



Evaluation of *Fox Volant of the Snowy Mountain* from the Perspective of Eco-Translatology—Degree of Holistic Adaptation and Selection

Dong Ren

Foreign Language Teaching Department, Yantai Nanshan University, Yantai, China
Email: papaya7777@126.com

Received 31 May 2016; accepted 18 June 2016; published 24 June 2016

Copyright © 2016 by author and OALib.

This work is licensed under the Creative Commons Attribution International License (CC BY).

<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>



Open Access

Abstract

The earliest study of eco-translatology started in 2001 when Professor Hu Gengshen from Tsinghua University was inspired by Darwin's theory of evolution and he introduced the concept "natural selection" into translation study. Hu proposed the approach of "translation as adaptation and selection", which is the fundamental theory of eco-translatology. Hu defines translation as "a selection activity of the translator's adaptation to fit the translational eco-environment". This thesis studies the English version of Jin Yong's *Xueshan Feihu* translated by Olivia Mok. By using case study, it evaluates Mok's translation with the new term—degree of holistic adaptation and selection. These points can be concluded: eco-translatology provides an effective theoretical tool for Wuxia fiction's translation; the evaluation criterion is the more the translator makes his adaptation to fit the translational eco-environment, the better the translation is. Survive the adapted; otherwise, eliminated.

Keywords

Eco-Translatology, Wuxia Fiction, Adaptation and Selection, Evaluation, The Degree of Holistic Adaptation and Selection

Subject Areas: Education, Linguistics

1. Introduction

Eco-translatology is not an independent discipline, but it can be understood as an ecological approach to translation studies or translation studies from an ecological perspective [1]. The fundamental theory of eco-translatol-

How to cite this paper: Ren, D. (2016) Evaluation of *Fox Volant of the Snowy Mountain* from the Perspective of Eco-Translatology—Degree of Holistic Adaptation and Selection. *Open Access Library Journal*, 3: e2784.

<http://dx.doi.org/10.4236/oalib.1102784>

ogy is “translation as adaptation and selection”, which borrowed from Darwin’s evolution theory of “natural selection” and “survival the fittest”. According to this approach, Hu Gengshen defined translation as “a selection activity of the translator’s adaptation to fit the translational eco-environment” [2]. The translation method can be briefly concluded as “three-dimensional transformations”, which is the adaptive selection and transformation on linguistic dimension, cultural dimension and communicative dimension.

There are different evaluation criteria for a translation work. To evaluate the same translation of a book or a paragraph, without same evaluation criterion, the evaluation is different. Some scholars consider that a translation is proper, while others consider it as not qualified if they have different criteria. Therefore, the evaluation is closely related to the evaluation criterion. Hu Gengshen has pointed that a successful translation is the result of the translator’s successful multi-dimensional adaptation and adaptive selection and the evaluation depends on “the degree of holistic adaptation and selection” [3].

The degree of holistic adaptation and selection means the combination of the result of the first stage of translation—degree of multi-dimensional adaptation and then the following stage—degree of adaptive selection, both of which should all match the eco-environment. Generally speaking, the higher the degree of holistic adaptation is, the higher the quality of the translation is. According to translation as adaptation and selection, Hu points three reference values: the degree of multi-dimensional transformation, the reader’s feedback and the translator’s quality. In the following part of the thesis, Mok’s translation will be analyzed from the three reference values. The advantages and disadvantages will be discovered to present her translation’s quality.

2. The Degree of Multi-Dimensional Transformation

To evaluate the degree of multi-dimensional transformation, we have to see whether the translator adapts to the translational eco-environment first, especially the “three dimensional transformation” which is the first reference to be considered.

2.1. The Degree of Linguistic Dimensional Transformation

As to the linguistic dimension, Mok mainly adapted literal translation, which is faithful to the source text. However, literal translation has its disadvantages which lead to misunderstanding of the readers.

Jianghu is a term specially used in Wuxia fictions, which refers to a quite sophisticated world composed of not only fighters but civilians, government officials, landlords and bullies. It is the world where kung fu masters live and fight for justice. Wulin is similar as Jianghu, referring to the whole group of people knowing kung fu. The translation of Jianghu in Mok’s version mostly rendered to “outlawry” and Wuli to “martial brotherhood”. When the heroes of different schools carried by Tree, the monk to the manor, they find it is difficult to reach the summit.

众人知是江湖上传递信息的讯号，…… [4]

They knew it was the signal used by the outlawry for sending messages [5].

