

# An Analysis of English Translation Strategies of Beijing Dialect in Lao She's *Rickshaw Boy*

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## ABSTRACT

It is acceptable that translation is the bridge and link between Chinese and Western cultures. Cultures vary greatly with their own characteristics, and the unique environmental characteristics of a region often bring unique character features to the local people, and due to regional differences, cultural differences cannot be ignored. However, dialect translation is one of the few research topics in the translation field. *Rickshaw Boy* is created by Lao She, a real Beijing cultural master, then, it is characterized by a strong Beijing flavor. From the perspective of preserving the linguistic charm of dialects, the following four translation strategies will be analyzed and compared, that is, Standardized Translation, Dialect-to-Dialect Translation, Self-created Translation of Literary Dialects and Desalting of Dialect Features, in order to explore the most suitable translation strategies for dialect translation and further understand the differences between Chinese and Western cultures and how to better carry out cultural communication. And the analysis on the translation strategies of Beijing dialect in *Rickshaw Boy* is made, so as to provide certain reference value for the appreciation and exchange of Chinese and Western literary works and deepen the understanding of foreign scholars on the aesthetic meaning of the language in Chinese literary works.

**Keywords:** Beijing dialect, *Rickshaw Boy*, Translation strategies, Cultural differences, Language charm.

## 1. INTRODUCTION

It is known that dialect, as a kind of language with regional color, can be used in literary works to show the real characteristics of a place and also to shape the image of characters. This kind of spoken language directly from daily life is highly personalized, which adds endless charm to literary works. From the perspective of how to retain the language charm of dialects, a comparative analysis and study of different translation strategies is made to explore which dialect translation strategy can better carry out cultural transmission, so as to further understand the traditional cultural differences between China and the West. The translation of dialect also adds a lot of difficulty to the translator's work. In the field of translation, (1) Does the translation use dialects? (2) Can the use of dialects in translation "make foreigners Chinese"? (3) With the popularity of Mandarin, is it still necessary to use dialects in translation? These

questions are worth further thinking and research. Dialect, as a part of traditional Chinese culture, is a symbol to show the characteristics of different places, and can even reflect the characteristics of people in different places. Perhaps with the development of modern technology, it has been forgotten in the long river of history, but it is still shining as a symbol of our culture. Therefore, if the traditional Chinese culture is to be further carried forward, translators must strengthen the study of local languages in order to better carry out cultural transmission.

Meanwhile, *Rickshaw Boy* is a masterpiece of the famous Chinese writer, Lao She. It mainly tells the tragic life of an old Beijing rickshaw puller, Xiangzi. The author himself is an authentic Beijinger, so he is good at using accurate and fluent Beijing dialect, and further refining and processing into concise and vivid literary language. Domestic translation studies of *Rickshaw Boy* are mainly

reflected in the following aspects: (1) Taking *Rickshaw Boy* as an example, to discuss the translation characteristics of literary texts from the perspective of literary texts. (2) To explore the translation of traditional Chinese culture and folk culture reflected in *Rickshaw Boy*. (3) To make a comparative study of the translation from different theoretical perspectives. Based on this, it intends to take the translation of Beijing dialect in *Rickshaw Boy* as an example to discuss and study the translation of Beijing dialect in *Rickshaw Boy* from various translations, and analyze its translation strategies in detail, so as to provide certain reference value for the appreciation and exchange of Chinese and Western literary works and deepen foreign scholars' understanding of the aesthetic implications of language in Chinese literary works.

## 2. TWO TRANSLATION VERSIONS

*Rickshaw Boy* takes old Beijing as the historical background and describes a sad story of a rickshaw puller. The author Lao She was born and lives in Beijing. He is familiar with Beijing very well, so his literary works are inevitably stained with a strong Beijing flavor. The wide-known authoritative translation of *Rickshaw Boy* in China is the translation by Shi Xiaojing and Howard Goldblatt. It is worth discussing how the two translators deal with the words with "Beijing flavor" in the study. Firstly, the study takes Shi's and Goldblatt's translations as examples to conduct a comparative study on the treatment of Beijing dialect, in particular, focusing on (1) The dynamic and static relations in the translation of Beijing dialect; (2) The differences of folk culture reflected by the expression "Beijing flavor".

