

Original Paper

Intralingual and Interlingual Translation of Chinese Classics—Taking the English Translation of the Tao Te Ching as an Example

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Abstract

Chinese classical texts represent the essence of Chinese culture, encapsulating rich humanistic, philosophical, and scientific content. This paper takes the translation and appreciation of Chinese classical texts as its focus, aiming to delve into the significant implications for cultural heritage and cross-cultural communication in this field. With Arthur Waley's English translation of the Tao Te Ching as the subject of study, the paper initially explores the linguistic and cultural differences encountered in the translation process, as well as the contextual shifts between ancient and modern times. Subsequently, the paper places a particular emphasis on analyzing the role of translation and appreciation in cultural heritage, underscoring the importance of disseminating Chinese culture through translation. Building on this foundation, the paper further investigates the facilitating role of classical text translation in cross-cultural communication, conducting a thorough analysis of how translation can foster dialogue and understanding between different cultures. Finally, in conjunction with the translation philosophy of Roman Jakobson, the paper proposes practical methods for translating Chinese classical texts, with the overarching goal of accurately conveying the original content.

Keywords

Intralingual Translation, Interlingual Translation, English Translation of the Tao Te Ching, Translation of Chinese Classics, Cultural Diversity

1. Introduction

Translation of Chinese classics is an effective way to follow the trend of the times, promote Chinese culture to go out and enhance cultural confidence. In the process of translation, the translators are not

only in the interlingual translation of cross-linguistic and cross-cultural translation, but also in the intralingual translation of understanding the original text and translating the ancient Chinese into modern Chinese. Intralingual translation and inter-linguistic translation are two processes through which the translation of Chinese classics must go through (Wang, 2011). In this paper, I take the English translation of the Classic of the Way of Virtue translated by Arthur Waley as an example to study the translation of Chinese classics. The Tao Te Ching is condensed in language and refined in vocabulary. Although the whole book is written in 5,000 words, it mainly displayed in three aspects: the succinct description and the implicit mood with each page revealing new insights and perspectives. Due to the reasons of time, space, society, and history, there are differences between ancient and modern Chinese, while modern Chinese and English show diversities (Xu, 2022). Roman Jakobson's view of translation emphasizes the conversion of the same language and different languages, giving inspiration to the translation of Chinese classics.

2. Roman Jakobson's Division of Translation

Roman Jakobson distinguished three ways of interpreting a verbal sign: it may be translated into other signs of the same language, into another language, or into another, non-verbal system of symbols. These three kinds of translation are to be differently labeled:

- 1) Intralingual translation or rewording is an interpretation of verbal signs by means of other signs of the same language.
- 2) Interlingual translation or translation proper is an interpretation of verbal signs by means of some other language.
- 3) Inter-semiotic translation or transmutation is an interpretation of verbal signs by means of signs of nonverbal sign systems (Jakobson, 1959).

On the question of linguistic differences, Jakobson argues that the essential difference between languages is not in what they can express, but in what they must express. It contains two categories, one is mandatory category, i.e., grammar; the other is non-mandatory category, i.e., vocabulary. He believes that the task of the translator is to obtain the information of the original text and recode it to express two sets of equivalent information in two different sign systems. Intralingual translation arises as a result of the original text such as time, space and social factors. This process requires the translator to do interpretation and judgment for further translation. Interlingual translation is cross-language conversion, in which the translator has to process the information according to his/her own understanding in combination with the translation method, so as to realize the conversion from one language to another.

In intralingual translation, Jakobson believes one can either use “another, more or less synonymous, word or resort to a circumlocution. In interlingual translation, as he asserted, “there is ordinarily no full equivalence between code-units, while messages may serve as adequate interpretations of alien code-units or messages” (Jakobson, 1959).

3. English Translation of Chinese Classics

3.1 Process of the Chinese Classics Translation

The process of English translation of the Chinese classics is a secondary translation process, which includes two stages: intralingual translation and interlingual translation. The text of Chinese classics belongs to classical Chinese. Before its English translation, it must go through dialogue and exchanges between the native speakers and the potential hearers in the same cultural context within the language, and then build a dialogue bridge between the native speaker and the potential hearers in the intercultural context on the basis of this dialogue.