The word “outlawry” is the noun of “outlaw” which means somebody who has done something illegal, and who is not protected by the law. Therefore “outlawry” has a negative meaning but “江湖” in Chinese is a neutral word without emotions positive or negative. Besides, the word frequently appears in the novel, so the translation of “outlawry” brings bad effect to the western readers, who will think the novel is about a group of outlaws. The translation did not match the linguistic dimension transformation or we can say the degree of linguistic dimensional is low. However, there are other translations for the word “江湖”.

众人浪迹江湖，都见过不少大阵仗，…… [4]

All the members of the group were experienced hands who had roamed the world and experienced the vicissitudes of life [5].

Here “江湖” is free translated and Mok did not use the word “outlawry” to render it. According to the linguistic dimensional transformation, this adaptation and selection is better than the word “outlawry”. There is another example with the source text “浪迹江湖”, however, Mok chose different translation to avoid repetition.

厅上这些人都是浪迹江湖的武林豪客，…… [4]

All those present in the hall were bold and brave members of the Martial Brotherhood, outlaws who had adventured across the kingdom.

Here “浪迹江湖” is translated as “outlaws who had adventured across the kingdom”, which is also not accurate with the negative word “outlaws”. Mok is a pioneer of Wuxia fiction’s translation, her choice of words

should be extremely careful especially when western readers had prejudice on this literary genre. “Outlaws” has negative meaning in the western readers views which is not only accurate to the original text, but leave bad impression on Chinese Wuxia fiction. “武林” is translated as “Martial Brotherhood”, which brings confusion to the readers because they have little knowledge about martial arts first and “brotherhood” means a feeling of friendship between people, however, the people in “武林” are not necessary friends but even foes. So according to the linguistic dimensional transformation, this translation is not proper either.

However, the words “江湖” and “武林” are Chinese words with profound meaning behind the literal meaning, so the translation is not an easy task even though they are just words but not long sentences. To meet the requirement of higher degree of linguistic dimensional transformation, I suggest that transliteration is a good choice because the Chinese culture can be remained and western readers can feel the original Chinese Wuxia literature. Although they can be confused by the word “Jianghu” or “Wulin”, the translator can add some notes to explain.

In Mok’s translation, words like these were mostly translated into words leading confusion, which makes low degree of linguistic dimensional transformation. However, this is just one aspect of her translation, but there are good examples on martial arts fighting actions. In Wuxia fictions, the use of sword and other weapons is unavoidable, Mok’s translation about this is easy to understand by western readers and does not tend to lead misunderstanding with simple words.

曹周只得挥剑挡架，二童一剑跟着一剑，绵绵不尽，挡开了第一剑，第二剑又不得不挡，十余招过去，竟尔不能抽身[4]。

Curio and Radiant whirled their swords to parry the blows. The twins flourished their swords, slashing one after the other and smiting blows and more blows. Curio and Radiant thus had to ward off every single one of the raining strokes. After ten or so tricks, they were still engaged, not able to extricate themselves from the fight [5].

Mok’s translation is as attractive as Jin’s original writing because the words she chose were simple and her structure is well-knit. “一剑” were translated to “blow” and she added many verbs such as “slashing” or “smiting” to modify the “blow” which is accurate and therefore the degree of linguistic dimensional transformation is high.

2.2. The Degree of Cultural Dimensional Transformation

Translation is a cultural exchange to some extent and one purpose is to export domestic culture so the target readers can experience a different reading experience. However, the cultural barriers are the obstacles for translators. Wang Zuoliang has proposed that the translator should be a person with rich cultural awareness [6]. Christiane Nord also pointed that “language should be considered as a part of culture and linguistic communication should therefore be restricted by cultural context [7]. According to Lefevere and Bassnett, the translation has changed from word to text as a unit; from translation as text to translation as culture [8]. It is clear to see the importance of culture, therefore the cultural dimensional transformation should also be paid attention to. In Mok’s version, her translation also has advantages and disadvantages. Mok’s translation about swordplay adapts and selects the eco-environment and enjoys a high cultural dimensional transformation. Western countries also have swordplay, but theirs are totally different from the Chinese one. Mok’s translation considered the cross-cultural background and she chose the understandable words to substitute the traditional Chinese description.

剑诀有云：“高来洗，低来击，里来掩，外来抹，中来刺。”这“洗、击、掩、抹、刺”五字，是各家剑术共通的要诀[4]。

The key to swordplay was in eliminating the opponents when attacked from above; smiting blows if attacked from blow; taking the enemies by surprise when attacked from within the circle; swiping if attacked from outside the circle; thrusting at the enemies when attacked halfway from the centre. These five tricks of Elimination, Smiting, Taking by Surprise, Swiping, and Thrusting were common to swordplay of all schools [5].

