

Original Paper

A Brief Analysis of the English Translation of the Fuzzy Expression in *Lunyu* Based on Gu Hongming's Translation Version

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Abstract

With the quick and deep development of globalization, cultural communication is deepening and covering various aspects. How to translate classical Chinese works not only comprehensively and precisely, but also easy for people who without cultural background to understand is becoming a heated problem. The affluent and high-valued minds in Lunyu almost ranks to the top among ancient Chinese works, and language in it is concise, advocating using a few words to express propounding thought. Therefore, fuzziness becomes one of its typical characteristics, however, the related research about translation strategies, reasons why translating in that way, and effects on it are lacking. This paper will under the direction of theories of fuzzy language and cultural context, picking representative instances mainly from Gu Hongming's translation version to make a brief analysis. It comes out that main translation strategies are noting, paraphrasing, expounding, and omitting. Plus, reasons resulting in fuzziness will be illustrated, such as original characteristics of language itself, writing style, different culture backgrounds and so on. Moreover, it owns both benefits and drawbacks, such as providing more possibilities for translators to translate in the way which they believe is the best but there still have so much disputation among different versions. The aim of this thesis is through the deliberate statement, giving a little enlightenment towards other Chinese traditional works' translation, especially fuzziness's translation.

Keywords

fuzzy expression, translation of Lunyu, different culture context, cultural thought, qualitative analysis

1. Introduction

One of the most essential features of ancient Chinese is fuzziness, and it includes common sense of people who living in that period and specific historical cultural background. Getting to know of various vague rhetoric words from translation and authentic meaning in reality make people's correct comprehension and interpretation. At the same time, vague rhetoric as a new branch of rhetoric, enjoying high aesthetic value and has its re-creative functions such as implicitness, imagery, obscurity, and emotions. Moreover, vague rhetoric burdens several symbols, for example, it has fuzzy appearance but clear essence, flexible form but certain content, so that comparing with the normal expressions, using vague rhetoric can make the passages more conclusive and elastic. When the professor Chen Zhengdao comes to the task of rhetoric, he says "the aim is to analyze a great number of vague expressions in the passages and seek the law and standard about how to use rhetoric in order that the translators and readers who come from different culture backgrounds can narrow the gap of culture shock and grasp the intrinsic quality totally. Finally, people can use and hold the functions of vague rhetoric. There are two main functions of learning vague rhetoric, one is to organize fuzzy language effectively when the passages need such expressions, the other is to find the reasons and solutions of fuzzy language, especially in translation." (Chen, 2005)

Lunyu is one of the great classical works and to some extent the most influential symbol of Chinese culture, playing an exceptional role in not only Chinese mind and literary progress, but also cultural communication all over the world. Abundant and authentic expressions in *Lunyu* bear unique cultural beauty, rich connotative tradition, and long historical quintessence. However, research on translation of the fuzzy language in *Lunyu* are absolutely not enough and even fewer about the connection between fuzzy expressions and cultural context. There is no doubt that fuzzy language in *Lunyu* closely reflect Chinese unique cultural characteristics, however, the big gap between English and Chinese culture context becomes a barrier to the translation of fuzzy language. If fuzzy language is isolated from the cultural and historical context, the profound meaning and connotations cannot be conveyed accurately. What's more, only accelerating related research can the great mind expressed in *Lunyu* which has passed more than two thousand years be understood smoothly. Therefore, the translators should pay much heed to cultural elements and deal with the unique cultural characteristics properly, making the connection between source language and target language clear. Gu Hongming sets a good model and his translation version of *Lunyu* is very valuable and deserves to be researched. Guided by the theories of fuzzy language and cultural context, focus on Gu Hongming's English translation method of vague rhetoric in *Lunyu*, specifically select some typical examples in order to make a little conclusion and implication for the further fuzzy language and rhetoric translation. In this thesis, the main methods adopted to are the qualitative analysis and comparative analysis

2. Literature Review

With the quick development of globalization, different cultural communications become more and more universal and necessary. An increasing number of Chinese and English classics have been translated into each other and have fueled lots of researches focusing on fuzzy language. In recent years, both China and west countries' professors have made great contribution in the development of vague rhetoric study so that there are lots of pertinent articles analyze how to translate vague rhetoric successfully and the unique function of it, especially on their expression and appreciation.

