



A Study on the Translation Methods of Social Culture-Loaded Words in Yang Xianyi and Gladys Yang's Translation of *Call to Arms* From the Perspective of Hermeneutics

CHEN Pengyu^[a]; JIANG Xue^{[a],*}

^[a]English Department, School of Foreign Languages, North China Electric Power University, Beijing, China.

* Corresponding author.

Received 28 February 2020; accepted 21 May 2020

Published online 26 June 2020

Abstract

It has been almost twenty years since hermeneutics is first introduced into China, providing comprehensive and diverse interpretations for some phenomena or expressions in translation process, especially for culture-loaded words in many literary works. *Call to Arms* is a very famous literary novel written by Luxun which contains a great number of culture-loaded words, including many social culture-loaded words which imply much meaningful social and cultural connotations. Yang Xianyi and Gladys Yang successfully use different translation methods related with hermeneutics in the translation of *Call to Arms*. By analyzing the translation methods of social culture-loaded words in *Call to Arms*' English translation from the perspective of hermeneutics, how the translators subtly use different translation methods to embody the three principles of hermeneutics can be reflected in terms of achieving different translation effects.

Key words: Translation methods; Culture-loaded words; Principles of hermeneutics; *Call to Arms*; Translation effects

Chen, P. Y., & Jiang, X. (2020). A Study on the Translation Methods of Social Culture-Loaded Words in Yang Xianyi and Gladys Yang's Translation of *Call to Arms* From the Perspective of Hermeneutics. *Studies in Literature and Language*, 20(3), 74-78. Available from: <http://www.cscanada.net/index.php/sll/article/view/11795> DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.3968/11795>

INTRODUCTION

In 1981, the translation of *Call to Arms* was published by the famous translators Yang Xianyi and Gladys

Yang. Their translation of *Call to Arms* has played an undeniable part in spreading Chinese culture into the world. This novel *Call to Arms* involves various aspects of Chinese culture reflected by so many kinds of culture-loaded words. Among them, the social culture-loaded words in *Call to Arms* play a significant role in reflecting and explaining Chinese traditional social and cultural life. It's known to us that translation, as an important means to spread culture, is a process of explanation and interpretation of meaning or culture. Likewise, hermeneutics also aims to interpret or explain some language phenomena. Up till now, many scholars have done a lot of researches on the translation of this novel, but there are few studies for the methods of social culture-loaded words in translation from this perspective. By studying on the translation methods of social culture-loaded words in Yang Xianyi and Gladys Yang's *Call to Arms* from the Perspective of hermeneutics, this paper aims at explaining how different translation methods are applied to show the different translation effects related with hermeneutics.

1. INTRODUCTION OF HERMENEUTICS

"The word 'hermeneutics' originates in old Greek and its Latin spelling is 'hermeneuein', meaning to understand" (Ma, 2009, p. 280). It's regarded as a branch or school of philosophical research and then it is put into translation research for further studies. It is known to us that understanding is the basis of interpretation and translation occurs during the process of interpretation. These principles of hermeneutics "historicity of understanding", "fusion of horizons" and "effect history" help us to explain the emergence and effects of the final translation version.

1.1 Hermeneutics

As a philosophical term, hermeneutics originates from Germany. In the early stage of 19th century, hermeneutics was proposed by the famous German philosopher

F.Schleiermacher, which was called “the theory of understanding”. In 1975, the publication of Gadamer’s *Truth and Method* (1975) brought the development of hermeneutics to a peak in the West. Later, after being brought into China in 1987, it is not until the late 1990s and early 21st century that hermeneutics has been studying extensively in China. The famous translation theorist Steiner George puts translation into hermeneutics and points out that language is always in a dynamic change process. The key concept of Steiner’s research is “hermeneutic motion” in his famous book *After Babel* (1975). Steiner describes the hermeneutic approach as “the investigation of what it means to ‘understand’ a piece of oral or written speech, and the attempt to diagnose this process in terms of a general model of meaning” (Steiner, 1975, p.249). That is to say, it is a theory for people to seek meaning’s interpretation, analyzing or investigating the meaning of certain texts or speeches during the process of understanding and interpretation.

