A Quantitative Study on Tao Te Ching Based on a Comparable Corpus

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Abstract

There were many Chinese scholars exploring the differences and translation strategies among different versions of translation of Tao Te Ching. The author selected four versions of translation of Tao Te Ching translated by Chinese translators Ren Jiyu and Lin yutang and English translator James Legge and Arthur Waley. By making comparable texts out of the four versions of translation, the author established a small specialized comparable corpus. And a quantitative study was carried out based on comparison and analysis of comparable texts. The study reveals the differences between Chinese translators and their English counterparts in terms of words and sentence pattern. Possible reasons for the differences are put forward for discussion and criticism in the future.

Key words: Quantitative study; Comparablecorpus; Tao Te Ching

INTRODUCTION

Laozi (also Lao-Tzu, Lao-Tsu, or Lao-Tze) was a famous philosopher and poet as well in ancient China. Tao Te Ching is his best known work and he is also considered to be the founder of philosophical Taoism and a deity of traditional Chinese religions. There are some discussions about when Laozi was born. Some historian reckon he can be dated back to the 6th century BC while some argue that he could be living during the Warring states which is about 5th century BC (Kohn, 2000). Laozi is claimed to be of the surname of Li, because in old days Li and Lao are of the same pronunciation. If so, he could be, as some people believed, the forefather of Li family in china. In the course of history, Laozi's Tao Te Ching has been accepted and welcomed by many movements against authority. Though the identity of its author(s) and/or compiler(s) has been under discussion in the course of history, Laozi is generally considered to be the author of the Tao Te Ching, (A. M. Simpkins & Simpkins, 1999; Morgan, 2001). In Chinese history and culture, Tao Te Ching is one of the most important articles. Just like with most other Chinese philosophers did in the old days, Laozi takes good use of paradox, analogy, appropriation of ancient sayings, repetition, symmetry, rhyme, and rhythm to explain his opinions. In fact, the whole book can be read as an analogy – the ruler is the awareness, or self, in meditation and the various creatures or empire are the experience of the body, senses and desires.

The Tao Te Ching is usually called Laozi because of its author who is extremely reputed in the Chinese history. The Tao Te Ching regards the Taoism as the source of everything in the world: it cannot be seen, but it is not transcendent. It is extremely powerful but consummately humble. It is the root of everything in the world. People have their own desires and also they have their own will so that they are capable of changing their own nature. But there are many people who act against the law of nature; therefore they could make the natural balance of the Dao out-of-order. The Tao Te Ching aims to bring students back to their natural state so as to live in harmony with Dao. (Norden, Bryan, & Ivanhoe, 2006) Language is critically assessed, so is conventional wisdom. Taoism looks at them as inherently tendentious and spurious. Taoism takes use of paradoxes to enforce the point (Kohn, 2000).

There is a simple explanation of Laozi's ideas of how to be back to nature. Take technology for example. Technology can lead people onto wrong way of living sometimes. In Laozi's opinion, people should not reject it immediately. They should not act. Instead they should desire for nothing, even change. To put it another way, people should seek for the state of Wu Wei. This also explains why Laozi believes people should be ignorant or simple-minded sometimes. Some scholars are against this explanation, for they think this explanation does not take the religious context into consideration, and others question it as an apologetic of the philosophical coherence of the text. It would not be unusual political advice if Laozi literally intended to tell rulers to keep their people ignorant. (Kohn, 2000)

Wu wei literally means "non-action" or "not acting". It is one of the most important concepts of the Tao Te Ching. The idea of Wu Wei is multileveled, which can be proved by its multiple meanings, even when it's translated into English; it can mean "not doing anything", "not forcing", "not acting" in the theatrical sense, "creating nothingness", "acting spontaneously", and "flowing with the moment." (Watts, Huan, & Al, 1975)

Wu wei can be used to explain ziran (nature), or harmony with the Taoism. It includes the concepts that value distinctions are ideological and seeing ambition of all sorts as originating from the same source. Laozi explained Wu Wei in a broad sense of meaning. Wu wei embraced the meaning of simplicity and humility which are taken for important character and virtues in Tao Te Ching. By performing these noble behaviors, people could stop them from conducting selfish action. From the perspective of politics, Wu wei means the emperor shouldn't start wars against people's will, and they should not carry out strict laws and impose heavy taxes to people (Kohn, 2000).

Some of Laozi's famous sayings include:

"When goodness is lost, it is replaced by morality."

"The usefulness of a pot comes from its emptiness."

"The best people are like water, which benefits all things and does not compete with them. It stays in lowly places that others reject. This is why it is so similar to the Way."

"When people see some things as beautiful, other things become ugly. When people see some things as good, other things become bad."

"Try to change it and you will ruin it. Try to hold it and you will lose it."

"Those who know do not say. Those who say do not know."

"The journey of a thousand miles begins with a single step."

"The more that laws and regulations are given prominence, the more thieves and robbers there will be."

—Laozi, Tao Te Ching.

