

A Comparative Study of the Translation of Reporting Verbs and Characterization between Conventional Translation and Self-Translation: A Case Study of Ah Xiao in Eileen Chang's “Steamed Osmanthus”

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Reporting verbs are not only an important means of presenting characters' speeches, but also an important means of characterization in narratives. The original and the two English versions of Eileen Chang's novella “Steamed Osmanthus” are used as a corpus to conduct a comparative analysis focusing on the reporting verbs of the heroine Ah-Xiao. The analysis shows that the two translators—Eileen Chang herself and Simon Patton—have different styles. Patton favors the use of structuring verbs (especially “replied”) and neutral verbs in serial verb constructions while Chang tends to use neutral verbs glossed by an adverb, an adjective or a prepositional phrase. Descriptive verbs, especially prosodic verbs, also predominate in Chang's version. As a result, both versions may have shaped a different Ah Xiao.

Keywords: “Steamed Osmanthus”, reporting verbs, self-translation, conventional translation

1. Introduction

Reporting verbs, a subcategory of speech act verbs, are used in both fictional and non-fictional texts. In fiction, they are important because they not only report what the characters say but also show how the characters speak, and are thus an essential element of characterization.

With the development of technology, the method of corpus-based translation research has been widely applied to literary translation studies. Baker (2000) was the first to use a corpus to analyze the frequency of the most commonly used reporting verb in English, “say”, and its different variants, as well as its syntactic features in translations (such as choice of tenses, direct or indirect reporting, and addition of modifiers) to study the styles of different translators. Huang Libo (2014) also discusses Howard Goldblatt's translation style through the translation of reporting verbs, taking Gladys Yang's translation as a reference, and discusses the differences between speech presentation and thought presentation in Goldblatt's version.

The studies conducted in the last 20 years on the translation of reporting verbs in literary narratives fall broadly into two categories: One examines the translation strategies or specifically the explicitation of reporting

verbs, usually on the basis of a corpus; while the other relates the translation of reporting verbs to characterization.

Ardekani (2002) examines the translation of reporting verbs between English and Persian by dividing these verbs into four categories. He concludes that Persian has a lower variety of reporting verbs and therefore suggests that translators need to find an optimal balance between faithful translation and omission. Chinese scholars are mainly concerned with *The Dream of the Red Mansion*, such as Liu Zequan (2010), Liu Zequan & Yan Jimiao (2010), Feng Quangong (2011), Zhang Dandan & Liu Zequan (2016), Ding Li & Liu Zequan (2021), with Liu Zequan's early studies being comprehensive studies. Based on the bilingual parallel corpus of *The Dream of the Red Mansion*, he and his co-authors investigate the general tendency of translating reporting verbs and confirm the hypothesis that reporting verbs reflect the translator's style and explicitation is a dominant tendency (Liu Zequan, 2010; Liu Zequan & Yan Jimiao, 2010). Feng Quangong (2011) selects 222 “*xiaodao* (笑道)” from eight chapters of *The Dream of the Red Mansion* and compares the Yangs' and Hawkes' translations. He finds that the Yangs' translation is more flexible and varied in its use of words. Apart from *The Dream of the Red Mansion*, studies on the translation of reporting verbs between English and Chinese can also be found in *Border Town* (e.g. Zhao Qiurong & Guo Xu 2019) and *Heavy Wings* (e.g. Wang Jiayin 2020). Zhao Qiurong & Guo Xu (2019) focus on the explicitation strategy of the word “*shuo* (说)” in four English versions of *Border Town* and find that translators treat the reporting verb “say” with different degrees of explicitness depending on the speakers' identity, status and power. Wang Jiayin (2020) compares and analyzes the English versions of *Heavy Wings* translated by Howard Goldblatt and Gladys Yang respectively, focusing on their different tendencies in using explicit vs implicit reporting verbs and complex vs monolingual reporting verbs.

