

The Interpersonal Meaning of Modality System in *Hong Lou Meng* and Their Translations^{*}

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Modality in language displays the speakers' social status, attitudes, responsibility, commitment. *Hong Lou Meng* (2000) focuses on the complicated interpersonal relationships among characters of different social status. The complicated interpersonal relationship in *Hong Lou Meng* is constructed through modality system in language. Therefore, the modality system in Chinese *Hong Lou Meng* has great impact on the conveyance of interpersonal meaning in the source text. The key of translating the modality system is the construction and realization of the interpersonal relationship in the source text by the translator. Based on the modality theory in Systemic Functional Linguistics, this study attempts to compare and contrast the interpersonal meaning of modality system and that of their English translations in Chinese-English parallel corpus of *Hong Lou Meng*. Through these analyses, cross-cultural construction of interpersonal meaning in English translation of *Hong Lou Meng* is explored and the translation style in each English version of *Hong Lou Meng* is also revealed. Then readers of different cultures could have a comprehensive appreciation of *Hong Lou Meng* and their English versions.

Keywords: modality system, *Hong Lou Meng*, interpersonal function, English translations

Introduction

Hong Lou Meng or *A Dream of Red Mansions* (2000) is the pinnacle of the Chinese classical novel. In *Hong Lou Meng*, the utterances of characters with different social status serve an effective way of character depiction. "In literary works, the speech of each participant in the conversation is peculiar in a certain way" (HUANG, 2000, p. 44). Moreover, modality system in utterance exerts great impact on the conveyance of meaning in text.

Systemic Functional Linguistics claims that the interpersonal function of language concerns the use of language to interact with other people, to establish and maintain relationship with them. The interpersonal function is realized by modality system and mood system at the lexico-grammatical level. Modality in language displays the speakers' social status, attitudes, responsibility, commitment, etc.. The complicated interpersonal relationships among characters of different social status in *Hong Lou Meng* are constructed and realized through modality system in language. Therefore, the modality system in Chinese *Hong Lou Meng* is crucial to the conveyance of interpersonal meaning in the source text. The construction and realization of the interpersonal relationship in the source text by translators are the key of translating the modality system.

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Based on the modality theory in Systemic Functional Linguistics, this study attempts to compare and contrast the interpersonal meaning of modality system and that of their English translations in Chinese-English parallel corpus of *Hong Lou Meng*. Then the study sets out to summarize the translation style in each English version of *Hong Lou Meng*. The corpus consists of the 120-chapter Chinese texts and its three representative English versions. The three best-known English versions chosen are *The Story of the Stone* (1973-1986) by David Hawkes and John Minford (to be abbreviated as Hawkes hereafter), *Hong Lou Meng* (1892-1893) by Bencraft Joly (to be abbreviated as Joly hereafter), and *A Dream of Red Mansions* (2003) by Yang Xianyi and Gladys Yang (to be abbreviated as the Yangs hereafter).

Theoretical Framework

Systemic Functional Linguistics claims that “the systemic approach is increasingly being recognized as providing a very useful descriptive and interpretive framework for viewing language as a strategic, meaning-making resource” (Eggins, 1994, p. 1). The function of language is to make meanings which are influenced by the social and cultural context. According to Halliday (1994), language has three metafunctions: ideational function, interpersonal function, and textual function. Among them, the interpersonal function of language enacts social relationships between interlocutors. “Here, the speaker is using language as the means of his own intrusion into the speech event: the expression of his comments, attitude and evaluations, and also of the relationship that he sets up between himself and the listener-in particular, the communication role that he adopts, of informing, questioning, greeting, persuading, and the like” (Halliday, 1971, p. 333).

The interpersonal function is realized by modality and mood semantic systems. “Modality refers to the area of meaning that lies between yes and no—the intermediate ground between positive and negative polarity” (Halliday & Matthiessen, 2008, p. 618). Modality system is composed of modal operators, modal adjuncts, and interpersonal metaphors. There are three variables in modality system: type, value, and orientation. Modalization and modulation are two types in modality system. Modalization refers to the probability or frequency of propositions, while modulation refers to the obligation or inclination of proposals. There are three values attached to the modal judgment: high, median, or low. The basic distinction between subjective and objective modality, and between the explicit and implicit variants is the orientation. Interpersonal metaphor, the incongruent form of interpersonal functions is realized through modality metaphor and mood metaphor.