1.2 Three Principles of Hermeneutics

Gadamer established systematic philosophical hermeneutics. In his book *Truth and Method* (1975), he put forward three philosophical theoretical principles of hermeneutics: “historicity of understanding”, “fusion of horizons” and “effect history” (Gadamer, 1975). First, “historicity of understanding” is regarded as a kind of foresight which serves as the premise of understanding and is influenced by the aspects of history, culture and tradition. Because of it, there may be pluralistic interpretations for different people of a certain text. Moreover, different time and space, different perspectives will also cause different misreadings and prejudices. Second, “fusion of horizons” means the integration of the author’s original text world and the reader’s text world. So the final meaning horizon of the text is no longer the author’s original text horizon, nor the nihilistic horizon that the readers interpret arbitrarily, but the meaning horizon produced in the blending of the first two horizons and the present meaning generated after the interplay and fusion of these two horizons. Third, in translation, the process of comprehension is the process of visual fusion, and the result of understanding prompts the emergence of “effect history”. Therefore, cultivating the translators’ sense of “effect history” can facilitate them to grasp what the original text means, integrating the translator’s horizon with the author’s horizon and forming a new “effect history” accordingly.

2. CULTURE-LOADED WORDS

Apparently, language and culture are strongly linked. Without language, culture is hard to be embodied and vice versa. Vocabulary, as the basic component of language, can be considered as a kind of direct and obvious representation of culture. Therefore, as the carrier

of culture, culture-loaded words carry much cultural connotations, implying the various customs, history, religion, society, thinking and ideas of a nation in various ways.

“Culture-loaded words refer to some unique expressions which reflect the unique ways in which particular peoples have gradually accumulated during their development processes, distinct from those of other peoples” (Liao, 2000, p. 232). In the language system, cultural loaded-words are those words which can not only best symbolize the language but also convey cultural connotations in different social life. The American famous translation theorist Eugene A. Nida(2001.9)has classified culture into five categories: ecological culture, material culture, social culture, religious culture, and linguistics culture. This novel *Call to Arms* involves various aspects of Chinese culture, and there are many words which can reflect Chinese traditional cultural characteristics profoundly in the text. According to Nida’s classification of culture, it’s proper to classify the culture-loaded words in *Call to Arms* into these five categories. Among them, the social culture-loaded words will be further analyzed in this paper.

3. LANGUAGE FEATURES AND CULTURE-LOADED WORDS IN CALL TO ARMS

The language features of *Call to Arms* are refined, implicit, profound and delicate. Whether in narrative language or character’s language, Lu Xun uses vernacular to make the language refined, pure, vivid, real and simple, increasing the artistic effects for the words and expressions. Besides, metaphor, realism, symbolism and other techniques are adopted subtly, which on the one hand have not only delicately depicted the mental states for those underclass people in that society, but also profoundly describe the intellectuals’ spiritual personality and social life which have been strongly distorted by the feudal autocratic culture in old Chinese society. Lu Xun has successfully applied various and unique culture-load words in *Call to Arms*, criticizing the Chinese feudal culture tradition in the ways of distorting, and destroying people. For example: ecological culture-loaded words(“一更”); material culture-loaded words(“圆图”, “纸锭”, “照壁”, etc); social culture-loaded words(“状元”, “黄伞格”, etc); religious culture-loaded words(“观音娘娘”, “阎王”, etc); linguistics culture-loaded words(“八’字”, etc).

