

Study on Multi-dimensional Transformations in C-E Translation of *The Three Word Primer* from the Perspective of Eco-translatology

Xiuying Lu ^{1,*} Yuqi Zhang ²

¹ Research Center for Applied Translation of Transportation and Engineering, School of Foreign Languages, East China Jiaotong University, Nanchang 330013, P.R.China

² School of Foreign Languages, East China Jiaotong University, Nanchang 330013, P.R.China

* Lu Xiuying. Email: 0441@ecjtu.edu.cn

ABSTRACT

Zhao Yanchun's *The Three Word Primer* is distinguished by its linguistic fidelity to the original text, its three-word grid, even-rhyming style, easily understood and informative commentary. Using the multi-dimensional transformations of eco-translatology, we find that the translator has successfully achieved the multi-dimensional transformations of traditional Chinese cultural elements in linguistic, cultural and communicative dimensions, so that the translation has withstood the "selecting the superior and eliminating the inferior" of the translation ecological environment. The translation has implications for the "going abroad" of traditional Chinese culture and classical masterpieces.

Keywords: Eco-translatology, *The Three Word Primer*, Zhao Yanchun, Multi-dimensional transformations.

1. INTRODUCTION

The Three Word Primer is one of the three major national enlightenment books, and is a valuable cultural heritage of the Chinese ethnic peoples. As the proverb goes, if you are familiar with *The Three Word Primer*, you will be erudite and informed. [1] It is a reflection of the wisdom of the Chinese people and *The Three Word Primer* has a profound impact in China. During its translation, attention must be paid to its format, rhythm, style and cultural connotations. This is why translating *The Three Word Primer* is not an easy task and requires the translator's tireless efforts and bold attempts. [2]

In 2014, *The Three Word Primer* from Zhao Yanchun is the first even-rhyming translation with three English words in a line. It made a lot of headlines of Xinhua News Agency, China Daily and other major well-known media. The article will analyse its success from the perspective of multi-dimensional transformations.

2. ECO-TRANSLATOLOGY AND MULTI-DIMENSIONAL TRANSFORMATIONS

Eco-translatology was proposed by Hu Gengshen, a scholar from Tsinghua University, who drew inspiration from Darwin's theory of evolution, compared the

translation ecology with the nature ecology, and explained the phenomenon of survival of the fittest in the translation industry with the idea of natural selection. Translation ecology is an interrelated and interactive entity consisting of language, culture, communication, author, translator, reader, sponsor and so on. [3]

Eco-translatology covers ten theories including balance and harmony, text transplantation, translator's responsibility, adaptive choice, multi-dimensional transformations and so on. [4] The ten theories have explained the phenomenon and law of translation from macro and micro perspectives respectively. Among them, the most meaningful one for translation practice is multi-dimensional transformations.

The theory emphasizes that the translator should realize multi-dimensional transformations from the original text to the target text, especially the linguistic, cultural and communicative dimension transformations, under the principle of selective and adaptive choice.

Linguistic dimension refers to the transformation of language forms during translation process. Translators should adapt to the linguistic ecology of the target language.

Cultural dimension requires translator to adapt to the cultural ecology, own culture consciousness in the

translation process, overcome the communication barriers caused by different regions and different culture. Translators should help readers of target language to realize cross-linguistic communication and cultural information exchange.

Communicative dimension seeks to keep the communicative ecology balance between original text and target text and maintain their communicative ecologies. In the process of translating a work, the translator must adapt to translation ecology. Then translator should make a choice for the words which really adapt to translation ecological environment from the perspective of eco-translatology. [5]

It requires translators to reproduce rhetorical techniques, linguistic form of the original text to convey the beauty of the linguistic dimension. Translators should explain the cultural background of the original text and thinking method of the original text to help readers of the target language cross the cultural gap and taste the cultural dimension. Translators should convey the communicative intention of author, so that the target text can strike a chord with readers. It will achieve the effect of communicative dimension.

3. THE THREE WORD PRIMER

The Three Word Primer is a Confucianism book which was written by He Xingsi in Qing Dynasty and translated by Zhao Yanchun. In ancient times, it was an ABC book to enlighten some little children. There are three words in a line and four lines in a stanza. Its core idea expresses Confucianism including benevolence, righteousness, sincerity, respect and fidelity.

Based on Chinese traditional culture, taking Confucianism as the core and Chinese history as the material, *The Three Word Primer* tells the importance of learning and education in cultivating talents with the glory of human nature. The unique centralized literacy, the poetic reading with rhyme, the people-oriented educational concept, and the dissemination and inheritance beyond time and space make *The Three Word Primer* a model textbook for Chinese traditional enlightenment education. [6]

The Three Word Primer is known as World Children's Education Series by United Nations Education Scientific and Cultural Organization. It combines Chinese traditional culture and historical allusions, and fully embodies the wisdom of Chinese people. It was handed down through the generations with a far-reaching impact on Chinese people.