The article composed by Zhang Yu and Wang Zhiyin called *Vague Rhetoric and Its Pragmatic Function* (2012) analyses the basic information and expressing way of fuzziness and its functional demonstration. The authors point out that fuzziness is one of the most basic characteristics of language and it exists commonly no matter in ancient classics and present usages, moreover, in many circumstances, language's fuzziness helps writers and communicators express mind accurately and comprehensively. The authors bring about several examples in daily life and in literary, such as numbers, range, person, same word with different meanings and different words with same meaning. The scholar Jiang Boqian (1985) takes words from *Lunyu* as an example to show how big the differences are in one same word. Jiang believes the main code of *Lunyu* is "Ren", and there are many sentences do not refer to external and distinct expression of it, however, the true meaning of them are equivalent to the meaning of "Ren". Jiang asserts descendants who are interested in *Lunyu* also make connection between "Li" and "De" with "Ren" and thinks fuzziness in surface but same understanding in deep meaning. Zhang Yu and Wang Zhi Yin (2012) provide one of the most famous usages of fuzzy expression in *Hamlet*, "To be, or not to be, that is a question." Translators from different countries give totally different translation versions. Some prefer reading it as a true question, what's more, when using vague rhetoric, it often combines with personification and metaphor, so that the specific language context ranks a high position in interpreting fuzziness. Last but not least, Chinese ancient articles and poems used fuzziness frequently because it fits the connotative tradition and people's deep allowance of neutralism. The existence of fuzziness offers more difficulties in translating, especially that are lacking exact cultural context. There is an essay written by Mao Ronggui and Fan Wuqiu named *Language's Fuzziness and Translation* (2005). Through this article, authors bring about fuzzy language's translation method from a special aspect. Because of the existence of vague rhetoric, we could not just hunger for the direct meaning but need to adapt to a flexible translation way. There are several rules when we meet fuzzy language, such as dynamic equivalence, communicative translation, adding and annotation. Moreover, there are four main ways to follow: using accurate words for accurate meaning, using accurate words for vague meaning, using fuzzy words for accurate meaning and using fuzzy words for vague meaning. Mao and Fan presents many examples to demonstrate pragmatic uses of this translation theory, and pointed out famous translators, Tyrwhitt's view that "Translating is to describe those very small details, it needs literary view for the choice of words and sentences; needs specialty for character and type; needs feeling for love and hate and needs sound for sense and spirit." The famous English translator

Richard said that “The old rhetoric regards fuzziness as one wrong expression and need to be limited and eliminated, however, the new advanced rhetoric looks fuzziness as an inevitable way and result of language.” This theory is also used by Gu Hongming in translating *Lunyu*. There are various kinds of fuzzy words with certain cultural meaning, and Gu proficiently utilizes these four ways, applying Chinese specific beauty into western aesthetic expression. Yu Guangzhong believes that excellent translators are all “matchmaker”, they have special ability to make different language to understand each other, just like marriage, enjoying coexistence after compromise.

Plus, professor Li Meiqiu (2011) has put forward several problems in translating fuzziness. For example, people do not make a totally agreement about the definition of vague rhetoric and the range of it. What’s more, there is not a clear gap between vague rhetoric and pragmatic fuzziness. Consequently, we need profound research for the cognitive motivation why this phenomenon appears and the number of translations for fuzziness is not enough. We need to make further development of the reasons and solutions for these problems and try to improve them from nature. We can find a typical instance in *Lunyu* which still has big dispute. 子曰：“斛不斛，斛哉！斛哉！” (Yong, BC540) “斛” means container when people drink wine in ancient time. One interpretation is that Confucius uses irony to express “not fluent”; the other one is that Confucius censures people who are indulged in party and wine. James Legge and Gu Hongming set very good models in translating fuzzy words in *Lunyu* and provide very functional methods in translating other vague expressions. This essay will make detailed demonstration for them.

