Translation of Chapter Titles from the Perspective of Sociosemiotics

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Abstract

A chapter title as the title for every chapter in a chapter novel is to introduce the whole chapter. A research will be made on the translation techniques of chapter title from the perspective of Sociosemiotics.

Sociosemiotics as an interdisciplinary science is dedicated to the research on the relationship between systems of signs and human society. Moreover, Sociosemiotics views language as the most comprehensive system of signs in the human society. Compared with other linguistic theories, Sociosemiotics pays more attention to the application of symbolic systems in society. In the practical translation process, translators should place linguistic signs in the social situation besides the influence of internal factors, thus facilitating a more comprehensive research. The paper integrates Sociosemiotics -- three meanings proposed by Morris Charles, namely, referential meaning, linguistic meaning and pragmatic meaning) into the chapter title translation firstly by taking the chapter titles of four Chinese classic novels as examples to explore the translation techniques of chapter titles, and comes to the conclusion: translation techniques such as literal translation, addition and substitution are favorable to transfer referential meaning; translation technique such as conversion is more appropriate to transfer linguistic meaning; as for pragmatic meaning, the technique of free translation is an ideal choice.

Key words: Chapter title; Sociosemiotics; Referential meaning; Linguistic meaning; Pragmatic meaning; Translation techniques

INTRODUCTION

The classic literature as a kind of the most important Chinese assets plays a pivotal role in transmitting the traditional Chinese culture and enriching people's spiritual life. Among all the Chinese classics, the four Chinese classic novels - *Hong Lou Meng*, *Xi You Ji*, *San Guo Yan Yi* and *Shui Hu Zhuan* in particular have imposed an incredible influence on literature, culture and society in China.

The translation study of the chapter titles in the four Chinese classic novels began to earn the attention of scholars and researchers over these years. However, there's still little systematic study on the translation techniques of chapter titles at present. This paper will start the translation study of the chapter titles from Sociosemiotics to propose techniques applied in the chapter title translation.

In the writer's opinion, the research in question will be of importance in terms of following perspectives: The research will be conducive to the target readers' understanding of the chapter titles and even the whole Chinese classics; it will provide a series of chapter title translation techniques for other Chinese classics; Sociosemiotics will avoid the long-time conflict between literal translation and free translation since the theory claims the cross-semiotic translation is actually a kind of relationship conversion; the research will be beneficial to transmit the essence of four Chinese classics to the world. Overall, it's of great necessity to conduct the research in this regard.

1. SEMIOTICS AND SOCIOSEMIOTICS

As the pioneer of modern linguistics and founder of Semiotics, Ferdinand de Saussure established Semiotics conducting a research on the rules of signs applied in the human society and a symbolic system. According to Saussure, a linguistic sign is a mental entity with two aspects: the signified (the "concept") and the signifier (the mental impression of the sound). The relationship between these two aspects was considered "arbitrary".

Another pioneer for Semiotics Charles Sanders Pierce firstly puts forward a systematic principle for the research on Semiotics: Every semiosis, namely, the symbolic process can embody the sign itself. He believes that a sign represents a substance (namely a sign).

Developing Pierce's semiotic theory, the American behavioral semanticist Morris Charles made a substantial contribution to Semiotics and applied the whole symbolic meaning to the linguistic research.

According to Morris, the referential meaning refers to the relationship between a linguistic sign and the subjective or objective world described or narrated by the sign. (Nida, 1964, p.70) once said "Referential meanings are those generally thought of as 'dictionary meaning'". The linguistic meaning is the relationship among linguistic signs at the levels including phonetics, vocabulary, syntax and discourse and the like. Besides, the pragmatic meaning involves the relationship between a linguistic sign and an interpretant.

As for Semiotics, it is a theoretical system devoted to the research of linguistic signs and non-linguistic signs as well as how human beings use and apprehend signs. The research of Semiotics started in the 1990s in a real sense.

Deriving from Semiotics, Sociosemiotics coming into being in the mid 1980s focuses on a systematic research on linguistic signs and non-linguistic signs. Moreover, it maintains that a perfect translation should achieve correspondence in meaning and similarity in function (Chen, 1996, p.12). Compared with other methods conducting a study of the inter-linguistic communication, Sociosemiotics regards language as the most comprehensive and complicated system for research in all signs human beings use.

2. TRANSLATION TECHNIQUES OF CHAPTER TITLES

2.1 Chapter Titles

Referring to the title in the chapters of chapter novels, a chapter title is the table of content for chapter novels. All ancient chapter novels have chapter titles. Some are single sentences and some are double sentences.

