Original Paper

Take Hamlet as an Example to Analyze the Promoting Effect of Foreign Classical Literary Works on Language Learning

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Abstract

This paper takes Shakespeare's classic play Hamlet as an example to deeply explore the important promotional role of foreign literary classics in language learning. By analyzing the linguistic features, literary value, and positive impact on learners' vocabulary expansion, grammar comprehension, sense of language, cultural awareness, and thinking expansion, this paper emphasizes the irreplaceable value of foreign literary classics in the process of language learning.

Keywords

foreign classical literary works, language learning

1. Introduction

Language learning runs through students' learning career, and the study and research of foreign classic literary works plays an important role in language learning. Through the study of foreign classic literary works, such as Shakespeare's Hamlet, the language features, literary values and the culture contained in it are helpful to language learning.

2. The Linguistic Features and Literary Value Contained in Hamlet

This part analyzes the language learning value of "Hamlet" from four aspects: syntactic level, rhetorical level, rhythm and cadence, and cultural connotation.

2.1 Syntactic Structure

Grammatically, Hamlet adopts many complex sentence structures. It contains a large number of clauses, such as attributive clauses used "To" modify nouns, for example, "To be, or not to be, that is a question". The "that" in "To be, or not to be", is an attributive clause that refers to the entire content of the preceding "to be, or not to be".

The text contains many inverted structures with different functions. This analysis will show two uses through examples. One way this works is with rhythm. For poetry, tweaking the usual word order lets lines fit the poem's meter, making them flow more smoothly. This gives the language a musical quality. It also improves reading fluency. Another use is for emphasis. Putting key words at the start of a sentence actually breaks typical sentence structures. This trick draws attention to important ideas, builds drama, or emphasizes significance—helping readers catch the main points faster. Starting with strong words or negatives also makes emotions more distinct. They make information stand out. For example, "Nor do not saw the air too much with your hand", the normal word order is "Do not saw the air too much with your hand, either", The inversion here is to emphasize the negative.

In addition, the use of a variety of complex syntax can also reflect the inner thoughts of the characters, so as to better depict the characters. Take "To be, or not to be, that is a question" as a question. This is an expression with a main list structure. "To be, or not to be" is the subject, indicating the act of choice "to be or not to be", and is a juxtaposition of two infinitive phrases joined by "or". "That" is the demonstrative pronoun that refers "To" the preceding "To be, or not to be" and is the subject of the sentence, "is" is the linking verb, and "a question" is the predicate. This line captures Hamlet's deep reflections over life-or-death decisions. And "Whether 'tis nobler in the mind to suffer the slings and arrows of outrageous fortune, or to take arms against a sea of troubles, and by opposing end them? ". As a complex sentence, where 'whether... or...' guides the choice of interrogative structure. In this sentence, "tis" is the written form of 'it is', 'in the mind' is an adverb that modifies 'nobler', 'to suffer...', and 'to take...'. These long and complex sentences demonstrate the inner turmoil of Hamlet, asking, In thought, is it more noble to endure the arrows of cruel fate and remain silent, or to pick up weapons to resist endless troubles and end them?

2.2 The Figure of Speech

In order to enhance the expressive force and appeal of the language, Hamlet uses a variety of rhetorical devices, such as metaphor, personification, exaggeration, pun, irony, parallelism, metaphor, question and so on. This is mainly about metaphors and parallelisms:

> I do repent, but heaven hath pleas'd it so,
>
> To punish me with this, and this with me,
>
> That I must be their scourge and minister.
>
> I will bestow him, and will answer well
>
> The death I gave him. So, again, good-night.

<p style="text-align:center">(Hamlet 3.4.192)</p>

There are two uses of metaphor in this line. First, "heaven hath pleas'd it so, To punish me with this, and this with me, That I must be their scourge and minister" Hamlet compares himself here to the scourge and minister of God, which is a metaphor. He perceived his own act as the execution of God's will, and the killing of Polonius was the fulfillment of God's punishment, if he were the instrument

through which God punished evil.