3. Discussion and Analysis

3.1 A Case Study of Fuzziness Translation in *Lunyu* Based on Gu Hongming’s Translation

3.1.1 Gu Hongming’s Translation of Fuzzy Word “Dao” in *Lunyu*

“Dao” plays an important role in the process of Chinese philosophy’s development, even some scholars believe that the whole developed process of Chinese philosophy is the process of “Dao”. And there are three main philosophic interpretations of “Dao”. The place where people can go to, the height where people’s mind can reach and the purpose which both people’s thought and practice can realize. “Dao” appears eighty-eight times in *Lunyu*, and the great master of Chinese culture Qian Mu points out that Confucius’s “Dao” not only refers to “the law for people”, but also “the law for nature”. The “law for people” can learn from people’s industrial practice, however, “the law for nature” can only get from profound thoughts, even it is the ultimate target and ideal for people’s whole life. What’s more, people can feel a sense of satisfaction from it because the true happiness can only achieve from the bottom of heart. Confucius said in *Lunyu* that “至于道，据于德，依于仁，游于艺。” That is the conclusive description of Confucius’s moral personality, and he also asserted that “Dao” which stands for spiritual value, equality and regulation needed to be the standard of all scholars who are the symbol of main power to push forward whole society. In Confucius’s eyes, “Dao” even had the decisive altitude, saying “朝闻道，夕死可矣。” Confucius remarked, “When a man has learnt wisdom in the morning, he may be

content to die in the evening before the sun sets.”

Because Gu Hongming has very special cultural background, bearing not only excellent bilingual ability but also outstanding bi-cultural capacity, so that he gets relatively deep understanding and comprehension of *Lunyu*. In consideration of the huge gap between Chinese and English, he mainly uses naturalization and annotation to express one of the typical fuzzy words “Dao” in *Lunyu*. According to the specific context, Gu translates “Dao” into nineteen different meanings flexibly. Learners frequently find Gu translates “Dao” into “order and justice” eighteen times, and into “principle” fourteen times. Others are translated into, such as: “duty”, “good government”, “the way”, “that”, “education”, “wisdom”, “man of virtue and learning”, “the rule” and so on. “Dao” appears eighty-eight times totally in *Lunyu*, and here is a conclusive form of Gu’s all translation version of “Dao” and the frequency of those different meanings.

Table 1. The Translations and Frequency of “Dao”

Translation of “Dao”	Times	Frequency
order and justice	18	20.5%
principle	14	15.9%
duty/path of duty	8	9.1%
perfect/good government	6	6.8%
the way/way	6	6.8%
that/-	5	5.7%
education/teaching	5	5.7%
wisdom	5	5.7%
man of virtue and learning	5	5.7%
be educated/be known	3	3.4%
the rule(of art)	3	3.4%
lead on/ directing	2	2.3%
say/speak of	2	2.3%
the truth	2	2.3%
order	2	2.3%
the common place	1	1.1%
theology	1	1.1%
art/accomplishment	1	1.1%
serious study	1	1.1%

“Dao” has its core and vagueness and the following are some typical examples that help readers to search for Gu’s translation strategies so as to successfully transfer the various and abundant meaning of

it. For example, 子曰：“天下有道则见，无道则隐。” (Tai, BC540) Confucius remarked, “When there is justice and order in the government of the world, he should be known, but when there is no justice and order in the government of the world he should be obscure.” (Gu, 1996) Gu translated “Dao” into “justice and order” due to the specific historical background that Confucius born and lived in warring state period (BC770-BC221). The whole social policy and rule were out of order, and the monarch was blind to many wise talents, however, Confucius still tried to do some progress so that “Dao” here refers to society domain.

子曰：“人能弘道，非道弘人。” (Wei, BC540), Confucius remarked, “It is the man that can make this religion or the principles he possesses great; and not his religion or the principles which he possesses, which can make the man great.” (Gu, 1996) Gu translated “Dao” into “principle” since it focuses on individuals’ criterion.

