

An Analysis of the English Translation of My Cultural Mountains and Rivers from the Perspective of Appraisal Theory

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Abstract: This article draws on the Appraisal theory to investigate the appraisal resources in the English translation of the essay *My Cultural Mountains and Rivers* (Wo De Wen Hua Shan He) authored by Yu Qiuyu. It focuses on the translator's insertion, conversion and deletion of certain Appraisal resources from the original work. The study finds that evaluative prosody of the text plays a significant role in influencing the translator's choices in relation to evaluative expressions. The analysis of the translation also reveals that the translator tends to make explicit in his work the author's invoked or implicit attitudes. However, relative inadequacy is observed in the translator's handling of the metaphorical expressions imbued with the author's emotions. Overall, this paper uncovers the translator's active engagement in the interpretation of the author's axiology and personal stance, while reflecting his own construal of values in the translated version. It provides researchers with an analytical model or perspective to better understand and appreciate the evaluative expressions in the translation process.

1. Introduction

Yu Qiuyu has emerged as a prominent figure in contemporary essay writing, distinguished by his unique style. Scholars (Wang, 2000) have summarized three essential elements or underlying structures in his essays: insightful humanism, historical and cultural connotations, and the fusion of individuals, nature, and history. One remarkable feature of his essays is the reflection on culture, expressing his own cultural stance and sentiments within the works. <Wo De Wen Hua Shan He> (*My Cultural Mountains and Rivers*) serves as the opening piece of Yu Qiuyu's essay collection <Shan He Zhi Shu> (*The Book of Mountains and Rivers*), which was originally titled <Shan Ju Bi Ji> (*Mountain Dwelling Notes*). This work is considered the core entry of the entire collection, representing the author's macro-level contemplation of mountain and river culture, inherently containing his rich personal values.

The English translation of this essay is done by contemporary literature translator and writer, Jeremy Tiang, from Singapore. This paper believes that this essay chapter is appropriate for analysis from the perspective of Appraisal Theory within Systemic Functional Linguistics because of its rich meanings regarding the author's personal attitudes and values. Hence, this paper uses Appraisal Theory to explore the representation of evaluative meanings in the original text and how they are

manifested in the translated version. Particular attention will be given to the differences in appraisal resource selection in the three subsystems of the Appraisal system between the translated and original texts, how the translator handles critical points, and how he interprets the author's value stance and incorporate his own subjectivity.

2. Appraisal Theory and Translation Studies

The framework of Appraisal Theory was initially proposed by Martin and White (2005). This theoretical framework is an extension of the interpersonal function in Systemic Functional Linguistics, exploring how evaluative language is used by language users to convey interpersonal meanings, including intersubjectivity and personal stance. The Appraisal system primarily consists of three subsystems: Attitude, Engagement, and Graduation. Each of these subsystems further contains their respective sub-systems.^[1]

Attitude is at the core of Appraisal and is divided into Affect, Judgment, and Appreciation, focusing on emotional reactions, judgements of behaviour, and evaluation of things, respectively. Attitude can be explicitly expressed through attitudinal lexis, known as "attitudinal inscription," or it can be indirectly invoked through other means, such as evaluative prosody or certain ideational lexical items, known as "attitudinal tokens" or "invoked attitudes".

Engagement focuses on the sources of attitude and the ways some linguistic resources position the language user with respect to the value position being advanced in the play of voices around opinions in discourse. It is divided into monogloss and heterogloss. Monogloss involves assertive or taken-for-granted discourse, providing only one standpoint or voice without acknowledging or being aware of other perspectives. Heterogloss, on the other hand, indicates that the speaker acknowledges or is aware of other voices or stances, and it can be categorized into contraction and expansion, allowing speakers to regulate their responsibility towards the meaning they express.

Graduation deals with the gradability of attitudinal meanings. It includes force and focus, where force covers assessments as to degree of intensity and as to amount, while focus represents the prototypicality of attitude.