The other perspective of research on the translation of reporting verbs is characterization. Čermakova & Mahlberg (2018) examine the reporting verbs of Alice and the Queen in *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* and their Czech translation and find that the use of reporting verbs are strong character cues, e.g. the Queen often “screamed”, “roared” and “shouted”, while Alice more often talked “in the form of an -ly-adverb of manner”. Mastropierro (2020) draws on Caldas-Coulthard's classification of reporting verbs to examine the Italian translation of *Harry Potter*, with the aim of finding out how the reporting verbs in translation impact characterization. Among Chinese scholars, Yu Hailing & Guo Shangxing (2016) examine the translation of the reporting verbs in the four English versions of the *Platform Sutra* and focus on how the choice of reporting verbs in the different versions shaped the image of Huineng, the Grand Master of Zen. Later studies on reporting verbs by Liu Zequan also address characterisation, focusing more on the role of Wang Xifeng. For example, Zhang Dandan & Liu Zequan (2016), by studying Wang Xifeng's “*shuo* (说)”, “*dao* (道)” and “*xiaodao* (笑道)”, found that what the characters talk about and what their relationship is like influences the translator's choice of reporting verbs, but all illustrate the tendency to explicate. Using the English translation of Wang Xifeng's “*xiaodao* (笑道)”, Ding Li & Liu Zequan (2021) note that the four English versions have more or less manipulated the evaluative meaning of “*xiaodao*” and shown different aspects of Wang Xifeng's personality and her interpersonal relationships, which affects the readers' perception of the character.

Despite the existing studies that investigate the translation of reporting verbs, few studies have considered self-translated versions, let alone a study comparing the writer's self-translation with a translation by another

translator. It is therefore expected that the present study may draw scholars’ attention to this area. Eileen Chang was a Chinese-born American essayist, novelist, and screenwriter who not only wrote novels but also translated some of them into English. One of them is “Steamed Osmanthus”, which was later translated by Simon Patton, an Australian scholar in Chinese literature. A comparative analysis of the translation of the reporting verbs in this novella in the two English versions would reveal not only the different styles of the two translators, but also their different effects of characterization.

Classification of Reporting Verbs

Researchers have made various classifications of reporting verbs, but more or less on the basis of Leech’s classification of speech verbs. Leech (1983, pp. 212-214) divides speech act verbs into three main categories, namely (1) neutral verbs; (2) phonically descriptive verbs; and (3) content-descriptive verbs, where phonically descriptive verbs focus more on the manner of speaking than on the content.

Halliday (2010, p. 258) divides verbs used for quoting proposals, rather than general reporting verbs, into (1) general verb *say*; (2) verbs specific to offers and commands, such as *tell*, *suggest*, etc.; (3) verbs embodying some circumstantial features or other semantic features, such as *threaten* or *vow*; (4) verbs involving some additional connotation, such as *yell* or *moan*.

R. Caldas-Coulthard (1987, 1994) classifies into three big categories and seven sub-categories as in Table 1.

Table 1
Caldas-Coulthard’s Taxonomy (1994)

Speech-reporting verbs		
Neutral		<i>say, tell</i>
Structuring		<i>ask, enquire reply, answer</i>
Metapropositional	assertives	<i>remark, explain agree, assent, accept correct, counter</i>
	directives	<i>urge, instruct, order</i>
	expressives	<i>accuse, grumble, lament confess, complain, swear</i>
Metalinguistics		<i>narrate, quote, recount</i>
Descriptive verbs		
Prosodic		<i>cry, intone, shout, yell, scream</i>
Paralinguistic	voice qualifier (manner)	<i>whisper, murmur, mutter</i>
	voice qualification (attitude)	<i>laugh, giggle sign, gasp, groan</i>
Transcript verbs		
Discourse signaling	relation to other parts of discourse	<i>repeat, echo add, emend</i>
	Discourse progress	<i>pause, go on, hesitate, continue</i>

