

Translation Strategies of Fuzzy Language—Taking *Red Sorghum* and Its Translation as Examples

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Fuzzy language is commonly seen in literary works as well as in natural language, the translation strategies of which become a core index to evaluate the quality of a literary translation. The present study explores the translation strategies of fuzzy language in *Red Sorghum* by classifying the use of fuzzy language in this work at different levels and analyzing their translation strategies, in an attempt to provide suggestions for the literary translation of fuzzy language.

Keywords: fuzzy language, literary translation, translation strategy, *Red Sorghum*

Introduction

“Fuzzy language uses the fuzziness of meaning to accurately express fuzzy concepts in our lives” (Yu, 2000, pp. 49-52). As a reflection of human thoughts, natural language contains a lot fuzzy expressions. In literary works, fuzzy expressions are also used for the efficient expression of the author’s ideas and feelings. The literary translation of fuzzy language not only involves differences between languages and cultures, but also combines the interpreters’ personal thoughts. Therefore, the translation strategies of fuzzy language become a core index to evaluate the quality of a literary translation.

Mo Yan was the first Chinese writer to win a Nobel Prize for Literature, and *Red Sorghum* (2007) is one of his most famous works. There have been some research on the translation of *Red Sorghum* from the perspectives of vocabulary features (Xu, Zhu, & Tu, 2019), rhetorics (Zhang, Zhen, & Cao, 2015), translation theory (Xu, 2016), and cross-culture analysis (Tian & Gan, 2017). However, few documents can be found concerning fuzzy language translation of this work. So the present study would explore the translation strategies of fuzzy language in *Red Sorghum*. There are different versions of translation to this work, among which Howard Goldblatt (a famous enologist)’s version (2003) has greatly promoted the overseas popularity of *Red Sorghum*. So this study would take Goldblatt’s translation version as research object.

This study would classify the use of fuzzy language in *Red Sorghum* into different groups at vocabulary level and sentences level, respectively, and analyze their translation strategies, attempting to provide some suggestions for the literary translation of fuzzy language.

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Translation Strategies of Fuzzy Words in *Red Sorghum*

In *Red Sorghum*, words with fuzzy meaning are mainly notional words, including nouns, verbs, numeral, and adjectives words.

There are two main strategies for the literary translation of words, namely literal translation and free translation (Wang, 1959). It is found that fuzzy nouns in *Red Sorghum* are basically literally translated; and the specific translation strategies are “Fuzziness to Accuracy” and “Fuzziness to Fuzziness”. For instance, the “青石” in the phrase “那块无字的青石墓碑” points out the color, rather than the scientific name of the stone, which is a fuzzy noun. In its English translation, Goldblatt (2003) interprets it as “granite” rather than “indigo stone”. There are various indigo stones in the world, while the use of granite is more specific and visual-friendly to foreign readers. This is one example of “Fuzziness to Accuracy”. Another such example is the translation of “种” in “种的退化”, which contains meanings of “the seeds of plant”, “species”, “races”, and “courage” in Chinese, into English “species”. An instance of “Fuzziness to Fuzziness” strategy is the translation of “整整一个上午”, which is a fuzzy time concept, into English “all that morning”.

For the fuzzy verbs in *Red Sorghum*, Goldblatt (2003) mainly uses free translation, in which the original verb may be omitted in the translation, rather than the literal word-to-word translation. For instance, in the sentence “父亲眼前挂着蓝白色的雾幔, 挡住他的视线”, “挂” originally means “to hang” in Chinese and Mo Yan (2007) uses it metaphorically to describe the state of “雾 (mist)” in the novel. In translation, the verb is omitted and combined into the meaning of the latter part of the sentence “a curtain of blue mist obscured the men themselves”, which may be called a translation strategy of “Fuzziness to Ellipsis”.

For the fuzzy numbers in *Red Sorghum*, Goldblatt (2003) uses the translation strategies of “Fuzziness to Fuzziness” and “Fuzziness to Accuracy”. One example for the former strategy is the translation of “比现在强烈无数倍的……气息” into “far stronger than anything you might smell today”; but this “Fuzziness to Fuzziness” belongs to free translation since “无数倍的 (countless times)” is omitted in the translation, as compared to that belonging to literal translation for fuzzy nouns. One example for “Fuzziness to Accuracy” is the translation of “……两只狗眼”, which may mean “two dogs’ eyes” or “two eyes of a dog”, to English “a pair of eyes”.

A lot of fuzzy adjectives in *Red Sorghum* are used in an unusual way, and are translated literally. For example, in “我父亲闻到了……黄红相间的腥甜气息”, the author expresses a vague meaning by using color adjective “红 (red)” and “黄 (yellow)” to modify smell, which refers to the smell of blood. Goldblatt (2003) translates it as “his nose detected a sickly-sweet odour, neither yellow nor red...”. There are also free translations for this part, for instance, the expression “你好大的命”, meaning “a person is very lucky”, is translated to “The heavens have smiled on you” since there is fixed expression in English.

