



A Comparative Study on the Translation Strategies of Two English Versions of *Luotuo Xiangzi* from the Perspective of Adaptation Theory

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Abstract

As a classic modern Chinese novel, Lao She's *Luotuo Xiangzi* has been widely introduced to readers outside China, which has promoted the development of translation and the dissemination of Chinese literature. This paper compares the two English versions of *Luotuo Xiangzi* translated by Evan King and Howard Goldblatt and their translation strategies on the basis of the four dimensions of the adaptation theory: context, structure, dynamics, and salience of consciousness in the process of adaptability. Three conclusions could be drawn from the study: (1) the adaptation theory can be used as a criterion for evaluating the practical activity of translation and analyzing translation strategies. Personal and social factors can influence the translator's translation strategies; (2) Evan King used such strategies of foreignization as literal translation and transliteration in translating cultural words and phrases. Influenced by the social consciousness of the target language country, King used retranslation by adding and deleting some storyline. Howard Goldblatt used a combination of foreignization and domestication, which is in line with his translation idea of being faithful to the original and close to the reader; (3) the Chinese cultural characteristic imagery and sentence patterns with colloquial features of the original are retained in both versions, and Goldblatt's version is more concise in language. However, both versions have played important roles in the dissemination of Chinese literature and the development of translation.

Keywords

Adaptation theory; *Luotuo Xiangzi*; translation strategies; Evan King; Howard Goldblatt

1. Introduction

Lao She is a renowned literary master in the history of modern Chinese literature, and his masterpiece *Luotuo Xiangzi* is noted for its unique local language style and its realistic portrayal of the life of lower-class common people. *Luotuo Xiangzi* has been translated into more than a dozen languages, and there are four English translations: Evan King's *Rickshaw Boy* (1945), Jean M. James's *Rickshaw: The Novel Lo-t'o Hsiang Tzu* (1979), Shi Xiaojing's *Camel Xiangzi* (1981) and Howard Goldblatt's *Rickshaw Boy* (2010). In this study, King's and Goldblatt's versions are chosen because: (1) Currently, there are relatively few comparative studies on these two translations by scholars, so there is room for innovation in such a comparative analysis; (2) Evan King and Howard Goldblatt are both Americans, but they are influenced by the mainstream consciousness of American society at different times as well as China's international influence, so it is worthwhile to study whether the two translators have adopted different translation strategies

as a result; (3) By analyzing specific words and sentences in their two versions, the differences between King's and Goldblatt's versions can also reflect the literary status of Chinese literature in the target language countries in different periods. Therefore, it is both feasible and valuable to compare and contrast these two versions.

Adaptation theory is a valuable perspective to be used in comparing these two versions of the novel. The basic idea of this theory was proposed in the mid-1980s, and after more than a decade of development and continuous improvement, it was finally published in Jef Verschueren's book *Understanding Pragmatics* in 1999. Adaptation theory has been applied as a perspective in the field of translation (Zhu & Ni, 2023) and even in the study of the English versions of *Luotuo Xiangzi* (Pan, 2012; Mansor, 2023). However, in the existing studies, the analysis with the theoretical framework of adaptation theory is not complete. Therefore, this paper can, hopefully, make a more systematic and comprehensive analysis of the English translations of *Luotuo Xiangzi* and their translation strategies from four aspects: contextual correlates of adaptability, structural objects of adaptability, dynamics of adaptability, and salience of adaptability.

2. Contextual Correlates of Adaptability

In language use, no linguistic choice can be made without context. Context in conformity theory refers to communicative and linguistic contexts. Contextual analysis is an important part of literary translation, and the degree of understanding and grasping the context is directly related to the merits of the translation.

