Research on Compensation Strategies in the Yangs’ *Chang Sheng Dian*
From the Relevance Theory

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**Keywords:** Relevance theory; Cultural Default; Compensation Strategy.

**Abstract**. As for cross-cultural drama translation, the cultural and linguistic differences influence the success or failure of drama translation, especially cultural default phenomenon. The writer discusses cultural default phenomenon under the framework of relevance theory, as well as the compensation strategy in drama translation. Although Chang Sheng Dian has many English versions, the Yangs is undoubtedly the most successful. Thus the writer carried out a case study of cultural default and compensation strategies citing and analyzing examples from the Yangs’ Chang Sheng Dian, furthermore to help the target readers better understand Chinese culture and drama translation.

**Introduction**

As an important part of literary translation, the study of drama translation has not received so extensive attention as the study of fiction or poetry translation. Drama is also an indispensable medium for cultural communication, and the cultural elements undoubtedly play an essential role in the understanding and appreciation of drama. This paper analyzes the cultural default phenomenon and the compensation strategies of translation in the Yangs’ *Chang Sheng Dian* from the relevance theory.

**Compensation Strategies in the Yangs’ *Chang Sheng Dian***

The writer describes the difficulty of drama translation, and introduces the Yangs’ translation difficulty and compensation strategies in the English version of *Chang Sheng Dian*.

**Difficulty in Translating**

*Chang Sheng Dian* is one of the classics of ancient Chinese opera written by Hong Sheng in 1688 reflecting profound Chinese culture such as Chinese philosophies (including Confucianism, Buddhism and Taoism), legends, customs and allusions, etc. It is obvious that Hong Sheng’s target readers are not those speaking English, but Chinese. Because of the clear and elegant characteristics of ancient Chinese opera, Hong Sheng omitted some cultural elements shared by his target Chinese readers but not in the English readers’ cognitive environment, to which the English readers will feel difficult to fill the omitted information gap.

Therefore, *Chang Sheng Dian* has a lot of cultural connotations which are difficult for foreigners to understand. Before the Yangs undertaking the translation, in the face of such a grand epic drama “culture”, they must have thought about a problem firstly—Chinese culture. In order to avoid the cultural impact and retain the original novel, whether the Yangs should abandon the examination of foreigners understanding difficulty on the traditional Chinese drama culture.

**Foreignization and Domestication**

In recent years, no matter how the translation strategies in literary works are applied, foreignization and domestication are still applicable to compensation strategies. Thus, foreignization and domestication are the main compensation strategies used by the Yangs’ in their translation of *Chang Sheng Dian*. Lawrence Venuti coined terms “Domesticating translation” and
“Foreignizing translation” to describe these two translation strategies. Lawrence Venuti regards domestication as “an ethnocentric reduction of the foreign text to target-language cultural values, bring the author back at home,” while foreignization “an ethnodeviant pressure on those (cultural) values to register the linguistic and cultural difference of the foreign text, sending readers abroad” (Venuti 20). The definitions of these two terms in Dictionary of Translation are:

Domestication is “a term used by Venuti to describe the translation strategy in which a transparent, fluent style is adopted in order to minimize the strangeness of the foreign text for TL readers.” And foreignization is “a term used by Venuti to designate the type of translation in which a Target Text is produced which deliberately breaks target conventions by retaining something of the foreignness of the original (Shuttleworth & Cowie 43).

Thus, domestication and foreignization are generally treated as translation strategies. The next part will analyze the Yangs’ Chang Sheng Dian with some dates.

Translating Methods adopted in the Yangs’ Chang Sheng Dian

In order to clearly know compensation methods for cultural default in the Yangs’ Chang Sheng Dian, the methods can be divided into different grades to represent degrees of foreignization and domestication. As following:

- Grade 1: literal translation
- Grade 2: annotation
- Grade 3: amplification
- Grade 4: paraphrase
- Grade 5: substitution
- Grade 6: deletion

The six grades are divided into 2 groups: Grade 1 to 3 are foreignization with smaller number showing higher degree while grade 4 to 6 are domestication with larger number representing higher degree.

Table 1. Frequencies and relative frequencies of every grade.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Grade</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Relative Frequency</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Grade 1</td>
<td>13 (0.149)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grade 2</td>
<td>15 (0.172)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grade 3</td>
<td>9 (0.103)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grade 4</td>
<td>39 (0.448)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grade 5</td>
<td>6 (0.069)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grade 6</td>
<td>5 (0.056)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Summation</td>
<td>87 (1.000)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

As shown in Table 1, each grade has got the frequency in the Yangs’ Chang Sheng Dian. In the Yangs’ version, the foreignization group (grade 1 to 3) is 37 times, occupying 42.5%; the domestication group (grade 4 to 6) is 50 times, making up 57.5%. In addition, the most frequently adopted compensation methods are grade 4 and grade 2 in Yangs’ Chang Sheng Dian. So annotation and paraphrase are main the Yangs’ compensation methods in Chang Sheng Dian.