To be specific, neutral verbs are those that “simply signal the illocutionary act—the saying” like *say* and *tell* (Caldas-Coulthard, 1987, p. 153). Structuring verbs “describe the way in which a given speech act ... fits

into a sequence of speech acts” (Caldas-Coulthard, 1987, p. 155) like *ask* and *answer*, *inquire* and *reply*. Metapositional verbs not only indicate the illocutionary act, but also elucidate “the narrator’s intended illocutionary force” (Caldas-Coulthard, 1987, p. 156). They include assertive verbs like *exclaim* and *declare*, directive verbs like *urge* and *instruct* and expressive verbs like *complain* and *accuse*. Metalinguistic verbs “refer to a linguistic act and not to a proposition”, like *narrate* and *quote*. (Caldas-Coulthard, 1987, p. 161) Prosodic verbs, such as *shout* and *cry*, “present non-segmental characteristics of speech” and express “vocal effects constituted by variation of pitch, loudness, and duration” (Caldas-Coulthard, 1987, p. 162). Paralinguistic verbs are divided in two sub-categories based on phonetic differences: voice qualifiers (e.g. *whisper* and *mutter*) are employed “to mark manner” (Caldas-Coulthard, 1987, p. 162), while voice qualification verbs (e.g. *laugh* and *sigh*) “mark the attitude of the speaker in relation to what is being said” (Caldas-Coulthard, 1987, p. 163). Finally, signalling discourse verbs are not, strictly speaking, reporting verbs. Rather, they “mark the interaction and ...guide the reader through a simulated process” by either marking “the relationship of the quote to other parts of the discourse” (e.g. *repeat* and *echo*), or “mark the development of the discourse” (Caldas-Coulthard, 1987, pp. 163-164), such as *pause* or *break in*.

Ardekani (2002), studying the translation of reporting verbs from English into Persian, divides them into four groups, namely: (1) those concerned with the content of the reported speech, such as *argue*, *warn*, *persuade*, *threaten*, etc.; (2) those related to the mode of utterance, such as *whisper*, *bark*, *mumble*, etc.; (3) those pertaining to the nature of the report, such as *say*, *answer*, *ask*, *order*, *retort*, etc.; and (4) implicit reporting verbs, such as *nod*, *frown*, etc.

While Liu & Han (2010) adopt Ardekani’s classification, Mastropierro (2020) draws on Caldas-Coulthard’s taxonomy. Since this paper will also examine characterization of the reporting verbs, we will also use Caldas-Coulthard’s taxonomy.

Data and Methodology

The novella “Steamed Osmanthus”, which tells the story of a maid in Shanghai named Ah Xiao, is recognized as one of Eileen Chang’s masterpieces along with “Love in a Fallen City” (倾城之恋) and “The Golden Canque (金锁记)”. So far there are only two English versions¹ available, one by Eileen Chang herself and the other by Simon Patton. The version translated by Chang herself was published in 1962 under the modified English title “Shame, Amah”. As a writer-translator based on her own work, Chang shortened certain parts of the plot and changed the names of the characters from the Chinese original. The other is “Steamed Osmanthus Flower: Ah Xiao’s Unhappy Autumn”, a more faithful version translated by Simon Patton, a professor at the University of Melbourne, Australia.

Despite the surged research interest in Eileen Chang as a translator since 2010, “Steamed Osmanthus” has not received much attention. While Chen Jirong (2009) and Ruan Guanghong (2016), who have studied Chang’s self-translation of “Steamed Osmanthus”, pay no attention to Patton’s version, Huang Libo (2014), who includes Patton’s version in his corpus, does not mention Chang’s self-translation.

¹ According to Chen Jirong (2009), there are three English translations, the third being Chih-tsing Hsia’s “Indian Summer: A-Hsiao’s Autumnal Lament”, but I have not found this version, only Chih-tsing Hsia’s reference to the novella in several books, translating its title as such.

On the basis of the source text and the two English versions mentioned above, a parallel corpus is created by identifying all the reported speeches, especially those with Ah Xiao as the speaker, in the source text and the corresponding English texts.

The analysis is carried out in the following steps. First, a quantitative comparison of the tokens and types of the reporting verbs is made between the source text and the target texts. Incorporating Caldas-Couthard's taxonomy, the study will then focus on the heroin Ah Xiao and elaborate the differences and similarities in the way she is reported in both Chinese and English. By comparing the specific verb categories chosen by the two translators, we will try to find their different "fingerprints" and analyze their different considerations for the representation and characterization of the heroine.

