

RESEARCH ARTICLE

A Study on the C-E Translation Strategies of Four-character Idioms in *Bronze and Sunflower*



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Yahui Zhu^{1,*}¹Foreign Languages School, Changsha Normal University, China

Abstract: Nowadays cross-cultural communication is becoming increasingly frequent, and some top Chinese children's literature works have been translated into English. The paper takes *Bronze and Sunflower* as an example which was written by Cao Wenxuan who won the Hans Christian Andersen Prize in literature in 2016 partly because of the translation version. This paper focuses on the translation strategies (Xiong, 2014) of the four-character idioms which highlights Chinese culture. Firstly, the examples of four-character idioms are enumerated under different translation strategies, and then the tendency of the whole domestication is found out. Finally, the positive reception of the translated version is explored, so as to provide reference for the C-E translation of Children's literature.

Key Words: *Bronze and Sunflower*; four-character idioms; translation strategies

1. Introduction

Bronze and Sunflower is Cao Wenxuan's masterpiece, set in the rural areas of northern Jiangsu Province during the Cultural Revolution. It tells the story of family, Bronze and Sunflower, who are not related by blood. It is full of affection and the beauty of humanity. In 2005, it was published in China and won numerous awards. It has become one of the required books for children. Ten years later, the book appeared in English, translated by Helen Wang, a British sinologist, and published by Walker Books, a British Publishing Company. In 2016, Cao Wenxuan won the Hans Christian Andersen Award, becoming the first Chinese writer to win the prize. There is no denying that the French and English versions of *Bronze and Sunflower* have played an important role in his winning the prize. January 25, 2017, Wang Helen won the Marsh Award for Children's Literature in Translation for the English Translation of *Bronze and Sunflower*, which shows the great influence of English Translation. *Bronze and sunflower* is the first Chinese children's literature introduced by British Children's Publishing House, which has won great reputation for both the author and the translator. It is a successful case of Chinese children's literature going to English-speaking countries. Based on Chinese four-character idioms with profound cultural connotations, this paper makes a systematic analysis of their translation strategies of *Bronze and Sunflower*.

2. Translation of Four-character Idioms (Lin, 2010) of *Bronze and Sunflower*

"Xiandai Hanyu CiDian" defines a Chinese idiom as a fixed phrase or phrase that has long been used concisely. Most Chinese idioms are known as four-character idioms, which have concise meanings and flexible structures. Conciseness means that idioms not only have literal meaning, but also have extended meaning. Therefore, it is very difficult to translate meaning and language structure of Chinese "four-character-case", so the right translation method must be chosen.

Corresponding Author: Yahui Zhu^{1,*}

¹Foreign Languages School, Changsha Normal University, China.

Email: 372511857@qq.com

After a thorough study of the text, the paper has selected almost all the four-character idioms in the source language. The following table contains the translation of them in the Narrative Order:

Idioms, their translations and respective translation methods

1. /FuYaoZhiShang/; /had lifted/; literal translation
2. /ErBinSiMo/; /teasing and twitching/; adaptation
3. /YiWnagWuJi/; /as far as the eye could see/; free translation
4. /LiuLianWangFan/; /lose all track of time/; free translation
5. /QingShenYiChang/; /JianZhenBuE/; loved them with all his heart; free translation
6. /PangRuoWuRen /MuZhongWuRen/; /like a king/; recreation
7. /QingBuZiJin/; /couldn't help/; substitution
8. /YouYuBuJue/; "not made up his mind"; free translation
9. /QianLiTiaoTiao/; /travelled thousands of kilometers to come to/; Literal translation
10. /YiSiBuGua/; "skinny"; free translation
11. /WuKeNaiHe/; /there was nothing could do/; free translation
12. /YiChouMoZhan/ ; /wondered what on earth they should do/; free translation
13. /WanWuYiShi/; /Nothing will go wrong/; free translation
14. /SanWuChengQun/; /huddled together in small groups/; free translation
15. /TongXinXieLi/; /push as hard as they could/; free translation
16. /MuDengKouDai/; /could barely believe their eyes/; free translation
17. /MianMuQuanFei/; /changed the world beyond recognition/; free translation
18. /YiWuSuoYou/; /at the house that had no walls"/; free translation
19. /RuoWuQiShi/; /as though it was the most normal thing in the world/; free translation
20. /FengYongErzZhi/; /swarmed around /; free translation

21. /BuMingBuBai/; /the matter had not been resolved/; free translation
22. /RYeJianCheng/; /through night and day/; free translation
23. /QianZhenWanQue/; /it felt very real indeed/; free translation
24. /XinBuZaiYan/ ; /miles away/; substitution
25. /YiYiShengHui/; /glistening and gleaming/; free translation
26. /WuShengWuXi/; /completely still, completely quiet/; literal translation

3. Translation Strategies of four-character idioms in *Bronze and Sunflower*

As for translation strategies, we have domestication and foreignization. Two strategies are employed during the process of translating four-character idioms in *Bronze and Sunflower*.

3.1 Examples of Translation Methods of

Four-character Idioms under Domestication

The translation methods under domestication strategy include the following: Liberal/free translation, adaptation, recreation and substitution. According to incomplete statistics, sampled idioms are translated freely at 19 places. The translations of sampled idioms are substituted with English idioms at 2 places. The translator recreated one sampled idiom and adapted one idiom.