Representing the main story happened in a chapter, the chapter title is the profound refinement and generalization, with an effect of showing the essence and enhancing the contents (Chen & Zhang, 2011, p.165). As a result, the chapter title translation plays a crucial part in the understanding of the whole novel.

As a special type of title, a chapter title has its own features. Firstly, chapter titles pay more attention to rhyming and aesthetics. Good rhyming will contribute to sweet melody, intonation and fluency.

Secondly, chapter titles enjoy simple wording since chapter titles are highly generalized. Moreover, widely applied in chapter titles, Chinese idioms as a characteristic linguistic phenomenon in Chinese can convey more profound meanings concisely. Also, literary allusions place a part in chapter titles, leaving valuable cultural treasures.

Thirdly, the chapter titles appear as couplets with corresponding parts of speech and the same number of Chinese characters. Antithesis is widely applied in chapter titles. Also, there're more chapter titles with 7 Chinese characters.

Besides, chapter novels are endowed with abundant figures of speeches such as simile, metonymy and alliteration. The features of metonymy lies in the supplementation of art, it does not speak out the original name of matters, but change its name or change another expression. So in this way, the name becomes more vivid, thus obtaining the artistic beauty. For example, in *Hong Lou Meng*, Xiaoxiang and Hengwu represent Daiyu and Baochai respectively.

Based on Morris' three meanings, namely the referential meaning, linguistic meaning and pragmatic meaning as well as the unique features of chapter titles, the following section will be devoted to the discussion of the translation techniques concerning chapter titles.

2.2 Translation Techniques Applied to Transfer Referential Meaning

Translating involves at least cultures of two languages, a variety of domains of definitions and the problematic intervention of a translator. The general tendency has been to annex this sprawling field of inquiry to already well-established sciences such as Semiotics and especially linguistics (Hewson & Martin, 1991, p. 3). The Sociosemiotic translation on the basis of social linguistics and Semiotics maintains that translation is the trans-cultural communication and the transformation of different signs. As the pioneer to conduct the research by combining Sociosemiotics and translation, Nida holds that the world is composed of different signs, thus it's a must to consider the language as a sign.

Generally, referential meaning is the basic meaning carried by linguistic signs. Therefore, it's necessary to have a clear understanding of the concepts expressed in the original text. Proper translation techniques to transfer referential meaning will be presented in the following parts.

2.2.1 Literal Translation

Among various translation techniques, literal translation as an important and also a fundamental translation technique places a vital part in the process of translation. This method emphasizes achieving equivalence both in meaning and form to the largest extent.

There are a large number of chapter titles with Chinese characters modified by adjectives or nicknames implying characters' features in the Chinese classic novels.

e.g. 1

Source Text: dai ba wang tiao qing zao ku da

leng lang jun ju huo zou ta xiang

-- Chapter 47, *Hong Lou Meng*

Translated Text: A Stupid Bully is Beaten up for His Amorous Advances

A Cool Young Gentleman Leaves Home for Fear of Reprisals

"dai ba wang" and "leng leng jun" refer to Xue Pan and Liu Xianglian in *Hong Lou Meng* respectively. The two lines of chapter titles show that: Xue Pan, the son of Aunt Xue, is an arrogant, amorous and ignorant guy. So people call him "dai ba wang". Xue Pan encounters Baoyu's friend Liu Xianglian at Lai's House, and wants to flirt with Liu. Liu finds an excuse to ask Xue to go outside of the city with him and gives Xue a lesson. Afterwards, Liu Xiangliu leaves for somewhere else afar.

When translating the names of the two characters, translators should employ literal translation to show the features of the two characters to a great degree. It's worth mentioning that "ba wang" has two meanings in Chinese culture: One refers to Xiang Yu – an important heroic figure in Chu State; while the other meaning is that someone who tends to bully the timid. Obviously, Xue Pan is not the person like Xiang Yu. Thus, we should choose the latter meaning.

2.2.2 Addition

Chinese is one of Sino-Tibetan Language Families while English belongs to Indo-European Language Family. Some of sentence elements such as subjects, prepositions and objects tend to be omitted for simplicity in Chinese; however, an English sentence should be connected by subjects, prepositions and so forth.

As a common translation technique, addition refers to a translation technique where necessary words, phrases or sentences are added based on the implied meaning in the original text, thus meeting the standards of the target language.

