Characterisation in Literary Translation: A Systemic Functional Approach to the English Translation of Legends of the Condor Heroes

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In this project, I use a parallel corpus of the Chinese martial arts novel "*Legends of the Condor Heroes*" [*射雕英雄传*] to analyse the portrayal of the protagonist Guo Jing[郭靖] in the English translation. Reviews from English readers of the translation indicate an amplification of Guo's humility, alongside a reduction in the portrayal of his intelligence, compared to the understanding of Guo Jing by the Chinese readers. To explore the reasons behind these discrepancies, I attempt to examine and compare the lexicogrammatical choices between the two corpora that might be significant in shaping the personality of Guo Jing, drawing upon a systemic functional analytical framework. In particular, my investigation will focus on address terms that signify Guo Jing's humility when Guo Jing is presented as a Sayer, and on mental clauses when Guo Jing is presented as a Senser, which serve as an important linguistic cue in conveying his intelligence.

By comparing the addressing terms found in the source text (ST) and the target text (TT) regarding social status and social distance, I aim to probe the reasons for the deepened impression on Guo's humility among the English readers. Additionally, through a comparison of various types of mental processes in the ST and TT, along with an assessment of the complexity of Guo Jing's mental projection in terms of frequency of embeddings, clauses, and variations in logico-semantic sequencing, I try to explore why Guo's intelligence is not equivalently portrayed in the translation.

To further interpret the analysis of the linguistic data, an interview with the primary translator was also conducted to gain insights into her decision-making that results in the lexicogrammatical choices found in the linguistic data analysis. In addition, experiments were conducted among English readers to test the potential links between relevant lexicogrammatical choices and readers' understanding of Guo's character traits. For a better interpretation of the results, surveys of Chinese readers are also included in the project to explore the profound impact of sociocultural factors on the lexicogrammatical choices made in the process of translation. The project is expected to contribute to the understanding of how a character could be developed in literary translation when the two languages are culturally distant and how literary translators navigate the diverse expectations of stakeholders during the process of translation.

Biodata

Shiwei Fu recently completed her PhD project at Macquarie University. Her research project explores the fascinating realms of literary translation, corpus-based translation studies, and the application of SFL in translation studies, as well as mixed methods approaches in translation studies. She is working with Dr. Jing Fang from Macquarie University and Prof. Xiao Ma from Wuhan University on projects in Chinese literary translation.