In translation studies, Munday explored the connection between Appraisal Theory and translation in his book *Evaluation in Translation: Critical Points of Translator Decision-making* (2011). One significant point made in this book is that evaluation is crucial in both communication and translation. Personal evaluative language can act as a bridge in terms of ideology and values, representing and constituting views of the external and internal worlds, as well as the author's identity.^[2] The application of Appraisal Theory in translation studies primarily starts from a micro-level language analysis, with the theory providing a linguistic model that can reveal how translators unconsciously or subconsciously embed or alter values in the text. It is important to note that this does not imply imposing linguistic theory and terminology on the translation context. Linguistic theories simply offer a perspective or analytical framework for studying translation, aiding the examination of translators' strategies in dealing with critical points. Considering the stylistic features of the selected essay (abundant in the author's personal attitudes and evaluative meanings), this paper chooses Appraisal Theory as the analytical tool to explore the translator's approach to Appraisal resources in the original text and to conduct an analysis and appreciation accordingly in the translation.^[3]

3. Translation Analysis

The main focus of this analysis is on the critical points present in both the original and translated texts. Critical points refer to areas in the text that are sensitive and prominent in terms of culture, ideology, and values, as well as the translator's handling of these points. They also include more

subtle and potentially less conscious choices, involving the recognition and reproduction of invoked attitude that may be culturally located (Munday, 2011:41). Additionally, critical points involve comparing the original and translated texts to identify the translator's interventions and subjective manipulations, which may reflect the translator's personal values and potentially impact the text's reception.^[4]

3.1. Insertion of Appraisal Resources

The insertion of Appraisal resources refers to observed evaluative additions in the target text based on the original text. For instance, the translation's opening contains a clear instance of Appreciation insertion:

(1)TT: Every Individual Will, sooner or later, experience this most extreme fear. Not old age and death, nor plague and pestilence, nor burglary and theft, but rather, a beguilingly sunny afternoon, in which a pretty teacher stands before her "General Knowledge" class.^[5]

The usage of "beguilingly" in the translation demonstrates the translator's intervention, which is not arbitrary but justified. This conscious or unconscious lexical choice by the translator represents his interpretation and perception of the source text, and thus holds significance. In this specific instance, the legitimacy of this supplementation lies in the impact of evaluative prosody within its context. The evaluative prosody of the entire discourse or its segments may influence the interpretation of seemingly neutral terms^[6], leading the translator to make explicit the underlying evaluative meanings. In this example, we can see that the evaluative prosody set by phrases like "Ji Da De Kong Ju (most extreme fear)," "Sheng Lao Bing SI (old age and death)," "Wen Yi Chang Jue(plague and pestilence)," and "Dao Fei(burglary)" influence the translator's interpretation of the seemingly incongruous positive evaluation term "Yang Guang Ming Mei(bright and sunny)," leading the translator to embed the word "beguilingly" that implies that the sunny afternoon is illusional. This choice reflects the translator's judgment of the author's stance and his own values.^[7]

There are other similar instances of Appraisal resources insertion in the translation:

(2)TT: For China, given how closed-off it was to the world, it made sense to knuckle down and focus on agriculture, becoming self-sufficient, with neither need nor possibility of pillaging territories farther away.

(3)TT: More recently, Zhuge Liang's most famous act was to "borrow the East wind," gaining victory in the Battle of the Red Cliffs through correctly predicting barometric changes.

In (2), "made sense" reflects the translator's positive evaluation of the point "Zhong Guo Mai Tou Gong Zuo, Zi Ji Zi Zu" (China knuckle down and focus on agriculture, becoming self-sufficient). Similarly, in (3), the word "correctly" is also an instance of positive Appreciation, constituting a crucial addition to the translation. These inserted evaluations all demonstrate the translator's interpretation of the author's stance and his own values.

As previously introduced, Appraisal resources encompass not only Attitude resources but also Engagement and Graduation ones, which are also distributed in the original text, and the translation is mostly consistent with the original. However, in some instances, the translation also exhibits insertions of these two aspects, for example:

(4)TT: With so many "islands of meaning", each proclaiming its own supreme importance, we have to ask whether they truly are as significant as they claim.

(5)TT: In ancient times, such an ocean was impossible to navigate, such mountains were impassable, such deserts were extremely difficult to traverse. This resulted in a sort of mechanism for isolation.