There are a number of chapter titles without subjects to achieve word refinement based on the observation of the chapter titles in the four classic novels of China. When dealing with this kind of chapter titles, translators should find out the major characters through grasping the whole chapter and then add the corresponding subjects based on the understanding of the whole chapter. In this way, readers in the target language will clearly understand the main idea.

e.g. 2

Source Text: tuo nan jiang liu lai guo tu

Cheng'en Bajie zhuan shan lin

-- Chapter 29, *Xi You Ji*

Translated Text: Sanzang, Delivered, Crosses a Border

A Grateful Pig Tours Mountains and Forests

The two lines of chapter titles tell that the king of Baoxiang State is deceived by the yellow robe monster into believing that Tang Sanzang is the tiger demon. In a fit of anger, the king puts Tang Sanzang into a cell. Later, Zhu Bajie goes to Mountain of Flowers and Fruits begging for Sun Wukong's help. With Sun's efforts, the yellow robe monster is defeated. As a result, Tang Sanzang and the king's daughter are rescued.

The first line of the title shows that it is Tang Sanzang who is saved from the plight. Hence, the true subject "Sanzang" is supplemented to facilitate convenient understanding in the process of translation.

Secondly, most prepositions indicating places in Chinese chapter titles tend to be deliberately omitted with the expectation of achieving a concise effect. The common format for chapter title is shown below: subject + preposition of place + predicate or preposition of place + subject + predicate. The corresponding prepositions should be added to convey a complete meaning in translation.

e.g. 3

Source Text: Chaisang kou wo long diao sang

Leiyang xian feng zhi li shi

-- Chapter 57, *Xi You Ji*

Translated Text: Sleeping Dragon Mourns Zhou Yu at Chaisang

Young Phoenix Takes Office at Leiyang

In *Xi You Ji*, this chapter tells that learning the death of Zhou Yu, Zhuge Liang goes to Chaisang for mourning. On his way back, Zhuge meets Pang Tong, telling Pang that if Pang is not contented with his current condition, he can go for Liu Bei for a shelter. Due to Pang's ugly appearance, Liu Bei sends Pang to Leiyang to take charge of local affairs. In the chapter titles, "Chaisang" and "Leiyang" are the two places where the events happen. Thus, the preposition "at" is used in the translated text.

Thirdly, there are also a large number of chapter titles without objects in Chinese. When translating them into English, translators should add the proper objects.

e.g. 4

Source Text: huo jian chan chao jian da guan yuan

shi gu jie du jue ning guo fu

-- Chapter 74, *Hong Lou Meng*

Translated Text: Malicious Talk Makes Lady Wang Have a Search Made of the Garden

To Guard Her Integrity Xichun Breaks with the Ning Mansion.

The story in *Hong Lou Meng* tells that Lady Wang thinks that the pornographic pouch is lost by Xifeng and

Xifeng cries to defense for herself. As a result, Lady Wang orders to have a thorough search of the Grand View Garden. So, the object "Lady Wang" should be added when the first line of the title is translated.

2.2.3 Substitution

In some cases, it's advisable to substitute a concise word for a tedious one rather than only literally translating some characters' names to achieve rhyming and simplicity or apply a tedious word to replace a concise word for easy understanding.

Generally, some people's names in the novel can be replaced by some other words according to the relationship in the story to achieve conciseness and neatness.

e.g. 5

Source Text: xie zhen xie bao shuang yue yu

sun li sun xin da jie lao

-- Chapter49，*Shui Hu Zhuan*

Translated Text: The Xie Brothers Make Their Escape The Two Suns Break Open the Jail

In the story, Xie Zhen and Xie Bao are brothers. So are Sun Li and Sun Xin. Since the target readers have no idea of the identities of these four persons who are not the heroes in the novel, it is a good idea to just present the kinship and family names of them.

Additionally, in English, there is considerable redundancy both in the language signs system itself and in its use process. In the language signs system, redundancy exists at the level of sounds, vocabulary, and grammar. In the translation process of the chapter titles, some concise Chinese characters which are to reach the effect of brevity need to be taken place by some tedious terms in English to avoid ambiguity.

e.g. 6

Source Text: yan mo fa zi di feng wu gui

hong lou meng tong ling yu shuang zhen

-- Chapter 25, *Hong Lou Meng*

Translated Text: Five Devils Invoked by Sorcery Take Possession of Baoyu and Xifeng

Two Sages See the Jade of Spiritual Understanding in the Dream of Red Mansions

In the chapter title above, "zi di" means "elder sisters and younger brothers" literally in Chinese. In the context of the chapter title, "zi di" refers to Wang Xifeng and Jia Baoyu who become desperately ill due to the obsession of devils. Hence, the translator translates "zi di" into Baoyu and Xifeng directly to facilitate understanding.

Based on the above, literal translation, addition and substitution are three major commonly applied translation techniques in the chapter title translation to transfer the referential meaning.