2.1 Adaptation of Communicative Context

Translators play dual roles in the process of translation, both as listeners and speakers, so translators have to adapt not only to the inner world and psychological world of the original author, but also to the inner world and understanding thinking tendency of the target language readers. The mental world is explored in terms of adapting to the original author's intention and adapting to the mental world of the original characters. Language is one of the forms of cultural transmission, and *Luotuo Xiangzi* has an important position and high literary value in the literary world, as well as rich cultural connotations, in which the folk culture and social system are very worthy of study. Consequently, the social world will be explored from the social scene, public system, and cultural perspective. Consequently, the social world is explored in terms of social scene, public system, and culture. Finally, the two translators' choice of translation strategies in response to the physical world will be examined in terms of temporal and spatial indicators.

Example 1

TT1: I'd say: "I'm selling my strength to make money, and I'm not a slave; you can keep your stinking money. If I were made of mud, I'd still have the qualities of dirt." (King, 1945, p. 79)

TT2: I was hired help, not a slave. 'You may be filthy rich,' I'd say, 'but even a clay figurine is made from earth.' (Goldblatt, 2010, p. 75)

This example reveals the original author's view on social class equity, so the translator should translate the author's intention when translating. Example 1 is what Gao Ma said when she was giving Xiangzi medicine and advised Xiangzi not to be too bullheaded but to take a longer view. This sentence shows Gao Ma's idea that she should also look at her own dignity when she lives in such a society where there is a gap between the rich and the poor and where she has to make ends meet by her own efforts. "ni ren ye you ge tu xing er" is a metaphor for the fact that people have their own personalities or dignity, and that even the most simple person loses his temper when pushed. Even King's translation of "the qualities of dirt" adds to the meaning of the previous sentence, while the first half of the sentence is a literal translation. Howard Goldblatt does not translate "tu xing er", but chooses "earth", which has a more specific meaning, to be more accurate in terms of vocabulary. His translation of the first half of the sentence adopts the free translation, but it allows the target readers to better understand the meaning of "mai li".

Example 2

TT1: He didn't know whether he was still going forward or had already come to a dead stop. All he could feel was one wave after another of motion, like the movement of a broad, dark sea. His heart and the darkness around him had become one endless haze of indistinctness and confusion. (King, 1945, p. 23)

TT2: Was he still walking, or had he stopped? All he sensed was a wavelike motion in his head, like black ocean swells; the darkness attached itself to his mind, unsettled, flustered, confused. (Goldblatt, 2010, p. 34)

In the novel, Xiangzi goes from being full of dreams at the beginning to becoming a muckraker after experiencing

various setbacks. The change in his mental world is also worth analyzing. Example 2 depicts Xiangzi's confused mental world when he was on his way to escape. Evan King has changed the word “zhan zhu le” in the original text and used the noun “dead stop” to visualize the confusion in Xiangzi's mind at this time. Howard Goldblatt converts this declarative sentence into an interrogative sentence, which expresses Xiangzi's confusion about the way forward. The words “unsettled”, “flustered”, and “confused” correspond to the original sentences.

2.2 Adaptation of Linguistic Context

As Verschueren (1999) points out, there is no such thing as de-contextualized language use (116). In a work of fiction, the language used by the author is adapted to the style of the whole work. Accordingly, the translator has to follow the principle of adapting to both the style of the original and the cognitive habits of the target language readers.

Example 3

TT1: Old Ch'eng had crawled back under his warm covers, and pointing to the tattered fur-lined gown that he had shed again, he said, “Have a smoke, Happy Boy, there are cigarettes in the pocket- ‘County Villainies.’” From the time that “Country Villa” cigarettes had come into existence, they had been called “County Villainies” by the rickshaw men, perhaps because of the two similar sounds. They had known more of villainy than of villas. (King, 1945, p. 140)

TT2: Old Cheng went back to bed and pointed to his leather jacket. “There are cigarettes in the pocket. You're welcome to them. They're Estates.” Rickshaw men had taken to Country Estate cigarettes as soon as they'd come on the market. (Goldblatt, 2010, p. 116)