Discussion of Interpersonal Meaning of Modality System in *Hong Lou Meng* and Their English Translations

Systemic Functional Linguistics claims that modality is one of the means of expressing interpersonal function of language. The complicated interpersonal relationship in *Hong Lou Meng* is constructed through modality system in language. Moreover, “we must also recognize the importance of inference in the determination of characters: in novels, as in real life, a person’s characters are inferred from outward behavior, especially from speech” (Leech & Short, 2001, p. 171). The construction of interpersonal meaning by modality system in Chinese *Hong Lou Meng* and its English versions will be discussed in the following examples.

Example (1)

Hong Lou Meng: 只见凤姐已将银子封好，正要送去。尤氏问：“都齐了？”凤姐儿笑道：“都有了，快拿了

去罢，丢了我不管。”尤氏笑道：“我有些信不及，倒要当面点一点。”说着，果然按数一点，只没有李纨的一份。尤氏笑道：“我说你禽鬼呢，怎么你大嫂子的没有？”凤姐儿笑道：“那么些还不够使？短一份儿也罢了，等不够了我再给你。”尤氏道：“昨儿你在人跟前作人，今儿又来和我赖，这个断不依你。我只和老太太要去。”凤姐儿笑道：“我看你利害。明儿有了事，我也‘丁是丁，卯是卯’的，你也别抱怨。”尤氏笑道：“你一般的也怕。不看你素日孝敬我，我才是不依你呢。” (CAO & GAO, 2000, p. 579)

Hawkes: She [You-shi] found her (Xi-feng) with the money already packeted and on the point of bringing it round to her. You-shi asked her. “Is it all here?” said Xi-feng gaily. “All there, hurry up and take it away. I do n’t want to be responsible for it if it gets lost.” said You-shi, returning her smile. “I do n’t think I altogether trust you, I think I’d like to check it first in your presence.” She opened up the packet and counted the money contained in it. The contribution for Li Wan appeared to be missing. She said. “I thought you were up to something,” “Why is n’t the money for Wan here?” Xi-feng smiled disarmingly. “Is n’t what you’ve already got there enough? Surely her little bit is n’t going to make all that much difference? Why not wait and see what you need? If you find you have n’t got enough, I’ll give the money for Wan to you later.” said You-shi, “I’m not letting you get away with this, playing the Lady Bountiful yesterday in front of all those others and then going back on it now, when the two of us are alone together. I shall have to go and ask Lady Jia for the money.” said Xi-feng. “You’re a hard woman!” “One of these days when I have you at a disadvantage, you must n’t complain if you find me just as much of a stickler.” said You-shi. “Threats? I think you are the one who should feel afraid. Do you think if it were n’t for the things you have done for me in the past I would let you off now?” (Hawkes, 1973, p. 352)

Joly: Lady Feng, she [Mrs. Yu] discovered, had already put the money into a packet, and was on the point of sending it over. Mrs. Yu asked “Is it all there?” Lady Feng smiled: “Yes, it is,” “so you might as well take it away at once; for if it gets mislaid, I’ve nothing to do with it.” Mrs. Yu laughed, “I’m somewhat distrustful, so I’d like to check it in your presence.” These words over, she verily checked sum after sum. She found Li Wan’s share alone wanting. Laughingly observed Mrs. Yu “I said that you were up to tricks!” “How is it that your elder sister-in-law’s is n’t here?” Lady Feng smiled. “There’s all that money; and is n’t it yet enough?” “If there’s merely a portion short it should n’t matter! Should the money prove insufficient, I can then look you up, and give it to you.” Mrs. Yu pursued, “When the others were present yesterday,” “you were ready enough to act as any human being would; but here you’re again today prevaricating with me! I wo n’t, by any manner of means, agree to this proposal of yours! I’ll simply go and ask for the money of our venerable senior.” Lady Feng laughed. “I see how dreadful you are!” But when something turns up by and by, I’ll also be very punctilious; so do n’t you then bear me a grudge!” Mrs. Yu smilingly rejoined. “Well, never mind if you do n’t give your quota!” “Were it not that I consider the dutiful attentions you’ve all along shown me would I ever be ready to humour you?” (Joly, 1892, p. 717)

