

Translation Strategies of Culture-loaded Words in Light of Thick Translation Theory: An Analysis on Two English Translations of Lunyu

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Abstract: *Lunyu* is one of the most translated Chinese texts. It has profound philosophical thoughts and is written in a pithy style. It is essential to present its cultural, social, and historical contexts to target readers for a deep understanding of *Lunyu* translations. Thick translation, which aims to produce thick contextualized texts, had been adopted by Gu Hongming and Roger T. Ames & Henry Rosemont, Jr. in *Lunyu* translations. This qualitative study compares text-close thick translations in these two English versions in an attempt to reveal how text-close thick translations support to achieve thick contextualization. This comparison identifies similarities and differences of notes and commentaries. The findings show that notes are translators' favorite maneuvers in supplying contextual information. However, due to the translators' different backgrounds, attention is paid to different aspects. In conclusion, translators can employ different means of text-close thick translations to construct thick contexts, thereby enhancing target readers' understanding.

1. Introduction

Lunyu, or *The Analects of Confucius*, has probably exercised a greater influence on the history and culture of the Chinese people than any other work in the Chinese language. Not only has it shaped the thought and customs of China over many centuries, but it has played a key role in the development of other countries that were within the Chinese cultural sphere, such as Korea, Japan, and, later, Vietnam^[1].

In *Lunyu*, readers will find no lengthy discussions of terminology or expositions of ideas. Instead, moral and political concepts are presented in terms of particular individuals, the teacher Confucius and the disciple or other person with whom he is conversing, and the particular circumstances under discussion. And because the participants and circumstances vary in different passages, the manner in which the ideas are conveyed varies accordingly.

This paper presents a comparative study of two English versions of *Lunyu* from the perspective of thick translation theory with emphasis on text-close thick translation. The first version was translated by famous Chinese translator Gu Hongming (Gu's version^[2]) and the other version was

translated by modern sinologists and philosophers Roger T. Ames and Henry Rosemont, JR. (A & R's version^[3]).

Although the translations of *Lunyu* have been investigated extensively, no comparative study on *Lunyu* translations from the perspective of thick translation theory has been made. According to Frank, "insight into the specifics of translation can best be gained by looking at several translations of the same text^[4]." This paper identifies the similarities and differences of notes and commentaries in the two selected versions in an attempt to reveal how text-close thick translations support to achieve thick contextualization. It is expected that the theoretical validity and practical significance of this study will advance the translation studies of *Lunyu* and beyond.

2. Case Analysis

This study compares two English versions of *Lunyu* in terms of thick translation theory. It examines how text-close thick translations of the two versions are achieved by two means, namely notes and commentaries.

2.1. Note

In this study, a note refers to a piece of written information located at the bottom of a page, embedded in a text or at the end of a text, namely footnote, cut-in note for endnote. *Lunyu* is written in laconic and poetic style with numerous rhetorical devices. Since the original has profound meanings, understanding the translations becomes a challenge for target readers. Therefore, both versions adopt a large number of notes to construct the source context. In this study, some notes are called single purpose notes since they provide one category of information, and others are referred to as multiple purpose notes since they provide more than one category of information. The notes in the two translations can be classified into four types: explanatory-notes, background-notes, translator's view-notes, and reference-notes.

Gu scattered 119 notes in 56 sections of the 20 chapters in *Lunyu*, among which there are 33 cut-in notes and 86 footnotes. Explanatory-notes serve to explain difficult terms and expressions and avoid confusing target readers. For example, in Chapter 1, section 12, the book mentioned for the first time an extremely important concept in ancient Chinese philosophy, "*Li* 礼". Gu translated it as "art". But A & R translated it as "propriety", which seemed kind of shallow. In order to explain why he translated this important expression in this way, Gu added a long footnote:

Dr. Legge says of the Chinese word 礼, which we have here translated "art," that it is a word not easily rendered in another language. On the other hand, Mr. B. H. Chamberlain in his book *Things Japanese*, remarks that Japanese language (China and Japan have the same written language) has no genuine native word for "art."

The English word "art," if we mistake not, is used in various senses to express: 1st, a work of art; 2nd, the practice of art; 3rd, artificial as opposed to natural; 4th, the principle of an as opposed to the principle of nature; 5th, the strict principle of art, in this last sense of the use of the English word "art" lies, as Dr. Legge says of the Chinese word mentioned above, "the ides of what is proper" and fit in all relations of things.