After the analysis of the related examples, it can be concluded that the translation strategy tendency of *Bronze and Sunflower* four-character idioms is domestication. Examples can be given to prove it.

To begin with, Liberal/free translation, the most typical four-character idiom translation is "huddled together in small groups". In Chinese, this four-character idiom means several people together. The English translation of adaptation is "ErBinSiMo". It was translated as "teasing and twitching". It is used in Chinese to describe a very close relationship. But in translation, it's taken away from the text and makes it more suitable for children's understanding.

Secondly, there is one idiom MuZhongWuRen in *Bronze and Sunflower*, and it was creatively translated as "like a king." In Chinese, "MuZhongWuRen" describes being arrogant and contemptuous of others. The translation of this four-character idiom is linked to the foreign cultural background; the king is naturally superior and arrogant. This is a fairly high level of creation which is easy to be understood by English speaking children readers.

Next, the four-character idiom "Xinbuzaiyan" is translated as "miles away". Substitution is employed here. The Chinese idiom refers to a lack of concentration. To avoid being misunderstood, it is replaced by an English idiom: "miles away", which is within English-speaking children's understanding. In a word, the translator has weighed the translation strategy of the original four-character idioms and made an optimal choice.

3.2 Examples of Translation Methods of

Four-character Idioms under Foreignization

In this part, examples of foreignization adopted in the translation of four-character idioms are analyzed. Through comparison and analysis, only three of the four-character idioms are translated through foreignization. The first one is "FuYaoZhiShang", the translated version is "had lifted". "FuYao" means a storm that spirals up sharply. It's going up fast. It's a metaphor for a career in politics as well. "ZhiShang" means up. The whole thing means to lift. So the translation of 'had lifted' is a literal translation which is classified as the method under foreignization. For example,

"WuShengWuXi" translated as "completely still, completely quiet". In Chinese, it means being still or exerting no influence. The above are examples of Chinese idioms translated literally into English.

4. Reception(Chen, 2018) by Readers on Goodreads

The top 21 community reviews of *Bronze and Sunflower* translations from goodreads are analyzed, which is the largest U.S. reader site. (Since one reader didn't rate them, the overall sample was 20 community reviews.) 60 percent of the reviews gave them five stars, thirty percent of the reviews gave the book a four Star Rating, which means that 90 percent of readers liked the book. In addition, readers' comments show that the translated language is consistent with the language in the Chinese text and does not diminish the charm of the Chinese language. For example: Nutting's comment "beautiful lyric letter, a young orphan girl and her friendship, a poor mute boy at home to adopt her. Obviously, there are seven books in this series, and unfortunately, only the first one has been translated-- hopefully we'll see more!" For example: Nutting's comment "beautiful lyric letter, a young orphan girl and her friendship, a poor mute boy at home to adopt her." Obviously, there are seven books in the series, and unfortunately, only the first one has been translated -- hopefully we'll see more! " One anonymous reader commented. "I may have some questions about the choices that adults make throughout the book, but those Pallid and surprising feelings, I feel that reading a book is written in a language that is very different from my own, in a world and a culture that is very different from mine, and that gives me a glimpse into the world of Chinese literature. "Of course, readers have also made great efforts to praise Wang's translation work. For example: Holly Thompson Hollythompson's review "likes the novel set in rural China, written by Hans Christian Andersen Award Cao Wenxuan and translated by Helen King. May more of his titles now be translated into English! " (June 14, 2016) VRAIN's comments "Helen's translation is expected to lay the foundation for Cao Wenxuan's translation of more Chinese children's literature. " (February 15, 2017) Lynette Caulkins' comments "the translation is handled by experts, allowing English readers to be drawn into Damadi's life and characters to be buried in your heart." (February 6, 2017) From this, it can be seen that both the language itself and the translator's persistent pursuit of language make the target text deeply loved by the readers.

Four-character idioms have rich cultural connotation, which is the essence of Chinese and has the unique cultural characteristics and connotation of the Chinese nation (Dong, 2017). It is the charm of Chinese four-character idioms that is worth mentioning in the praise of Chinese culture in the reader's comments, which makes readers have a special sense of beauty towards Chinese culture.

5. Conclusion

To sum up, the success of the English version of *Bronze Sunflower* in overseas translation and dissemination is not accidental, but an effective attempt of a new translation and introduction model. Therefore, the mode of the English version of *Bronze and Sunflower* is of great significance to the development of Chinese literature, especially the contemporary Chinese children's literature. (Chen & Xu, 2019) First of all, on

the subject of translation and introduction, the publishing houses of Children's literature books should choose a sinologist or a translator from an English-speaking country with profound Chinese cultural background, who has a keen interest in the translated works and is willing to introduce them to English readers, with rich experience in children's literature translation, this is to ensure the fluency of the translation, in line with the reading habits of English readers, to promote the translation of the maximum degree of acceptance by the target audience. Secondly, on the premise of keeping the style of the original text, the translator are supposed to make full use of various translation methods, consider the cultural tradition and ethical value factors behind the translation, and coordinate the translation so as to ensure the readability and acceptability of the translation. Thirdly, there is no universal or fixed translation strategy in the translation of Chinese children's literature, so the two translation strategies of domestication and foreignization should be taken into account in order to fully convey the original meaning. And domestication is probably the better strategy for target language readers.

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Conflict of Interest

The authors declare that they have no conflicts of interest to this work.

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