Example one:

笑他每似堂间处燕，有谁曾屋上瞻鸟!(第十出 96)
The men of today are thoughtless as the swallows
That nest beneath the eaves,
Not knowing that crows have swarmed upon the roof; (the Yangs 97)

Expressions underlined in this example lead to cultural default. The metaphorical phrase “堂间处燕” refers to those who are not aware of their imminent danger. The Yangs translate it into “thoughtless as the swallows” and “that nest beneath the eaves”. The Yangs’s add the amplified part “thoughtless as” before “the swallows” to convey the implied meaning to make Chinese cultural schema can be understand by English Readers. The Yangs’ adopt literal translation to make sure
English readers understand the original meaning.

Example two:

俺非是爱酒的闲陶令，也不学使酒的莽灌夫，一谜价痛饮兴豪粗。
撑着这醒眼儿谁偢睬?问醉乡深可容得吾?听街市恁喳呼，偏冷落高阳酒徒。(第十出 100)

I am no wine-loving poet,
No rough, hard-drinking soldiers;
When I drink I look soberly round,
Feeling this country of drunkards no place for me;
There is too much noise and bustle in the streets,
But I stay here alone. (The Yangs 101)

In this example, “爱酒的闲陶令”, “使酒的莽灌夫” and “高阳酒徒” are all famous person in Chinese history. But these famous figures are strange to English readers who does not know Chinese culture. Therefore, here, the Yangs paraphrase them as “wine-loving poet”, “hard-drinking soldiers” and “I” respectively. English readers can catch the main meaning expressed in the sentence.

Example three:

向天街徐步,暂遣牢骚,聊宽逆旅。俺则见来往纷如,闹昏昏似醉汉难扶,那里有独醒行吟楚大夫!俺郭子仪呵,待觅个同心伴侣,怅钓鱼人去,射虎人遥,屠狗人无。(第十出 98)

As I stroll in the street to master my depression,
A stranger here, I watch the jostling crowds;
They are all like drunkards; where is Qu Yuan*1 the poet
Who alone stayed sober to sing in a land of drunkards?
I long to find a companion after my heart,
But the men I could admire are dead and gone:
The leader who was a fisherman*2,
The general who shot the tiger*3,
And the warrior who worked first as a butcher*4. (The Yangs 99)

*1 A great patriot and poet (340-278 B.C.), who was slandered and sent into exile and finally drowned himself.

*2 Jiang Shang, a legendary figure of the eleventh century B.C. Before he assumed command, he was a fisherman living in seclusion.

*3 Li Guang, a famous general during the reign of Emperor Wu (140-87 B.C.) of the Han Dynasty.

*4 Fan Kuai, a famous general during the reign of the first emperor of the Han Dynasty (206-195 B.C.). He was a butcher before he rose to fame.

In the above example, “楚大夫” refers to a Chinese poet, Qu Yuan who is one of the most famous patriotic poet in ancient China. “钓鱼人” refer to Jiang Taigong or Lv Shang who fished without any bait. But Jiang Taigong is also a very great strategist in ancient China. In order to compensate for these culture defaults, the Yangs adopt annotation to deal the default problems, i.e. the Yangs directly explain who is “楚大夫” The Yangs paraphrase “屠狗人” as “the warrior who worked first as a butcher”, and then explain “butcher” in endnote. It is a good method to English reader. If the Yangs translate “屠狗人” into “the dog butcher”, that may confuse or disgust the dog-loving English readers. In China, there are many words about dog expressed bad meaning. But, in many other countries, dog always be used in good word expressed nice meaning. The Yangs have thought about this cultural difference.

According to the above three examples of analysis concluded that the Yangs use a variety of compensation methods to solve the problem of cultural default. The correct compensation method can not only make up for the cultural default, but also help the reader to understand the correct intention of the play to prevent the loss of the original culture.
Summary

Drama translation aims to spread Chinese culture. In fact, for the translator, the translation of Chinese classical drama is facing many problems. The first difficulty the translator have to face is the cultural default. Because the translator and the reader have different cultural backgrounds, the cultural default problem is inevitable. The translator had to use different translation strategies and methods to restore the original intention of the article to avoid loss of the original culture. This paper analyzes the culture default in Chang Sheng Dian with the relevance theory. Relevance theory puts forward the principle of optimal relevance, that means an utterance must achieve adequate contextual effects and put the hearer to no unjustifiable effort in achieve adequate contextual effect and put the hearer to no unjustifiable effort in achieving them. According to the relevance translation theory, translation is a secondary communication, unlike monolingual communication, it involves two ostensive-inferential processes. The first process takes place between the original writer and the translator, and the second between the translator and the target reader. This theory lays down the theoretical framework and provides theoretical foundation for translation practices. Based on the relevance theory, the paper studies the compensation strategy of the Yangs in Chang Sheng Dian—Foreignization and Domestication. Simultaneously, with the method of Grade 1 to 6, the Yangs finished the traditional Chinese drama masterpiece in English. The verion of the Yangs translation retains a strong Chinese culture and spread the Chinese classical culture. But because of the existence of different social and psychological culture, some content cannot be accepted by Western readers. The Yangs’ version is still the most successful and the most influential in the field of Chinese traditional drama translation.

References