To put it simply, Hamlet uses metaphors to connect killing to shared pain. This shows he's trying to make sense of his own actions, while also laying bare his inner conflicts and moral dilemmas:

> O! speak to me no more;
>
> These words like daggers enter in mine ears;
>
> No more, sweet Hamlet!

(Hamlet 3.4.186)

Here Chotrude's "O! speak to me no more; ... These words like daggers enter in mine ears; ... No more, sweet Hamlet!" This repetition creates a parallel structure. The repeated use of "no longer" strengthens Gertrude's opposition to Hamlet's words. This structure makes her emotional expression more intense. It also gives her speech a stronger rhythm. Through this repeated sentence pattern, it can more strongly highlight the pain and despair of Chotrude under the verbal attack of Hamlet. Gertrude hoped Hamlet would end his criticism. This parallel structure expressed her urgent wish. It conveyed the strength of her feeling.

In Hamlet's scolding of Gertrude, a similar parallel structure exists, though not strictly parallel, it has a similar reinforcing effect terms of tone and rhythm. For example, Hamlet's powerful and coherent reproaches to Gertrude are designed to touch her conscience. Hamlet repeats similar sentence structures often, and this repetition ramps up tension in the dialogue. It also gives the conversation a clear rhythm. This makes the characters' intense emotions feel even more powerful to the audience. At the same time, it can also portray the character of the characters well. Hamlet possesses a deep and passionate character. This nature makes his thoughts deeper. It also makes them more convincing. This is shown when he confronts Gertrude. Her reaction displays confusion. It also shows helplessness.

2.3 Rhythm and Rhyme

2.3.1 Blank Verse

The text uses blank verse, which emphasizes the dignity of kings and princes. It also conveys a sense of solemnity. But there are exceptions, and they will adopt other literary forms to meet different needs. The first is when they have mental problems. In Hamlet, after the ghost of his father informs him that his uncle Claudius murdered him, Hamlet feigns madness. This pretense allows him to speak in prose in public, such as in his dialogue with the King Polonius in Act II, scene II. But when he does his monologue in Act II, scene II, or when he meets his mother alone in Act III, scene IV, Hamlet adopts blank verse. Another example is Ophelia, daughter of Polonius. Her use of blank verse marked her exalted status, but when she was deranged by the death of her father, ballads and prose came in handy. Another situation is that those who are cultured and well-educated communicate with people of lower social status, such as Hamlet's dialogue with the actors in Act 2, Scene 2, or his dialogue with the gravedigger in Act 5, Scene 1.

Theoretically, blank verse refers to unrhymed iambic pentameter. As Shakespeare's writing evolved, scholars later summarized three main features. The first feature involves rhythmic variation. An iamb usually contains a weak syllable followed by a strong syllable. But Hamlet's lines also include other structures. Take these examples: In "For what we know must be, and is as common (*Hamlet* 1.2.36)", "being of" is two unstressed syllables, and "so young" is a stressed syllable followed by an unstressed syllable.

The second point is the breaking of the five tone rhythm of the cadence. It is pointed out in the text that the five tone rhythm of the cadence is often broken, and pauses can occur at the beginning, middle, or end of a line of poetry. For example:

Beginning of line pause: "That, being of so young days brought up with him (*Hamlet* 2.2.88)"

Middle of line pause: "So frown'd he once, when, in an angry parle (*Hamlet* 1.1.22)"

End of line pause: "And therefore I forbid my tears; but yet (*Hamlet* 4.7.244)"

The third point is the variation in the number of syllables, which usually consists of ten syllables in iambic pentameter, but may be more or less so in Hamlet. For example, "A brother's murder! Pray can I not (*Hamlet* 3.3.176)" has only nine syllables.

Shakespeare employed a flexible poetic form in Hamlet. He did not follow strict rhythmic patterns. He varied the rhythm of lines. He changed their length. This made the characters' speech sound more natural. It also created more variety. This approach helped him express complex emotions with greater power. It enhanced the play's dramatic effect.