Interparticle constraint is a quite important part of linguistic contextual adaptation. It refers to the fact that discourse will be influenced and constrained by some discourse styles and contextual factors. The linguistic behavior of the character roles in *Luotuo Xiangzi* is constrained by their identity background and education (Xiao, 2018, p. 36). Therefore, when translating the language of the rickshaw driver, it is necessary to take into account the status of the character, the region, and the cultural influences of Beijing. In this example, Old Cheng, like Xiangzi, is a character from the lower class and has a low level of education, so he calls the cigarette by the wrong name, saying “ye” instead of “shu”. This reflects the constraints of the original's style of speech and situational factors. However, due to the language difference, translating is a challenge for the translator. King translates “bie shu” as “County Villainies”, which is in line with the meaning of the original word. The translation of the word “bie shu” as “County Villa” changes the meaning of the word, but highlights the difference between the two words in terms of vocabulary form. On the contrary, Goldblatt fails to translate this subtlety shaped by Lao She.

3. Structural Objects of Adaptability

Structure can be used as a reference for the study of the functioning of linguistic ideation. In the process of communication, the speaker chooses appropriate linguistic symbols for communication according to his/her own and the listener's linguistic abilities and interests. Language use and adaptation are also governed by ideology and language attitudes. When translating a novel, the translator has to make linguistic choices that are appropriate for the novel.

3.1 Choice of Languages, Codes, and Styles

Both translators use English as the target reader language. However, there will be some differences in the choice of the linguistic code and language style when translating. A code is any system of symbols that people use for communication, which can be the language itself, or a dialect, style, or domain. Code-switching refers not only to switching between different languages but also to switching from one dialect to another, from a dialect to a standard language, or from a more casual to a more formal style (Wardhaugh, 1998, p. 88). Code-switching is also involved in the translation process. Style is reserved to describe variability along with dimensions of formality and informality, and all languages are amenable to variable stylistic use.

Example 4

TT1: The stories were different, but they all amounted to the same thing: Happy Boy had come into easy money. And no matter how queer a fellow might be, when he came into easy money everybody treated him with respect. (King, 1945, p. 40)

TT2: The stories differed, but the conclusions did not: through shady dealings Xiangzi had struck it rich, and anyone who came in to easy money, whether he was on good terms with people or not, was worthy of respect. (Goldblatt, 2010, p. 50)

Code can be defined as the variants of any language that can be distinguished. Such as standard dialect, local dialect, social dialect (Verschuren, 1999, p. 118). The use of Beijing dialect is a notable feature in *Luotuo Xiangzi*. In example 4, the phrase “bu de ge men er” implies that people do not like the person much and are not popular. King translates it as “queer”, which is still a little different from the meaning of the original word. Goldblatt uses a concession adverbial clause to more accurately translate the meaning.

3.2 Choice of Utterance-building Ingredients

The elements of utterance-building are phonological structure, morphemes and words, and sentences. When translating a source language, the translator tries various methods to convey the sounds and rhythms of the source language to the translated text. Words are the basic unit of language, and the existence of words themselves and the overall semantic structure of words make them variable and negotiable. Language users need to choose appropriate words or phrases to communicate according to the actual situation. That is to say, translators also need to take into account phonetic and lexical factors when translating. Similarly, in the process of translation, the translator focuses on the structural characteristics of the two languages to realize the appropriate conversion between different languages.

Example 5

TT1: The wind bent the trees along the roadside until they looked like bows; it took the cloth shop signs with their red symbols showing what the store sold and tore them into shreds; it ripped all the handbills posted on the walls clean away; it covered the very face of the sun itself with clouds; it sang, it shouted, it moaned; (King, 1945, p. 60)

TT2: The wind bent roadside trees, shredded canvas shop signs, ripped handbills from the walls, and blotted out the sun; it sang, it roared, it howled, it resounded... (Goldblatt, 2010, p. 82)

Chinese is characterized by the fact that there can be more than one predicate in a sentence, whereas in English, if there are more than one predicate, they need to be joined with a conjunction, processed into a subject-subordinate structure, or split directly into independent sentences, and so on. Example 5 has only one subject, “feng”, but there are more than one predicate, they are “cui wan”, “si sui”, “jie jing”, “zhe hun”, “chang”, “jiao”, “hou”, “hui dang”. King splits the ST into several independent sentences, using it as the subject of each predicate. Goldblatt uses the parallel predicates connected by and, which is consistent with the sentence format of ST.