The first is intralingual translation: to understand the original ancient Chinese text of the Chinese classics completely and accurately in modern Chinese. This stage is carried out within the Chinese language system, with the source language being ancient Chinese and the target language being modern Chinese. The task is to draw on and absorb the results of good notes and good translations of the past generations, to grasp the Chinese classics completely and thoroughly, and to understand the content of the ancient texts, the style and meaning of the words as well as the idioms and allusions, etc. This is crucial to the quality of English translation.

The second stage is interlingual translation, which means expressing the meaning of the original Old Chinese text completely and accurately in modern English. This is a cross lingual translation, with the source language being modern Chinese and the target language being modern English. The original translation of classics is ancient or modern Chinese, the translation is modern English, and the intermediate language is modern Chinese. Both understanding and expression become more complex, and there is a significant distance between the translation and the original text from content to form.

3.2 Pre-translation Preparation for Chinese Classics Translations

Before translating Chinese classics, the translator needs to fully understand and introduce to foreign readers the author's era and overall thinking (Lock, 2015). In the case of The Analects of Confucius, for example, it is necessary to firstly understand the era in which Confucius lived and the historical background, because the times were different, the problems faced were different, and the traditions embraced were different. Secondly, when introducing the author, one can also compare him with relevant foreign figures in history, which will make foreign readers feel more close to him (Percival, 2011). For example, compare the experiences and claims of Confucius with those of Socrates and Jesus. For example, Confucius' famous motto, "Do not do to others what you would not have them do to you", is similar to it stated in the New Testament.

4. Linguistic Characteristics of the Tao Te Ching

The Tao Te Ching is an ancient text from the pre-Qin Dynasty, which is said to have been written by Lao Tzu, a distinguished thinker at the end of the Spring and Autumn period (Wen, 2023; Wang, 2023). The Tao Te Ching is universally regarded as a representative Chinese classic of the Taoist school during the Spring and Autumn Period and the Warring States Period, and also represents a revered classic of

Taoism. It is based on the philosophical meaning of "Way" and "Virtue" which tells the principles of self-cultivation, governing the country, military strategies, and health care. Mostly with a political focus, the book has had a profound impact on traditional Chinese thoughts, science, politics, literature, art and other domains. As a classic work of traditional culture, the Tao Te Ching is concise and harmonious in language, simple but profound in content, and we sense the richness of thoughts and the grandeur of spirits conveyed by traditional Chinese culture from the style of language.

4.1 Simple in Language and Abundance in Meaning

The Tao Te Ching contains a wealth of philosophical thinking and ways of doing things, covering many fields and aspects. Lao Tzu expounds a wide range of ideas in simple language. In the first chapter, Lao Tzu says, "The Way that can be told of is not an Unvarying Way; The names that can be named are not unvarying names." In just 22 words, Lao Tzu points out the beginning of all things in the whole world. The "Way" is described as the universe, including all things in life, and the "Unvarying Way" is referred to the constant truth; The "Name" means only the name originally, and the "Unvarying Name" is referred to the self nature of all things. The opening chapter makes a brief introduction of "Way" and "Name" in short but thought-provoking language. In the fourth chapter, the same 15 words, "In it all sharpness is blunted, All tangles untied, All glare tempered, All dust soothed." are written to define the nature of 'the same hidden virtue and the same commonplace'. These 15 words not only signify Lao Tzu's paraphrases of the 'Way', but also Lao Tzu's wisdom in dealing with people in the world, which can be realized from the concise language.

Besides, Lao Tzu emphasizes the laws of nature and advocates that the 'Way' is not to be spoken, so how can one make good use of language but not be limited by it to express the meaning within the words? Lao Tzu uses metaphor, symbolism, and other rhetorical devices to vividly demonstrate abstract thinking. In Chapter 36, "It is best to leave the fish down in his pool; Best to leave the State's sharpest weapons where none can see them". Utilizing the metaphor, absorbing from the reality that fish cannot live without the water to obviously explain his points of view through the similarity between things, which compliment a strong artistic charm to the article and make the book more universal and easier to comprehend. To a certain extent, this feature increases the difficulty of intralingual and interlingual translation as well.