Results and Discussion

A General Comparison of Reporting Verbs

As we know, sometimes a speech in the narrative is not introduced by a reporting verb, but by the characters' turn-taking or quotation marks, which can be called implicit reporting. In the Chinese novella, there are a total of 148 reported speeches, with implicit reporting included. The reporting verbs by characters and verb types are listed in Table 2 and Table 3 respectively:

Table 2
Reported Speeches by Characters in the Source Text

Characters	Freq.
Ah Xiao / Ah Nee	74
Mr Garter/ Mr. Schacht	15
Xiuqin/ Ning Mei	14
Baishun/ Shin Fa	11
Ah Xiao / Ah Nee's husband	10
The short-term worker	7
Miss Li	6
The elderly lady from their home village	5
The neighbor's amah	4
The taxi dancer	1
The children	1
Total	148

Excluding the 13 implicit reported speeches, the remaining reported speeches introduced by reporting verbs can be listed in Table 3.

Table 3
Reporting Verbs by Verb Types in the Source Text

Verbs	Freq.	Verbs	Freq.
道 <i>dao</i> , meaning "say"	67	叱喝 <i>chihe</i> , meaning "scold"	1
说 <i>shuo</i> , meaning "say"	30	催促 <i>cuicu</i> , meaning "urge"	1
叫/唤 <i>jiao / huan</i> , meaning "call"	12	大喊 <i>dahan</i> , meaning "shout"	1
问 <i>wen</i> , meaning "ask/inquire"	8	叮咛 <i>dingning</i> , meaning "urge/warn"	1
答应 <i>daying</i> , meaning "answer / reply"	3	告诉 <i>gaosu</i> , meaning "tell"	1
解释 <i>jieshi</i> , meaning "explain"	2	骂 <i>ma</i> , meaning "curse/scold"	1
回/回答 <i>hui / huida</i> , meaning "answer/respond"	2	下结论 <i>xiajielun</i> , meaning "draw a conclusion"	1

补 <i>bu</i> , meaning “add”	1	招呼 <i>zhaohu</i> , meaning “greet”	1
唱念 <i>changnian</i> , meaning “chant”	1	自言自语 <i>ziyanziyu</i> , meaning “talk to oneself”	1
Total		135	

According to Caldas-Couthard’s taxonomy, they can be divided into the following categories as shown in Table 4.

Table 4
Reporting Verbs in the Source Text Classified with Caldas-Couthard’s Taxonomy

Categories	Freq.
Neutral (including glossed ones)	98
Prosodic (including glossed ones)	13
Structuring (including glossed ones)	13
Metapropositional	6
Metalinguistic	2
Paralinguistic	2
Discourse signaling	1

It is easy to see that in the source text, the use of neutral reporting verbs is overwhelming with a share of 72.6%. However, one third of these neutral verbs are what we can call “glossed neutral verbs”. Since there is a relative lack of reporting verbs in Chinese, glossing modifiers are often added to describe the speaker’s manners and attitudes, such as “不悦道 (said with an unpleasant tone)”, “嗔道 (said in a rebuking manner)”, “带笑道 (said with a smile)”, “气喘吁吁说 (said with a gasp)”, etc.

As mentioned earlier, Chang’s version is much shorter due to her creative and abridged self-translation, with some plots and descriptions omitted. The statistics in Table 5 show that Patton’s version is almost twice as long as Chang’s and therefore has a greater variety of word types, as can be seen from the Standard Type/Token Ratio. Patton’s STTR is 45.49 compared to Chang’s 42.68, both of which are somewhere close to the 44.63 in the fiction subcorpus of the TEC (Olohan, 2004, p. 80). At the same time, both the average word length and mean sentence length in Chang’s version are lower than in Patton’s. According to the fiction subcorpus of the TEC (Olohan, 2004, p. 80), average word length is 4.36 and mean sentence length is 135.08 (which must be a mistake for 13.508). We can see that Patton’s sentence length, i.e. 13.77, is more in line with this figure while Chang’s sentences are much shorter.