Zhao Yanchun's translation was praised as an excellent English version in China, because his translation realized the beauty of rhythm with three words in a line to express Chinese sound better. There are more foreigners learning about and reciting the English

version from Zhao Yanchun, *The Three Word Primer*. As an important part of the "Sinology Classics Translation Library" project launched by Tianjin Foreign Studies University and a hit product for the overseas dissemination of Sinology classics, the translation conforms to the trend of the times of culture going global. *The Three Word Primer* plays an important role and has a great significance in promoting the overseas dissemination of Sinology classics.

4. MULTI-DIMENSIONAL TRANSFORMATIONS OF CHINESE TRADITIONAL CULTURE IN *THE THREE WORD PRIMER*

4.1. Linguistic Dimension Transformations

4.1.1. Rhyme

According to Zhao Yanchun, when the translation focuses on communication, the rhyme scheme of the target language can be adopted. When the translation tends to reference, the rhyme scheme of the source language should be adopted. [7] *The Three Word Primer* uses the even-rhyming style, AABB rhyme scheme, which takes into account both the AABA rhyme scheme of the source language and the AABB rhyme scheme of the target language. It is an intermediate term. Since AABA rhyme in Chinese is rare in English, and even-rhyming in English is rarely found in Chinese. The rhyme scheme used in *The Three Word Primer* can be regarded as an intermediate term that takes into account the characteristics of both rhymes.

The Three Word Primer creatively uses the three-word grid, even-rhyming style, choosing three words in English to correspond to three words in Chinese each line, and rhyming with a strong sense of rhythm. The words chosen are simple and easy to understand. What did the author want to express could be shown in the target text. The brief explanation from annotation is also very convenient for foreign readers to read and understand. Example 1:

Source Text: 人之初，性本善。性相近，习相远。

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Target Text: Man on earth, Good at birth. The same nature, Varied on nurture.

Annotation: Man was good in the beginning, or he is good at birth. Human nature deviates due to different natures. [13]

The rhyme scheme is based on the rhyming of "th" in the first line of "earth" and "th" in the second line of "birth", and "ture" in the third line of "nature" and "ture" in the fourth line of "nurture", which form the AABB rhyme scheme. AA means the same final sound in the first and second sentences, and BB means the same final

sound in the third and fourth sentences. The rhyme scheme is in line with the rhyme scheme of Chinese poetry, and is easy to read and recite for children.

The Three Word Primer corresponds word for word, but it is not any translation for the sake of rhyming. Although the translation is simple, it accurately conveys far-reaching meaning and profound thoughts. In target text, the word “性” is translated into “nature” and the word “习” is translated into “nurture”, which correspond to the meaning of the words and rhyme with each other.

The Three Word Primer also adds a short annotation after each stanza to facilitate readers understanding target text. If the reader understands the allusions or learn about its background, he or she can simply appreciate the beauty of the twelve words in each stanza. If the reader does not understand the allusions or learn about its background, he or she can read the annotation before reading the stanza. Whether the annotation is read or not, it is entirely up to the individual’s needs.

4.1.2. Allusion

The Three Word Primer contains many historical allusions, such as Mencius’s mother moving three times and reading by the light of bagged fireflies or the reflected light of snow. These classical historical stories are Chinese household stories, but it is difficult to translate such historical stories into English, as most of foreigners have little knowledge of them, let alone expressing the inner thoughts contained in them in accurate English. Example 2:

Source Text: 头悬梁，锥刺股。彼不教，自勤苦。

Target Text: Head strung high, Needled his thigh. Not pushed they, Kept working away. [13]

It tells the story of two young men who study diligently named Sun Jing and Su Qin.

Sun Jing was so young and studious that he often stayed up all night reading and studying. To avoid dozing off at midnight, he tied one end of a rope to a beam and the lower end to his own hair. Whenever he was tired and sleepy and wanted to doze off, he would lower his head and the rope would tug violently on his hair, waking him up, chasing away his sleepiness. From then on, year after year, Sun Jing studied hard and became a great scholar.

During the Warring States period, Su Qin, who was not educated well, was not valued by others and was looked down upon with disdain. Therefore, he was determined to study hard. When he dozed off, he would stab the awl into his thigh. In this way, he would feel the pain so that he would wake up and keep on reading. In the end, he proposed the strategic idea of uniting the six kingdoms to fight against the Qin. He lobbied in many kingdoms and was recognized by Lord Yan Wen.

