystem of xiangsheng translation is in a healthy development. The analysis of the eco-environment characteristics of xiangsheng is based on the language dimension, cultural dimension and communication dimension. The use of these translation methods can help to obtain a relatively high "integrated adaptive selection" translation. Eco-translatology also puts forward higher requirements for translators who play a leading role in the translational eco-environment. Only by continuously improving their own translation competence, can translators meet the increasing appreciation needs of audience.

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