The Yangs: She [Madam You] called first on Xifeng, who had already wrapped the silver up ready to be delivered asked Madam You. “Is it all here?” Xifeng smiled. “Yes. Hurry up and take it away. I wo n’t be responsible if anything’s lost.” Madam You laughed. “I do n’t quite believe you. I must count it here in your presence.” She did so, and found that Li Wan’s share was missing. She scolded. “I knew you were up to one of your tricks,” “Where’s your elder sister-in-law’s contribution?” “Have n’t you got enough with all the rest? What does it matter if you’re one share short? I’ll make it up later if your funds run out.” “Yesterday in front of everyone you played the Lady Bountiful; now you want to get out of it, but I won’t let you. I’ll have to apply to the old lady now for the money.” protested Xifeng, smiling. “What a terror you are,” “Do n’t complain next time you’re in trouble if I put on the screws.” “So you can be frightened too! I would n’t let you off if you were n’t usually so dutiful to me.” (The Yangs, 2003, pp. 865-866)

Example (1) is extracted from the scenario in which You shi takes on the management of Xi-feng’s birthday party. You shi, the sole mistress of the Ning Mansion, has the same status as Xi-feng has in the Rong Mansion. But You shi’s father is not prominent and she has no children. WANG Xi-feng, the niece of JIA Zheng’s wife, is married to the son of Jia She. She has the prominent family background in the whole mansion, and she actually takes charge of the whole Rong Mansion. She has the capability to handle the complicated interpersonal

relationships among characters of different social status. Nicknamed “Peppercorn Feng” or “Fiery Phoenix”, WANG Xi-feng’s disposition is arrogant, scornful, and venomous. Therefore, You shi is submissive and obedient in Xi-feng’s presence.

The realization of mood metaphor could be achieved through the modal particles. The modal particle “罢” in Xi-feng’s utterance “短一份儿也罢了” plays an effective role in revealing Xi-feng’s personality and constructing her identity. The usage of the modal particle covers up Xi-feng’s greediness, protecting her face which is important in the whole mansion. While in Joly’s version, median value modal verb “should” is used. “Should” has an epistemic necessity value. Quirk, Sidney, Geoffrey, and Jan (1985, p. 227) described that in contrast with “must”, “should” and “ought to” do not express the speaker’s confidence in the truth of what he is saying. “They use the term ‘tentative inference’ to characterize the ‘noncommitted necessity’ meaning of ‘should’ and ‘ought to’ . That is to say that the speaker is not sure about the truth of his verbal assumption, but tentatively concludes that it is true, on the basis of his knowledge” (R. Z. LI, 2004, p. 46). The usage of the median value modal verb “should” in Joly’s version covers Xi-feng’s greediness. In the Yangs’ version, the general question is used, ignoring Xi-feng’s current emotion feeling. And in Hawkes’ version, question mark is put at the end of the clause. The role of modal particle “罢” could be transmitted formally, not functionally. Therefore, the interpersonal function of the clause could not be transmitted functionally and equivalently in Hawkes’ and the Yangs’ versions.

The original Chinese clause “我有些信不及，倒要当面点一点。” depicts You shi’s submissive and obedient disposition. As regards metaphor of modality, Halliday (1994) claimed that “the explicitly subjective and explicitly objective forms of modality are all strictly speaking metaphorical, since all of them represent the modality as being substantive proposition” (p. 362). Based on the above claim, the modality metaphor, realized by the explicitly subjective clause, is used to render You shi’s utterance in Hawkes’ version. The usage of the modality metaphor reveals that the proposal she put forward is subjective. Though the surface tone of the clause is imperative, the intended meaning of the clause reveals You shi’s submissive inner emotion. Moreover, “Face is the essential element of politeness. To be polite is to be face-caring. Face and politeness hold a means-to-end relation between them” (GU, 1990, p. 241). The purpose of using the modality metaphor is to be face-caring. Then the submissive and obedient disposition of You shi is vividly depicted in Hawkes’ version. According to the politeness principle, denigrate self and elevate other are two submaxims in the self-denigration maxim. While in Yangs’ version, the usage of high value modal verb “must” violates the politeness principle, enhancing the imperative tone. “Must can be used to lay an obligation or to advocate a behavior. It often relates to the speaker or implies that he is in a position of authority” (R. Z. LI, 2004, p. 58). Then the interpersonal function of the original clause could not be functionally rendered in Joly’s and the Yangs’ versions. In a word, the Hawkes’ version is faithful to the original text in terms of interpersonal function.

In You shi’s utterance “我说你禽鬼呢”, modality metaphor with explicitly subjective is used to depict You shi’s disposition.