The keywords on playing swords are five short sentences, but her translation is long. If Mok chose literal translation, the readers can not understand how to play, so she used free translation and describe the keywords in detail. The five Chinese characters “洗”, “击”, “掩”, “抹” and “刺” are terms used for swordplay which even the Chinese readers have difficulty to understand the moves. However, Mok had a deep cultural awareness and her translation transformed the terms into commonly used words, which is helpful to a smooth reading. However,

her translation about the characters' appellations does not enjoy a high degree of cultural dimensional transformation. Mok wrote that the traditional, genre-specific practice of conferring appellations or sobriquets on warriors must be interpreted in the traditional Chinese cultural context as well as the social-cultural backdrop of martial-arts fiction [9]. Although she wrote the cultural elements should be considered, her literal translation is hard to understand for western readers.

Generally speaking, characters with high social status in Jianghu have an appellation. The best martial arts player in this novel is Phoenix Miao, whose appellation is “金面佛” and Mok translated it as “The Gilt-faced Buddha”. The only female character with an appellation is Sign Tian, whose appellation is “锦毛貂” and was rendered to “Glistening Sable”. Valour Ruan of the Dragon Lodge enjoyed the appellation of “七星手” which was rendered as “Seven Star Hands”. Most the characters' appellations were literally translated. She even created some formulas for the translation. According to the degree of cultural dimensional transformation, the cultural connotation can not be presented by just the literal translation.

2.3. The Degree of Communicative Dimensional Transformation

The qualified translator is not only to understand the source text, he has to understand the culture. According to Susan Bassnet, the task of the translator is to translate as well as interpret [10]. Therefore, besides language and culture, the communicative purpose should also be reached. Mok's version also has strong points and weak points to the degree of communicative dimensional transformation.

In Mok's translation, she omitted many abusive expressions which are considered as a high degree of communicative dimensional transformation. When the story dated back to twenty years before, Tree told the story to the group of people visiting the manor. He was a doctor at that time, poor-educated and rude, so his words were rough. Expressions like this were canceled to reach the communicative purpose.

我心道：“好家伙，他妈的这么凶！” [4]

Other rude expressions were partly rewritten because Mok wanted the readers to have good impression on characters from Wuxia literature and tried to eliminate the prejudice on Wuxia fictions.

我这才知他原来说笑，心想：“你讲笑话，也得拣拣人，老子是给你消遣的么？你这狗日的恶鬼！” [4]

... he was, after all, just teasing me. I thought to myself, “Joke or no Joke, you could have picked someone other than me.” [5]

In the example, Mok broke the sentence into two sentences and chose polite words to translate. In the Chinese version, the abusive words “老子是给你消遣的么？你这狗日的恶鬼” were totally deleted. This way of translation is better than translate the curses word by word.

Besides curses by rude characters, some sentences with traditional Chinese images were cancelled in Mok's translation which is also fit for the high degree of communicative dimensional transformation. Communicative transformation pays more attention to readers rather than to the content, which allows to proper revision, such as omission, simplification or interpretation. When Tree, the monk first saw Gully Hu and his wife, he thought like this:

这一男一女哪，打个比方，那就是貂蝉嫁给了张飞，观音娘娘嫁给了判官[4]。

On my life, I could not believe my eyes. The man was a ferocious warrior and his wife, a kingdom-quelling beauty [5].

This translation by Mok was totally free. She changed the images and the original meaning. “打个比方” is a oral expression of saying “making an analogy”, however, this expression was omitted. The following images of “貂蝉” and “张飞” were characters of Three Kingdoms, one of which was a beauty and one was ugly. Jin used these two persons to show the contrast of Gully Hu and his wife. “观音” and “判官” are characters from ancient Chinese legendary, one of whom was elegant and the other was horrible. There is no doubt that foreigners have difficulty to understand such a chain of characters from ancient China, so Mok cancelled these images and used “ferocious” to modify Hu and described his wife as a “a kingdom-quelling beauty”. Mok cited this expression from *The Story of the Stone* translated by David Hawkes. “A kingdom quelling beauty” can express the similar meaning as “貂蝉” or “观音”. Her translation is proper because the communicative purpose was realized.