According to the Chinese-English translation : 《呐喊》*Call to Arms*——Echoes from the Classics, quantitative analysis approach is used here, which shows that there are approximately ninety culture-loaded words and about sixty social culture-loaded words in the novel. Specifically, this novel includes classical mythical figures(“天将”), folk customs(“春赛”, “社戏”, “双十

节”, etc), ancient imperial examination system(“举人”, “茂才”, etc), social idioms and practices(“著之帛锦”, “中交票”, “黄伞格”, etc), classic characters(“古久先生”, “西施”, etc) and astronomical calendar(“火克金”), etc. “From the point of view for the close connection of social life, understanding the whole meaning of Lu Xun’s novels is the key to the great success in the researching of *Call to Arms*” (Wang Hui, 1986). It is the social culture-loaded words in *Call to Arms* that are closely related to the specific social life and times, which have great warning and symbolic significance to the whole society.

4. A STUDY ON THE TRANSLATION METHODS OF SOCIAL CULTURE-LOADED WORDS IN YANG XIANYI AND GLADYS YANG’S CALL TO ARMS FROM THE PERSPECTIVE OF HERMENEUTICS

From the perspective of the three principles of hermeneutics, in *Call to Arms*, a large number of social culture-loaded words are found in using different translation methods which embody principles of “historicity of understanding”, “fusion of horizons” and “effect history”. Each theoretical principle applies to one or several translation methods naturally and available to a large extent, achieving different translation effects.

4.1 Literal Translation

According to the “effect history” principle of hermeneutics, the result of understanding in translation activities is the emergence of “effect history”. Similarly, literal translation is a method to transform the connotation and form of the source language directly, aiming to achieve a better and a more direct understanding of the source text. Besides, by maintaining the features of the forms and meanings of the source language in using literal translation method, the translator’s consciousness of “history effect” can be cultivated.

Example 1

ST: 他活着的时候, 人都叫他 Quei 死了以后, 便没有一个人再叫阿Quei 那里还会有“著之竹帛”的事 (Lu, 2010, p. 144)

TT: During his lifetime everybody called him Ah Gui, but after his death not a soul mentioned Ah Gui again for he was obviously not one of those whose name is “**preserved on bamboo tablets and silk**.”(Yang & Gladys Yang, 2010, p. 45)

“著之竹帛” is a phrase derives from *Lu’s Spring and Autumn Annals*, meaning to use bamboo tablets and silk as writing material in China before paper was invented. By translating “著之竹帛” into “preserved on bamboo tablets and silk” directly, it achieves the faithful effect to the original text. Different people would have different understandings towards the same things in different

historical periods, but here the translator uses literal translation method of “bamboo tablets and silk” to achieve a more direct historical effect, which enables readers to perceive a more clear and subjective understanding of the culture of the original text.

4.2 Free Translation

According to the “historicity of understanding” principle of hermeneutics, that is, the foresight, there may exist diverse interpretations for people in the same text. Free translation aims at making the translation version plain and clear by transforming the formation and implication of the source text. People who hold different perspectives will form different misreadings and prejudices from the view of different time and space. There are some representative cases below:

Example 2

ST:所有未庄的居民, 全不在他眼睛里, 甚至于对于两位“文童”也有以为不值一笑的神情。(Lu, 2010, p. 148)

TT: He looked down on all the inhabitants of Weizhuang, thinking even the two **young “scholars”** not worth a smile. (Yang & Gladys Yang, 2010, p. 149)

In example 2, “文童” refers to the young students in the imperial examination era. In the traditional imperial examination, there are students like “文童”, “秀才”, “举人”, “进士” etc. Among them, “文童” is the lowest level. Because most “文童” are very young, the understandings of “文童” are influenced by the translator’s “historicity of understanding”, that is, the historical and tradition beliefs. The readers may misread the meaning of “文童” as “the children who is knowledgeable” wrongly. In order to decrease these misunderstandings or prejudices, free translation is used here so that people will not be interfered by the literal meanings of the original text.

