
Original Paper

An Analysis of the Re-imagining of Monkey King in the English Translation of *Journey to the West* from Character Dialogues

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Abstract

Literary translation involves not only the conversion between two different languages and the exchange of different cultures behind the language but also the reshaping of the style and characterization of the original work in the translation. Dialogue is one of the best ways to shape characters in the writing process. Dialogue shapes the characters and plays a role in revealing the background and features of the characters, so it should be paid attention to when translating dialogue. By comparing the treatment of dialogues in the two English translations of *Journey to the West*, this paper analyzes how translators understand the original text and reshape the characters, as well as the issues they should pay attention to when translating dialogues, from the perspectives of both historical and immediate personal speech styles.

Keywords: *Journey to the West*, speech styles, synchronic and diachronic, comparative studies

1. Introduction

Journey to the West is the first ancient Chinese romantic chapter-book-length divine and magical novel written by Wu Cheng'en in the Ming Dynasty and is known as one of the Four Great Classical Masterpieces of China, together with the Romance of the Three Kingdoms; the *Water Margin*, and *Dream of the Red Chamber*. Although it is a novel of gods and demons, it reflects the corruption of the ruling class in the late Ming Dynasty. Under this corrupt rule, the common people suffered greatly, and the social order was extremely chaotic, and the country was in a state of decay. The novel mainly describes the story of the Monkey King, who, after his birth and great disturbance in the Heavenly Palace, meets the Tang Monk, Pigsy, Sha Monk, and White Dragon Horse and goes to the Western Paradise to obtain scriptures. Then they undergo the 81 hardships, arriving at the Western Paradise to meet the Buddha and finally becoming the Five Sages. The author rendered and portrayed the main characters in the original text through many dialogue descriptions. Through dialogues, the character traits and thought conditions of the characters can be shown more intuitively, and they can also effectively convey the characters' moods and reflect their subtle psychological activities, as well as reveal information about the character's identity, status and cultural cultivation (Ji & Shen, 2007). The main characters in *Journey to the West* include the Tang Monk, the Monkey King, the Pig, the Sand Monk, and the White Dragon Horse, but the author spends much ink on the character of the Monkey King to create a brave image of justice for the readers.

Journey to the West has been widely circulated among the people since it was first published, and various versions of it have been produced. After the Opium War, many classical Chinese literary works were translated into Western languages. *Journey to the West* gradually spread to Europe and America and was translated into English, French, German, Italian, Spanish, and other languages (Baidu). The first English translation of *Journey to the West* was made in 1895, and the peak of the English translation was probably in the 1980s. During this period, various versions of the English translation of *Journey to the West* were released, which can be divided into three types according to completeness: fragmentary English translation, single-volume English translation, and English adaptation, most of which are translated from Chinese, while a few belong to other languages (Zheng, 2012). Currently, only two complete translations have been translated and compiled by Yu and Jenner. The English translation of Yu's, which took more than ten years (1977-1983), is the first complete English

translation and is often considered the best. W. J. F. Jenner's English translation, which began in 1982 and was published in 1986, is the second complete English translation and the most influential one in China. Therefore, this paper selects the complete English translation by Taiwanese writer Yu Guofan and British sinologist Jenner to study the characters' dialogue and analyze how the translators interpreted the original text and portrayed the characters. In the context of globalization, translators have the task of actively letting Chinese culture "go out" and promoting the foreign translation and exchange of Chinese literature, and it is constructive for the translation work to discuss the image-building of literary characters.

Throughout domestic and international research, numerous results have been achieved in studying the English translation of *Journey to the West*. Domestically, mainly from the language level, such as sentence grammar, a comparative study of the chapter titles of the novel in Yu's and Jenner's English translations (Zhu, 2021) explores the influence of different translation strategies and translators' backgrounds on translation strategies; the English translation standards of Chinese stacked poems (Liu & Zhang, 2012) studies the feasibility of formal equivalence in poetry translation; and the use of multiple rhetorical techniques in *Journey to the West* describing scenes, and how to deal with rhetorical expressions in the translation process are also hot topics. With the continuous development of research, translation study is no longer limited to simple genres or pure language. Still, the cultural discourse embodied behind the translated text and the academic community have begun to notice that *Journey to the West*, a divine and magical novel, has a rich religious content. Translators interpret and integrate the text according to the needs of their translation purposes so that this work not only has the function of learning and entertainment but also can be used as a missionary tool (Wan, 2016). It is worth noting that, unlike translation studies at the textual level, the cultural load and the attribution of artistic discourse in translation have led more and more scholars to pay attention to the translator and the context in which the translator is embedded. Thus, translation studies have become more social and historical in nature. For example, how the translator's religious background and ideology affect his rewriting and reshaping of the original text of *Journey to the West* (Song, 2018). Unlike domestic studies focusing on the text, foreign studies of the translation of *Journey to the West* have favored cross-cultural comparisons. Among them, Koss Nicholas of Indiana University's paper *Journey to the West* in the Formative Period examines the sources of its stories. Also, he compares different versions of the originals, essentially summarizing the findings of foreign scholars on the originals at the time.