Though the analysis separates the three dimensional transformation to highlight each dimension's feature, it has to be stressed that the three dimensional transformations do not separate themselves obviously. The translation process is dynamic and the style of text is always changing, therefore the three dimensional transformation

are dynamic, interwoven and closely related to each other. Besides, the sequence of the three transformations is also random, not necessarily follow the sequence in the thesis. It includes all-round aspects of translation and is considered as the first reference to the degree of holistic adaptation and selection.

3. The Reader's Feedback

Reader's feedback is the feedback from the market to a large extent, because besides the common readers, there are other elements such as the client, the publishing company and some critics influencing the degree of holistic adaptation and selection. According to Nida, to a specific product, no matter how perfect it is in theory or how beautiful it displays, if the audience's feedback is bad, it will not be accepted [11]. It is the same as translation. As there are so many influential aspects in reader's feedback, this thesis analyzes reader's response and publication condition of Mok's translation.

3.1. Reader's Response

Generally speaking, Mok's translation is fluent for reading and easy to understand. Her translation strategy is literal translation most of the time which is helpful to remain the original meaning. The western readers will addict to it as Chinese readers once they start the reading. However, there are some shortcomings from the readers' comments.

A reader buying this book from Amzone commented as this: "the translation perhaps does not do justice to the original work in Chinese." This reader is reserved, others' words are fiercer: "I almost threw the book in the trash when I read the first page—I was so disappointed with the translation. How could anyone use a dictionary to translate martial arts terminology?" "The story itself is okay, but the translation is horrible. Why does Ms. Mok translate the book the way she did? It is perhaps she feels that Chinese culture is such a mystery that everything needed to be translated, even using archaic and strange term?" This comment is found on *The Book and the Sword*, however, it mentions about Mok's translation: "these two books (*The Book and the Sword* & *The Deer and the Cauldron*) are currently the only novels by Louis Cha translated into English (except for one notoriously bad translation by someone else). Mok's translation is referred as "notoriously bad translation" and even not belongs to the translation works of Jin Yong. These comments are cited from the website of Amozon, which is a bookseller on the internet. Although these examples are not enough to see all the buyers' ideas, it does explain something. Some readers feel uncomfortable about Mok's literal translation about martial arts terms. Her translation about characters' names and weapons are worth consideration.

However, there are some positive comments on her translation. One reader said that "once you start reading several pages of the book, you cannot stop reading it until it is finished. You will be lost in ancient China. A bit of warning here. This book is very addictive." This comment does not comment on the translation directly, but we can infer that he must think the translation is proper, or he would throw the book into trash too. Although her translation has many shortcomings, it does not affect the reading generally.

These comments presented reader's response towards Mok's translation. Generally speaking, the book is not as notoriously bad as one reader said, but receives warm welcome because it is a pioneer work first introduced to western countries as a published book. Readers think Chinese Wuxia fiction as a literature genre is engrossing and entertaining which should not be limited to the Chinese language but be translated to English.

3.2. Publication Condition

The readers' comments we have analyzed above are individuals personal opinion, while the data from the publish house is more eloquent.

After the publication of the original book by Jin Yong in 1959 in Ming Bao, Jin revised the work several times and Mok's translation is the second revision book published in 1977. Her translation was first published in 1993, when her study interests focused on martial arts novels translation. In 1996, the Chinese University Press published the second edition. Then in 2004 and 2010, the second printing and third printing was published. We have to mention that this press is a non-profit institution, so it dose not need to publish more to earn money. Although the printings are not as many as bestsellers, the printing in recent years presents that her translation is gaining popularity. This phenomenon shows that the reader's feedback is good and the translation enjoys a relatively high degree of holistic adaptation and selection.

Some translations enjoy popularity for a long time, which can be understood as it has good reader's feedback

and survives as a stronger one. Generally speaking, the warmer the reader's feedback is, the higher the degree of holistic adaptation and selection is. It is the translator's business of how to translate, however, as to the social influence after publication, the fittest survives [12].

4. The Translator Quality

The reason why the theory set translator's quality as one reference in the holistic degree of adaptation and selection, it is because of the "translator-centeredness" of the eco-translatology. Translator quality is not only a reference for the degree of holistic adaptation and selection, but also provides guidance in choosing translation strategy. Besides, it has practical meaning for translator's education, recruitment and entrust. Fu Jingmin pointed that the evaluation of a translation should respect the translator's personality and consider his intention [13]. Translation is a cross-cultural communication with the translator as the subject, therefore the evaluation should include various factors including the translator.