子曰：“士志于道，而耻恶衣恶食者，未足与议也。” (Li, BC540) Confucius remarked, “It is useless to speak to a gentleman who wants to give himself up to serious studies and who yet is ashamed because of his poor food and bad clothes.” Gu translated “Dao” into serious studies, as Gu was deeply impressed by Confucianism, and he seriously knew that if one person strived for scholars in ancient time, the only way was struggling studies.

In summary, the several various translated meanings of “Dao” remind readers that in order to precisely translate Chinese classical works, translators must take two cultural differences and the reading customs into serious account, achieving dynamic equivalence.

3.1.2 Gu Hongming’s Translation of Fuzzy Word “Ren” in *Lunyu*

According to the frequency of several main words exist in *Lunyu*, “Ren” appears 109 times. Moreover, there is without any questions that “Ren” is the core and essence of Confucianism, but specific expressions of “Ren” under different contexts are lacking in the book so that it is a big challenge when translating “Ren” into English. The basic interpretation of “Ren” is people show care and friendly affection towards others. Confucius regards “Ren” as the highest standard of morality and abundant implications of it indwelling in the analects. There are so many sentences in *Lunyu* refer to “Ren”, from a conclusive view, “Ren” comes to four general categories. First, it stands for moral quality. Second, it is the symbol of people who bear good qualities. Third, it means the action of doing altruistic things. Last but not least, it relates with good reputation. Here is a conclusive form of all translation of “Ren” from James Legge and GuHongming.

Table 2. Comparative Translation of “Ren”

James Legge		Gu Hongming	
Translation of “Ren”	Times	Translation of “Ren”	Times
True/perfect virtue	57	Moral character	46
Perfectly/truly virtuous	12	High moral life	25

Virtuous	10	Moral man/people	13
Benevolent	9	Be moral/covetous	8
actions/benevolence			
The man of virtue	8	To live a moral life	5
The virtuous	7	Morality	5
Pronoun	2	A good man	2
The good	1	Moral surrounding	1
A man	1	Man of the people	1
Act virtuously	1	Men of moral worth	1
Men of principle	1	Moral well-beings	1

Based on the translation of “Ren” from Gu Hongming’s and James Legge’s versions, it is obvious to find some differences between each other. Gu Hongming mostly translate “Ren” into “moral”, such as “moral character”, “high moral life”, “moral man/people/well-being”, “moral reform” and “moral law”. Compared with Gu, James Legge usually translates “Ren” into virtue, such as “true virtue”, “perfect virtue”, “perfectly virtuous”, and “truly virtuous”. The official interpretation of “virtue” is: “behavior or attitudes that show high moral standard; a particular good quality or habit; an attractive or useful quality”. (*Oxford Advanced Learner’s English to Chinese Dictionary*) James Legge regards “Ren” as one specific good character, to some extent, he narrows the fields which Confucius wanted to cover with “Ren”. Gu’s translation of “Ren” takes care of culture context, closely relating to the true philosophic idea. For example, 子曰: “其为人也孝弟, 而好犯上者, 鲜矣. 孝弟也者, 其为仁之本与?” (Xue, BC540) A disciple of Confucius remarked, “A man who is a good son and a good citizen will seldom be found to be a man disposed to quarrel with those is authority over him. Now, to be a good son and a good citizen—do not those form of the foundation of a moral life.” Actually, “孝” and “悌” mean the harmony and friendly relationship among family members. Gu translates it into “a moral life” and it seems that it not functional, however, it conforms to the generalized meaning of “Ren”. Another example is that, 子曰: “唯仁者, 能好人, 能恶人.” (Li, BC540) Gu’s translation is, Confucius remarked, “It is only the man of moral character who know how to love man or hate man.” Gu uses emphasized sentence, according with the source language.

In summary, because of the difference and diversity between wo cultures, no matter “virtue” or “moral” cannot completely explain comprehensive meaning of “Ren” in *Lunyu*, so that in order to avoid misunderstanding, “Ren” just translates into its transliteration “Ren”.