For those who may be interested in the subject, we may here mention that the modern Japanese invention, bijutsu 美术 (beautiful legerdemain) for "art" is not a happy one. The proper term in Chinese for a work of art would be 文物; for the practice of art, 艺. In fact, the Japanese word Geisha 艺师 means literally an artiste. As for the use of the term "art" in the sense of "artificial" as opposed to something "natural," the philosopher Chuang Tz uses 人 (human) and 天 (divine).

This footnote elaborates the meaning of "art" in the Chinese context and provides insight into the

real meaning of this expression. It means the way people interact with each other based on their specific characteristics after they are classified. In comparison, the original expression contains one Chinese character, while in A & R's version also one word, "propriety", with no footnote. The text-close thick translation of this expression reveals the field of the context of situation.

Background footnotes also assist to achieve thick contextualization in Gu's version. They supply background information related to the topic in discussion in order to increase target readers' insight into the topic. Following is an example from Chapter 5:

Source text:

子曰：“伯夷、叔齐不念旧恶，怨是用希。”

Gu's translation: Confucius, remarking of two ancient worthies, famous for the purity and saintliness of their lives and character, said, "They forgave old wrongs, therefore they had little to complain of the world."

Footnote: The names of these two men are Po-Yi and Shuh-Ts'i, who are two sons of a prince of a small principality. They both gave up their heirship to the throne to a younger brother and retired from the world. When the old Imperial dynasty was changed, they refused to eat the grain of the new dynasty, and finally starved themselves the death at the foot of a lonely mountain.

The footnote here retold the story of the two men mentioned, so as to make target readers more clearly understand the nobility and purity of their spirit for a better grasp of this section.

Footnotes in Gu's version were also used to share his views. This type of footnotes manifests the translator's thoughts about the original and his translation. By expressing his own views, the translator guides his readers into other times, other cultures, and other contexts. Following is an example from Chapter 16 of Gu's version.

Source text:

孔子曰：“君子有三畏：畏天命，畏大人，畏圣人之言。小人不知天命而不畏也，狎大人，侮圣人之言。”

Gu's translation: Confucius remarked, "There are three things which a wise and good man holds in awe. He holds in awe the Laws of God, persons in authority, and the words of wisdom of holy men. A fool, on the other hand, does not know that there are Lawas of God; he, therefore, has no reverence for them: he is disrespectful to persons in authority, and comtemns the words of wisdom of holy men."

Footnote: Literally, "Commandments of God." In other places we have translated these words as Religion; for that not the laws of Moses, Lycurgus, Christ or Confucius, which are merely interpretations of the Laws of God, is, we believe, what two and two make four; that ginger is hot for the mouth; the laws that guide the courses of sun, moon ans stars, to, finally, the highest Law of Right and Wrong in the heart of man.

Confucius expanded on the junzi's behavior in this section, paying particular attention to how to explain the Laws of God. Similar portrayals of God exist in Western culture, and the majority of the target readers are familiar with them. In order to draw in readers with this footnote, Lin explained his perspective on the Laws of God and compared it to a recognizable idea in a Western context. This footnote further demonstrates Gu's thorough familiarity with both Chinese and English culture.

In addition, Gu employed a number of footnotes to provide reference information which leads target readers to contextual material. In Gu's version, all footnotes of this type refer to other chapters within *Lunyu*. For example, in Chapter 8, there is a line: “禹，吾无间然矣。” Gu translated it as: “I have not been able to find a flaw in the character of the ancient Emperor, the Great Yu.” He attached to this line a footnote: “See note Section 18 of this Chapter.” In this part, Confucius outlined his ideas regarding the Great Yu, an ancient emperor, and provided evidence to back them up. Confucius also discussed the Great Yu's moral standing in Section 18 of the same

chapter, describing him as noble and unsurpassable. This demonstrates Confucius's standard for the monarch's merit. When a target reader reaches this line, the footnote leads him to Section 18 of the same chapter, which helps him better grasp Confucius's ideas on the necessary quality of a good emperor.

Ames and Rosemont used 181.5% more notes than Gu in their translation. In A & R's version, there are 335 notes in total which are all endnotes serving 20 chapters. Similar to Gu's version, the explanatory notes take the majority. Among 182 explanatory endnotes in A & R's version, Ames and Rosemont used some endnotes to provide explanatory information only and others for multiple purposes to provide explanatory, background, and/or reference information in the same note. The following example, from Chapter 2, shows a multiple purpose endnote with explanatory information and reference information. The original line is:

“为政以德，譬如北辰，居其所而众星共之。”

Ames and Rosemont translated it as: “Governing with excellence can be compared to being the North Star: the North Star dwells in its place, and the multitude of stars pay it tribute.” An endnote was attached to this line: “20. The Dingzhou text has “proper (正)” for “governing (zheng 政).” The use of this cognate character in the extended and specific sense of “governing properly” is familiar in the classical texts. See 12. 17.” This endnote provides explanation to the term “政” and at the same time references to other version of the original and a related chapter. The reference in this endnote is to Dingzhou (GD) text, the earliest example of *Lunyu* ever discovered, which makes target readers realize that different characters with the same meaning are used in the same line of different original versions. This endnote improves the target readers' understanding of this line and is conducive to further research.