4.2 Harmonious in Language and Natural in Thought

The Tao Te Ching not only emphasizes the harmony of thought but also places great importance on linguistic harmony. This is evident in its harmonious phonetics, semantic coherence, and grammatical harmony. The text advocates for natural content and also pays attention to the naturalness of language, demonstrated through its eloquent expressions and well-crafted sentences. The use of parallelism is prevalent in the Tao Te Ching, employing either three or four-character phrases, or five or six-character lines, with a skillful play on tones and rhymes, showcasing flexibility and variety. In the second chapter, the passage "For truly, Being and Not-being grow out of one another; Difficult and easy complete one another. Long and short test one another; High and low determine one another. Pitch and mode give

harmony to one another. Front and back give sequence to one another." employs well-organized parallelism to expound on the concept of not dwelling on achievements, enhancing both linguistic grandeur and philosophical clarity. The final chapter states, "True words are not fine-sounding; Fine-sounding words are not true. The good man does not prove by argument; The he who proves by argument is not good. True wisdom is different from much learning; Much learning means little wisdom." Through linguistic harmony, Lao Tzu expresses the heaven's way is to sharpen without cutting."

Nature is Lao Tzu's fundamental pursuit, and in his use of language—be it words, sentences, or grammar—he achieves a seamless naturalness. For instance, phrases like "Should be contented with their food, pleased with their clothing. Satisfied with their homes, Should take pleasure in their rustic tasks." and "What is most perfect seems to have something missing? Yet its use is unimpaired. What is most full seems empty; Yet its use will never fail. What is most straight seems crooked; The greatest skill seems like clumsiness, The greatest eloquence like stuttering." Lao Tzu effortlessly blends words to suit different meanings, creating sentences that flow naturally. In the Tao Te Ching, we experience the harmony, naturalness, and charm of the Chinese cultural language. Without doubt, translators need to deepen their understanding beyond literal meanings and achieve an intralingual translation to convey the profound connotations effectively.

5. Translation Research of the Tao Te Ching

Translating the Tao Te Ching involves two key processes: intralingual translation and interlingual translation. Initially, the original text of the Tao Te Ching is transformed into modern Chinese. From there, it is translated into modern English. Various translation methods are employed based on the specific characteristics of the text, achieving both intralingual and interlingual translation.

5.1 Lexical Choices

As a philosophical ancient prose, the language of the Tao Te Ching has undergone meticulous refinement and rigorous selection of words. The use of precise, accurate, and beautiful language throughout the text results in concise and elegant prose, rich with philosophical depth. This imparts a succinct, unadorned, and naturally aesthetic information.

5.1.1 Antonyms

The Tao Te Ching is imbued with a simple dialectical philosophy, emphasizing the unity of opposites, the affirmation and negation inherent in all things in the world. The classic carefully selects antonyms.

Eg1:

ST: 将欲歛之，必固张之；将欲弱之，必固强之；将欲废之，必固举之；将欲取之，必固与之。

(In Chapter 36) (Chen, 2016)

TT: What is in the end to be shrunk

Must first be stretched.

Whatever is to be weakened

Must begin by being made strong.

What is to be overthrown

Must begin by being set up.

He who would be a taker

Must begin as a giver. (Arthur Waley)