3.1.3 Gu Hongming’s Translation of Other Chinese Fuzzy Culture-Specific Words in *Lunyu*

In analects, there are some other culture-specific words which refer to Chinese traditional words. They may not their superficial meanings but cover some other cultural annotations, which need extra interpretations from translators in order to clearly transfer the deep meaning.

Generally speaking, there are four types. First and foremost, core words which are about ecological

culture, including animals, plants, and locations. Secondly, core words concern to material culture, including basic necessities of life. Thirdly, core words refer to figures, including Confucius, his disciples, and other historical characters. Last one is those words which are about social culture, including social customs, behaviors, and mode of thinking.

There are some examples of these culture-specific words' translation of Gu Hongming. “季氏旅于泰山。” “The head of powerful family of nobles mentioned in section of this chapter was going to offer sacrifice on the top of the great T'ai Mountain [an imperial prerogative].” Gu adopts literal translation with annotation together concerning the target readers' acceptance and it is in favor of the recognition and spread of Chinese traditional culture. “孔子谓季氏，‘八佾舞于庭。’” “The head of a powerful family of nobles in Confucius' native state employed eight sets of choristers [an imperial prerogative] in their family chapel.” “佾” means band and every unit has eight people, the scales of band are different when different grades use them. Liu Dianjue, Arthur Waley and Xu Yuanchong use “team” and “row” to translate it too generally, however, Gu uses “choristers” to explain specific number of people and processes naturalization. 子曰：“述而不作，信而好古，窃比于我老彭。”

Gu's translation, “In this respect I may venture to compare myself with our old Worthy Peng.” There are two interpretation of “老彭”, one is that it means Lao-Tzu and Jian Keng, the other one is that it means just Jian Keng. For the sake of clearly translating the cultural annotation, Gu uses literal translation and adding, using worthy to elaborate the respect covered in it. “子以四教：文，行，忠，信。” Gu's translation, “Confucius through his life and teaching taught only four things: the knowledge of literature and the art, conduct, conscientiousness and truthfulness.” Gu's translation shows big difference among others, and it seems a little lengthy, but he restores the source language to a large extent. 子曰：“关雎，乐而不淫，哀而不伤。” (Ba, BC540) Confucius remarked, “the first ballad in the book of Ballads and Songs expresses the emotion of love. It is passionate, but not sensual; it is melancholy, but not morbid.” Gu uses free translation and paraphrase respectively to explain pure and holy love of a couple.

In summary, there are several main translation strategies upon analects, such as add interpretation, naturalization, alienation, and literal translation. What's more, reasons influence the choices of strategies are: historical background, translator's knowledge, attitude and purpose, subconscious readers in translator's mind and the existed translation edition and source language.

3.2 The Merits of Gu Hongming's Translation of Fuzziness in Lunyu

3.2.1 Gu's Translation of Fuzzy Words in Lunyu with Linguistic Effect

Fuzzy words and expressions have their own traits and benefits. Generally speaking, fuzzy expression could promote and enhance linguistic development because it provides a totally different way to describe things no matter under what circumstances. Fuzzy expression enlarges meaning scope of one word and broaden linguistic communicative functions. Besides, it also uses frequently of vague rhetoric to present fuzziness, and with the rhetoric, sentences become vivid and active.