The explicitly subjective and explicitly objective forms of modality are all strictly speaking metaphorical, since all of them represent the modality as being the substantive proposition. Modality represents the speaker’ angle, either on the validity of the assertion or on the rights and wrongs of the proposal; in its congruent form, it is an adjunct to a proposition rather than a proposition in its own right. Speakers being what we are, however, we like to give prominence to our own

point of view; and the most effective way of doing that is to dress it up as if it was this that constituted the assertion ('explicit' I think)—with the further possibility of making it appear as if it was not our point of view at all ('explicit objective' it's likely that). (Halliday & Matthiessen, 2008, p. 624)

In terms of the above claims, You shi's utterance constitutes the assertion “我说” explicitly. While in the three English versions, modality metaphors with explicitly subjective are used to reveal You shi's submissive and obedient disposition in Xi-feng's presence. The interpersonal function of the original clause is functionally and equivalently rendered in the three English versions.

Modal adjuncts “are most closely associated with the meanings constructed in the mood system: those of polarity, modality, temporality and mood” (Halliday, 1994, p. 82). According to PENG's (2000, p. 126) classification of Chinese modal adjuncts, “只” is one of them presenting the intensity of the adjunct. “只” in the clause “我只和老太太要去” weakens You shi's imperative tone. She can only bully Xi-feng by flaunting her connection with Lady Jia who is the authority in the whole mansion. But Lady Jia loves Xi-feng much better. While in the three English versions, modal verb with different value is used. In Hawkes' version, low value modal verb “shall” is used. “Shall is a deontic, not participant-external, necessity modal and is restricted to second and third person subjects in assertion” (Quirk et al., 1985, p. 230). The connotation of the “shall” violates the original meaning of the modal verb. Therefore, the “shall” is misused in Hawkes' version and then the interpersonal function of the original clause is lost. In Joly's and the Yangs' versions, median value modal verb “will” is used. “Will has an epistemic reading. It refers to what it is responsible to expect and can be roughly paraphrased as ‘A reasonable inference is that...’” (Palmer, 1990, p. 57). The “will” successfully portrays You shi's submissive and obedient disposition. The interpersonal function of the clause and the interpersonal relationship between Xi-feng and You shi could be maximally and functionally rendered.

Example (2)

Hong Lou Meng: 不料自己未张口，只见黛玉先说道：“你又来做什么？横竖如今有人和你玩，比我又会念，又会作，又会写，又会说笑，又怕你生气拉了你去，你又做什么来？死活凭我去罢了！”宝玉听了忙上来悄悄的說道：“你这么个明白人，难道连‘亲不间疏，先不僭后’也不知道？我虽糊涂，却明白这两句话。[...] 她是才来的，岂有个为她疏你的？”林黛玉啐道：“我难道为叫你疏她？我成了个什么人了呢！我为的是我的心。”宝玉道：“我也为的是我的心。难道你就知你的心，不知我的心不成？” (CAO & GAO, 2000, p. 276)

Hawkes: But before he could get his mouth open, she had anticipated him: “What have you come for this time? Why can't you just leave me here to die in peace? After all, you've got a new playmate now—one who can read and write and compose and laugh and talk to you much better than I can. Oh yes, and drag you off to be amused if there's any danger of your getting upset! I really can't imagine what you have come back here for!” said Bao-yu, coming over to where she sat and speaking very quietly. “Old friends are best friends and close kin are kindest,” “You're too intelligent not to know that. Even a simpleton like me knows that much! [...] Compared with you she's practically a new arrival. Why should I ever be any less close to you because of her?” “Do you think I want you to be any less close to her because of me? Whatever do you take me for? It's the way I feel that makes me the way I am.” said Bao-yu, “And it's the way I feel, that makes me the way I am! Do you mean to tell me that you know your own feelings about me but still do n't know what my feelings are about you?” (Hawkes, 1973, pp. 411-412)

Joly: But at an unforeseen moment, and before he could himself open his mouth, he heard Tai-yu anticipate him. She asked. “What have you come back again for? Let me die or live, as I please, and have done! You've really got at present some one to play with you, one who, compared with me, is able to read and able to compose, able to write, to speak, as well as to joke, one too who for fear lest you should have ruffled your temper dragged you away: and what do you return

here for now?" Pao-yu, after listening to all she had to say, hastened to come up to her. he observed in a low tone of voice, "Is it likely, that an intelligent person like you is n't so much as aware that near relatives can't be separated by a distant relative, and a remote friend set aside an old friend! I'm stupid, there's no gainsaying, but I do anyhow understand what these two sentiments imply. [...] while she has only recently come, and how could I ever distance you on her account?" "Ts'ui!" Tai-yu exclaimed. "Will I forsooth ever make you distance her! who and what kind of person have I become to do such a thing? What (I said) was prompted by my own motives." Pao-yu urged, "I too, made those remarks prompted by my own heart's motives, and do you mean to say that your heart can only read the feelings of your own heart, and has no idea whatsoever of my own?" (Joly, 1892, p. 330)