3.3 Choice of Utterances and Utterance Clusters

Utterance refers to any fragment of language with a definite beginning and end produced by the same person, such as a word into a sentence, a speech act that constitutes a conversational turn of phrase, or a multivolume collection of novels. Utterance clusters are organized conglomerates of utterances, such as conversations and written letters (Verschuren, 1999, p. 131).

Example 6

TT1: “Happy Boy, Happy Boy, come here.” It was Tiger Girl’s voice again. (King, 1945, p. 102)

TT2: “Come here, Xiangzi, come back here!” It was Huniu. (Goldblatt, 2010, p. 90)

Exclamatory sentences made up of words can indicate content as well as emotions. Lao She uses a lot of exclamatory sentences in the text. Example 6 uses four exclamation points in a row to describe Huniu’s eagerness, longing, and command when she calls Xiangzi. The last exclamation shows Xiangzi’s inner thoughts, reflecting his helplessness and inner boredom. In King’s translation, “Happy Boy” is repeated several times, emphasizing the fact that Huniu calls Xiangzi by his name. In Goldblatt’s translation, “come here” is repeated several times, emphasizing the fact that Xiangzi is told to come here, and the exclamatory sentence is also translated. Both translations express the emotions that ST is trying to convey.

4. Dynamics of Adaptability

Translation is something that needs to be dealt with dialectically and dynamically, and is influenced by many factors,

such as historical development, increasing communication, language contact, and cultural fusion, all bring more possibilities for translation. The dynamic nature of language changes, that is, everything that happens along with the language can be linked to the previously mentioned aspects of context and structure. In translation, such dynamics are tied to the individual.

4.1 The Temporal Dimension

Example 7

TT1: Even when it came to gambling, he had prepared machiang sets for his guests; that was much more refined and polished than playing the lottery game called “Pawning the Precious Thing.” (King, 1945, p. 159)

TT2: Even where gambling was concerned, he had prepared tables for mahjong, much more refined than common betting games. (Goldblatt, 2010, p. 130)

Time is one of the factors affecting the form of language. Just as there are four versions of *Luotuo Xiangzi*, the language used and style of each version reveal the characteristics of the individual translator and the time in which he lived. The translation of “ma jiang” in Example 7 is a good example. King translates it as “machiang”, using the transliteration. Goldblatt, translates it as “mahjong”. It is said that an American businessman named Joseph Babcock introduced it to the United States in the 1920s and translated it into English as “mahjong”, which later spread to Europe. The different translations chosen by King and Goldblatt may be due to the translators’ personal perceptions and the popularity of mahjong in the United States at different times.

4.2 Dynamics and Context

In the same discourse, the same words may have different meanings in different contexts. This requires translators to understand and adjust their translations according to the specific context. People are different, with different cognitive backgrounds and life experiences, different aesthetic values, etc. Only when the translator deeply understands and adapts to the spiritual, social, and physical worlds can the source text be correctly conveyed to the target readers and then be accepted by the target readers.

Example 8

TT1: Supposing that in ordinary times he had made friends with two or three of the others who were big strapping fellows like himself, he would still not be afraid even if there were two Tiger Girls. His friends would think up some way out for him, and they would even be willing to use their strength for him in pulling the thing out by its roots. (King, 1945, p. 109)

TT2: If he’d made friends with just a few of them—men like him—he wouldn’t have to fear several Hunius, let alone one. His friends would give him advice and take his side. (Goldblatt, 2010, p. 95)

In example 8, it is the word “mai li qi” that has to be considered in terms of contextual dynamics. This word is also found in example 1, but a closer reading reveals that it has a different meaning in the two sentences. The word “mai li qi” in Example 1 means to sell your strength to work, while in Example 8 it means to exert oneself as much as possible. King employs literal translation, using a different verb to accompany the noun “strength”. Goldblatt translates both sentences with free translation, after his own understanding of ST, then organizes the language to translate appropriately. From these examples, it can be found that the individual translator’s language ability and understanding of the cultural background of the original is one of the main points that enable their translation strategies to achieve contextual dynamic adaptation.