In (4), the inserted "as they claim" is an Engagement resource, acting to signal explicitly the speaker's stance as separate from the cited, external one. This conscious or unconscious choice

highlights the author's detachment from the claim that those "islands of meaning" are significant. The inserted Graduation resource in (5) is a result of the evaluative prosody in the preceding two sentences, where the Negation resources "Wu Fa" (impossible) and "Mei Ren" (nobody) influence the non-direct Negation evaluation resource in "Nan Yu" (difficult), causing it to enhance its Force through adding the word "extremely". In this way, "extremely difficult" becomes equivalent to "impossible" in terms of the effect of expression. Additionally, the use of the softening Graduation resource "a sort of" is an interpretation of the quotation marks around "Ge Jue Ji Zhi" (mechanism for isolation) in the source text.^[8]

3.2. Conversion and Deletion of Appraisal Resources

In addition to adding Appraisal resources to certain meanings of the original text, the translation also involves some changes and omissions of Appraisal resources from the original text. Here is an example:

(6)TT: Then they mock China for having no accomplishments in this regard, and the many defeats we suffered from naval invaders right up to the nineteenth century.

In (6), the original term "Mo Ran" (indifferent) falls under Affect within the Attitude categories, while the translation "having no accomplishments" represents a Judgment resource of capacity, expressing a value judgment of the ability of China to achieve something in this context. Shifting from an emotional description to a judgment of capacity, the latter has a stronger impact on the interpersonal relationship between China, the author, and the readers. The translator's handling of this transformation is flexible and reasonable, as the author explains the concept of so-called "Wu Wei" (doing nothing) and even defends for China later in the text, further maintaining the interpersonal relationship. The translator's approach allows readers to have a better understanding of the author's meaning.^[9]

Likewise, the shifting from Appreciation to Affect can also be observed in the following example:

(7)TT: And with that, mind and body relax, and I feel free and joyous. The commotion around me turns into an empty performance, which I'm happy to watch for a time before resuming my journey.

In this case, "Bu Cuo" (not bad) is an Appreciation resource, expressing the author's reaction to something (meaning something attracts "me"). On the other hand, "I'm happy to" is clearly an Affect resource, emphasizing the speaker's personal emotions. The boundary between the two types is not absolute, but Affective expressions can exhibit the emotions originating from the conscious participant more directly.

In addition to the transformation between different types of Attitude resources, there can also be transformations within the same type. For example:

(8)TT: Yes, China has many, many flaws, but if we look at the vision articulated at the start of this essay, looking at the planet from afar, you'd see the absurdity of people swarming across a small ball of earth like bugs, attempting to cross bodies of water in order to attack and dominate others of their species.

In this example, "Wu Liao" (tedious) and "absurdity" both represent judgments about people and their actions. However, "Wu Liao" implies an evaluation related to capacity which belongs to the social esteem category in Judgment system, suggesting that such behaviour (compared to the development of human civilization, for example) is incapable. On the other hand, "absurdity" falls under the impropriety category of social sanction, indicating that such behaviour is morally improper. This value transformation reflects the translator's stance and values.

Regarding the omission of evaluative resources, there is one sensitive point in the original text

that is not present in the translation:

(9)TT: Hundreds of thousands of souls were destroyed in an instant, shocking the nation awake from the stupor it had fallen into.

The term “Ji Zuo” (extreme left) belongs to a sensitive category and is rarely used in this selected text. The omission by the translator is likely due to a grasp of the author’s overall value stance (i.e., the author’s opposition to the idea of “man-made political disasters”). From this perspective, avoiding a few sensitive words does not affect the text’s acceptability.

Regarding the conversion of Graduation resources, there are several instances in the translation:

(10)TT: Further to this, mankind might be powerless in the face of the forces of nature.

(11)TT: On this subject, I’ve published an essay saying that the Wenchuan earthquake proves that the Chinese people are quite possibly the best tribe in the history of mankind.

The term “Que Shi” (indeed) in the original text is a sharpening Focus (to up-scale the specification) of the evaluation “Wei Bu Zu Dao” (insignificant). On the other hand, the translation “might be” is a softening Focus (to down-scale the specification) of “powerless.” In (12), “Bi Jiao Xiang Yang De” (comparatively decent) belongs to the softening Focus category, while “the best” locates at the highest degree of intensity. Looking at the adjustments in these two Gradation resources, it can be observed that the translator diminishes the negative value of “Wei Bu Zu Dao” and enhances the positive value (i.e., “good” upscaled to “best”). However, to determine if the translator tends to enhance all positive values and diminish all negative values, more data is needed to comprehensively grasp this point.

3.3. Appraisal Resources Adjusted by Evaluative Prosody

In the previous sections, we have discussed the influence of evaluative prosody on the selection of evaluative resources in the translation, and one very prominent instance of evaluative prosody is found in the following passage:

(12)TT: Now and then, a truthful vision will awaken us again, for instance those of Laozi, Zhuangzi, Siddhartha, Einstein, Stephen Hawking...