The Yangs: But she forestalled him by asking: "What have you come back for? You've got a new playmate now, someone better than I am at reading, writing and versifying, better at talking and laughing with you too. Someone who dragged you away for fear you might lose your temper. So why come back? Why not leave me to die in peace?" Baoyu stepped to her side and said softly, "Someone of your intelligence should know that distant relatives can't come between close ones, and new friends can't take the place of old. Dense as I am, I know that. How could I be less close to you because of her?" [...] while she has only recently arrived." "Do I want you to be less close to her? What do you take me for? It's just that my feelings are hurt." "And it's your feelings that concern me. Do you only know your own heart and not mine?" (The Yangs, 2003, pp. 400-401)

Example (2) is extracted from the scenario in which Bao-yu just comes back from Bao-chai's room. Bao-chai and Dai-yu are two major characters in *Hong Lou Meng*. Both of them fall in love with Bao-yu.

In Dai-yu's utterance, the interrogative metaphorical clause "你又来做什么" is used repeatedly to emphasize her furious feeling, compared with the congruent form of this clause. The surface meaning of the metaphorical clause is to express Dai-yu's command "你不应该来" which emphasizes her reproach to Bao-yu. Appearing repeatedly at her utterance, the metaphorical clause is intended to emphasize her displeasure. Then the interpersonal function of the metaphorical clause is in accord with the intimate interpersonal relationship between Bao-yu and Dai-yu.

Consequently, Bao-yu equivalently uses the interrogative metaphorical clauses "岂有个为她疏你的?" and "不知我的心不成?" to respond to Dai-yu's enquiry. The semantic meaning of these clauses is to blame Dai-yu that she does know the feeling of Bao-yu's inner heart. Facing Bao-yu's response, Dai-yu accordingly uses the interrogative metaphorical clause "我难道为叫你疏她?" to express her indignation. While context is "a psychological construct, a subset of the hearer's assumptions about the world, more specifically it is the set of premises used in interpreting that utterance" (Sperber & Wilson, 2010, p. 15). Systemic functional linguists are interested in exploring just how context gets into text. Halliday (1994) claimed that context of situation is divided into three factors: field of discourse, tenor of discourse, mode of discourse. Among them, "tenor refers to the social role relationships played by interactants" (Eggins, 1994, p. 63). The intimate relationship between Bao-yu and Dai-yu in this specific context of situation is realized through these interrogative metaphorical clauses used by both Bao-yu and Dai-yu. While in the three English versions, the Yangs' version employs the disjunctive question "Why not leave me to die in peace?" to render the metaphorical clause "你又来做什么", and the question intensifies the mood of indignation. Then the interpersonal function of the clause is functionally and equivalently rendered. On the contrary, the general questions are used in the other two versions, and the question weakens the mood of the original clause, ignoring the interpersonal relationship between interlocutors. Moreover, complementary clauses are used in the two versions. In Hawkes' version, interrogative clause with modal verb "can" is used. "'Can' may refer to the ability of the participant" (Ehrman, 1966, p. 13). The complementary

clause emphasizes Dai-yu's furious feeling. In Joly's version, declarative clause is added to strengthen her displeasure feeling. In a word, the Yangs' version is faithful to the original text, because the interpersonal function of the original clause and text is rendered functionally and equivalently.

In Bao-yu's utterance “难道连‘亲不间疏，先不僭后’也不知道？”，interrogative clause with idiom is used to depict Bao-yu's reaction to Dai-yu's enquiry. The idiom in the interrogative clause indicates that the truth is universally acknowledged by everyone, let alone an intelligent one like Dai-yu. There is no modality metaphor used in the original clause. However, both in Joly's and the Yangs' versions, modality metaphors are used to render the original clause.

In order to state explicitly that probability is subjective, or alternatively, at the other hand, to claim explicitly that the probability is objective, the speaker construes the proposition as a projection and encodes the subjectivity (I think), or the objectivity (it is likely), in a projecting clause. (Halliday & Matthiessen, 2008, p. 615)

“It is likely that” in Joly's version and “Someone of your intelligence should know that” in the Yangs' version are projecting clauses including modality metaphors with explicit objectivity. Then Bao-yu encodes the objectivity in these projecting clauses. The usage benefits the readers' understanding of the thoughtfulness of Bao-yu. Then the interpersonal relationship and interpersonal function of the original clause is functionally and maximally rendered in Joly's and the Yangs' versions.