2.3 Translation Techniques Applied to Transfer Linguistic Meaning

Since each language belongs to a unique linguistic system, it's difficult to maintain the linguistic system of the original language during the translation process. However, one system can also be able to convey the similar meaning of another system by transferring from the perspective of phonology, lexicon and sentences etc. Transferring the linguistic meaning will be carried out by using the translation technique of conversion.

2.3.1 Conversion

In light of the linguistic meaning as one of the three meanings proposed by Morris, translators should conduct the translation by taking the interrelationship between a word and other elements in a discourse into account.

Sometimes, in the process of translation, a word needs to be transferred into another part of speech in a line to achieve the corresponding effect with the original text.

e.g.7

Source Text: qing zhong qing yi qing gan mei mei

cuo li cuo yin cuo quan ge ge

--Chapter 34, *Hong Lou Meng*

Translated Text: Moved by Affection, Baoyu Moves His Cousin

A Wrong Report Makes Baochai Wrong Her Brother

There are three "qing" in the first line and three "cuo" in the second line for the Chinese characters are repeated to emphasize a kind of feeling or meaning. The first two "qing" have no practical meaning. Neither do the first two "cuo". As the writer of the original aims to enhance the aesthetic effect of the chapter titles, the translator translates "cuo" into the word "wrong" twice. The first "wrong" used as an adjective means being unrealistic; while the second word "wrong" is a verb, and means making someone suffer from injustice.

Figures of speech are widely used in chapter titles of the four Chinese classic novels, which greatly promote the gracefulness and the vividness of chapter titles. The research on the translation of the figures of speech -- alliteration, metonymy and antithesis in the original will be transferred by repetition, extension, combination and word order adjustment. .

2.3.2 Repetition

Alliteration refers to the repetition of a particular sound in the first syllables of words. Largely developed from poetry, alliteration means the repetition of a consonant in syllables in a narrow sense. As for readers, the use of alliteration will enhance the rhythm and the aesthetics.

e.g.8

Source Text: xiang fu ren fu shen hai dao fu

chi qing nv qing zhong yu zhen qing

-- Chapter 29, *Hong Lou Meng*

Translated Text: Favourites of Fortune Pray for Better Fortune

An Absurd, Loving Girl Falls Deeper in Love

There are three "fu" and three "qing" in the original chapter titles, which is able to enhance the rhythm in the original and when conducting the translation of such chapter titles, the translator had better apply alliteration in

English to achieve the similar phonetic effects. Moreover, the Chinese character "fu" has the same pronunciation with the initial pronunciation of the word "fortune". The three "fu" in the original and three "fortune" in English are able to achieve a perfect correspondence in terms of phonetics with the pronunciation of the first two phonemes in /f/. In addition, two "qing" in the original are translated into "loving" and "love" by trying to repeat the words with same phonetic sounds, which is also consists of alliteration with the same initial phonetic sounds /l/.

2.3.3 Extension
Metonymy is a type of figure of speech in rhetoric where a thing or a concept is called by the name of something closely related with the thing or concept mentioned rather than by its own name. Metonym is generally regarded as an effective way of names for what it truly represents. Proper application of metonymy will highlight the nature of things and enhance the vividness of language.

e.g. 9
Source Text: di cui ting yang fei xi cai die
Mai xiang zhong fei yan qi can hong

-- Chapter 27, *Hong Lou Meng*

Translated Text: Baochai Chases a Butterfly to Dripping Emerald Pavilion

Daiyu Weeps over Fallen Blossom by the Tomb of Flowers

The chapter 27 tells that Baochai swings her fan to catch butterflies; Baoyu is looking for Daiyu and goes to the tomb of flowers, hearing Daiyu chanting a poem to cry for the fallen flowers. Based on the content of the chapter, there's nothing about Concubine Yang and Feiyan. Thus, translators should have a profound consideration of the original implied intention.

Concubine Yang and Feiyan do not actually refer to Yang Yuhuan and Zhao Feiyan respectively. As everyone knows that Concubine Yang as one of the four beauties in the ancient China is famous for her plump beauty and the most beloved concubine of Emperor of Tang Xuanzong. In the first line of the chapter title, the writer of the novel applies the metonymy to refer to Xue Baochai - another plump beauty. As for the latter part, Feiyan - the empress of the Emperor of Hancheng during the Western Han Dynasty, is famous for her emaciated figure similar to Lin Daiyu.

Therefore, it's proper to translate Concubine Yang and Feiyan into Baochai and Daiyu directly, which will be easy for readers of foreign cultures to grasp the main idea of the chapter mentioned.