As one of the more famous ancient chapter-book novels in China, *Journey to the West* can be said to be the most intuitive expression of China's traditional culture and the way of describing ancient texts and has assumed a vital role in China's foreign cultural export. Therefore, taking Yu's and Jenner's English translation as an example, the author studies the two translators' portrayal of the Monkey King in the process of translation using documentary analysis, qualitative analysis, and case study on the character dialogues; firstly, what translation strategies are used to deal with the character dialogues, and secondly, how different translation strategies differ in terms of the diachronism and synchronism of the character language on the portrayal of the characters.

2. The Diachrony of Character Language

Dialogue of characters in literary works has always been an essential means for writers to portray their characters. The importance of dialogue translation in novels is even more self-evident when translating literary works. The success of a translation often depends on whether the beauty of dialogue in the original text has been reproduced in the translation. In other words, whether the dialogue in the translation has been conveyed meaningfully (Zhang & Gai, 2006). Therefore, translating the characters' language is often the "main event."

Accurate and imaginative character language translation cannot be achieved without a comprehensive grasp of the individual's speech style. Personal speech style is a comprehensive manifestation of a person's speech use characteristics. It is influenced by subjective factors that often act on the subject of speech, forming a relatively stable part of personal speech style. At the same time, the style is influenced by other subjective factors that are prone to change, creating a variable part of it. These two features can be called ephemeral and immediate, respectively. The two together constitute the unified personal style of the character's language.

In real life, each person's origin, experience, occupation, status, and age are different, thus forming a distinct character, which makes their language have different characteristics, that is, "what kind of person, what kind of words." This is the stable and long-lasting factor in the language of the characters, and it is also the central theme of the language of the characters.

2.1 Character Identity Features

The language of the characters in the novel reflects their origin, experience, education, occupation, etc. The characteristics of language are different for different characters. When translating, you must grasp the characteristics of the language of the characters in the original text and express them appropriately to reproduce the characters' images while simultaneously explaining the background and bringing out the flavor of life. Let's start with the following passage from *Journey to the West*:

猴王近前叫道：“老神仙！弟子起手。”

那樵汉慌忙丢了斧，转身答礼道：“不当人！不当人！我拙汉衣食不全，怎敢当‘神仙’二字？”

猴王道：“你不是神仙，如何说出神仙的话来？”

樵夫道：“我说甚么神仙话？”

猴王道：“我才来至林边，只听的你道：‘相逢处，非仙即道，静坐讲《黄庭》。’《黄庭》乃道德真言，非神仙而何？”

(Chapter 1)

The Monkey King drew near and called out: "Reverend immortal! Your disciple raises his hands."

The woodcutter was so flustered that he dropped his ax as he turned to return the salutation. "Blasphemy! Blasphemy!" he said. "I, a foolish fellow with hardly enough clothes or food! How can I bear the title of immortal?"

The Monkey King said, "If you are not an immortal, how is it that you speak his language?" The woodcutter asked, "What did I say that sounded like the language of an immortal?"

The Monkey King explained, "When I came just now to the forest's edge, I heard you singing, 'Those I meet, if not immortals, would be Daoists, seated quietly to expound the Yellow Court. The Yellow Court contains the perfected words of the Way and Virtue. What can you be but an immortal?'" (Jenner)

The Monkey King went closer and called to him. "Old Immortal, your disciple greets you." The woodcutter dropped his axe in astonishment and turned round to say, "No, no. I don't even have enough to eat or drink, so how can I possibly let you call me an Immortal?"

"If you're not an Immortal," the Monkey King said, "why do you talk like one?"

"I don't talk like an Immortal," the woodcutter said.

"At the edge of the wood just now," the Monkey King replied, "I heard you say, 'The people I meet are Taoists and Immortals, sitting quietly and expounding the Mantingfang. The Mantingfang contains the truth about the Way, so if you're not an Immortal, what are you?'" (Yu)

In the text, the Monkey King, to find the way to immortality, adopted the views of the other monkeys and went out to see the gods. When he passed by a place, he heard someone singing Taoist songs and thought it was a real god, which led to the above conversation. From the dialogue, we can see that although Monkey King is a stone monkey, he still knows the basic etiquette, but his tone is not formal enough, which makes him feel a bit casual. The above two translations adopt the method of literal translation plus free translation; for example, the underlined words "reverend immortal," "blasphemy," and "greet you" are the translation, and "raises his hands," "no, no" and "old immortal" are literal translation. It should be noted that the Monkey King, as a stone monkey, not only has little experience but is more casual in communicating with others. Although the meaning conveyed in Jenner's is more

accurate, Yu's translation is better in expressing the character of the Monkey King.

2.2 Highlighting the Character's Traits

Just as you cannot find two identical leaves in the world, each person is bound to have a different character due to the various backgrounds of time and nation and the different backgrounds of origin, experience, occupation, and knowledge.

In *Journey to the West*, Monkey King is a powerful and rebellious character with great wisdom and courage, defying the feudal hierarchy; he is also a positive, optimistic, courageous, fearless, hard-working character. It is challenging to avoid danger in the way of learning, and when he meets demons and monsters, Monkey King is always optimistic and brave enough to go forward.