## 3. DIALECT TRANSLATION STRATEGIES

The choice of translation strategy depends on the translator's intention. It is a communicative activity. In order to make the translation reach the standard of "faithfulness, expressiveness and elegance", it is necessary to understand and master the content of the work deeply. In the past 20 years, western scholars have focused on four translation strategies for literary dialects: Standardized Translation, Dialect-to-Dialect Translation, Self-created Translation of Literary Dialects and Desalting of Dialect Features [1]. Dialect Standardization Translation is to translate regional dialect into ordinary standard language. Dialect-to-Dialect Translation is to find the same or similar

standard language slang to translate the translation between dialects. Self-created Translation of Literary Dialect is a self-created language that can express the characteristics of regional language. Desalination of Dialect Features is a compensatory translation strategy, in which the local language is translated in a restrained manner, but there are obvious traces of dialect in the translation. As far as *Rickshaw Boy* is concerned, on the expression, Lao She combines Beijing dialect, which includes not only spoken language, but also the colloquial expressions of special ethnic forms. How to strike a balance between "meaning" and "culture" in translation has always been a problem faced by translators. Culture, it seems, should make concessions for meaning. Importance should be attached to meaning, style and cultural factors respectively. Therefore, how to convey cultural factors in literary works with local flavor needs exploring and researching by translators. Therefore, when they translate literary works with strong folk flavor, it is inevitable to have a deep understanding of the unique customs and habits of this region. Literature is different from other kinds of texts, such as news, science, medicine, etc., because it is the interpretation of a country's culture over thousands of years. Literary writers in different countries subconsciously show their cultural fruits when they are creating literature because they are influenced by regional culture, customs and civilization. On the other hand, the personal cultivation of cultural creators also needs a profound discussion. For instance, the literary concept the author holds, the social background he lives in, and whether he belongs to "the Peking School" or "the Shanghai School", those are all helpful for the translator to have a deep understanding of his literary works. Therefore, it is very important to choose appropriate translation strategies, and the premise is to have a deep grasp of the literary works themselves.

### 3.1 The Purpose of Dialect Translation Strategy

*Rickshaw Boy* can be said to be the representative works of folk literature in Chinese culture, with the very ability to express the characteristics of Chinese culture. The reason why it can extend so far and can activate in the long history lies in the cultural value it displays. Chinese readers may be drawn to Lao She's tale of the tragic fate of the human charioteer, while western readers may want to learn about life in Beijing at that time, which is for them a visual feast of exotic customs

or study the writing style of famous Chinese novelists. Therefore, in order for western literary workers to accurately study Chinese literature, the translators of *Rickshaw Boy* must be infinitely close to being "Lao She of the West". This means that, in our second "creation", not just to translate words, more should pay attention to how to retain the original cultural connotation and better attach the symbols of different cultures, the "Chinese style" or "western" processing, the original language to convey the cultural connotation of once again appear in the target language, cultural level of the equivalence principle. At the same time, it is necessary to fully reflect the "beauty" of translation, so that readers can achieve physical and psychological harmony and pleasure in the process of reading books and articles, and bring readers the "original sense", so as to arouse readers' thinking and wash their minds [4].

### **3.2 Analysis of Dialect Translation Strategies**

Dialect, as a language symbol with regional characteristics, has certain communicative significance. There is a necessary connection between dialect and its social context in literary works. Therefore, the choice of translation strategies for dialects is different from the translation of ordinary living languages. In fact, the development and application of dialects have certain similarities in pragmatics. However, due to the different cultural traditions and historical backgrounds of different countries, the research must combine the characteristics and context of different regional dialects in dialect translation.