Example 4

ST: 他写了一封“黄伞格”的信, 托假洋鬼子带上城, 而且托他给自己介绍介绍, 去进自由党。(Lu, 2010, p. 194)

TT: He had written an **extremely formal letter**, and asked the Imitation Foreign Devil to take it to town he had also asked the latter to introduce him to the Liberty Party. (Yang & Gladys Yang, 2010, p. 195)

Example 5

ST: 这是新闻记者还未缺少润笔的缘故, 万一政府或是阔人停了津贴, 他们多半也要开大会的。(Lu, X. 2010, p. 218)

TT: He knew this was because the journalists had not yet had their **pay** docked. If the government or the rich were by any chance to cut off their subsidies, most of them would hold a rally too. (Yang & Gladys Yang, 2010, p. 219)

In addition to the good interpretations and effects of using free translation in the imperial examination system, there are also some social culture-loaded words used in other social aspects. For example, in example 4 and 5 “黄

伞格”和“润笔” are translated into “extremely formal letter” and “pay” respectively. “黄伞格” is written in the old formal letter format to show respect, because the form is like a yellow umbrella in the old official guard of honor so people call it “黄伞格”. “润笔” originally refers to the pay to the person who writes poetry or paint, and later it is also used as a kind of remuneration. Nevertheless, if the translator does not interpret the meaning of the two words by free translation method to make the original author’s and the translator’s horizons fused, the readers may misunderstand or just have literal misreading of the two words blindly. So, due to the free translation method, it is clear for us to know how the process of fusion of horizon between the translator and the readers can help the readers understand the text well.

4.3 Transliteration

“Transliteration is a method of expressing a literal symbol of a language in another language with the same or similar pronunciation.” (Xiong, 2014) According to hermeneutics’ principle of “effect history”, similar to literal translation method, transliteration aims to achieve a direct effect when translating the source text, achieving the effect that the features of the source text can be maintained regardless of the historical changes.

Example 6

ST 到进城，已是正午，阿Q见自己被搀进一所破衙门，转了五六个弯，便推在一间小屋子里。(Lu, 2010, p.200)

TT: It was already midday by the time they reached town, and Ah Q found himself carried to a dilapidated **yamen** where after taking five or six turnings, he was pushed into a small room. (Yang & Gladys Yang, 2010, p. 201)

In example 6 “衙门” is directly transliterated into “yamen” that used to call the official office department “衙门”, that is, the office of the political power organization. It’s easy for readers to infer the general meaning of “yamen” from the preceding and the following texts, so the translator uses transliteration directly here, which accords with the “effect history” principle of hermeneutics and achieves such effect by preserving the cultural features of the source text.

4.4 Combination

Combination in translation is a blending technique or method to combine two or more sentences in original text into one sentence in target text. During this process, the translator’s understanding horizon and the readers’ understanding horizon are combined, which is what we called “fusion of horizons” in hermeneutics.

Example 7

ST: 当时我并不想到他们为什么年年要演戏。现在想,那或者是春赛,是社戏了。(Lu, 2010, p. 272)

TT: At the time, it never occurred to me to wonder why they should put on operas every year. Thinking back

to it now, I dare say it may have been **a ritual drama for the late spring festival**. (Yang & Gladys Yang, 2010, p. 273)

In example 7, the translator combines “春赛” and “社戏” into a unique noun phrase “a ritual drama for the late spring festival”. Furthermore, he combines the meaning of the two parallel words into a subordinate structure with “a ritual drama” being dominant and “for the late spring festival” subordinate, emphasizing on the dominant position of the “社戏” (a ritual drama). Then he puts the adverbial of time “for the late spring festival” behind to modify the former. By translating “春赛” and “社戏” into a single noun phrase, the translator and the original author’s understanding horizons have fused through information processing and continuous communication.

4.5 Omission

“Omission is a method to express the content of the original text more succinctly and smoothly, or to achieve specific translation purposes better, it deletes certain words, sentences or paragraphs of the original text” (Xiong, 2014). During the process of omission, the translator should first comprehend the author’s understanding horizon, and then decides whether or not to omit the parts which he think is unnecessary or redundant, which composes this process of “fusion of horizons” in hermeneutics between the author’s understanding horizon and the translator’s interpreting horizon.

