

Non-verbal Communication in the Adaptation of Literary Work—Take *A Dream of Red Mansions* for Instance

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Apart from intercultural communication and ESL education, non-verbal communication is also an ideal method to examine the visual adaptation of literary works when it is further classified into direct and indirect communication. Whether an actor or an actress' non-verbal performances are compatible to the non-verbal behaviour of the character he or she plays is of great importance in the appraisal, which is transparent through the comparison and contrast of non-verbal communication in two versions of *A Dream of Red Mansions* TV series.

Keywords: non-verbal Communication, *A Dream of Red Mansions*, adaptation of the fiction, direct communication, indirect communication

1 Introduction

Non-verbal communication can be considered as the shard implicit during the communication among a group of people whose targets are achieved by the non-verbal method. It has been defined repeatedly and slightly differently by a myriad of researchers, among whom Samovar, Porter and Edwin's definition is universally regarded to be the most classic in their groundbreaking book of intercultural communication named *Communication Between Cultures*: “nonverbal communication involves all those nonverbal stimuli in a communication setting that are generated by both the source and his or her use of the environment and that have potential message value for the source and/or receiver” (Samovar, Porter, & McDaniel, 2015, p. 297).

The indubitable significance of non-verbal communication has been demonstrated by numerous scholars as well. Burgoo, Guerrero and Floyd argues that, “the nonverbal side of communication is crucial and often overshadows the verbal communication that is going on. Successful human relations hinge on the ability to express oneself nonverbally and to understand the nonverbal communication of others” (Burgoo, Guerrero, & Floyd, 2016, p. 21). Samovar, Porter and Edwin also quote a saying by René Descartes, “To know what people think, pay regard to what they do, rather than what they say” (Samovar, Porter, & McDaniel, 2015, p. 296).

However, researchers about non-verbal communication usually study it under the perspective of intercultural communication or ESL education, but it is obvious that non-verbal communication is also very important in the adaptation of literary works. The audience, especially those who have read the fiction, is supposed to focus more on whether the adaption is really compatible with the original work or not. “This is

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possible because readers understand how descriptions of expressions, movements, and appearance map onto characters' personalities, emotions, and intentions" (Hal & Knapp, 2013, p. 3). Usually dialogues among characters, that is, the verbal communicative factor, are the same as or similar to what has been written by the author. The non-verbal communicative element, therefore, is crucial to the assessment of the adaptation. For that reason, this paper is going to discuss non-verbal communication in the adaptation of literary work with two versions of *A Dream of Red Mansions* television series as examples.

The greatest of all Chinese novels, *A Dream of Red Mansions* (or *The Dream of the Red Chamber*) expatiates the decline of the Jia Family. The novel enjoys its celebrity not only because of its appropriate blend of realism and romance, but also due to its fabulous characterization, particularly "its portrayal of characters, the psychological probings of the characters and the techniques of characterization, by contrast, dialogues, décor, and behavior" (Kao, 1980, p. 109), among which the description of expressions and manners of characters can be deemed as a part of the non-verbal communication. Sometimes the goal of non-verbal communication probably fails to achieve, but the communication is successful given adaptation if it correctly reflects what the novel has presented or what the author was prone to. Correspondingly, a successful version of adaptation is supposed to reappear the non-verbal communication the fiction implies and it plays a significant role in the audience's reputation of the drama, as a result of scientist's research that non-verbal actions account for 93% of human communication, while verbal ones for only 7% (Liu, 2002, p. 72).

2 Analysis of Non-verbal Communication in Two Versions of Television Series adapted by the Novel *A Dream of Red Mansions*

2.1 Categories of Non-verbal Communication

Non-verbal communication has been categorized variously by different linguists, but some terms like eye contact, gesture, posture, facial expression, touching behavior and paralanguage are frequently mentioned, so the disparity is rather slight. In this paper Professor Guo Shan and Professor Peng Wei's method of classification is going to be adopted.

Guo and Peng classify non-verbal communication into two major categories: direct communication and indirect communication when communicative means is taken into consideration. Direct or indirect communication are categorized according to the participation of mere human bodies or some other objects during the communication, and there's several subordinate categories: paralanguage, body language under direct communication, and object language and temporal and spatial language supporting indirect communication (Guo & Peng, 2011).