The number of modal verb with different value is different in English versions of *Hong Lou Meng*. In Hawkes' and Joly's versions, modal verbs with low value are frequently used in the utterances of Bao-yu and Dai-yu, such as “can” and “could”. While in the Yangs' version, less modal verbs are used. “‘Can’ may refer to the ability of the participant” (Ehrman, 1966, p. 13). “‘Could’ can also be used in a quasi-imperative manner, to suggest a course of action” (R. Z. LI, 2004, p. 56). These frequently used modal verbs in these two versions cover up Dai-yu's imperative tone, functionally transmitting the interpersonal relationship between Bao-yu and Dai-yu.

Many modal particles are frequently used in Chinese *Hong Lou Meng* to achieve the realization of mood metaphor, such as “么”, “罢”, etc.. “Modal particles play an important role in revealing characters' personality and constructing their identity” (TANG & D. Y. Li, 2007, p. 73). In the above example, the mood of imperative is weakened by the usage of modal particle “罢” in Dai-yu's utterance, revealing her irresolute disposition and constructing the intimate relationship between Dai-yu and Bao-yu. In the Yangs' version, interrogative clause with negation is employed to render the original clause with modal particle, intensifying the mood of imperative. Then the intimate relationship between Dai-yu and Bao-yu is weakened. While in the other two versions, the clause with modal particle was not rendered, then the interpersonal function which is revealed by the clause is ignored totally by the translators. In a word, the interpersonal function of the original Chinese clause with modal particle is not functionally and equivalently rendered in the three English versions.

The love between Bao-yu and Dai-yu is the main theme in *Hong Lou Meng*. In particular, the conversation between Bao-yu and Dai-yu is distinctive and unique. Dai-yu's utterance connotes the meaning of irony sometimes. In this example, the Dai-yu's utterance “横竖如今有人和你玩，比我又会念，又会作，又会写，又会说笑，又怕你生气拉了你去” not only reveals her personality of loving to tease Bao-chai, but also presents her jealousy because Bao-chai is filled with talent.

A term of address is a numerically and attitudinally-marked designator which: (a) functions as a particle to pronominal “you” to form a notionally paradigmatic phrasal “you”, (b) consists of name, word, or a combination of both, (c) is used for the benefit of a speaker, addressee, or a third-party hearer either optionally or necessarily for grammatical, praisal, social, emotional, ceremonial, or externally-imposed reasons. (Dunkling, 1990)

The term of address has three functions in social communication: illocutionary function, expressive function, and interpersonal function. The terms of address “你” “我” in their dialogue are salient indicators of the interpersonal relationship between the addresser and the addressee. The person pronouns signal the less social distance between the interlocutors. Moreover, they can also unveil whether the inter relationship is close or distant between Bao-yu and Dai-yu. Therefore, the usage of the term of address can demonstrate the intimate relationship between Bao-yu and Dai-yu.

Conclusions

Based on the modality theory in Systemic Functional Linguistics, this study attempts to compare and contrast the interpersonal meaning of modality system and that of their English translations in Chinese-English parallel corpus of *Hong Lou Meng*.

In Chinese *Hong Lou Meng*, modal adjuncts and modal particles in modality systems are frequently used. They play an effective way in revealing characters’ personality, constructing characters’ identity and achieving the realization of the interpersonal function of the texts. Moreover, interrogative metaphorical clauses and term of address are also employed to depict various characters and to achieve the realization of interpersonal function. Modal verbs with different value and modality metaphors are frequently used in the three English versions. In Joly and the Yangs’ versions, the interpersonal function of the Chinese original clause and the interpersonal relationship between interlocutors could be equivalently and functionally rendered because of the equivalent usage of the modal verbs. These two versions are faithful to the original text in both form and function. While in Hawkes’ version the modal verb with value different from the one in the original text is used, and then the interpersonal function of the original clause is lost.

Through the analysis of the interpersonal meaning of modality system and that of their English translations, cross-cultural construction of interpersonal meaning in *Hong Lou Meng* translation is explored. Then readers of different cultures could have a comprehensive appreciation of *Hong Lou Meng* and their English versions.

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