

Research on the English Translation Red Sorghum Family by Howard Goldblatt

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Abstract

Under the background of Chinese culture “going global”, Chinese excellent culture is gradually translated into other languages and introduced to all the world with the increasingly frequent and in-depth cultural exchanges between China and foreign countries. Mo Yan, a famous Chinese writer, who firstly won the Nobel Prize in Literature in 2012 is also the first writer in China. After that, both Mo Yan and the translator Howard Goldblatt have attracted extensive attention of literary lovers all over the world. At that time, his native novels began to appear in various magazines and literary newspapers at home and abroad. It not only posed a great sensation in China's literary circles, but also had a great impact on the literary creation of western countries like America and Britain. Red Sorghum Family, one of the Mo Yan's most famous representative works, is an anti-traditional and non-mainstream novel featured by unexpected and fascinating plots. Through the analysis of translation principles, translation strategies and translation methods used in Red Sorghum Family translated by Howard Goldblatt, especially the extensive usage of domestication, this paper aims to make foreign readers better understand the story and folk customs in the novel, so as to better understand and learn Chinese culture.

Keywords

Chinese Culture; Red Sorghum Family; Howard Goldblatt.

1. Introduction

It is well-known that the reason why literary creation is so hard and difficult is that there are a large number of newly created literary every year, but just few works can really make a deep impression on people. The works that can resonate with readers are rare, not to mention the works that can be praised and recognized by western literary readers. At present, among the Chinese literary works introduced to western countries, the “Four Great Classical Novels” and some classic poems account for half of the works, and few modern works are introduced to outside [1]. The influence of Mo Yan's success has refreshed the understanding of western scholars on Chinese literary works and won more people's attention to the translation of Chinese literature.

Mo Yan's works are featured with unique personal style and language characteristics, and contain many Chinese cultural factors. In order to care for the reading habit and psychology of Western readers, Howard Goldblatt used domestication theory to consciously manipulate and process part of the language and deal with the text content flexibly. It is no exaggeration to say that it was Howard Goldblatt's translation that introduced Chinese culture and Chinese literature to the world and made Mo Yan popular among the world. Lawrence Venuti, a famous American translation theorist, put forward the concept of domestication in *The Translator's Invisibility* in 1995. Domestication is to localize the source language, take the target language or target language readers as the destination, and adopt the expression methods used by the

target language readers to convey the content of the original text. Domestication translation requires the translator to approach the readers of the target language. The translator must speak and behave like the native author. If the original author wants to have a direct dialogue with the readers, the translation must become an authentic native language. Domestication translation helps readers better understand the translation and enhance the readability and appreciation of the translation.

2. Analyzing the Translation Strategies of Red Sorghum Family from the Linguistic Level

In Mo Yan's novels, language has its own characteristics and style. It contains Chinese slang, as well as many other rude words, wild words and dirty words. Therefore, if the characteristics of the source language are retained in translation, even foreigners who have lived in China for many years may not be able to understand these languages, so it will be very difficult for other western readers to understand them if we focus on preserving the original form in translation. Therefore, Howard Goldblatt adopts the domestication translation strategy, which is successful and necessary, but sometimes at the cost of sacrificing part of the original intention [2].

2.1. Translation of Names

In the creation of literary works, the name of characters is the code of distinction. For some names with no special meaning, the translator will use the original pronunciation, but for some names with special meaning, it is necessary to consider the meaning the author wants to convey. SL:余占鳌对土匪头子花脖子的做派有隐隐的敬佩感，同时又有憎恨感。

TL:Yu Zhan ao had grudging respect for the way Spotted Neck carried himself, but not to the exclusion of loathing.

Analysis: In the translation of Yu Zhan 'ao, a domestication strategy is adopted to convey the content of the original text in the way that the target language readers are accustomed to. In addition, the representative name in this work is "lian'er". She is a person who dares to love and hate. Howard Goldblatt uses the word "passion", which makes the characters more complete.

2.2. Translation of Vulgarities

The writing background of the work is the rural areas of Northeast China. The main characters are farmers with low level of knowledge, so they will use some vulgarities when communicating, such as "Wangba Laozi Zazhong" in Chinese. In different speaking environments, these vulgar words have different meanings. In the process of translation, we must fully consider the emotional color expressed by the author. When translating, the translator adopts literal translation or applies American vulgar slang on the basis of being faithful to the character of the original character and combining the relationship and emotional meaning between the speakers [3].

SL:余司令一愣神，踢了王文义一脚，说：“你娘个蛋！没有头还会说话！”

TL: Commander Yu froze momentarily, then kicked Wang Wenyi: "You dumb fuck! he growled. 'How could you talk without a head?'"

SL:“骂你？老子要宰了你！畜生，老畜生！豆官，你的枪呢？”

TL: "Curse you? I'll goddamn kill you! You bastard, you old bastard! Douguan, where is your gun?"

2.3. Translation of Unconventional Words

In this work, Mo Yan is creative in collocation of words, breaking the shackles of the use of words in traditional novel writing. Therefore, when translating these unconventional

collocations, Howard Goldblatt adopted the method of re creation, which made the translation easier to be accepted by readers and praised by people.

TL: 外曾祖母唠唠叨叨：“小祖宗哟，你不吃不喝，是成了仙还是化了佛？你把娘难受死了哟！”

SL: When “Your little urchin” Great-Grandma grumbled, “Do you think you are an immoral or Buddha who doesn’t need to eat or drink? You’ll be the death of your own mother!”