Following is an example from Chapter 10 which shows a multiple purpose explanatory-note with background and explanatory information.

Source text:

緇衣，羔裘；素衣，麀裘；黄衣，狐裘。

Target text: With black upper garments, they wear lambskin; with undyed silk upper garments, fawn fur; with yellow-brown upper garments, fox fur.

Endnote: 145. In ancient times, the fur faced outward, with the skin on the inside. The yi 衣 is an upper garment that contrasts with and is independent of an apron or skirt worn below.

In this section of Chapter 10, Confucius explained how a junzi should adorn himself. Confucius emphasized the way junzi's winter clothing matched here. He held that a junzi should wear a black smock in winter to go with a black lambskin coat, a white cover-up with a white coat, and a yellow smock with a yellow coat. Ames and Rosemont added an endnote to "yi 衣" because the structure of fur coats in ancient China differed from that in the West and the reader might not completely appreciate this part without knowing this knowledge. The first sentence of this endnote gives background information on the design of fur coats in ancient China, assisting readers in comprehending why coats made of various animal skins have various hues, establishing their own suitable color combinations. The second phrase goes into greater detail on Chinese attire during the time and explains the term "yi 衣."

A & R's version includes fewer background endnotes. Since the translators employed a large number of explanatory endnotes for multiple purposes, most background information was provided in explanatory endnotes.

Endnotes on translator's view in A & R's version are in a totally different order from Lin's version and have similar functions. Following is an example from Chapter 2. The original is:

“子曰：攻乎异端，斯害也已。”

It was translated as: “The Master said: “To become accomplished in some heterodox doctrine will bring nothing but harm.” and an endnote was attached:

Here we follow the Dingzhou text which has “to be accomplished in, to specialize in (gong 功)” rather than “to attack (gong 攻)” as found in the received editions. Because the character *gong* “to attack” appears three other times in the Analects and in each case means “to attack,” Yang Bojun, ignoring the fact that *gong* here is followed by the prepositional particle “in *hu* (乎),” rejects the commentaries that would read this as “to pursue study in.” He reads this passage as “If one attacks heterodox doctrines, it will put an end to their harm.” The Dingzhou text seems to resolve this debate.

In this example the translators used an alternative mode of context based on Dingzhou text. In this endnote, the translators expressed their thoughts on the reason of using Dingzhou text and displayed their decision-making process in the translation with reference to Yang Bojun’s research.

A & R’s version uses more reference-notes than Gu’s version. The endnotes in A & H’s version on reference information mostly refer to the original texts of Dingzhou and other chapters with similar meaning within *Lunyu*. Ames and Rosement also made reference to *Mencius*, another important Confucianism classic. Endnotes of this kind direct the target readers to study the primary sources, evaluate various writings, and investigate Confucianism philosophy.

Following is a comparison between Gu’s version and A & R’s version regarding the use of notes. Both versions use a large number of notes to achieve thick contextualization. Among the three categories of notes, both versions widely employ explanatory notes. However, there are obvious differences between the two versions in the use of notes. Firstly, the notes in Gu’s version are either cut-in notes or footnotes, while in A & R’s version all are endnotes. Secondly, explanatory-notes in A & R’s version not only give explanations as Gus version, but also serve multiple purposes, such as providing reference information and/or background information in a single note. Thirdly, A & R’s version uses reference notes much more than Lin’s version. It should be noted that A & R’s version was published 100 (1898 - 1998) years later than Gu’s version. This whole century has witnessed fruitful academic achievements in the studies of *Lunyu* and its translations. The literature which Ames and Hall referenced most, such as Dingzhou text, did not exist in Gu’s era. In other words, literature Ames and Rosemont referenced shows that translators had advantage of the time they lived in. In summary, the translators of the two versions implemented a variety of strategies in adding notes to construct thick contexts.