This section primarily discusses the dialectical relationship of the dual nature of things and the mutual transformation of contradictions, embodying Lao Tzu's dialectical thinking of "when things reach an extreme, they turn to the opposite." The translator retains the parallel structure of the original text, ensuring clarity of context, profound argumentation, and a powerful logical force. The original text comprises four pairs of contradictory antonyms: contraction and expansion, weakness and strength, abandonment and embrace, taking and giving. In Arthur Waley's translation, these are rendered as be shrunk against be stretched, be weakened against being made strong, be overthrown against being made strong, and be a taker against as a giver. Upon comparing with the original, it's evident that the original text employs an active voice, while the translation transforms it into corresponding passive constructions. The original text lacks explicit subjects, and the translator, based on personal understanding of the logical relationships and philosophical connotations implied in the text, adjusts the aesthetic information structure of the original language according to the linguistic features of the target language. The translator adds subjects such as "what is..." and "he who..." to the sentences. Chinese emphasizes subject consciousness, and the overall form of grammar is simplified and implicit, not overly concerned with the seamless integration of "meaning" and "form." For Chinese speakers, sentences without a subject possess a kind of fuzzy beauty. The absence of an explicit actor in the sentence can create a sense of unknown flexibility and make the sentence more concise. In contrast, English tends towards nominalization, emphasizing rationality and precision. Its grammar follows strict rules, adhering to meticulousness and precision, advocating for accuracy and logical rigor while opposing ambiguity and confusion. The addition of subjects and the use of passive constructions in the translation result in smooth and tightly structured sentences, creating a kind of "logical beauty" in the process of interlingual translation.

5.1.2 Conversion

In language, the use of a word from one grammatical category as a member of another category is known as conversion. When executed skillfully, the transformation of the part of speech and usage of words can enhance the vividness and literary quality of the writing, making the expression concise and lively. La Tzu's precise handling of the flexible use of word categories in the Tao Te Ching results in many structurally sophisticated and aesthetically pleasing sentences.

Eg2:

ST: 衣养万物而不为主，可名于小。(In Chapter 34) (Chen, 2016)

TT:

Yet having produced them, it does not take possession of them.

Makes no claim to be master over them,

Therefore it may be called the Lowly. (Arthur Waley)

This sentence discusses the role and character of the "Way." The "Way" is omnipresent, nurturing all things in the world without interference, and it is unwilling to be the master of all things. After an intralingual translation, the term "衣" can be understood as "覆," implying protection and nurturing, clearly used as a verb. In modern Chinese, "衣" is commonly used as a noun, and its usage as a verb has become rare. The translator analytically considered the part of speech and meaning of "衣" in this sentence. In his translation, Arthur Waley renders "衣养" as "cover... like a garment" in the line "Tao, though it covers the ten thousand things like a garment." He employs a metaphorical rhetorical device, likening the "Tao" to a garment that covers and protects all things. This vivid metaphor paints a detailed picture of the role of the "Tao," making the abstract and ineffable nature of the "Tao"—something that cannot be expressed in language, defined conceptually, or perceived by the senses—more tangible. This not only sparks the reader's interest in exploring the original text but also helps the reader truly grasp the philosophical meaning of the original.

Eg3:

ST: 为无为，事无事，味无味。(In Chapter 63)(Chen, 2016)

TT:

It acts without action, does without doing,

Finds flavour in what is flavourless. (Arthur Waley)

This sentence expounds on the attitude of "doing by not doing" and the approach of "doing things with an attitude of non-interference," turning the tasteless into flavorful. The concise and rhythmic parallel structure of the three-character lines provides a powerful and distinct rhythm, elucidating Lao Tzu's philosophy of "cultivating oneself in tranquility and acting without striving," and "maintaining a serene tastelessness" in one's actions. The use of "为", "事", and "味" in each triplet follows a consistent pattern, where they function as verbs at the beginning of the sentence and as nouns at the end. This creates a sense of beauty both phonetically and visually. In the process of interlingual translation, Arthur Waley's version, "It acts without action, does without doing, Finds flavour in what is flavourless," prioritizes semantic expression but abandons a direct structural equivalence. While the translation may seem slightly longer than the original, Waley handles the polysemy skillfully. He utilizes the flexibility of the English language, incorporating inflections to create related words. By transforming "act" into "action," "do" into "doing," and "flavour" into "flavourless," he changes the word class and maintains a clear derivation from the original terms. This approach ensures consistency with the original text to a significant extent and facilitates the reader's understanding of the content.