2.3.2 Changes in the Rhythm of Language

Atmosphere can be created through pauses and changes in speaking speed. For example, in "Hamlet", when Hamlet accidentally kills Polonius, the pace of the dialogue suddenly quickens. Hamlet cried out, "How now! a rat? Dead, for a ducat, dead!" (*Hamlet* 3.4.182) Here the sentences are short and almost without pause. This language rhythm reflects the tension and stress reaction of Hamlet in the moment. He thinks that King Claudius is hiding behind the scenes, so he draws his sword without thinking, and the rush of language well conveys the sudden tension. This rhythm establishes an atmosphere of impending danger. It suggests coming conflict. The audience enters a tense scene immediately. The characters' emotions show growing tension. It can effectively raise the tension of the drama, so that the audience's heart hangs in the air, worrying about the fate of the characters.

2.4 Culture

2.4.1 Renaissance

During the Renaissance, England was undergoing a significant transition from feudalism, and the character image embodied by Hamlet reflected the contradictions and conflicts between the feudal system and the transitional stage of capitalism in Britain at that time from the social level, such as the greed and selfishness of the emerging bourgeoisie represented by Claudius, and the collision between the humanistic ideal and the dark reality represented by Hamlet.

The work reveals power struggles within the English court. It shows political conspiracies of that period. For example, Hamlet's uncle Claudius killed his brother. He then took the throne. Hamlet's plan to get back the throne also shows how complex court politics could be. It demonstrates its cruel nature. It also reflects the reflection and exploration of human nature in the British society at that time, and the complexity and multi-faceted character of the characters in the work reflects people's deep reflection on the good and evil of human nature, morality and ethics.

2.4.2 Humanism

The Renaissance supported humanist ideas. This placed importance on human worth. It also focused on human dignity. For instance, while seeking revenge, Hamlet thinks deeply about human nature, ponders moral questions, and reflects on what life means. This shows he values human experience more than religious doctrine alone.

This era also valued individual freedom. Hamlet questions old social hierarchies and pushes back against traditional norms—revealing his desire for personal liberty and his fight against outdated restrictions. The era also put a focus on reason and knowledge. Hamlet's reluctance to act on revenge shows he values rational thinking, and his time studying at Wittenberg University mirrors this respect for learning.

The school Hamlet attends shows that Hamlet is in a famous Renaissance city, which implies that Hamlet is a humanist, a suggestion confirmed by Horatio, Hamlet's only friend in the play. Hamlet's failure reflects the contradiction between humanism and reality. In the end, Hamlet could not get rid of the fate of death, and the ghost of his father could not help Hamlet regenerate. Hamlet from revenge to death reflects the change of human nature and embodies the human subject.

Fate is controlled by human beings rather than ghosts, and death is the sublimation of humanism. Hamlet's ideological character is lofty, he firmly fought against the feudal ideological forces, is a precious spiritual wealth under the background of The Times. The humanism thought is the strongest voice of Hamlet, whose core lies in the affirmation and praise of man, his rejection of man himself and mankind.

To be filled with the hope and confidence that man has noble reason, great strength, and infinite wisdom. This reflects the very spirit of the Renaissance—a major breakthrough in human thought. It was like a great awakening of the mind, showing us that true growth begins with honest self-examination. Take Hamlet: when he deeply examines his own strengths and flaws, his journey grows to be much more than just revenge. This process evolves into a quest for purposeful existence. It fosters complete personal growth. His vision extends beyond restoring political order. It encompasses cleansing a morally corrupt world. This was a kind of "people-oriented" political sentiment. At the same time, even under the shadow of revenge, he still longed for sincere friendship and pure love. This shows a worldview that puts personal emotions and human connections above all else—a fresh take on life. Thus, it can be seen that humanistic thought was the cornerstone he used to confront the ugly

world. This illustrates how self-awareness enables world-changing actions. Hamlet engages in profound self-analysis. He looks at his strengths and limits, and his journey shifts from avenging his father to chasing higher ideals. The pursuit of the ideal is not only expressed in the restoration of enlightened monarchy, but also in the elimination of evil from the world. Hamlet believes that the country ruled by his father is powerful and an ideal era, so his political view is people-oriented. Hamlet's longing for true love and loyalty is deeply personal, but it also goes beyond that—it shows he's fighting to hold onto ideal human values. This occurs during a period when such values were fading.