From the aspect of cultural transmission and acceptance, it is not easy for the translator to find the corresponding western dialect and transform it, so it is difficult to achieve the dialect-to-dialect translation to a certain extent. It is difficult for translators to achieve "functional equivalence" like standard language when dealing with dialect translation, so most of them adopt dialect standardized translation, which can guarantee less mistakes to a large extent. However, this requires translators to have a deep understanding of dialects in different regions and accurately grasp the linguistic features of dialects. On the other hand, from the linguistic characteristics of dialect itself, its literary acceptance among readers is low, and it is generally applicable to the people at the bottom of society or the salaried class. A novel without various images or characters has nothing different

from report. So in Lao She's novels, there are also many characters as famous as the novels [3]. In literary works, the use of dialect can highlight the vulgar and straightforward character characteristics of characters. Some people even doubt the translatability of dialects. They put forward that literary translation can ignore the translation of dialects and only translate the literal meaning of dialects, ignoring the stylistic meaning of dialects. Therefore, in order to achieve its expressive function in translation, both the self-created translation of literary dialects and the desalinated translation of dialect features can retain the traces of dialects to a certain extent.

### **3.3 Research on Dialect Translation in China**

The study of dialect translation is becoming more and more important in the field of translation, but it is still on the edge because of non-standard language. Early studies on dialect translation have for a long time been concerned with the question of whether it is really necessary to carry out translation. In recent decades, the research content of dialect translation seems to be more inclined to the following aspects: dialect translation strategy, dialect translation and socio-cultural context, dialect translation theory, dialect translation and author translator research. With the increasing research results on dialect translation at home and abroad, it can be seen that the research methods on dialect translation are mainly comparative research, and the research topics have become diversified, presenting a multidimensional research phenomenon in general. Secondly, the study of dialect translation also goes deeper into the micro, and cross-studies with different disciplines, such as semiotics, linguistics, social context and so on. The studies on dialect translation at home bear much resemblance to studies abroad focus on whether the dialect shall be translated or how to be rendered, likewise, the dialect-for-dialect method and the standardization of the dialect method were concentrated on domestically [7]. The study of dialects covers a wide range and is very detailed. As for the Beijing dialect in *Rickshaw Boy*, it not only requires a precise grasp of the local language of Beijing, but also requires us to have a deep understanding of the target language. Therefore, the study of dialect translation is still a difficult point in the academic circle.

#### 4. AN ANALYSIS OF TRANSLATION STRATEGIES OF IN BEIJING DIALECT RICKSHAW BOY

##### 4.1 Analysis and Comparison of Beijing Dialect Translation Strategies

Beijing's language and culture reflects the word "礼". The city is under the emperor's feet, and the Beijing people are polite and dignified, with a kind of elegant aristocratic style. Therefore, the strong sense of self-esteem of Beijing people is reflected behind the Beijing dialect, such as some daily expressions of Beijing people: "得了吧, 您呐", "吗呢您", "您嘛去了". "您" is usually used instead of "你". As far as Rickshaw Boy is concerned, Shi's and Goldblatt's translation of Beijing dialect is also worth careful consideration, in which the treatment of address words with "Beijing flavor", place names and rude words are different. The following will be the comparative study of translation strategies to analyze how to properly translate Beijing dialect.

(1) "劳诸位的驾。" [6]

S: Ai, excuse me for putting you out!

G: I have put you all to a great trouble.

Old ma, a coachman in his fifties and sixties, fainted in a teahouse due to cold and hunger. After waking up, he apologized to the coachman and the boss who were drinking tea in the teahouse. Shi's translation is a standardized dialect translation. There is a saying in Friends: "Well, excuse me for putting a good spin on a traffic jam!" The standard dialect translation method translates the characteristic dialect into the standard target language, which makes the characteristics and charm of the original language disappear completely, and is not conducive to highlighting the characters' personality, which makes the characters lose their linguistic individuality and weakens the literary function of the dialect.

(2) "临完上天桥吃黑枣。"

S: End up at the Tian Qiao execution ground with lead jujubes in our chests!

G: To be wind up with black dates in our chest at the Tianqiao Execution ground.

This sentence comes from the context of detective Sun's blackmail and intimidation of Xiangzi. "天桥" refers to the place where executed criminals were disposed of in the past, and "黑枣" refers to bullets. Shi and Goldblatt both use the

Dialect-to-Dialect Translation. "Execution ground" means a place where prisoners are executed, which is the interpretation of the "天桥". Transliteration first and then explanation, which preserves the exoticism well and helps western readers to understand Chinese culture. For the treatment of "黑枣", they are different, a careful comparison will find that Shi's treatment is more interesting and appropriate, this is closer to the original meaning. It is worth noting that the original text is "吃黑枣", which means being shot, which is a dynamic expression. However, the translation of "吃", which Shi and Goldblatt seem to omit, makes the structure of the article more concise and straightforward.