5.2 Rhythm

Chinese is a language that embodies structural beauty, musical beauty, and expressive beauty. The independent block structure of Chinese characters lacks a mechanism for morphological changes, but it is conducive to flexible integration, enabling a myriad of combinations and extensions from left to right

(Liu & Zhang, 2011).

5.2.1 Reduplication

Reduplication involves the repeated use of a single character to achieve a dual aesthetic effect in both visual and auditory senses. The Tao Te Ching belongs to the ancient prose genre, yet its language is rich in poetic qualities, featuring a distinctive characteristic of extensively employing reduplication to enhance phonetic effects. As Chinese characters are monosyllabic and each morpheme constitutes an independent word with a distinct meaning, it is easy to create reduplication by repeating a character. In Chinese, nouns, numerals, classifiers, adjectives, adverbs, verbs, and onomatopoeic words all undergo reduplication changes (Mao, 2005). In contrast, English primarily forms reduplicated words through the substitution of vowels or consonants, resulting in fewer and less frequent reduplicated forms than in Chinese. Therefore, in most cases, Chinese reduplication cannot be translated directly into corresponding English reduplicated words; rather, their meanings must be conveyed through compensatory methods.

E.g., 4:

ST: 绵绵若存，用之不勤。(In Chapter 6) (Chen, 2016)

TT:

It is there within us all the while;

Draw upon it as you will, it never runs dry. (Arthur Waley)

This sentence employs the reduplication "绵绵" which not only brings about an auditory aesthetic but also conveys rich connotations and additional meanings. In an intralingual translation, "绵绵" suggests continuous and endless, describing the continuity, infinity, and invisibility of the "Way" outlining the eternal nature of the "Way". This simple pair of reduplicated words achieves a perfect combination of phonetics and imagery. However, artistic language features specific cultural characteristics that are neither dispensable nor replaceable. In order to compensate for the loss of rhetorical nuances resulting from the inability to transplant reduplication during the English translation process, Arthur Waley employs the strategy of "textual translation." By combining personal understanding and feelings, he uses the English expression "all the while" to convey the boundless nature of the "Way."

E.g., 5:

ST: 众人熙熙，如享太牢，如春登台。(In Chapter 20) (Chen, 2016)

TT:

All men, indeed, are wreathed in smiles,

As though feasting after the Great Sacrifice,

As though going up to the Spring Carnival. (Arthur Waley)

Eg6:

ST: 傫傫兮，若无所归。(In Chapter 20) (Chen, 2016)

TT: I droop and drift, as though I belonged nowhere. (Arthur Waley)

In Chapter 20 of the Tao Te Ching, there are two pairs of reduplication: "熙熙" and "傫傫" "熙熙"

describes a lively and cheerful state, while "傞傞" depicts a languid and leisurely condition. These words' reduplication integrate sound, form, and meaning, providing both rhythm and vivid descriptive power, enhancing the imagery of the language. When faced with the challenge of finding direct equivalents for these Chinese reduplication in English, Arthur Waley turns to a phonetic rhetorical device in English—alliteration in the process of interlingual translation. In Waley's translation, "傞傞" is rendered as "droop and drift." This not only accurately conveys the original meaning but also enhances the sense of rhythm, preserving to some extent the phonetic features of the source language while ensuring a faithful transmission of the original ideas.

5.2.2 Rhyme

The Tao Te Ching adopts the ancient prose style with a poetic language, featuring neatly structured sentences, a brisk rhythm, and harmonious cadence. Most sentences in the text exhibit rhyming, creating a rhythmic quality and harmonic beauty through the repetitive recurrence of the same rhyme within paragraphs. This contributes to the musical and harmonious aesthetics of the language. Due to significant differences in the linguistic and rhetorical systems between Chinese and English, transplanting the musicality of rhyming is often challenging. Translators generally operate based on their own aesthetic ideals and experiences (Liu, 2012).

E.g., 7:

ST: 故有无相生，难易相成，长短相形，高下相倾，音声相和，前后相随。(In Chapter 2)(Chen, 2016)

TT:

For truly, Being and Not-being grow out of one another;

Difficult and easy complete one another.

Long and short test one another;

High and low determine one another.