他见三藏只管绪绪叨叨，按不住心头火发道：“你既是这等说我做不得和尚，上不得西天，不必恁般绪绪聒恶我，我回去便了！”那三藏却不曾答应，他就使一个性子，将身一耸，说一声：“老孙去也！”(Chapter 14)

When he heard Tripitaka's persistent reprimand, he could not suppress the flames leaping up in his heart. "If that's what you think," he said. "If you think I'm not worthy to be a monk, nor can I go to the Western Heaven, you needn't bother me further with your nagging! I'll leave and go back!" Before Tripitaka had time to reply, Pilgrim was already so enraged that he leaped into the air, crying only, "Old Monkey's off?" (Jenner)

Monkey, who had never let himself be put upon, flared up at Sanzang's endless nagging.

"If you say that I'll never become a monk and won't ever reach the Western Heaven, then stop going on at me like that. I'm going back."

Before Sanzang could reply, Monkey leapt up in a fury, shouting, "I'm off." (Yu)

From the above dialogue, we can see that the Monkey King, to protect the Tang Monk, killed the bad guys, highlighting the sense of justice and reckless character, especially the last sentence, "老孙去也," showing that he is decisive. In the translation, Jenner translates as "Old Monkey's off" and Yu "I'm off." The word "Old Monkey" is a self-description, showing that Monkey King is confident in his identity, not only his seniority but also his ability. In this sentence, "Old Monkey" is more appropriate.

3. The Synchronism of Character's Language

Personalization does not mean homogenization. Any language that expresses the character's inner personality in a specific context is personalized. The character of a natural person must not be an idol under a label. "To whom, what to say" and "on what occasion, what to say" are elements of instant change in character language. The synchronism of character language involves both the subject and the object and thus assumes a double communicative character. On the one hand, it has to maintain the consistency of the character's personality. On the other hand, it has to chronicle the development of the plot through the exchange of scenes and character relationships to reflect the character's personality more comprehensively and deeply.

3.1 The Character's Thoughts and Emotions

行者闻言，心中暗道：“我那老和尚不禁打；假若一顿鞭打坏了阿，却不是我造的业？”(Chapter 25)

When Pilgrim heard what he said, he thought to himself, "That old monk of mine cannot stand such flogging. If the whip destroys him, wouldn't that be my sin?" (Jenner)

"That old priest of ours couldn't stand a flogging," thought Monkey when he heard this, "and if he died under the lash, the fault would be mine." (Yu)

The above article is about how the Monkey King cut down the fruit tree and was caught up by the owner of the fruit tree. Monkey King's mental activity reveals his love and care for the Tang Monk. Compared with Yu's translation, Jenner's "Wouldn't that be my sin?" emphasizes Monkey King's psychological state and highlights the urgency of saving the Tang monk.

3.2 Speaking Occasions

Lao She once said that dialogue is the most natural part of a novel, and what is to be said must be combined with timing (Feng, 2006, p. 56). In other words, what and how to say is not only governed by the identity and character of the character but also, in many cases, by who is speaking to whom and on what occasion. The object of the speech is different, the choice of words and sentences should be different, and the tone and intonation of the speech should also be different.

好猴王，也十分乖巧：巍巍端坐中间，也无一些儿惧色，面上反喜盈盈的笑道：“贤郎请起。我因年老，连日有事不遂心怀，把你生时果偶然忘了。且等到明日回家，问你母亲便知。”(Chapter 14)

Instead, his face beaming with pleasure, he said, smiling, "My worthy boy, please rise. Because of my age, I have been troubled by all sorts of things of late, and I have quite forgotten the exact time of your birth. Let me ask your mother when I return home tomorrow." (Jenner)

He continued to sit in majesty in the central position, showing not a trace of fear as he replied with his face wreathed in smiles, "Please get up, dear boy. I'm getting so old now that nothing goes the way I want it to anymore. I can't remember just now exactly when you were born. I'll ask your mother when I go home tomorrow." (Yu)

The context of this dialogue is that the Monster King has captured the Tang Monk, and the Monkey King, pretending to be the Bull Demon King, persuades the Monster King to set the Tang Monk free. The tone between the father and the son is different. As we can see from the translation, in terms of sentence style and wording, Jenner's translation is relatively more formal, while Yu's translation is closer to everyday life and more casual. Generally speaking, it is unlikely that a father and his son would be very formal with each other, but the more casual tone of Yu's translation is more realistic.

4. Conclusion

The above comparison shows that characterization requires a three-dimensional translation of character language, reflecting the character's synchronic and diachronic traits. The two translators' different treatment of the dialogue has resulted in a slightly different portrayal of Monkey King in the translation. The characters in the translators' works have to show the other sides of the character in a specific unified tone with a unique color and vividness so that the readers can see a "familiar stranger." At the same time, it is important to specific linguistic devices to achieve this requirement—for example, lexical devices, grammatical devices, rhetorical devices, and some hyperlinguistic devices. In translation, we must first "stand tall" and have a global comprehension of the characters and their language, then grasp every word and sentence of the characters and restore them in a specific context.

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