(3) "我打他妈的。"

S: I've pulled the mother-fucker.

G: I've been fucking at it.

"他妈的" is a typical Beijing curse Shi's translation is a clever combination of Western culture and Beijing dialect, while both translators are completely standardized dialect translation. It is a translation treatment close to western readers and very easy for readers to understand, but not suitable for the transmission of Chinese culture to the West. The unique Beijing dialect and Beijing charm culture in Rickshaw Boy are not fully reflected in some translations. Some translators omit the cultural factors and Beijing dialect characteristics of the original text in order to save trouble or facilitate the reading of the translation readers, which is not desirable when cultural transmission is emphasized [8].

(4) "对花钱是这样一把死拿, 对挣钱祥子更不放松一步。"

G: He was miserly with his money and tenacious about making more of it.

S: Tight-fisted as he was about spending money, Xiangzi let slip no chance of earning it.

Shi and Goldblatt translated the verb "死拿" into the adjective "miserly" and "tightfisted", using adjectives instead of nouns. For "不放松一步", this is clearly a phrasal verb, and Goldblatt treats this differently with the adjective "tenacious". Shi translated it into the phrasal verb "let slip no chance of doing something". She uses the Self-created Translation. It not only makes the translation read more lively and clever, and fully demonstrates Xiangzi's urgency to make money in the original text, but also reflects the creativity of the translator. If it is mostly handled by nominalization, it will make the article look rigid and lifeless. However, in

the literary expression skills of Rickshaw Boy, novels like this always use some actions to shape characters, so some dynamic processing in translation will be closer to the original meaning.

(5) "祥子受了那么多的累, 过河拆桥, 老头子翻脸不认人, 他们替祥子不平。"

G: who had worked like a slave for days, only to have the old ingrate on him, to tear down the bridge after the river was crossed.

"过河拆桥" is used to mean to kick away those who have helped you when you have achieved your goal. Here, the translator adopts the foreignization translation method, translating the literal meaning of "过河拆桥" without translating its metaphorical meaning. Such a method can effectively arouse readers' curiosity and reading expectation, and at the same time retain the language charm of the original text, fully interpret the cultural connotation of the original text, and achieve a balance between literariness and acceptability.

(6) "给它个不论秧子。"

S: What did he care?

G: So what the hell!

"不论秧子" means whoever it is. Not because of the other party's status and have scruples or fear, belong to the authentic Beijing dialect. Shi's translation strategy is standardized dialect translation, which is to translate dialects into standard language. Goldblatt, on the other hand, uses dialect-to-dialect Translation, looking for interchangeable slang in the target language. The choice of dialect-to-dialect translation here will greatly reduce the language charm of the original work. And it will dilute the traces of dialect, reduce the expressiveness and literariness of dialect.

#### ***4.2 The Interpretation of Language Charm in Dialect Translation***

The translation of literary works is necessarily different from other types of texts in essence, and it must have some aesthetic connotation. This aesthetic effect includes content and form, because literary works always convey a certain spirit or emotion, so that people can absorb spiritual power, enhance aesthetic sentiment and improve the spiritual world in the process of reading. Literature is an art, a language art, an emotional art. Therefore, it requires the translator to have artistic thoughts, create a new art world, provide readers with the same aesthetic object as the original text, and show

the author's emotional attitude and language style. However, we cannot deny that Chinese is a highly contextual style, while most Western countries express themselves in a low-contextual way. Chinese is implicit, while English is straightforward. In literature, in both emotion and language, most of them are vague, which is what makes literary translation unique. In Rickshaw Boy, Lao She used a great deal of language description to show the characters' personalities and embodied a strong Beijing flavor. This greatly strengthens the ordeal for translators, who need to strengthen the study of regional languages and consciously carry out comparative analysis between different languages, so as to realize the commonality and individuality of different languages.