Pitch and mode give harmony to one another.

Front and back give sequence to one another. (Arthur Waley)

Lao Tzu enumerates six pairs of opposing unities: “有无”“难易”“长短”“高低”“音声”“前后”. This elucidates a dialectical perspective on binary oppositions and the interdependence of opposites. The original text presents these pairs in concise four-character lines, juxtaposing and contrasting them with a rhythmic and compact style. Moreover, it employs free rhyme, with the first and second lines rhyming with "-eng" sounds, and the third and fourth lines rhyming with "-ing" sounds. The prose is elegantly flowing, rich in both phonetic and rhythmic beauty. Waley acknowledges the rhyme scheme in the original text, but the challenges posed by differences in character structures and phonetic nuances often make a direct translation of these elements impossible, leading him to explore alternative approaches (Fang, 2019). In the process of interlingual translation, Waley prioritizes the detailed and precise representation of the historical intent of the original work. While not retaining the rhyming rhetorical color from the source text, he concludes each sentence with a compensatory structure, typically ending with a "verb/verb phrase + one another." This results in well-structured and smoothly

flowing sentences in English.

5.3 Parallelism

Parallelism refers to a rhetorical device where a series of related ideas are expressed in a similar structure, consistent tone, and parallel relationship. In Chinese, parallelism must consist of three or more structurally similar, semantically related, and tonally consistent words, sentences, or paragraphs, creating a compact structure and a brisk rhythm (Bredin, 2011). Chinese characters and the language system excel in utilizing the strength of repetition to construct aesthetic beauty (Huang, 2012; Luo, 2023). The Tao Te Ching is replete with examples of parallelism, each one showcasing the aesthetic information within the language system of sentences and paragraphs.

E.g., 8:

ST: 五色令人目盲，五音令人耳聋，五味令人口爽。(In Chapter 12) (Chen, 2016)

TT:

The fives colours confuse the eye,

The fives sounds dull the ear,

The five tastes spoil the palate. (Arthur Waley)

After an intralingual translation, it could be rendered as: "A profusion of brilliant colors dazzles the eyes; a myriad of noisy sounds dulls the hearing; various flavors render the taste buds numb." These individual sentences, employing the rhetorical technique of parallelism, enhance the linguistic momentum. They not only possess a formal aesthetic appeal but also offer a more concise and profound analysis of the principles. The translator preserves the parallel structure of the original text. Arthur Waley employs a structure like "The five + noun + verb + the + noun," as in "The five colors confuse the eye." Each line consists of six words, precisely matching the original word count, resulting in a flowing and concise style, brimming with rhythmic beauty. However, the translation of "五色", "五音", and "五味" is handled through a literal translation method. For readers unfamiliar with Chinese culture and accustomed to interpreting concrete things through abstract concepts in Western traditions, this approach may lead to questions and confusion. If the translation were to use a literal translation with annotations, providing explanations for these terms carried with cultures, readers could gain a deeper understanding of the essence of the original text. Annotations could offer more insights into the source language culture, fostering a richer appreciation of the cultural nuances embedded in the text.

6. Conclusion

Culture is not a one-way transmission; globalization empowers us to propel traditional Chinese culture onto the global stage. Translating Chinese classics involves rich content, spanning culture, systems, technology, and more. The structure of the Tao Te Ching is orderly, featuring predominantly rhymed verses that intricately interconnect. Beyond the aesthetic appeal of rhyme, it possesses a melodic quality. Its linguistic artistry is robust, utilizing various rhetorical devices to render expressions more precise, vivid, and distinct, thereby enhancing both rationality and persuasiveness. However, this

complexity also intensifies the challenges of translating from Chinese to English. Roman Jakobson's intralingual and interlingual translation approaches offer insights for translators. Intralingual translation is a process of comprehension, while interlingual translation involves how to manage and structure the comprehended content. This process necessitates the application of various translation methods. The translation of Chinese classics is a nuanced process, and the translated output holds paramount significance in fortifying cultural exchange. Chinese classics translation aligns with the contemporary trend and represents a responsibility for translators in the present day.

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