1. TRANSLATION OF TAO TE CHING IN THE COURSE OF HISTORY

Tao Te Ching, as the classical work of Taoism, has long attracted the attention of the Western missionary and Sinologist. Since the 16th century, the Tao Te Ching has been translated into many languages. English translation of the Tao Te Ching has been more than six between 1866 and 1942. And the number rises to more than 40 when it comes to 1960s. Up to now, all kinds of Western version of the Tao Te Ching have more than 250. According to UNESCO statistics, Tao Te Ching is the second largely translated world cultural class, while the first goes to the Bible

There are three main waves for translation of the Tao Te Ching in the world. With the imperialism coming to China, the first wave of the Tao Te Ching translation appeared for the sake of performing missionary work in China; At the end of the Ming dynasty, with the large number of western missionaries coming to China appeared the second wave of the Tao Te Ching translation; With the frequent international communication across different cultures and that the Tao Te Ching research was accepted by more and more people in the west especially after the second world war, China saw the third wave for the translation of Tao Te Ching, which additionally was seen to supplement the western modern spiritual culture.

In the course of Tao Te Ching translation appear famous Western translators such as Legge, Waley, Henricks, Puffenberger, Duyvendak, Wing, Hinton, etc. Chinese translators appear relatively late in China. Hu Zilin was considered to be the first translator who did his work in 1936, later Lin yutang, Wang Rongpei, Gu Zhengkun moved onto the stage.

2. ANALYSIS OF TAO TE CHING WITH PARALLEL TEXTS BASED ON COMPARABLE CORPUS

Comparable text, also known as parallel texts, refers to the real non-translated text which is taken from the text in the target culture library; it should belong to the same class with purpose language in terms of stylistics.

Because the word "corresponding text" in bilingual parallel corpora usually refers to the match language materials made up from the original text and its translated text corresponding on the level of word, sentence and paragraph. So in order to avoid ambiguity, we adopted the term "comparable text" which is commonly used in research of corpus. Comparable text, previous translation and background text constitute auxiliary texts, which are the most important reference resources for translators in the process of translation since auxiliary texts provide useful information about the aspects of pragmatics, culture, language, translation method and so on.

There are several relevant factors which need to be considered when establishing special corpus, such as the scale of corpus, text type, text source, the author, the recipient, authenticity, technicality, the result and subject of the implementation, etc.. In general, the size of the specialized corpus can be either big or small, depending on whether it can meet the demand of the translator for information. And the key lies in whether the selected materials are adequately credible and whether they can contain most of the features of similar materials or not (Liang, Li, & Xü, 2010). Based on this principle, the author selected the version translated by Chinese translators Ren Jiyu and Lin Yutang and that of the English translators James Legge and Arthur Waley who are from English speaking countries. A small self-built specialized corpus was established on the basis of the selected materials mentioned above. And at the same time a quantitative analysis was conducted in order to reveal the potential factors for the differences between English translation and the comparable text. This analysis could possibly provide reliable data for translation criticism.

This research adopts PatCount as the corpus retrieval software. PatCount is a free text analysis tool developed by Chinese language engineering laboratory of language educational research center of Beijing Universities of foreign studies. Because PatCount takes good use of the powerful regular expressions, it can make effective analysis of multiple features of text from the perspectives of vocabulary, syntax and even discourse. In the field of foreign language teaching and research, it has broad application prospects.

Firstly, according to the observation, in Chinese translators' version of translation the number of token is 16,552 while the number of types is 2,549. So the type-token ration, namely, TTR is 15.3. In the English translators' version of translation the number of token is 19,648 while the number of types is 2,887, so the TTR is also approximately 14.6. Seeing from the two variables token and type, English translators use richer vocabulary, which conforms to the differences between native language speakers and foreign language users from the aspect of language use. But in the Chinese translators' version of translation the type-token ratio is 15.3 and in the English translators' version of translation the type-token ratio is 14.6, based on the SPSS analysis, there is no significant difference concerning vocabulary repetition rate.

Secondly, in order to further observe the subject of the two kinds of text, we extract the word frequency table, and the words are lemmatized. According to the retrieval results, in Chinese translators' version of translation, the number of words used more than 100 times is 22. These words are *the is and of to it not he be in a who are people Tao one that can do with therefore all*. the 16 most frequently used notional words are *Tao, what,*

things, heaven, people, sage, way, know, power, man, good, being, call, state, earth, life. In Chinese translators' version of translation there are 2,266 types of word whose frequency of utilization is less than 5. There are 251 types of words whose frequency of utilization is between 5 and 100; In English translators' version of translation there are 2,452 types of word whose frequency of utilization is less than 5. There are 403 types of words whose frequency of utilization is between 5 and 100.