To come to a conclusion, fuzzy nouns are mainly literally translated word-to-word; if there are specific expressions in the target language, fuzzy nouns could be translated from “Fuzziness to Accuracy”; otherwise it would from “Fuzziness to Fuzziness”. Fuzzy verbs could be freely translated, in which the original verb may be omitted in the translation, rather than the literal word-to-word translation; and it may be called a translation strategy of “Fuzziness to Ellipsis”. Fuzzy numbers may be literally translated from “Fuzziness to Fuzziness” or from “Fuzziness to Accuracy”; it may even be freely translated from “Fuzziness to Ellipsis” according to specific situation or usage. A lot of fuzzy adjectives in *Red Sorghum* are used in an unusual way; for those there

are fixed expressions in the target language, the interpreter may use free expression; otherwise these unusual expressions shall be literally translated.

Translation Strategies of Fuzzy Sentences in *Red Sorghum*

According Lu and Fan (2011, pp. 36-38), “Syntax reflects the agreement of word relationships and the related collocation of word positions in a sentence; syntactic fuzziness refers to the uncertainty in the relations between sentence structure components”. In *Red Sorghum*, fuzzy sentences are mainly sentences with unclear logic relations, sentences with incomplete components, and sentences with contradictory components.

Unlike English, in which logical relations within a sentence or between sentences are directly indicated by local connections or conjunctions, in Chinese, local relations of sentences are usually implied by word meaning or sentence meaning, without overt expression. In *Red Sorghum*, one could find some typical examples of this kind, and the interpreter shall add some local indicator in translation. For instance, in the sentence “奶奶披着夹袄，送他们到村头”，there is no overt expression of relation between the two verbs “披 (wear)” and “送 (see, accompany)”, while according to the meaning, the former shall be a part further explaining or modifying the latter. So in translation, the former is turned into an accompany adverbial “a padded jacket over her shoulders”, and the later becomes the main clause “saw them to the edge of the village”.

Omission of some sentence components, especially the subject, may be called one of the features of Chinese, which may cause fuzziness in understanding. Then in translation, the interpreter shall supplement these omitted elements. For instance, in the sentence “拐进高粱地后，雾更显凝滞，质量加大，流动感少”，the subject is omitted, although native Chinese speakers could understand that the sentence describes actions of the troops. So in translation, the subject is added and the sentence is interpreted as “The surrounding mist grew more sluggish once the troops were in the sorghum field”.

Sometimes the author uses components indicating contradictory meanings to express his special feeling or mood. The translator always literally translates these elements. For instance, the sentence “……高密东北乡无疑是最美丽最丑陋、最超脱最世俗、最圣洁最龌龊、最英雄好汉最王八蛋、最能喝酒最能爱的地方” contains four pairs of contradictory expressions, and is literally translated as “...Northeast Gaomi Township is easily the most beautiful and most repulsive, most unusual and most common, most sacred and most corrupt, most heroic and most bastardly, hardest-drinking and hardest-loving place in the world”.

In conclusion, for fuzzy sentences with unclear logic relations and those with incomplete components, the translator usually supplements the overt logic indicators and the missing components. Fuzzy sentences with contradictory components are usually literally translated if there are no fixed expressions in the target language.

Conclusion

In *Red Sorghum*, words with fuzzy meaning are mainly notional words, including nouns, verbs, numeral, and adjectives words. Fuzzy nouns are mainly literally translated word-to-word; if there are specific expressions in the target language, fuzzy nouns could be translated from “Fuzziness to Accuracy”; otherwise it would from “Fuzziness to Fuzziness”. Fuzzy verbs could be freely translated, in which the original verb may be omitted in the translation, rather than the literal word-to-word translation, which may be called a translation strategy of “Fuzziness to Ellipsis”. Fuzzy numbers may be literally translated from “Fuzziness to Fuzziness” or from “Fuzziness to Accuracy”; it may even be freely translated from “Fuzziness to Ellipsis” according to specific situation or usage. A lot of fuzzy adjectives in *Red Sorghum* are used in an unusual way; for those there

are fixed expressions in the target language, the interpreter may use free expression; otherwise these unusual expressions shall be literally translated.

Fuzzy sentences in *Red Sorghum* are mainly sentences with unclear logic relations, sentences with incomplete components, and sentences with contradictory components. For the first two kinds of fuzzy sentences, the translator usually supplements the overt logic indicators and the missing components. The last kind is usually literally translated if there are no fixed expressions in the target language.

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