Hanging from a beam and stabbing with an awl is unique cultural imagery in China with historical stories and cultural context. Although foreign readers need to have the relevant background knowledge to understand the content and intent of the translation, the translator preserves the integrity and uniqueness of Chinese culture.

4.2. Cultural Dimension Transformations

The Three Word Primer is based on He Xingsi’s version in the Qing dynasty with great cultural consciousness. As the development of China, it played an increasingly important role in global culture. It needed discourse reconstruction and active export of culture.

4.2.1. Spiritual Culture

Confucianism, represented by Confucius, is one of the hundred schools of thoughts in the pre-Qin dynasty. Its thinking with benevolence as its core has a profound impact in Chinese ancient time. Besides, Confucianism also contains such things as three principles and five virtues, which were used as norms for people’s daily behavior in the past. The theme of *The Three Word Primer* is Confucianism, and many of its parts profoundly reflect the importance of Confucianism in people’s lives. Example 3:

Source Text: 三纲者，君臣义。父子亲，夫妇顺。

Target Text: Three tenets always, Subject lord obeys. Child father reveres, Wife man endears. [13]

This is an introduction to the three principles of Chinese Confucian ethics and culture. Under three principles, ruler guides chancellors, father guides son, and husband guides wife. This was used to maintain political rules as an important ethical code. Three principles of righteousness of the ruler and his chancellors, kinship of the father and his son, and harmony of the husband and his wife are also concrete embodiments of the idea of benevolence. It reflects the special moral relationship between ruler and chancellors, father and son, and husband and wife in feudal society.

The Three Word Primer presents an ideal and harmonious picture. The translation respects the expression of the original text, using the words “obeys”, “reveres” and “endears” to correspond to the words “义”, “亲” and “顺” in the original text respectively. The choice of words is accurate, and the harmonious picture of a wise ruler and loyal chancellors, a kind father and a filial son, and a sweet couple is drawn out.

4.2.2. Material Culture

Material culture is the culture embodied in the material goods created by human beings, including the technology, art used and basic necessities of life. [8]

China is located in the interior of Asia. Its flat terrain and fertile soil have made China a traditionally agricultural country. Its inland culture is therefore clearly dominant. It is a different geographical environment that has given rise to the different material cultures of the East and the West. Example 4:

Source Text: 稻粱菽，麦黍稷。此六谷，人所食。

Target Text: Rice, sorghum, beans, Wheat, millet, corns. These crops main, Our life sustain. [13]

Here introduce six kinds of crops in Chinese daily life. China is inland and has a broad agricultural acreage. The traditional farming life has naturally created a wide variety of crops. The stanza mentions six kinds of crops. “菽” is a generic term for all kinds of beans. Zhao Yanchun translates it into “beans”, meaning any edible seeds of plants of leguminosae used for food or any leguminous plants grown for edible seeds and pods. Differences in material resources inevitably result in cultural lexical gaps. For example, the word “黍” and “稷” appear in the original text are less common food in the West, so there are no English expressions equivalent for them. This also reminds the translator that encountering such a situation, he or she should make appropriate adaptations in choosing translation strategies and techniques to ensure a smooth translation, on the premise of correctly understanding its cultural connotation.

4.3. Communicative Dimension Transformations

From a pragmatic point of view, enjoying a literary work is a communicative process. During this process, the reader must seek connections between the “situational context” (e.g contextual content) and the “cultural context” (e.g cultural background) in which the text is located. Based on the author’s explicit message, the reader ultimately reasons about the communicative intent of the author’s words. [9]

4.3.1. Contextual Content

Zhao Yanchun mentions in his *A Reductionist of Approach to Translatology* that translation is a system of balance that follows the principles of correlation and convergence and cannot be overruled at any time. The translation must be correlative, otherwise it will be a far cry. The translation must converge, otherwise it will be unreasonable. [7] Therefore, in his process of translation, he considers the contextual content, pays attention to the choice of translation strategies, and pursues high-quality translation. Example 5:

Source Text: 养不教，父之过。教不严，师之惰。

Target Text: What’s a father? A good teacher. What’s a teacher? A strict preacher. [13]

The original text is a declarative sentence, but the target text is a rhetorical question. The stanza expresses the position of home education and school education well. It is universally accepted that parents are the first teachers of their children. The first sentence emphasizes the important role that the family represented by the father, plays an important role in the child’s growth as the first teacher. The translation describes the role of the father as a teacher very well and makes it clear to the reader in the first sentence.