2.3.4 Combination and Word Order Adjustment
Antithesis is the figure of speech where a pair of phrases or sentences with the same number of Chinese characters and similar structure and symmetrical meaning is used to achieve highly generalization and musical aesthetics. Among the four Chinese classic novels, antithesis is widely applied. Here, the combination of literal translation and word order adjustment are adopted to translate the

antithesis in Chinese chapter titles to meet the English standards.

e.g.10
Source Text: ji xiong chou Zhang Fei yu hai
xue di hen xian zhu xing bing

-- Chapter 81, *San Guo Yan Yi*

Translated Text: Eager for Revenge, Zhang Fei Is Assassinated

To Avenge His Brother, the Emperor Goes to War

The chapter 81 of the novel *San Guo Yan Yi* tells that after Guan Yu was killed by Lv Meng, Zhang Fei becomes extremely depressed and violently beats his subordinates Fan Jiang and Zhang Da. Since then, the two generals have a grudge against Zhang Fei, thus they murder Zhang and then flee to Wu State. Learning of the death of Zhang Fei, Liu Bei flies into a rage and sends armed forces to fight against Wu State.

Here, "Eager for Revenge" and "To Avenge His Brother" are used as adverbial clauses of purpose for each part of the chapter titles. The translated text forms the corresponding effect.

2.4 Translation Techniques Applied to Transfer Pragmatic Meaning
The application of literary allusions is a common rhetoric means in literary works to add glamour to novels. As for foreign readers, an allusion is regarded as one of important channels for them to grasp exotic cultural flavors and information. However, the application of literary allusion will make translators' tasks much more formidable since an allusion itself is a story which is highly concentrated to a word or a vocabulary and sentence with its implied meaning far more profound than the literal meaning (Zheng, 2000, p. 41-42).

e.g.11
Source Text: Xue Wenlong hui qu Hedong Shi
Jia Yingchun wu jia Zhongshan Lang

-- Chapter 79, *Hong Lou Meng*

Translated Text: Xun Pan Marries a Fierce Lioness and Repents Too Late

Yingchuan Is Wrongly Wedded to an Ungrateful Wolf

Chen Zao, one of Su Shi's friends was a great writer and calligrapher during the Northern Song Dynasty in Chinese history. However, Chen's wife Mrs. Liu was a well-known hellcat. As a result, Chen was in fear of his wife. Knowing Chen's awkward situation, Su Shi has even composed a poem to express his compassion for Chen Zao. In his poem, Su used "shi zi hou" which refers to the yelling of a lion. Originating from the Buddhist language, "shi zi hou" means that Buddha like a roaring lion is fearless to promote Buddhism. "Hedong" refers to today's Shanxi Province in China. Since then, "he dong shi hou" became a household word, symbolizing women with strong personality. Therefore, it's suggested to translate this word flexibly to convey the implied meaning in the source chapter title.

The word "Zhongshan Lang" comes from *Story of Zhongshan Lang* created by Ma Zhongxi in the Ming Dynasty. According to the story, during the Spring and Autumn Period, Zhao Zijian serving as a senior official in Jin State held a hunting in Zhongshan. While encountering a wolf, he pursued it desperately. Fortunately, Mr. Dongguo saved it. However, the wolf even wanted to eat Mr. Dongguo after being rescued. Later, people use the "Zhongshan Lang" to refer to an ungrateful person.

As for this chapter, Jia Yingchun married Sun Shaozu - a vile guy. When Sun became impoverished, he once begged for help from Jia's Family. After he got a huge promotion, he committed many crimes. Even worse, he married Jia Yingchun and abused her after their marriage. As a result, Yingchun died due to Sun's maltreatment. So "Zhongshan Lang" should be translated into "ungrateful wolf" to reveal the implied meaning.

When it comes to the translation of allusions in chapter titles, translators should deal with the allusions flexibly to translate the in-depth meanings to the target readers based on their comprehensive understanding of the literary allusions to avoid mistranslation.

CONCLUSION

With the communication between China and the world in culture and literature, the ancient Chinese literature as an important part of Chinese culture becomes the coveted pursuit of foreigners. The Chinese classic novels are widely regarded as the optimal research subjects. Chapter titles as the table of content of chapter novels play a crucial role in introducing the major content to readers. Accordingly, the chapter title translation is of significance for introducing Chinese chapter novels to foreign readers. This paper aims to carry out a rough research on the chapter title translation, trying to come up with some translation techniques for chapter titles to transfer the referential meaning, linguistic meaning and pragmatic meaning proposed by Morris. It's the author's sincere hope that the research results obtained will provide references for future researches in this field.

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