2.2 Examination of Two Versions of Adaptation under the Perspective of Non-verbal Communication

There are a number of episodes worth analyzing in the adaptation of *A Dream of Red Mansions* under the perspective of Non-verbal Communication, among which the story that Chia Pao-yü compares Hsüeh Pao-ch'ai with Yang Kuei-fei in Chapter 30 is about to be specifically examined 註1, because the text contains characters' detailed actions and psychic activities.

Here's the text translated by H. Bencraft Joly in 1891:

These words evoked laughter from every one in the room. Pao-ch'ai, however, was present at the time so Lin Tai-yü did not retort, but went and ensconced herself in a seat near her grandmother.

When Pao-yü noticed that no one had anything to say, he smilingly addressed himself to Pao-ch'ai. "On cousin Hsüeh P'an's birth-day," he remarked, "I happened again to be unwell, so not only did I not send him any presents, but I failed to go and knock my head before him. Yet cousin knows nothing about my having been ill, and it will seem to him that I had no wish to go, and that I brought forward excuses so as to avoid paying him a visit. If tomorrow you find any leisure, cousin, do therefore explain matters for me to him."

"This is too much punctiliousness!" smiled Pao-ch'ai. "Even had you insisted upon going, we wouldn't have been so arrogant as to let you put yourself to the trouble, and how much less when you were not feeling well? You two are cousins and are always to be found together the whole day; if you encourage such ideas, some estrangement will, after all, arise between you."

"Cousin," continued Pao-yü smilingly, "you know what to say; and so long as you're lenient with me all will be all right. But how is it," he went on to ask, "that you haven't gone over to see the theatricals?"

"I couldn't stand the heat," rejoined Pao-ch'ai. "I looked on while two plays were being sung, but I found it so intensely hot, that I felt anxious to retire. But the visitors not having dispersed, I had to give as an excuse that I wasn't feeling up to the mark, and so came away at once."

Pao-yü, at these words, could not but feel ill at ease. All he could do was to feign another smile. "It's no wonder," he observed, "that they compare you, cousin, to Yang Kuei-fei; for she too was fat and afraid of hot weather."

Hearing this, Pao-ch'ai involuntarily flew into a violent rage. Yet when about to call him to task, she found that it would not be nice for her to do so. After some reflection, the colour rushed to her cheeks. Smiling ironically twice, "I may resemble," she said, "Yang Kuei-fei, but there's not one of you young men, whether senior or junior, good enough to play the part of Yang Kuo-chung."

While they were bandying words, a servant-girl Ch'ing Erh, lost sight of her fan and laughingly remarked to Pao-ch'ai: "It must be you, Miss Pao, who have put my fan away somewhere or other; dear mistress, do let me have it!"

"You'd better be mindful!" rejoined Pao-ch'ai, shaking her finger at her. "With whom have I ever been up to jokes, that you come and suspect me? Have I hitherto laughed and smirked with you? There's that whole lot of girls, go and ask them about it!"

At this suggestion, Ch'ing Erh made her escape.

The consciousness then burst upon Pao-yü that he had again been inconsiderate in his speech, in the presence of so many persons, and he was overcome by a greater sense of shame than when, a short while back, he had been speaking with Lin Tai-yü. Precipitately turning himself round, he went, therefore, and talked to the others as well.

The sight of Pao-yü poking fun at Pao-ch'ai gratified Tai-yü immensely. She was just about to put in her word and also seize the opportunity of chaffing her, but as Ch'ing Erh unawares asked for her fan and Pao-ch'ai added a few more remarks, she at once changed her purpose. "Cousin Pao-ch'ai," she inquired, "what two plays did you hear?"

Pao-ch'ai caught the expression of gratification in Tai-yü's countenance, and concluded that she had for a certainty heard the raillery recently indulged in by Pao-yü and that it had fallen in with her own wishes; and hearing her also suddenly ask the question she did, she answered with a significant laugh: "What I saw was: 'Li Kuei blows up Sung Chiang and subsequently again tenders his apologies'."