Table 5
Statistics of the Two Versions based on Wordsmith 8.0

Translator	Tokens	Types	Type/Token Ratio	Standard Type/Token Ratio	Mean word length	Mean (in words)
Chang	5343	1313	25.47%	42.68%	3.99	10.54
Patton	10846	2311	21.32%	45.49%	4.23	13.77

Of the 148 reported speeches in the original text, Chang has omitted as many as 29, and 44 are translated as implicit reporting, i.e., only using quotation marks. Patton, on the other hand, translated the entire text, and only 15 were converted into implicit reporting. In both translations, there are cases where the reporting verbs are converted into nouns or adjectives. For instance, “又骂 (cursed again)” is translated as “continued her

harangue”, “他问道：‘哈罗？’ (He asked, ‘Hello?’)” is translated as “After an interrogative ‘Hello?’”. The overall use of reporting verbs in the two versions are listed in Table 6.

Table 6
Reporting Verbs in the Two English Versions

Chang	Freq.	Patton	Freq.
say	28	say	27
ask	8	reply	23
call	6	ask	16
cry	3	call	6
explain	3	respond	5
answer	2	add	3
grunt	2	answer	3
nod	2	explain	3
sigh	2	scold	3
sing	2	comment	2
tell	2	continue	2
add	1	laugh	2
bark	1	repeat	2
chirp	1	sigh	2
cluck	1	speak	2
conclude	1	tell	2
repeat	1	urge	2
shriek	1	assent	1
sign	1	bawl	1
snap	1	bid a farewell	1
speak	1	chant	1
yell	1	chorus	1
yelp	1	interrogate	1
		nod	1
		put off	1
		ramble	1
		read	1
		recite	1
		remark	1
		shout	1
		suggest	1
		turn	1
Total	72	Total	120

As Table 6 shows, Patton used a wider range of reporting verbs because he translated the novella in full while Chang used fewer verb types because of her creative abridgment.

A Comparison of Ah Xiao’s Reporting Verbs

Since we will focus on the heroine Ah Xiao, in this section we will compare her reporting verbs in the original and in the two English versions. Of the 74 reported speeches of Ah Xiao, 9 are done implicitly. With that excluded, then 34 out of 65 are neutral verbs, including 23 *dao* (道) and 11 *shuo* (说), and 17 glossed neutral verbs, such as *buyue dao* (不悦道, said unpleasantly), *chayi dao* (诧异道, said in amazement), *daixiao*

dao (带笑道, said with a smile), *diantou dao* (点头道, said with a nod), *daoqian shide shuo* (道歉似地说, said apologetically), *qichuanxuxu shuo* (气喘吁吁说, said with a gasp), *xianfan shide shuo* (厌烦似地说, said as if annoyed), etc. If grouped under the categories, her reporting verbs would be as listed in Table 7.

Table 7

Ah Xiao's Reported Speeches and Reporting Verbs in the Source Text

Ah Xiao's reported speeches	Freq.	Ah Xiao's verb categories	Freq.
Explicit reporting	65	Neutral (including glossed ones)	51
		Prosodic (including glossed ones)	3
		Structuring (including glossed ones)	6
		Metapropositional	4
		Discourse signaling	1
Implicit reporting	9		
Total	74		

For these 74 reported speeches of the heroine Ah Xiao, we find quite different “fingerprints” in the two English versions, as shown in Table 8.

Table 8

Reporting of Ah Xiao's Speeches in the Two Versions (Frequency and Percentage)

Chang's Version		Patton's Version	
Explicit (30)	Neutral (14, 46.67%)	Explicit (59)	Neutral (19, 32.20%)
	Structuring (4, 13.33%)		Structuring (25, 42.37%)
	Metapropositional (2, 6.67%)		Metapropositional (9, 15.25%)
	Metalinguistic (0, 0%)		Metalinguistic (0, 0%)
	Prosodic (7, 23.33%)		Prosodic (3, 5.08%)
	Paralinguistic (2, 6.67%)		Paralinguistic (2, 3.39%)
	Discourse Signaling (1, 3.33%)		Discourse Signaling (1, 1.70%)
Implicit (25)		Implicit (13)	
Nominalized (1)		Nominalized (2)	
Omitted (18)		Omitted (0)	

Discussion**The Translators' “Fingerprints”**

From Table 8, we can find that the two translators have quite strikingly different preferences in their choice of reporting verbs.