Here are some examples of analects' translation of Gu's version. 子曰：“不义而富且贵，于我如浮

云。” Confucius remarked, “whereas riches and honors acquired through the sacrifice of what is right, would be to me as unreal as a mirage.” To Confucius, wealth and fame are meaningless and useless without acquiring it through sacrifice of what is right, just like the floating cloud. However, Gu translates “浮云” into “mirage”, using metaphor, which familiarizes to western readers and explain Confucius’s attitude towards riches and honors that they seems wonderful but unreal and hard to reach. During ancient people, especially Chinese daily life, they were conventional to use fuzzy words in dialogues to express things in a euphemistic way. Using fuzzy expression promotes feeling-conveying covered in words and enhance implication in the conversation. There are some examples of euphemistic fuzzy expression in *Lunyu*. 问管仲。曰：人也。夺伯氏骄邑三百，饭疏食，没齿无怨言。” (Xian, BC540) The enquirer finally asked of the character of Kuan Chung (the Bismarck of the time). Confucius answered, “As a man he was able to take possession of an estate, confiscated from the head of an old noble family in the country, in such way that the former owner, although he was thus obliged to live in great poverty to the end of his days, yet had nothing to say in complaint against Kuan Chung.” Death is totally unhappy, serious topic which people try to avoid in both Chinese and English, so there are various euphemistic terms to interpreter it. “没齿” is a euphemistic way in ancient to refer to “the last day of one’s life.” Gu uses fuzzy equivalent strategy to relate source language and target language.

Fuzziness in *Lunyu* also includes exaggerated expression, for there is not a clear boundary between the initial and the exaggerated. However, both hyperbole in English and in Chinese amplifies the feeling conveying and the power of language. The instance is: “子在齐闻韶，三月不知肉味。” (Shu, BC540) When Confucius on his travels was in a certain State, he, for the first time, heard a played a piece of ancient music (the oldest then known in China). Thereupon he gave himself up to the study of it for three months, to the entire neglect of his ordinary. Gu uses literal translation to show Confucius’s great love and enthusiasm towards music that after listening to music, he could even forget the taste of food for three months.

3.2.2 Gu’s Translation of Fuzzy Words in *Lunyu* with Aesthetic Effect

The fuzzy expression’s aesthetic effect presents as its vivid image that leave broad space for readers to imagine. Because of the different cultural contexts between the east and west, one fuzzy expression may exert several various images, so translators should make some supplement and explication to make the original meanings full of the sense of beauty as well as distinction.

It can be exemplified in *Lunyu* as: 子夏问曰：“巧笑倩兮，美目盼兮，素以为绚兮。” A disciple asked Confucius for the meaning of the following verse: “her coquettish smile, how dimpling they are; her beautiful eyes, how beaming they are; oh fairest is she who is simple and plain.” Gu uses poem style to present such a vivid image of a beauty, however, he also uses some fuzzy words which are adopted to target readers and at the same time, leaving space for them to fancy the ideal image in their own mind, completing various kinds of beauty by themselves.

4. Conclusion

To sum up, translating fuzzy expression of Chinese into English is a very difficult work, because it not only requires translators to have excellent language ability, but also to bear a high quality of bi-cultural understanding, knowing cultural essence and true meaning of the fuzzy expression. Consequently, achieving the equivalence between source language and target language to make target readers comprehensively understand those classical Chinese works and to promote the development of ancient glorious mind. Gu Hongming's translation of *Lunyu* has settled a good model without any doubt and provides much useful information and inspiration for the following learners but not limited about translating fuzzy language.

Fuzzy expression in *Lunyu* has its own characteristics, such as "Dao" "Ren" and "Li", they appear so many times in *Lunyu* with totally different meanings under various culture contexts, therefore, only with precise interpretation can the target readers tell the difference from each other. Besides these, other words which contain Chinese tradition and local annotations, including core words including ecological culture, material culture, social and figures. Even some words refer to colors and numbers covering some potential meanings needing extra explanation. Gu provides very outstanding translating models of them and makes great progress in translation strategies of fuzziness.

What's more, fuzzy expression has its own advantages. It has both linguistic effect and aesthetic effect. As for linguistic effect, fuzzy expression uses several rhetoric, such as metaphor, hyperbole and euphemism to enlarge the expression scope of language and enhance language's ability when describe something with emotionalism. Plus, it also owns aesthetic effect that fuzzy expression presents vivid but different images with different people's understanding based on cultures. So, it leaves space to both writers and readers that they could imagine and get a reasonable comprehension in their own minds. There are also many examples in Gu's version of *Analects*, and both linguistic effect and aesthetic effect can be appreciated from multi-angles.

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