As A.C. Bradley observed, Hamlet shows authentic feeling toward Ophelia. He also keeps complete trust in Horatio. These traits contrast with the false behavior around him. His mother's swift remarriage and the betrayal by court officials push him further from idealism.

Helen Gardner noted that his hope for perfect relationships only leads to disappointment, which underscores his inner conflict as a Renaissance-era character. He values reason, faithfulness, and moral awareness. He is pulled between avenging his father and staying true to his principles.

His humanist beliefs drive his actions and back his efforts to restore human dignity—all in a society where morals have fallen apart. In this way, humanism becomes the foundation of his opposition to a corrupt world.

2.4.3 Dramatic Culture

As a classic drama work, Hamlet itself represents a high achievement of British drama culture, with its unique dramatic structure, language art and performance style, such as through monologues, dialogues and other forms of profound presentation of the character's inner world and emotional changes, become a model of dramatic creation.

At the same time, it also reflects the social background and cultural atmosphere of British drama performance at that time, including the audience's appreciation habits, the status and role of drama in social life, etc., which provides valuable materials for the study of British drama history.

3. The Problem of Modern Subjectivity

Hegel's subjectivity thought emphasizes the three main characteristics of wholeness, reality and mediation, among which wholeness is the primary characteristic of Hegel's subjectivity thought, which means that subjectivity thought surpasses the traditional dualistic opposition and realizes the contradictory unity of subject and object, thinking and existence, body and mind, individuality and universality. Rereading Hamlet from Hegel's subjectivity perspective, we can not only see the survival predicament of people in modern society in Hamlet's self-struggle, but also gain insight into the ultimate cause of its "destruction" and reveal the significance of the tragedy to solve the problem of modern subjectivity.

During the early modern period, many changes took place in society, including cultural, political and ideological aspects. Hamlet reflects this shift. In the first act, Hamlet is depicted as an early modern subject. He is restricted by social norms, such as the death of his father and the remarriage of his mother, which makes him feel lonely, and triggers a reflection on the meaning of his own existence, and experiences an existential crisis. He expresses his boredom with life, such as "how weary, stale, flat, and unprofitable seem to me all the uses of this world" (How weary, stale, flat, and unprofitable seem to me all the uses of this world!) and "o, that this too too solid flesh would melt, thaw and resolve itself into a dew!" (Oh, that this too solid flesh would melt and dissipate into a heap of dew!) In this line, Hamlet felt suffocated by the heavy social discipline represented by "solid flesh", and longed for it to "disintegrate" and ascend to the "dew-like" realm of freedom. This points to one of education's most important goals: helping people free themselves and realize their own value. The ultimate goal of critical thinking self-awareness advocated by modern education is to guide students to bravely examine and break through various restrictions of the external world, just like the inner struggle of Hamlet. What he pursued was not simple destruction, but an "sublimation" of existence, transforming the heavy "body" into something containing infinite possibilities like "dew". In fact, this reminds us education's value goes beyond just teaching knowledge. Its deeper meaning is in inspiring people to actively explore and create meaning from the inside out—letting everyone reach their own unique, meaningful sense of self-fulfillment.

In Act 3, Hamlet hits a turning point in understanding himself. His famous "To be or not to be" soliloquy shows him grappling with a personal choice: not just accepting fate or God's will, but actively choosing whether to live on his own terms. This reflects his emergence as an individual with the power to define his own existence. At the same time, "to take arms against a sea of troubles" (to take up arms and face the odds) reveals the responsibility assumed by the new individual. He refused to be controlled by others, as when he said to a friend, "you would play upon me; you would seem to know my stops; you would pluck out the heart of my mystery; (...). You cannot play upon me. You cannot play upon me. You seem to know my thoughts; you want to find out the secrets of my heart; (...) you can't play tricks on me.