The second sentence is also clear in describing the teacher’s responsibility. Strict with the students is indispensable during education. It uses domestication to enable the reader of the target language to establish a connection with the original language as far as possible. Thus, the translation uses “preacher”, a cultural image familiar to Western readers, as a metaphor for the responsibilities of teachers. After all, most of Western readers are Christians. They can easily make the connection between teachers and priests and thus understand original text’s meaning thoroughly.

This stanza focuses on the raising of children, and it is the fault of the father if he only feeds them without providing a good education. It is the teacher’s failure not to teach students with strict standards. Zhao Yanchun’s translation follows the connotations of the original text. Although his translation does not refer to the words “养”、“教”、“过”、“惰”，the translation maintains the best possible connection with the original text in terms of its textual message and its poetic effect.

4.3.2. Cultural Background

In the translation of foreign works, the translator should not only adapt to the differences in language but also adapt to different cultural background of different languages and different background of the work, so that the cultural background of the foreign text can be transformed through translation. It can be expressed and transmitted more closely and accurately.

The differences between the cultural dimension, language, and the understanding of the content of the work, historical traditions, customs, and other cultural aspects require the translator to adapt to such cultural differences in the translation process from the cultural point of view of the target language, to deeply understand the cultural imagery of the original text and its connotation, and to faithfully convey the original culture connotation. [10] Example 6:

Source Text: 子不学，非所宜。幼不学，老何为？

Target Text: An unschooled child, Will grow wild. A young loafer, An old loser. [13]

In ancient Chinese texts, the word “子” is often used, not to refer specifically to a person, so target text is supposed to use an indefinite article. In Zhao Yanchun’s translation, various syntax and diction conversion appears. The translator chose daily words but it is appropriate. The last sentence of the original text is a rhetorical question, but the target text is a declarative sentence, directly stating a clear ending, which is straightforward and rhymes with three words. The rhyming form is in keeping with the style, connotation, and rhythm of the original text.

Zhao Yanchun says that the target audience for *The Three Word Primer* is not a special group, but everyone. Although *The Three Word Primer* is a book for little children, it is also a pocket-sized encyclopaedia suitable for all-aged people. Some of the words used in *The Three Word Primer* are also accurate and semantically appropriate, which can be understood easily. He believes that *The Three Word Primer* conserves the simplicity and clarity of the original language, which is in line with the rules of the target language and is easily accepted by readers. From the perspective of the grammar, the target text uses a lot of short sentences, non-predicate phrases, and appropriate words, while the articulation and coherence of the original text are taken into account. [11]

5. ENLIGHTENMENTS FROM THE THREE WORD PRIMER FOR THE TRANSLATION OF CLASSICAL MASTERPIECES

In my opinion, analysis of *The Three Word Primer* from the perspective of multi-dimensional transformations has a great learning and reference value on the translation of classical masterpieces.

Firstly, translators should pay attention to the format and rhyming and use some explanations to realize linguistic dimension transformations. Readers can feel the beauty of original text and the spirit of Chinese traditional classical masterpieces.

Then, culture output is also very important. Cultural gap needs translators to do more work. Most of time, translators should try to find appropriate expressions that receptors can understand under their cultural background.

In the end, from the perspective of communicative dimension transformations, translators need learn about their readers and stand in readers’ shoes and look at the target text through their eyes.

Although cultural gap cannot be changed, a real responsible translator will make a real good translation can be accepted and understood by receptors well even with some explanations.

6. CONCLUSIONS

As is shown in the above examples, the translator has taken into account the characteristics of the original text and the cultural background of the target language readers and has restored the linguistic features, cultural connotations, and communicative effects of *The Three Word Primer*, successfully achieving the multi-dimensional transformations from the original text to the target text.

From the translation booming period, at the end of the Qing Dynasty, when a large number of missionaries entered China, to the development of Sino-Western exchanges after the reform and opening up, to the publication of *The Three Word Primer*, there have been countless translation versions. According to Zhao Yanchun, no matter how many versions arise, if they do not reproduce the stylistic features, rhetorical styles, and cultural connotations of *The Three Word Primer*, they cannot be considered successful versions and cannot be called autonomous, self-contained, equivalent versions and comparable to the original classics. What he presents is a three-word and even-rhyming version that corresponds to the original text, which in terms of form is real *The Three Word Primer*. [12]

The Three Word Primer has been proved to be able to withstand the survival of the fittest in the translation ecology through the multi-dimensional transformations from the original text into the target text. This also has great implications for Chinese classical masterpieces translation. Translators should strive to highlight the cultural characteristics of the original text not being overly biased towards the culture of the target language, which keeps the cultural-ecological balance.

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