4.3 Dynamics and Structure

People arrange the information structure of discourse according to different communicative purposes, and this also applies to translation activities. The translator arranges the development and twists of the storyline according to the direction of the story he or she wants the translation to take. That is reflected in King’s version. One of the great controversies of King’s version is the reworking of the story’s ending. In order to achieve his desired ending effect and smooth connection, he has made some changes in the arrangement of the content of the previous chapters. In Example 9 below, in the original, it is first written that Xiangzi loses the last hope of a positive life when he learns that Xiao Fuzi is dead, but King puts the storyline of Xiangzi finding the living Xiao Fuzi in the last chapter of the

translation, which makes the originally tragic story go to the happy ending. The deviation from the original is closely connected with King's purpose and consciousness of the translation. Goldblatt, in contrast, holds the idea of translating faithfully to the original. The storyline and paragraph settings of his version are generally the same as the original.

Example 9

TT1: "I thought—I only meant—I'll take you." (King, 1945, p. 313)

TT2: "Her? Long gone." Flour Sacks pointed outside. "Hanged herself from a tree." (Goldblatt, 2010, p. 217)

5. Salience of Adaptability

Conscious salience is the state of meaning generation in which people use language in variant, negotiable, and adaptive ways that are linked to an adaptive medium. Making linguistic choices can be conscious or unconscious. In the process of translation, conformity takes place in the conscious environment of the translator. Cultural background, knowledge structure, language preference, and other real conditions will subconsciously affect their understanding, judgment, interpretation, and the use of translation strategies of the original, and the emergence of such conformity inevitably affects the process and results of translation. In this section, translators' choices of adaptation in the translation process are compared in terms of high and low levels of consciousness, respectively.

Example 10

TT1: Heng, why can't you? Under the very eyes of the beholder, the magic happens, and the rickshaw man is a rickshaw man no longer. (King, 1945, p. 162)

TT2: "Of course you can. Before you know it, cymbals will clash and drums will be thumped!" (Goldblatt, 2010, p. 132)

In this example, though, the two translators' degree of conscious salience is reversed. The ST depicts that the other rickshaw drivers flirt with Xiangzi and Huniu. "dong dong ca" is the sound of drums and music during a marriage, which is a metaphor for a marriage. King employs a free translation to translate the ST. He translates the implicit meaning of the ST, reflecting his high degree of conscious salience. On the contrary, Goldblatt's translation of this sentence does not reflect his high degree of conscious salience, as he only translates that the way to make the sound is cymbals clash and drums are thumped, and does not translate the deeper meaning of the sentence.

6. Conclusion

Through the examples analyzed above, it could be identified that the most obvious translation methods that Evan King used in translating *Rickshaw Boy* are retranslation and omission, involving the deletion of the content of the introduction of the Chevron faction in the first chapter of the original, the addition of sexual descriptions, and the retranslation of the individual characters' images and endings. In addition, by analyzing the examples, it was found that King used more literal translation, complementary translation, and transliteration in his version. In terms of sentence structure, he came as close as possible to the original. On the whole, he used domestication in the translation of the storyline, and he used foreignization in the organization of the language. A big reason for using this strategy lies in the fact that King incorporates his own sense of mainstream America in his translation. His translation shows the American people's desire for the future in that period of time that they can pursue a better future through their personal hard work, and therefore, the storyline is in line with the mainstream expectations of the American society at that time. The use of literal translations of Chinese dialects and folklore is in line with his personal perception and the purpose of spreading Chinese literature and culture into the United States.