In Act 5, Hamlet's outlook changes clearly. He accepts that death is unavoidable, but he still clings to the belief that life has meaning. His words—"If it be now, tis not to come; if it be not to come, it will be now; if it be not now, yet it will come—the readiness is all"—reflect a new acceptance: what matters is not when death comes, but being prepared for it. If it doesn't come, it will come now; if it doesn't come now, it will—readiness is everything. His dialogue with Horatio shows his growth into a man who values loyalty and reason. This shows how he's grown into someone who can trust deeply and judge thoughtfully—traits that mattered in early modern society.

In addition, different scholars have different interpretations of modern subjectivity in Hamlet. For example, it has been argued that Hamlet represents the modern sense of man, who is a different self

when he is alone than when he is with others. When a person is alone, the self will appear more authentic, and one can show oneself freely in front of others, but this independence may be affected to some. His "to be or not to be" monologue became a symbol of modernity and modern self-consciousness, embodying the pain caused by excessive self-consciousness.

Hamlet's thoughts and actions also reflect his redefinition of the meaning of revenge. Realizing that he was emulating his role on stage, he developed a plan to "capture the conscience of the king".

At the same time, other characters in the play also reflect or contrast some aspects of modern subjectivity to some extent. Claudius as a conspirator and a figure of power represents the image of the bourgeoisie, who will stop at nothing for the sake of. Indeed, Ophelia represents a typical aristocratic young woman of the feudal era. She is trapped by traditional expectations, controlled by the men around her, and ultimately becomes a tool used by others for their own purposes.

In a word, the image of Hamlet in Hamlet is complex and changeable, the characteristics of modern subjectivity embodied in Hamlet and the interpretation of it by different scholars all show the profound connotation of the work and the exploration of modern subjectivity. It is not only a story about revenge, but also a reflection on human nature, society, fate and many other issues.

4. Pragmatic Identity

In the course of verbal communication, speakers often choose different pragmatic identities to satisfy different communicative purposes. We'll analyze this from four angles.

Pragmatic identity choice to disguise madness for revenge

Once Hamlet learned the truth—his uncle had murdered his father—he decided to get revenge. However, the circumstances at the time were extremely unfavorable for him, and he was under the surveillance of Claudius, so he chose to fake madness to confuse his enemies and create an opportunity for revenge. To pull this off, he convincingly pretended to be "mad". He used this disguise to watch others, speak the truth indirectly, and get through the dangers around him.

In his dialogue with Polonius, Hamlet behaves incoherently and grotesquely. "Denmark is a prison", he said. "Then the world is a prison" "A large prison, with many cells, cells, and dungeons; Denmark is one of the worst". He deliberately confused the concept by comparing Denmark to a prison, a seemingly illogical statement in line with the idea of a madman, and convinced Polonius that he really was mad. By pretending to be mad, Hamlet can observe others and collect evidence without drawing suspicion. This act also gives him more time to plan his revenge. His odd words and actions hide his real motives, so Claudius can't easily figure out what he's truly thinking. In this way, Hamlet gains a layer of protection in a dangerous court environment.

4.1 Pragmatic Identity Selection when Communicating with Mother

When talking to his mother Gertrude, Hamlet wants two things: to make her see her own mistakes and to show her who Claudius really is. To do this, he acts as both a "harsh critic" and a "resentful son"

around her. When Hamlet was talking to his mother in the bedroom, he strongly criticized her behavior:

> Such an act
>
> That blurs the grace and blush of modesty,
>
> Calls virtue hypocrite, takes off the rose
>
> From the fair forehead of an innocent love
>
> And sets a blister there, makes marriage-vows
>
> As false as dicers' oaths: O, such a deed
>
> As from the body of contraction plucks
>
> The very soul, and sweet religion makes
>
> A rhapsody of words: heaven's face doth glow;
>
> Yea, this solidity and compound mass,
>
> With tristful visage, as against the doom,
>
> Is thought-sick at the act.

<div align="center">(Hamlet 3.4.182-183)</div>

In the role of "severe critic", he didn't hold back—he pointed out how immoral his mother's remarriage was and tried to wake her conscience. At the same time, he also reveals his feelings as a "son of pain" in his words, such as "You see, your married daughter, chaste as ice, pure as snow, her forehead has been planted by you ugly black spots". He expressed his inner pain and disappointment at his mother's behavior. The construction of this dual identity can not only make the mother feel his anger and pain, but also make the mother more easily accept his accusations, so as to achieve the purpose of letting the mother reflect on her own behavior.