Thirdly, we are going to see whether there are differences in the use of "personal pronoun + modal verb" pattern between Chinese translators and their counterparts in order to find whether Chinese translators use this pattern too often or too less. First, the software Treetagger developed by Chinese language engineering laboratory of language educational research center of Beijing Universities of foreign studies need to be used to do the lemmatization, part-of-speech tagging and parsing. And then a pattern file needs to be created to input the suitable regular expression of "personal pronoun + modal verb". The pattern file includes the following regular expressions:

(we| I| you | he| she) _PP \w* \ s(ca | can) _VM
(we| I| you | he| she) _PP \w* \ s could_VM
(we| I| you | he| she) _PP \w* \ s (would |'d) _VM
(we| I| you | he| she) _PP \w* \ s dare_VM
(we| I| you | he| she) _PP \w* \ s(will|'ll|w o) _VM
(we| I| you | he| she) _PP \w* \ s may_VM
(we| I| you | he| she) _PP \w* \ s might_VM
(we| I| you | he| she) _PP \w* \ s must_VM
(we| I| you | he| she) _PP \w* \ s need_VM
(we| I| you | he| she) _PP \w* \ s ought_VM
(we| I| you | he| she) _PP \w* \ s shall_VM
(we| I| you | he| she) _PP \w* \ s should_VM
(we| I| you | he| she) _PP \w* \ s used_VM (Liang & Xiong, 2008).

According to the result, the frequency of "personal pronoun + modal verb" is 34 in Lin Yutang's version of translation, and 54 in Ren Jiyu's, which adds up to 88. In contrast, the frequency of "personal pronoun + modal verb" is 62 in Legge's version of translation, and 97 in Waley's, which adds up to 159. It seems that English translators like to use the pattern more than Chinese translators.

Fourthly, we are going to see whether there are differences in the use of "V-ing" clause, "V-ed" clause and "to-V" clause patterns between Chinese translators and their counterparts. We also need to create a pattern file before start of PatCount. The regular expression "\S+_VB\S+\s(\S+_[RXNP]\S+\s)*\S+_V[BDHV]G" is used to express "V-ing", in which "_V[BDHV]G" is to express V-ing, "\S+_VB\S+\s" is used to express "Be" and "\S+_[RXNP]\S+\s" is used to express "BE+adv. +V-ing" and "BE+n./pron.+V-ing". In order to retrieve the pattern of "to-V" clause, we input regular

expression"\S+_TO\s(\S+_[RX]\S+\s)*\S+_V[BDHV]I\s|\S+_TO\s(\S+_[RX]\S+\s)*\S+_V[BDHV]\s". The regular expression of "V-ed" clause is to some extent complicated. The patter of "V-ed" could be expressed as"_V[BDHV]N"(named as A). "\S+_VH\S+\s(\S+_[RXNP]\S+\s)*\S+_V[BDHV]N" (named as B) can express the pattern of "have done". "\S+_VB\S+\s(\S+_[RXNP]\S+\s)*\S+_V[BDHV]N" (named as C) can

express the pattern of "be done". And "\S+_VH\S+\s(\S+_[RXNP]\S+\s)*\S+_VB\S+\s(\S+_[RXNP]\S+\s)*\S+_V[BDHV]N" (named as D) can express the pattern of "have been done". Therefore, the number of "V-ed" clause can be express as is equal to (A-B-C-D). (Fang, 2013)

After executing the program PatCount, we got the following result.

Table 1
Frequency of "V-ing" Clause, "to-V" Clause and "V-ed" Clause

	Frequency A			Frequency B		
	Lin Yutang	Ren Jiyu	(Chinese translators)	Legge	Waley	(English translators)
"V-ing" clause	387	154	541	286	563	849
"to-V" clause	279	345	624	193	443	636
"V-ed" clause	249	384	633	346	432	778
Sum	915	883	1798	825	1438	2263

Comparably speaking, English translators use more clauses according to the statistics, which are 2,263 to 1,798. And for each pattern of clause, it is also true that, English translators use more "V-ing" clause and "V-ed" clause patterns. The only exception lies in the pattern of "to-V", whose frequency is 636 to 624 respectively between Chinese translators and their counterparts, showing insignificant differences technically.

CONCLUSION

Chinese translator's translations of Tao Te Ching and English translator's versions have both similarity and difference concerning the forms. Similarities are reflected in the number of token and the number of type. And meanwhile in both Chinese and English translators' version of translation, Tao, heaven and man, sage, call, life, and the state are listed in the first 16 most frequently used words, which is another evidence for the opinion that there are similarities between Chinese translator's translations of Tao Te Ching and English translator's versions. However, based on the comparable text, we found there are definitely some differences between them. In English translator' version of translation, there are 32 types of words whose frequency of utilization is more than 100. This is significantly higher than the number of types in the Chinese translators' version. This could be an indication for the opinion that English translators are more flexible in using English vocabulary compared with the Chinese translators. Another significant difference lies in that "what" in among the list

of frequently used words in English translators' version, while in Chinese translators' version of translation, it is not the case. This could suggest that there are differences in the understanding of the clause of what between Chinese translators and English ones. Probably native English speakers take more advantages in the use of that clause.

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