Their call to consciousness often leaves us in a cold sweat. Looking back at the world, at humanity busily asserting all manner of “meanings,” spying on and destroying each other, the blood and flames of battle, pages flooded with ink, dispute after dispute. Only after the clarion call do people realize that the “meanings” they’ve been wallowing in are all suppositions, and so quieten down somewhat.

As a result, human civilization can be divided into two layers: the layer of falsehoods, and the layer of truth. The former occupies about nine-tenths of the space, and by turns represents itself as sacred, or majestic, or mighty, or successful, or deep, or rebellious, each with its hordes of passionate followers; the other category comprises the crystallized philosophies that remain after falsity has been left behind, and although few in number, they can look impassively upon all that is sacred, majestic, mighty, successful, deep or rebellious.

In (12), the author’s stance is quite clear - he supports and advocates for “Zheng Shi(truth)” while opposing and criticizing “Jia She(suppositions)”. This interplay of positive and negative values influences a larger context. It is also worth noting that the original text uses “Jia She” (supposition) throughout (12). However, in the translation, the direct equivalent neutral terms such as “assumption” or “hypothesis” are not used. Instead, the translation first uses “asserting” to describe the act of making suppositions and follows it with “superstitions” and “falsehoods” to refer to suppositions. These terms are all non-neutral and carry negative connotations. Additionally, the use of the phrase “hordes of passionate followers” for “Cong Zhe Ru Yun, Lie Lie Yang Yang” (having a large following) also makes explicit the negative evaluative meaning. These choices are

based on the evaluative prosody of the original text, and the translator chose to render it explicit.

3.4. Handling Metaphorical Expressions

In the previous sections, the concept of “invoked attitude” has been mentioned multiple times. Apart from explicit evaluative elements in the original text or evaluative prosody influencing specific segments, metaphorical expressions also serve as significant resources for triggering evaluations, capable of provoking an attitudinal response in readers, as seen in the following example:

(13)TT: ... but most of China was no longer paying attention to them, instead focusing on a remedial existential lesson about the baseline of life.

In this instance, “Tian Di Zhi Ke” (lesson of heaven and earth) is a metaphor, and the translation makes it explicit, eliciting the attitudinal response that this “Tian Di Zhi Ke” is a lesson about human existence and carries a remedial value.

However, it is worth noting that many metaphors in the original text contain the author’s personal emotions and can trigger emotional responses from readers. In the translation, these metaphors are retained, but the hidden emotional attitudes are not explicitly conveyed. Due to different cultural experiences, whether these retained metaphors can trigger emotional responses from the target language readers is unknown. For example:

(14)TT: All my investigations followed a baseline existence that wasn’t secure, and so felt like venturing into a deep cavern or onto thin ice from beginning to end.

(15)TT: I sought a path across mountains and rivers, plastering my brief life across a rugged corner of this planet.

From the above examples, it can be observed that the translation attempts to reproduce the metaphorical expressions from the original text. However, in the sentence structure and word choices, it feels more like a literal translation, especially in (15). This expression may not fully replicate the emotional impact of the original text. Further interpreting the hidden emotions in the original text and adopting a way to render these hidden emotions explicitly might achieve a better expressive effect.

4. Conclusion

This paper has analysed the translation of the essay *My Cultural Mountains and Rivers* from the perspective of Appraisal Theory. Overall, the translation’s value interpretation aligns with the original text in most parts, but there are also instances where the translator’s intervention is highlighted. Therefore, this study focuses on the insertion, conversion, and deletion of Appraisal resources by the translator and attempts to explain the underlying factors influencing these choices.

The research findings indicate that evaluative prosody at the discourse level plays a significant role. The translator’s understanding of the author’s value stance and the evaluative prosody built upon it allows him to reasonably manage Appraisal resources. Moreover, the study finds that in most cases, the translator makes implicit attitudes in the source text explicit in the translation. However, there are certain shortcomings in dealing with emotional aspects of metaphoric expressions in the source text.^[10]

In conclusion, this paper has employed a linguistic theoretical perspective to analyse and appreciate the essay and its English translation, which contains the author’s personal attitudes and values. It reveals that the translator actively interprets the author’s stance while incorporating his own value in the process of understanding the original text. By analysing the Appraisal resources in the translation, this paper provides researchers with an analytical model and perspective to better understand and appreciate evaluative expressions in translation.

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