Pao-yü smiled. "How is it," he said, "that with such wide knowledge of things new as well as old; and such general information as you possess, you aren't even up to the name of a play, and that you've come out with such a whole string of words. Why, the real name of the play is: 'Carrying a birch and begging for punishment'".

"Is it truly called: 'Carrying a birch and begging for punishment'?" Pao-ch'ai asked with laugh. "But you people know all things new and old so are able to understand the import of 'carrying a birch and begging for punishment.' As for me I've no idea whatever what 'carrying a birch and begging for punishment' implies."

One sentence was scarcely ended when Pao-yü and Tai-yü felt guilty in their consciences; and by the time they heard all she said, they were quite flushed from shame. (Tsao & Kao, 2012, pp. 102-104)

It seems that the communication fails to succeed because Chia Pao-yü infuriates Hsüeh Pao-ch'ai and he himself and Lin Tai-yü are retorted satirically by Pao-ch'ai when Tai-yü attempts to ridicule her further, but Tsao Hsüeh-chin skillfully and accurately reveals characters' trait and their relationship, and it's an implication of Pao-ch'ai's nonfulfillment in royal election owing to her brother Hsüeh Pan's commitment of crime.

There are numerous adapted versions of this masterpiece, and the ones produced respectively in 1987 and 2010 (they are going to be mentioned as "the old version" and "the new version" in the following text) continuously arouse debate among the audience. Some have even updated clips online of the same plot to show the comparison and contrast between these two versions. It is generally acknowledged that the new version employs a large number of original dialogues in the novel, and sometimes, the text and characters' psychic activities are read overtly by an invisible addresser. In contrast, the old version changes characters' words at times, scarcely display what the protagonists are thinking, and even expunges some peripheral characters and some stories that are supposed to be indispensable. Take this episode, for example, the old version changes Pao-yü's "for she too was fat and afraid of hot weather" into "you're too well-fed", a sentence which is more understandable to those who are not familiar with the novel in Chinese. And the servant girl Ch'ing Erh disappears. Therefore, some of the audience have the corollary that the new version is more original-work-faithful in this respect. However, it tells a different story when non-verbal communication is taken into consideration.

2.2.1 Direct Communication

When humans communicate only with the help of their bodies instead of other things, for example, tone and intonation, facial expressions, gestures and postures, and eye contact, it is considered direct communication. Direct communication can be further classified into paralanguage and body language, the former signifying the human voice and the latter the human body.

2.2.1.1 paralanguage.

Paralanguage is the form of speech and they are so close to each other that paralanguage ought to exist when verbal communication happens. Paralanguage usually refers to vocalics, quasilanguage, silence, etc. Vocalics pertains to the vocal factors in communication including volume, stress, tone, intonation and speed of speech; quasilanguage involves non-verbal voices like a sigh, groan and cough; and silence does mean something rather than express nothing.

The novel stipulates that Pao-yü feels embarrassed about the situation, Pao-ch'ai responds to Pao-yü's offensive words in vexation through the description "Pao-ch'ai involuntarily flew into a violent rage", and Tai-yü is satisfied at the sight of Pao-yü poking fun at Pao-ch'ai. Their interaction is a mixture of wrath, tease, retort, embarrassment and complacency. The new version, nevertheless, displays the episode in a rather peaceful way. When it comes to vocalics, all the characters are talking in a plain tone, and there's never any alteration in the speaker's volume and spoken speed, while in the old version, the audience can recognize Pao-ch'ai's rage by hearing her louder voice and faster-spoken speed. Furthermore, no quasilanguage is shown in the new version, so the characters' emotions cannot be felt, while Pao-ch'ai in the old version clearly

expresses her mood by snorting, so it can be concluded that the old version adapts better in view of the paralanguage.

2.2.1.2 body Language.

Body language refers to body movements employed by the speaker while interacting with others, consisting of head movement, facial expression, eye contact, gesture, etc. It is universally acknowledged that body language is frequently used when people communication with other, characters in *A Dream of Red Mansions* included.