The language charm of Rickshaw Boy cannot be ignored. The language in Rickshaw Boy is "alive" and "vital". Lao She's role in it is more like recording the life conditions of the lower class in Beijing in the 1920s and 1930s than that of a writer. Therefore, his language is the original Beijing dialect, without any embellishment, and it is impossible to judge them by general English grammar. This original Beijing dialect cannot be appreciated alone. Only when it is placed in literary and artistic works can its power be shown and cannot be ignored. As for the translation of Chinese folk culture words, we should neither blindly adopt literal translation to make western readers confused, nor eradicate the uniqueness of each national culture in order to present complete cultural equivalence.

(1) "刺儿头": a hard nut to crack.

Goldblatt's translation is the Self-created Translation. "刺儿头" means a person who is difficult or difficult to deal with. Goldblatt here has not translated into about "a difficult man" or "a fastidious person", but is translated into "a hard nut to crack", a very vivid image conveys the persecution of personality characteristics, but also very accord with western readers' reading habits. "刺儿头" itself is a metaphor for stubborn and difficult people. Goldblatt's translation well demonstrates the language tension of the original text, making the translation embody its artistic charm and allowing western readers to feel the "beauty of language" in it.

"乡下脑额": a head of a peasant.

Goldblatt's translation is a standardized translation of dialect. "乡下脑额" refers to a countryman, and the context here is Tigress's taunt

of Xiangzi's dullness and vulgarity. "Head of a Peasant" was a picture of the famous western painter Casimir Sevenrovitch Malevich. From the perspective of expression skills, Lao She's expression of "乡下脑颜" is a way of metonymy, substituting part for whole, while Goldblatt's translation is a way of substituting things for people, which shows the language charm of the original text and makes it clear to western readers.

## 5. THE INTERPRETATION OF CULTURAL DIFFERENCES IN DIALECT TRANSLATION

### 5.1 Translation and Analysis of Beijing Traditional Culture

The difference between Chinese and Western ways of thinking is a bridge that translators must bridge. To enable foreign readers or researchers to better understand the rich cultures of different countries, translators need to accurately understand and master the culture and values of the target language country. However, the Beijing dialect in *Rickshaw Boy* is lively and vivid, which embodies the living characteristics of the working people in Beijing everywhere. Therefore, such a literary work requires translators not only to be pragmatic and realistic, but also to have certain creativity and contextual thinking to transform the customs and cultural beauty of old Beijing people's life.

In the study of traditional and modern Chinese literature, we have often been warned that it is biased and unfair to apply a Western critical approach indiscriminately to Chinese literary texts. Rather than criticize a Chinese work only in terms of Western critical models, standards, and values, we should complement our criticism by employing also the yardsticks against which the Chinese critics measure their own literature. It is true of translation. In order to better spread Chinese culture and tell Chinese stories to the world, we should not use western grammar structure or understanding thinking to carry out cultural transmission. Because what we introduce to the world is Chinese literature, which reveals Chinese traditional and modern culture, including Chinese people's values, religious beliefs, special cuisine and regional customs. If you study more carefully, you will understand the way of thinking and grammar of The Chinese people. Therefore, translators should use Chinese values and ways of thinking to carry out translation work, and only in this way can they better spread Chinese culture to the world.

*Rickshaw Boy* describes a lot of traditional Chinese culture, local customs and traditional food in old Beijing. The expression style is popular with delicacy. "Popular" means that the characters' language is simple and easy to understand. The scenery features, customs and food it shows are easily accessible to the people at the bottom and familiar to the public. However, Mr. Lao She really achieves vulgity and delicacy, and the delicacy of beauty is revealed in the popularity. Thus, translators are required to have the most detailed understanding of the traditional culture of old Beijing, so as to make appropriate and accurate cultural transmission to western readers and researchers of *Rickshaw Boy*.

"年画, 纱灯, 红素蜡烛, 绢制的头花, 大小蜜饯, 都陈列出来。"

S: displays of New Year posters, gauze lanterns, red and white candles, silk flowers for the hair, and sweetmeats of all sizes.