Firstly, it is noticeable that Patton is extremely fond of using structuring verbs. As mentioned earlier, structuring verbs “describe the way in which a given speech act ... fits into a sequence of speech acts” (Caldas-Coulthard, 1987, p. 155). They simply introduce a speech “without explicitly evaluating it” (Caldas-Coulthard, 1994, p. 305). Patton uses 16 “reply”s (See Fig. 1), 5 “ask”s, 2 “answer”s and 2 “respond”s, which is imprinted with his style of being neutral, while Chang only uses 3 “ask”s and 1 “answer”.

Concordance		Concordance Plot	File View	Clusters/N-Grams	Collocates	Word List	Keyword List
Concordance Hits		16					
Hit	KWIC						
1		Ah Xiao replied : 'Good morning, Big Sister!' with Baishun adding,					
2		now, it's time to get going!' Ah Xiao replied , 'What's got into you? A jumper, for Heaven'					
3		, Sir?' She nodded and said: 'Corn, Sir.' Ah Xiao replied : 'There's no flour, Sir.' Ah Xiao had never					
4		. Her employer asked who it was. Miss Li, she replied . Her employer did not wish to speak with her					
5		it. Goodbye, Miss.' Ah Xiao came out smiling and replied : 'Goodbye, Sir!' Ah Xiao said: 'Mr Garter ... she					
6		telephone number at work. Doing likewise, Ah Xiao replied : 'This is Miss Li I'm speaking to, isn'					
7		. He hasn't said anything about it.' Ah Xiao replied : 'Mr Garter... she's gone to the office! ...Yes,					
8		paper-cut of the word for "longevity". Ah Xiao replied : 'And the rest!' Ah Xiao said: 'I should do					
9		like a little tramp, doesn't he?' Ah Xiao replied : 'Ah-hah. They bought that apartment for 1.5 mill					
10		, as neat and tidy as can be. Ah Xiao replied : 'About three altogether, I think.' Ah Xiao answe					
11		carrying box after box up the stairs.' Ah Xiao replied : 'I haven't actually seen the bride. As if					
12		bride. As if jumping to her defense, Ah Xiao replied with annoyance: 'Perhaps that wasn't the bride yo					
13		you say? ... I can't hear you. Ah Xiao replied resentfully: 'We'll die in this heat!' Without tu					
14		er doubted her professional integrity before. She replied with faint laughter: 'Of course I did! Perhaps he					
15		in her voice: 'Sister, open up!' Smiling, Ah Xiao replied : 'The rain was too heavy and there are no					
16		in that blasted street. 'Yes, I do,' Ah Xiao replied .					

Figure 1. Concordance of Patton's overwhelming use of "replied".

Secondly, it is easy to see that Chang favors prosodic verbs much more than Patton. For example, she not only uses "call" and "cry", which are quite common, but also uses "shriek", "yelp", "chirp" and "snap" which are less common. Patton uses "call", "shout" and "bawl". The following are Chang's use of prosodic verbs.

Ah Nee and her son *chirped* back, "Elder Sister!" "Aunt!" "Elder Brother!"
 "Say 'Aunt.'" Ah Nee *yelped* at the boy.
 "Ah ya!" *cried* Ah Nee, "..."
 "All right, cry no more," she *snapped*. "Hurry up and read."
 She *shrieked angrily* in the tone of an occidental shrew, "Hello?"

Thirdly, even in the case of neutral reporting verbs, where the difference between the two versions is less striking, they show different traits on closer inspection. Neutral verbs are those that "simply signal the illocutionary act—the saying" like *say* and *tell* (Caldas-Coulthard, 1987, p. 153). However, an author usually glosses "utterances with the reporting verb 'say' plus either an adverb, an adjective, or a prepositional clause which will **mark either manner or attitude**" (Caldas-Coulthard, 1987, p. 165, emphasis mine). Interestingly, of Patton's 18 neutral speech reports in which "said" is used, 9 of them simply use "said", only 3 of them are glossed with "an adverb, an adjective, or a prepositional clause", the remaining 6 are used in serial verb construction. These three sentences glossed with an adjective or a present participle (used as an adjective to modify the subject) are as follows:

Flustered, Ah Xiao *said* to Miss Li: "..."
Softening towards her son, Ah Xiao *said*: "..."
 "... she *said, still thinking of Miss Li* as she bent over kneading the wet clothes, ...