In this episode, Pao-ch'ai "involuntarily flew into a violent rage", so it is impossible that she has delighted or placid expressions on hearing what Pao-yü has said. The old version perfectly exhibits the alteration of her expressions: she listens to and answers Pao-yü's explanation for his absence from Hsüeh Pan's birthday celebration with smile, and pouts, snorts and sneers after hearing Pao-yü's impolite analogy, but Pao-ch'ai in the new version keeps smiling no matter what happens. With beam she rejoins both Pao-yü and Ch'ing Erh too amiably to make Pao-yü realize his inconsideration or "Ch'ing Erh made her escape", that is to say, in the new version, Pao-ch'ai's non-verbal communication is unsuccessful because she cannot boost the development of the plot.

When it comes to Pao-yü's body movement, the new version eclipses the old one. For example, hearing Pao-ch'ai's reply that she cannot stand the heat, he "could not but feel ill at ease", and his embarrassment achieves to be performed by the actor in the new version. Pao-yü from the old version, however, holds Pao-ch'ai's wrist to scrutinize her, which shows that he deliberately scoffs at Pao-ch'ai's body shape rather than tries to rectify the awkward situation by complimenting Pao-ch'ai's beauty but his words backfires.

Another important character Lin Tai-yü is satisfied with Pao-yü's unintentional taunt. For this reason, she should have an imperceptible smile on her face, which has been shown by the actress in the old version instead of the new one. The actress in the new version remains serious in the whole course of communication, seeming that she's exceedingly jealousy of Pao-ch'ai, even deem Pao-yü's offensive comment as the demonstration of his affection for the latter. As a result, when she asks Pao-ch'ai what plays she has watched, no sardonic answer would be made in order to put Tai-yü into shame, and that's the ludicrous deviation to the original work owing to improper non-verbal communication among those characters.

2.2.2 Indirect Communication

Object language and temporal and spatial language is subordinate to indirect communication which deals with the communication in virtue of things excluding the human body. Object language and temporal and spatial language are two main branches of indirect communication.

Object language refers to all the objects that are capable of conveying the meaning of the communicator, including clothes, and appearance which can demonstrate a communicator's trait, preference, status, faith, etc. This episode takes place in summer, and both the old and the new version manage to reflect this: people in the old version keep from the heat by using fans, and characters in the latter one wear light and thin clothes. The Ch'ia Family, however, is from the wealthy stock, but the new version does not present it perfectly, particularly when there are few apparent differences in clothes, ornaments or postures between the superior and the menial, and at this point, it is overshadowed by the old version.

Temporal and spatial language concerns the message transferred by things relating to time and space, two abstract objects playing a key role in human communication. Albas explains that closer distances are more appropriate for intimate interactions than for casual conversations (1991). Also, temporal factors imply one's attitude towards others. *A Dream of Red Mansions* is actually a novel that spatial factors are easier to perceive than temporal factors, because time is various and complex in the original work (Wang, 2007), probably because it is a novel unfinished.

In this episode, spatial factors are also more conspicuous than temporal ones. It is obvious that the episode takes place under the roof because Lin Tai-yü "ensconced herself in a seat near her grandmother" and she's familiar with Lady Chia correspondingly. Each person in the old version takes a seat, and keeps a closer distance from others than in the new version, correspondingly suggesting a more amicable environment, and their conversation is more likely to be a joke among cousins. No matter how impolite or inconsiderate the utterance is, the speaker is finally supposed to be forgiven. But the new version leaves an impression of stress and strain because people are arranged to walk while engaging in conversation, and sometimes one character leaves another person immediately as soon as his or her words have finished. Therefore, some audience comment that characters in the new version seem to be about to have arguments with each other, which is an irrefutable miscomprehension of non-verbal communication in the original work.

3 Conclusion

Drama producers' fully understanding of the non-verbal communication of characters in a literary work helps the adaptation, and the two versions of *A Dream of Red Mansions* are examples. Non-verbal communication, with the definition of human communication except the oral element, can be categorized as direct and indirect communication with further branches of paralanguage, body movement subordinate to the direct interaction; object language and temporal and spatial language belonging to the indirect one. When the two versions of adaptation are analyzed following these branches, the elder adaptation overall achieves the aim of communication in the novel while the latter fails. This is also an inspiration that adaptors should read carefully and comprehend completely the original literary work, otherwise their adaptation would not able to build a reputation among audiences.

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