Analysis: Dai Fenglian, my grandmother in Mo Yan's article, was initially betrothed to a person with leprosy, so she was in a trance for three days when she returned to her mother's house. Grandma's mother, that is, her great grandmother, was worried and had no choice, so she nagged and complained about grandma painfully. The Chinese "Xiaozuzong" here contains these loving meanings. I'm afraid the literal translation is not easy to understand, so Howard Goldblatt translated it into "little urchin", which often means "little beggar" in English. Such translation is feasible in line with the context, but the meaning of "great grandmother" loving "grandmother" is difficult to express, which is also the sacrifice that language hybridity has to make.

3. Analyzing the Translation Strategies of Red Sorghum Family from the Cultural Level

In order to consider the feelings and understanding of English readers, the translator must modify and paraphrase the Chinese cultural ideas involved in the original text, or directly replace them with similar English cultural ideas. Each nation has its own cultural customs, including some cultural common sense or taboos [4]. For example, we are familiar with some cultural common sense, but Western readers are unfamiliar, which will cause difficulties in understanding. At this time, the translator needs to consider whether it should be expressed in a way that is easier for readers to understand. In terms of cultural taboos, it is likely that what seems insignificant to one nation is very important to another nation. Therefore, as a translator, we must consider the feelings of readers and treat them carefully.

3.1. Translation of Idioms and Proverbs

In the extensive and profound history of Chinese, writers often use highly concentrated four character idioms and proverbs with rich cultural information to describe things and express emotions. Chinese and English belong to two different language families, so they are very different in pronunciation, grammar and semantics. This requires translators' bilingual control ability and translation skills.

SL: 秋风苍凉，阳光很旺，瓦蓝的天上游荡着一朵朵丰满的白云，高粱上滑动着一朵朵丰满的白云的紫红色的影子。一队队暗红色的人在高粱棵子里穿梭拉网，几十年如一日。

TL: The autumn winds are cold and bleak, the sun's rays intense. White clouds, full and round, float in the tile-blue sky, casting full round purple shadows onto the sorghum fields below. Over decades that seem but a moment in time, lines of scarlet figures shuttled among the sorghum stalks to weave a vast human tapestry.

3.2. Translation of Religious Words

SL: 北斗勺子星——北斗主死，南斗簸箕星——南斗司生，八角玻璃井——缺了一块砖，焦灼的牛郎要上吊，忧愁的织女要跳河。

TL: The ladle of Ursa Major (signifying death), the basket of Sagittarius (representing life); Octans, the grass well, missing one of its tiles; the anxious Herd Boy (Altair), about to hang himself; the mournful Weaving Girl (Vega), about to drown herself in the river.

Analysis: almost every country and nation has its own religious belief, which affects all aspects of people's life. When the translation involves religious words, the translator should interpret the words in accordance with the principle of respecting different religious beliefs, so that the readers can more accurately understand the information transmitted by the author [5].

3.3. Translation of Cultural Knowledge

SL:“青天大老爷，”那女人哭哭啼啼地说，“俺婆婆.....”

TL: “worthy magistrate, your honor,”she sobbed, “my mother-in-law.....”

SL:半晌，她才清醒过来，跪在地上，连呼：“青天大老爷！”“青天大老爷！”

TL: Once she regained her senses, she fell to her knees and said over and over, “His honor, the upright magistrate! His honor, the upright magistrate!”

Analysis: Master Qingtian belongs to cultural common sense for Chinese people and can naturally understand different meanings in different contexts, but Western readers have no relevant cultural background. Therefore, Howard Goldblatt's translation is hybridized at the cultural level and translated differently according to different contexts [6]. At the beginning, when a rural woman shouted injustice in front of Cao county magistrate, because the case had not been settled, "master Qingtian" belonged to a respectful title, so it was translated as "worthy magistrate". When county magistrate Cao made a fair judgment and presided over justice for the rural women, the rural women shouted "Lord Qingtian" to thank the county magistrate for his fair judgment, so it was translated as "upright magistrate".

4. Conclusion

Before the 21st century, Chinese and Western cultures had been in an unbalanced state between input and output, which is still in this stage. It is mainly reflected in the following two aspects. On the one hand, since ancient times, many of western literary classics have been widely introduced and spread to China through various channels, which has had a great impact on Chinese literary lovers. On the other hand, it is hard to imagine the current situation that Chinese literary classics have been rarely translated into western countries. Until 2012, Mo Yan, a famous Chinese writer, won the Nobel Prize in Literature. The news that Chinese writers firstly won the Nobel Prize in Literature was exciting and spread all over China overnight. It can be regarded as an important point where it opens a new charter for China's excellent culture and classic literature.

Through the analysis of translation strategies used in the English translation of *Red Sorghum Family* by Howard Goldblatt, it is easily to find that Howard Goldblatt strictly follows the rules of translation and adheres to his rigorous translation attitude, presenting a more satisfactory and accurate translation to most readers. As a result, foreign readers have a more full understanding of China's history, culture and language, which has made important contributions to creation and communication of China's literary. Thanks to the dual identity as a writer and sinologist, Howard Goldblatt accurately translated Mo Yan's literary works, which reversely promotes the success of winning Nobel Prize in Literature for Mo Yan.

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