This sentence describes some customs of Traditional Chinese festivals. Shi uses foreignization translation method to retain the local characteristics of traditional folk culture to a certain extent. It is concise and clear, and the artistic conception intended to be conveyed in the original text is well interpreted. In the initial stage, domestication is the preference for translators because it caters to the reading expectation of target readers; during the development period of translation, an integration strategy is taken into account for both cultural communication and readers' expectations. In the booming period of cultural communication, foreignization is the prior choice for transmitting the authentic Chinese culture overseas and allowing target readers appreciate the charm of Chinese culture [9].

(2) "英国兵, 法国兵, 所说的万寿山, 雍和宫, '八大胡同', 他们都晓得。"

S: They can understand when English and French soldiers ask for the Summer Palace or the Yonghe Lamasery or the "Eight Alleys" red district.

In Shi's translation, she literally translates these places, which are difficult for Westerners to understand the cultural meanings behind. The Eight Great Hutong, or Beijing's red-light district, was put in quotation marks by Lao She, and Shi also added a note.

## 5.2 *The Differences Between Chinese and Western Values and Modes of Thinking in the Translation of Rickshaw Boy*

Due to the different cultural formation history of different countries, the cultural tradition of different countries has been created, which also indirectly makes the value concept and thinking mode of people in each country different. "Translation" is not only the second creation of works, but also the best bridge to communicate between different cultures. The meaning of it is not to "equate" the two cultures, but to "transfer" the connotations and information of the two cultures [4]. To a certain extent, the process of translating literary works can also be understood as a process of constantly exploring values and ways of thinking between different cultures. Like this: "嫁鸡随鸡, 什么也甭说了。" And its translation is "Now I'm stuck with you, there's no more to be said". "嫁鸡随鸡, 嫁狗随狗" is a proverb, which means that after a woman marries, she must follow her husband, whether he is good or bad. Shi's translation is a standardized dialect translation. This is more likely to cause cultural ambiguity. People in the 20th century have not been completely free from the backward thought of male superiority and female inferiority. They are still used to yielding to male power and have no strong sense of female independence. The expression "be stuck with" means being unable to get rid of, reflecting the passivity of the subject. This phrase is used here to convey a sense of compulsion, but in the context of the original text, this sentence comes from Tigress, who is willing to spend her life with Xiangzi. If translated as "I'm stuck with you", it implies that Tigress is forced to accept spending her life with Xiangzi, which is obviously not the meaning of the original text. Therefore, the translator here does not express the meaning of the Chinese traditional saying "嫁鸡随鸡, 嫁狗随狗" well. The translation treatment of "be stuck with" may be very suitable for westerners' thinking habits, because they have been influenced by independent thinking earlier, but they may misunderstand this sentence. Therefore, faced with such situation of cultural equivalence, translators need to accurately convey the real meaning behind traditional Chinese culture.

## 6. CONCLUSION

Writing in dialect is a common phenomenon in literature. This study starts with the above translation strategies and obtains their advantages

and disadvantages. However, if we look further, why do writers choose to use dialects? In fact, the writer only hopes to highlight the character's personality through the power of words, and then promote the development of the story. Therefore, in this sense, the standardized translation of dialects has been questioned and criticized by many Chinese and foreign scholars. This is a way to avoid translation risks, but it can fully avoid the language charm of the original text. At present, a translation strategy commonly accepted by translators is "dialectalization", which can not only keep the local characteristics, but also make it easier for western readers to accept and understand.

This study analyzes not only the dialect itself, but also the language charm reflected in the dialect translation and the different cultural characteristics of the dialect. The translation practice of Beijing dialect in *Rickshaw Boy* has important reference value for Chinese and foreign literature, especially for translators' translation practice, and has played a positive role in promoting the spread and promotion of Chinese culture in the global scope. Cultural communication between different languages should be applied in language translation. The world is a society composed of many races. Every country has its own cultural system. Strengthening cultural exchanges among all ethnic groups can promote their harmonious development and improve the cultural systems of all countries.

Currently, dialect translation is relatively rare in the translation field. It is far from enough to discuss the translation of Beijing dialect as an example. Therefore, in the future, we hope to further study and deepen the cultural understanding of various ethnic groups, so as to expand the translation research of various dialects.

## AUTHORS' CONTRIBUTIONS

Shaoxia Zhan is responsible for writing the manuscript and article revision, Yue Xu collected and analysed materials.

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