The translator quality can be judged from these aspects, such as the translator's bilingual ability, cross-cultural sensitivity, degree of familiarity to the original theme, judging ability on the translational eco-environment, background knowledge, working attitude and translation experience, etc.

The translator's ability means the translator's ability to use words, sentences, paragraphs and passages, including the ability of grammar and language construction [14]. However, the translator's bilingual ability should be the ability to manage two languages. Mok was born and raised in Hong Kong and studied in the United States and the United Kingdom. Her bilingual ability is naturally good because she experienced different languages and cultures. As a professor of City University of Hong Kong who studied cross-cultural communication, Mok's cross-cultural sensitivity is high. Having lived in western countries for years and carried the study about cross-cultural communication as a profession, Mok transformed many difficulty parts the novel into easy ones.

As to the degree of familiarity to the original theme and background knowledge, we also can not deny the fact that Mok is very familiar with Wuxia fiction and her background knowledge is enough for the translation though some readers' comments on her work is negative. She turned to Wuxia fiction study at the beginning of the 1990s and wrote her PhD. Degree thesis on martial arts fiction. She also published many essays about the translation of martial arts fiction form translation strategy to translation phenomenon. She did research by herself to find the reason why little Chinese martial arts fictions were translated into English.

Her translation experience and working attitude can be discovered from her work, which is rich and careful. The original work is not a long novel, however, it is almost two hundred pages, which still needs plentiful experience and attention. She is a responsible translator. Overall, the translator quality is high, so the degree of holistic adaptation and selection is high. In brief, Mok's made a qualified translation though some shortcomings exist.

5. Conclusion

Hu proposed the evaluation criteria—the degree of holistic adaptation and selection, which includes the references as follows: the degree of multi-dimensional transformation, the reader's feedback and the translator's quality. The analysis proves that as Mok's translation adapts to the translational eco-environment well and her selection of the target text is proper, the degree of multi-dimensional transformation is high. Besides, as to a market-oriented work, translation should consider the reader's feedback and publication situation; however, both the elements are positive. The analysis also finds that there are some mistakes and improper translation because Mok is a pioneer Wuxia fiction translator after all. She has little material to refer to, however, the work *Fox Volant of the Snowy Mountain* in general a qualified work.

References

- [1] Hu, G.S. (2008) Eco-Translatology: A Primer. *Chinese Translator's Journal*, **6**, 11-15.
- [2] Hu, G.S. (2003) Translation as Adaptation and Selection. *Perspectives: Studies in Translatology*, **4**, 283-291.
- [3] Hu, G.S. (2004) Approach to Translation as Adaptation and Selection. Hubei Education Press, Wuhan.
- [4] Jin, Y. (2009) *Fox Volant of the Snowy Mountain*. Guangzhou Press, Guangzhou.
- [5] Mok, O. (1993) *Fox Volant of the Snowy Mountain*. The Chinese University Press, Hong Kong.
- [6] Wang, Z.L. (1984) Cultural Comparison in Translation. *Chinese Translator's Journal*, **1**, 2-6.

- [7] Nord, C. (2001) *Translating as a Purposeful Activity—Functionalist Approaches Explained*. Shanghai Foreign Language Education Press, Shanghai.
- [8] Lefevere, A. and Susan, B. (1990) *Translation, History and Culture*. Cassell, London.
- [9] Mok, O. (2002) Translating Appellations in Martial-Arts Fiction. *Perspective: Studies in Translatology*, **3**, 273-281. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/0907676X.2002.9961451>
- [10] Bassnett, S. (2010) *Translation Studies*. 3rd Edition, Shanghai Foreign Language Education Press, Shanghai.
- [11] Nida, E. (2004) *Toward a Science of Translation*. Shanghai Foreign Language Education Press, Shanghai.
- [12] Xu, J. (1998) *Reflections on Translation*. Hubei Education Press, Wuhan.
- [13] Fu, J.M. (1997) On Translator's Personlaity. *Shanghai Journal of Translators*, **4**, 3-5.
- [14] Chen, X.W. (2006) *A New Coursebook on Pragmatic Translation*. Economy and Science Press, Beijing.

Open Access Library

Warmly welcome your paper submission to OALib Journal!

- Publication on a daily basis
- 9 [subject areas](#) of science, technology and medicine
- Fair and rigorous peer-review system
- Fast publication process
- Article promotion in various social networking sites (LinkedIn, Facebook, Twitter, etc.)
- Widely-targeted and multidisciplinary audience to read your research

Submit Your Paper Online: [Click Here to Submit](#)Contact Us: service@oalib.com