4.2 Pragmatic Identity Selection in the Face of Friends

When Hamlet communicates with his friends Horatio and Rosengrantz, he chooses different pragmatic identities according to specific situations. When he suspects that a friend might be used by Claudius, he constructs an identity as a "cautious tempter"; and when he trusts his friends and needs their support and help, he will communicate with them as a "sincere partner".

For example, when Rosengrantz and Guildenston came to try him out as to whether he was really mad, Hamlet sensed their coming and said, "I have of late—but wherefore I know not—lost all my mirth... this goodly frame, the earth, seems to me a sterile promontory; this most excellent canopy, the air... this majestical roof fretted with golden fire... appears no other thing to me than a foul and pestilent congregation of vapours" (*Hamlet* 2.2.110). He seems to be pouring out his troubles, but he is actually testing whether his friend really cares about him or is just a puppet of Claudius. Through these careful exchanges, Hamlet seeks to confirm where his friend stands while protecting himself. In his talks with Horatio, he openly expresses trust, saying for example: "You are the most honest man I have ever known". This shows both his need for a reliable ally and his emotional dependence on their friendship. When he plans his revenge, he will also be honest with Horatio, telling him his ideas and plans, and at

this time he is interacting with friends as a "sincere partner", hoping to get support and help from friends.

4.3 Pragmatic Identity Choice in Confrontation with Claudius

When dealing with Claudius, Hamlet has two goals: exposing the king's crimes and making sure he stays alive. He shapes an image pragmatism, that is, "the brave avenger" and "the cunning manipulator".

In "The Mousetrap", Hamlet observed Claudius' reaction by dramatically presenting the process of his father's murder through the play. He deliberately acts mysterious in front of Claudius, making Claudius uneasy. When confronted by Claudius, he replied tactfully, "No, Your Majesty; I have been in the sun too long". This ambiguous answer both confused Claudius and showed his wit. And at critical moments, such as after killing Polonius by mistake in the queen's bedroom, he confronted Claudius head-on, and he was not afraid to accuse Claudius: "You corrupt, murderous, adulterous, evil Danish king!" At this moment, as "the valiant avenger", he expressed his hatred of Claudius with such firmness that it brought home to the latter full extent of his comprehension. Meanwhile, he met Claudius with such cunning words and actions as to avert the danger of an immediate revengeful attempt on the part of the.

5. Conclusion

In this play, references to God and religious doctrines are made multiple times. For instance, in Hamlet's struggle during his pursuit of revenge, there are expressions of reverence for God and contemplations on the redemption of the soul. These examples show how religious beliefs shaped people's thoughts and actions back then, and they mirror Christian moral values. People considered good and evil. They struggled between justice and sin. Ideas of repentance and salvation were also important. These ideas were tightly connected to Christian culture. This research uses *Hamlet* as a typical case. It examines how foreign classical literature supports language learning. The text of *Hamlet* provides rich and diverse vocabulary. It contains complex sentence patterns. It also includes various rhetorical methods. These offer useful material to language students. The play's famous quotes and dialogues carry special meaning in language and culture. They help learners build their vocabulary, master grammar rules, and get better at expressing ideas flexibly and accurately. From a cultural point of view, Hamlet reflects the social characteristics and cultural characteristics of English society in the Renaissance, which learners to deeply understand the cultural background of the West and enhance their cultural awareness in the process of reading, which has positive significance for cultural understanding and communication in language learning. However, the study also has limitations, such as the analysis of Hamlet is difficult to cover the characteristics of all foreign classical literary works, and the discussion of practical language learning applications is not comprehensive enough.

Future studies may further expand the research scope of literary works, combine more empirical research methods, and explore how to integrate foreign classical literary works into language teaching

and learning practice more efficiently, so as to give full play to their great potential in improving the comprehensive literacy of language learners, and help language learning and cross-cultural communication achieve better results.

Acknowledgement

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