The six sentences in serial verb construction are:

She nodded **and** said: "..."
 She blushed, laughed weakly **and** said: "..."
 From a crockery jar on top of the refrigerator, Ah Xiao took out half a loaf of leftover bread **and** said, "..."
 She wondered for a moment **and** said: "..."

She then turned to Baishun **and** said: "..."
 Ah Xiao wrinkled up her face **and** said: "..."

On the contrary, of the 13 neutral reports in Chang's version, more than half of them use "said" plus an adverb or present participle (used as an adjective to modify the subject). E.g.

... Ah Nee *said smiling*, flushed with embarrassment.
 "I told him," she *said smiling*. "..."
 She turned to her friends and *said blushing apologetically*, "..."
 "... Ah Nee *said firmly, defending* her master's face, ...
 "... Ah Nee *said half laughing*.
 "...", she *said irritably*.
 Ah Nee *said quickly*: "..."

Characterization

Reporting verbs play an important role in characterization as already proved in the studies on *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* (Čermakova & Mahlberg, 2018) and in Dickens's works (Ruano, 2017, 2018). Drawing on Leech & Short's analysis of "The Bucket and the Rope" (Leech & Short, 2007), we will analyze Ah Xiao's characterization in the two English versions.

Firstly, in Patton's version, Ah Xiao is very passive in that she rarely initiated a conversation, but more often "replied" "responded" or "answered", which never occur in Chang's version. Secondly, she seems to be quite impulsive and even hysterical, as she often "scolded" and "bawled" her son—which in the Chinese context is an indication of affection—and often "replied resentfully", "replied with annoyance" and "repeating fiercely".

On the other hand, Ah Xiao in Chang's version is milder, as she often "said smiling", "said half laughing", "said blushing apologetically", "called back smiling". However, Chang's use of prosodic verbs may have undermined her characterization of Ah Xiao, as Ah Xiao "chirped" (like a bird), "shrieked" (like an owl), "snapped" (like a dog) and "yelped" (like a fox). These verbs denoting animal sounds are generally used to represent villains. According to Ruano (2018, p. 490), "villainy is significantly enhanced by verbs that are primarily used to refer to sounds emitted by animals". Apart from Ah Xiao, Chang also uses "grunt" "bark" "cluck" for other characters than Ah Xiao. Such a choice of reporting verbs by Chang could undermine her original intention of characterization.

Conclusion

Shui Jing, an accomplished critic in Chih-ting Hsia's eyes, wrote several papers analyzing Ah Xiao's personality. According to him, Ah Xiao is clever and competitive, with a vigorous vitality. She is generous and hospitable; she desperately desires her son's success, always rebuking him and urging him to study hard; "the most outstanding thing in her personality is her omnipresent and all-embracing motherly nature (Shui Jing, 2008, p. 172).

On comparison, we find that both versions by Chang herself and by Patton use more reporting verbs than in the original novella, which is obviously due to the linguistic difference between Chinese and English, the former of which tends to use general words while the latter prefers specific words. In comparison, Patton "strives to reflect the realities of Chinese literature in his translation" and "focuses on the cognitive experience

of language” (Chen, 2011) while Chang, as a bilingual writer, is more liberal with her own work, so that her self-translation is more like a re-creation, with many arbitrary deletions and changes in descriptions and plot lines.

As for the role of reporting verbs in characterization, we note that Patton favors structural verbs, especially “replied” “answered” and “responded”, creating a passive image of Ah-Siao, while Eileen Chang tends to omit reporting verbs and use quotation marks and turn taking to separate the speeches of the different characters, and on the other hand prefers neutral verbs with modifiers and descriptive verbs, making the character seem milder and more moderate. However, her above-average use of prosodic verbs denoting animals sounds may undermine her characterization of Ah Xiao.

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