Example 8

ST: 双喜说，那就是有名的铁头老生，能连翻八十四个筋斗。(Lu, 2010, p. 276)

TT: Shuangxi told us this was **a famous acrobat** who could turn eighty-four somersaults one after the other. (Yang & Gladys Yang, 2010, p. 277)

In example 8, the translator omits the translation of “铁头” and translates “有名的铁头老生” into “famous acrobat”. Since the following passage has already explained the skills of the old man who can turn a lot of somersaults in the stage, even if the translation of “铁头” is omitted here, it will not affect the word’s original implication and the reader’s understanding. Therefore, the use of omission translation method is a good reflection of how the translator fully follows the important principle of “fusion of horizons” in hermeneutics during the translation process.

CONCLUSION

From the perspective of hermeneutics, this paper has mainly analyzed the translation methods of social culture-loaded words in the translation of *Call to Arms*. Based on the three principles of hermeneutics, different translation effects are illustrated in this paper by exerting these translation methods of literal translation, free translation, transliteration, combination and omission respectively. Furthermore, for the social culture-loaded words in Yang

Xianyi and Gladys Yang's translation *Call to Arms*, the use of free translation method mainly reflects both the principles of "historicity of understanding" and "fusion of horizons"; the combination and omission translation methods are mainly used to correlate the principle of "fusion of horizons"; the uses of transliteration and literal translation methods mainly embody the principle of "effect history" directly and faithfully in hermeneutics. Therefore, by applying the perspective of hermeneutics, how these different methods contribute to explain and relate to the original text world and the reader's understanding world are obviously showed by the translators and readers. More importantly, in explaining some translation phenomena, hermeneutics has been playing an increasingly important role in providing more powerful illustrations for translators to choose proper translation methods, so as to achieve different translation effects.

REFERENCES

- Gadamer, H. G. (1975). *Truth and Method*. New York: The Continuum Publishing Co.
- Ma, H. J., & Miao J. (2009). *Selected Reading of Contemporary Western Translation Theories*. Foreign Language Teaching and Research Press.
- Nida, E. A. (2001). *Language, Culture and Translating*. Shanghai: Shanghai Foreign Language Education Press.
- Steiner, G. (1975). *After Babel: Aspects of language and translation*. London: Oxford University Press.
- Huang, T. T. (2018). A study on translation of culture-loaded words from the perspective of Skopos theory—Taking the two English translations of Lu Xun's novel *Call to Arms* as an example. *Journal of Lanzhou College of Education*, 34(01), 158-160.
- Lu, X. (2010). *Echoes from the classics: Call to Arms*. (X. Y. Yang & Y. Gladys, Trans.). Beijing: Foreign Language Press.
- Liao, Q. Y. (2000). *Exploration of contemporary western translation theories*. Nanjing Yilin Press.
- Wang, H. (1986). The middle matter of history and the spiritual characteristics of Lu Xun's novels. *Literary review*, (05), 53-67.
- Wu, T., & Qi, W. H. (2019). An analysis of the translation strategies of culture-loaded words in the English translation of *Call to Arms*. *English Square*, (07), 17-18.
- Xu, W. (2015). A brief introduction of culture-loaded words on the functional equivalence in Lu Xun's English translation novels. *Language Planing*, (30), 43-44.
- Xiong, B. (2014). Concept Confusion in translation studies: Taking translation strategies, translation methods and translation skills as examples. *Chinese Translation*, 35(03), 82-88.
- Xi, f. (2009). Interpretation of hermeneutic translation in China. *Foreign Languages and Their Teaching*, (03), 56-60.
- Zhu, Y. P. (2010). The enlightenment of three principles of hermeneutics to literary translation — Taking tess of the D'Urbervilles as an example. *Jiangxi Social Sciences*, (01), 217-220.