2.2. Commentaries

Commentaries in translations of classical literature are beneficial to target readers’ understanding. There are numerous subsections in each chapter of *Lunyu*, some of which are clear in their meaning and some of which are not. Gu provided commentaries while translating these cryptic passages, drawing on his understanding of both Chinese and Western culture to provide a more detailed explanation that would assist readers grasp the text’s underlying meaning. Gu’s version provides 83 sections of 19 chapters with commentaries. A & R’s version has no commentaries, but its extremely detailed notes are also of great help to the target readers in understanding the text. Gu also contributed a lot of debate about the state of the nation and current politics to his commentaries, unlike other translators, and occasionally compared Chinese and Western philosophical stances based on his own knowledge and experience. Because of the unsettling international scenario China was in at the time, it is important to note that all of Gu’s commentaries are in Chinese and not English. This suggests that the primary goal of these commentaries might be to inform and educate

Chinese readers.

Commentaries made by Gu show his comprehension of *Lunyu* and serve as a link between his translations of *Lunyu* and his extensive knowledge of history and culture. Following is a commentary from Section 1, Chapter 1:

子曰：“学而时习之。”朱子注谓：“学之为言效也。”余窃谓，学之义甚广，不当作“效”字解，使之后为学者只求其当然，而不求其所以然，所谓依样画葫芦者也。犹忆中国乾嘉间，初弛海禁，有一西人身服之衣敝，当时又无西人为衣匠者。衣已，招华成衣至，问：“汝能制西式衣否？”成衣曰：“有样式即可以代办。”西人检旧衣付之，成衣领去。越数日，将新制衣送来，西人展视，剪制一切均无差，惟衣背后剪去一块，复又补缀一块。西人骇然问故，成衣答曰：“我是照你的样式做耳。”今中国锐意图新，事事效法西人，不求其所以然，而但行其所以然，与此西人所剪之成衣又何以异之，噫！

Following is the English translation of Gu's Chinese commentaries above:

Confucius remarked, “It is indeed a pleasure to acquire knowledge and, as you go on acquiring, to put into practice what you have acquired.” Zhu Xi made commentaries here, “To acquire knowledge is to imitate.” However, I personally believe that the meaning of “learning” is very broad, and it should not be narrowly interpreted as “imitating”, otherwise it will only let the later scholars know how and why, which is the so-called “copying mechanically”. I still remember that during the reign of Emperor Qianlong and Emperor Jiaqing of the Qing Dynasty, when the sea embargo was just lifted, a European came to China. His suit was very shabby, but there were no European tailors. So he went to a Chinese tailor and asked him, “Can you make a suit?” The Chinese tailor replied, “As long as there is a pattern, I can copy it.” So the European gave his old suit to the Chinese tailor, who took it and left. A few days later, the Chinese tailor sent a freshly made suit. When the European observed his new suit, he found no difference in size, style, etc., except that a small part had been cut off the back of the new suit and then a patch had been added. The European was very surprised and asked the Chinese tailor why he did this. The Chinese tailor replied, “I made it exactly according to the pattern you gave me.” Now China is innovating and doing everything like the Westerners without asking why they are doing it. They just do it. How is this any different from the joke about the Chinese tailor making a suit out of a torn suit and then patching it? Alas!

Gu had provided a detailed analysis of the meaning of "learning" in this commentary using an excerpt from this section together with his own thoughts and knowledge. More crucially, Gu combined his own experience and used this passage to criticize and rectify China's then-current growth strategy, which was to invent but slavishly copy, demonstrating his patriotism and the national development crisis consciousness of the moment. This commentary places Section 1, Chapter 1 in a larger context, assisting the target readers in understanding the main ideas of this chapter and Gu's initial goals in translating *Lunyu*.

3. Conclusions

This paper presents a comparative study of two selected English versions of *Lunyu* with emphasis on text-close thick translation. Two means of text-close thick translation are explored in this comparison, namely, notes and commentaries. Gu employed both means of text-close thick translations, while Ames and Rosemont used only one means: notes, in order to support achieving thick contextualization. Notes are heavily relied on in both Gu's and A & R's versions; however, the latter used more notes than the former. Among the four categories of notes, both versions put

the most effort in explanatory-notes and secondly on reference-notes, which are needed due to the pithy style of the original. The literature that Ames and Rosemont referenced shows that translators had advantage of the time they lived in, since A & R's version was published 100 years later than Lin's version. This shows that reference information may vary significantly when there is a big time difference between the translations. While A & R's version contains no translators' view, commentaries are extremely important in Gu's versions in supplying related information. However, Gu used commentaries to express his own comprehension of the original text, explained the thoughts of *Lunyu*, and transferred knowledge of Chinese culture and philosophical thoughts to target readers, rather than simply providing information. This study demonstrates that translators can build thick contexts by adopting different means of text-close thick translations and thereby 'produce a target text that matters to target society the way the source text matters to the source society'^[5].

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