Howard Goldblatt, on the other hand, adopts a parallel strategy of foreignization and domestication in translating *Rickshaw Boy*. First of all, it can be found from his translation that he has a certain understanding of Chinese culture. When translating some sayings, he retains the cultural images in Chinese. The reason why Chinese culture is translated more vividly in Goldblatt's translation may be due to the fact that China's comprehensive influence is increasing internationally, and its cultural endeavors are further spreading abroad, arousing the interest of foreigners. In cases where the use of literal translation of a sentence may cause some difficulties in comprehension, he chooses to use methods such as free translation to make the translation closer to the target language readers. Goldblatt's translation strategy is in line with his idea of translation: reader-centered. In literary translation, he practices both "loyalty" and "betrayal", but the two are not dichotomous. Just as he hopes, people can judge the degree of success of an entire

work in terms of its fidelity, such as tone, register, clarity, charisma, gracefulness of expression, etc. (Goldblatt & Shi, 2014, p. 41).

The biggest difference in perception between King's and Goldblatt's versions is the layout of the passages. Some of the passages in King's version do not follow the arrangement of the original passages. In contrast, Goldblatt's version is basically consistent with the distribution of the original paragraphs. In addition, because the sentence of the original has been literally translated or interpreted, the language in King's version tends to be lengthy, and there are problems such as punctuation errors in the printing. In contrast, Goldblatt's translation is a much smoother read, respecting the original and using concise language. Moreover, the books are printed without errors and have an easy-to-read layout.

It is undeniable that King's version created a craze in the United States when it was published, and opened the door to a certain extent for the dissemination of Chinese New Age literature abroad. Yet, this bestseller also illustrated the gap between the literary status of the two countries at that time, and even the gap between their political and economic strengths. As a result, Chinese New Age literature was placed in a marginal position in the literary system of the target language country, so much so that the *Rickshaw Boy* at that time was covered up and injected with the imprint of the social consciousness of the target language country. Later, after the publication of two versions of the translation, Goldblatt's translation appeared, which "faithfully" and "transparently" reproduced Lao She's original literary style and the novel's themes. Such a change shows that the status of modern Chinese literature is gradually improving, and Chinese literature is now more widely accepted and more comprehensively recognized abroad.

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Appendix: Examples used in the paper from the original *Luotuo Xiangzi* (Lao She, 2017)

Example 1

卖力气挣钱，不是奴才；你有你的臭钱，我泥人也有个土性儿。(76)

Example 2

不知道是往前走呢，还是已经站住了，心中只觉得一浪一浪的波动，似一片波动的黑海，黑暗与心接成一气，都渺茫，都起落，都恍惚。(25)

Example 3

老程又钻到被窝中去，指着破皮袄说：“祥子抽烟吧，兜儿里有，别野的。”别墅牌的烟自从一出世就被车夫们改为“别野”的。(124)

Example 4

说法虽然不同，结论是一样的——祥子发了邪财！对于发邪财的人，不管这家伙是怎样的“不得哥儿们”，大家照例是要敬重的。(44)

Example 5

风吹弯了路旁的树木，撕碎了店户的布幌，揭净了墙上的报单，遮昏了太阳，唱着，叫着，吼着，回荡着……(84)

Example 6

楞了会儿，桥上叫：“祥子！祥子！这儿来！祥子！”虎妞的声音！(94)

Example 7

连赌钱，他都预备下麻将牌，比押宝就透着文雅了许多。(141)

Example 8

假若他平日交下几个，他想，像他自己一样的大汉，再多有个虎妞，他也不怕；他们会给他出主意，会替他拔创卖力气。(100)

Example 9

“她？早完了！”“白面口袋”向外一指，“吊死在树林里了！”(249)

Example 10

“哼，你怎么不能呢，眼看着就咚咚嚓啦！”(5)