

Translator's Style Through Phrasal Verbs: A Corpus-Based Analysis of Two English Translations of *The Analects of Confucius*

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This article compares Gu Hongming and James Legge's translated version of *The Analects of Confucius*. Gu is a non-native English speaker while Legge is a native English speaker. Results revealed that Gu used more phrasal verbs than Legge in total. In specific, Gu used more aktionsart/aspectual, figurative, and non-compositional phrasal verbs than Legge. The article concludes that in terms of the use of phrasal verbs, Gu as a non-native English speaker seems to have an edge over Legge, a native English speaker, in translating *The Analects of Confucius*.

Keywords: corpus, *The Analects of Confucius*, phrasal verbs, translator's style

Introduction

The Analects of Confucius is a collection of prose works recording ancient Chinese educator and philosopher Confucius and his disciples' words and deeds. As Confucianism has shaped the traditional society and ideology of China to a large extent, *The Analects of Confucius* is greatly valued by Chinese. Because of its unparalleled status in China, this classic work has been rendered into almost all major languages in the world.

There has been various research on the translation of *The Analects of Confucius* from different perspectives and translator's style arouses many researchers' interest. In recent years, with the development of technology, corpus-driven approaches have been used to investigate the translational features in different translated versions of *The Analects of Confucius*. Cai and Yu (2018) found that Legge's version was more flexible, abundant in vocabulary and formal in register than Gu Hongming's version by contrasting traditional quantitative indicators such as standard type/token ratio, high-frequency words, average word length, and average sentence length. However, little research explores the use of phrasal verbs in the translation of this classical work from Chinese to English, even though "phrasal verbs are extremely common in English" (McCarthy & O'Dell, 2017, p. 6). To fill this gap, this article contrasts the translator's style in two translated versions of *The Analects of Confucius* in terms of the use of phrasal verbs.

Given that *The Analects of Confucius* is about the daily words and deeds of Confucius and his disciples, its register is less formal. The use of phrasal verbs in translated versions of *The Analects of Confucius* is worth researching, because "phrasal verbs are common in less formal English" (McCarthy & O'Dell, 2017, p. 6).

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Drawing on corpus-based analysis, this article aims to explore the differences between Gu and Legge's use of phrasal verbs in translating *The Analects of Confucius* and thus reveal their individual translation styles.

Methodology

Based on corpus-driven analysis of the two translated versions of *The Analects of Confucius*, this article focused on the phrasal verbs with the most common particles in both translated texts to probe into the stylistic features and differences in the translations of English non-native speaker Gu Hongming and English native speaker Legge. Besides a comparative study of the total number of phrasal verbs used in each text, the respective numbers of aktionsart/aspectual, figurative, and non-compositional phrasal verbs were also investigated. The phrasal verbs were identified both by Lancsbox 6.0 and manually. Both quantitative and qualitative analysis of the representative use of the phrasal verbs were carried out in this study to contrast the styles and features of the two translated texts.

The Establishment of Corpus

This article chose two representative translated versions by Gu Hongming and James Legge. Gu was born in Malaysia during China's Qing Dynasty. His father was ethnic Chinese while his mother was from a Western country and spoke English and Portuguese. Although he studied British and German when he was young, he was a firm defender and preacher of traditional Chinese culture. Legge was a British missionary and sinologist. Although he was committed to his missionary cause and was not conscious of his role as a bridge in cultural communication between the East and the West, what he did contributed tremendously to the spread of the Chinese ancient codes and records, such as *The Analects of Confucius*, *Doctrine of the Mean*, and *The Book of Songs*. The two translators were brought up in different language backgrounds and with different ideologies and different comprehension of Chinese traditional culture, so their translation styles of the Chinese classic *The Analects of Confucius* are worth contrasting.

Their translations were switched from PDF format to TXT format and then put into Lancsbox 6.0 to establish two parallel corpora: GHMcor and Leggecor. GHMcor stood for Gu Hongming's corpus and Leggecor stood for Legge's corpus.

The Definition and Classification of Phrasal Verbs

Phrasal verbs consist of a verb, and one or two particles, e.g., take off, bring up, put up with (Gairns & Redman, 2011). Phrasal verbs can be divided into five semantic categories: literal, aktionsart/aspectual, reiterative, figurative, and non-compositional. Literal phrasal verbs' (e.g., go forward) meaning is transparent and can be deduced directly from the verbs and particles. Phrasal verbs with aktionsart/aspectual meaning (e.g., break up) indicate subjects' condition (Paula, 2012). Phrasal verbs with reiterative meaning (e.g., lift up) have overlapped meaning in verbs and particles (Paula, 2012). Phrasal verbs with figurative meaning are used with figurative or metaphorical senses (Paula, 2012). For example, "bring up" means "cultivate" in certain contexts. Non-compositional phrasal verbs' meaning cannot be predicted from their parts in isolation (Paula, 2012). For example, "give up" means "abandon" in certain contexts, but its meaning cannot be predicted from "give" and "up".

The Selection of Phrasal Verbs

In this study, we chose the following particles as part of phrasal verbs, namely, "away, back, down, in, off, on, out, over, up, ahead, apart, around, round, about, by, forward, through, and together", because they are the

most commonly used particles in English (Sinclair, 1993, p. 4). First, GHMcor was imported into Lancsbox 6.0. Then each particle was inputted respectively as keyword. With the keyword in context (KWIC) function, the lines with inputted particles were detected. The phrasal verbs in these lines were manually picked out and their frequencies were recorded. Leggecor was processed in the same way. Two lists (i.e., Gu's list and Legge's list) were compiled according to the data.

Results and Analysis

Based on the comparison of the use of phrasal verbs, the quantitative results of the two translations are presented in this section. Table 1 shows the numbers of phrasal verbs used by Gu Hongming and Legge respectively. First, the data suggest that Gu uses more phrasal verbs than Legge in total. Second, Legge uses more phrasal verbs with literal meanings than Gu. Third, Gu uses more diverse phrasal verbs except for the ones with literal meaning. Gu uses nearly two times more phrasal verbs with figurative meaning and three times more phrasal verbs with non-compositional meaning than Legge. These two kinds of phrasal verbs are idiomatic and opaque and are often difficult for non-native English speakers (Wu, 2023).

Table 1

Statistical Comparison of Phrasal Verbs

Translated version	Gu	Legge
Total number of phrasal verbs	204	176
Phrasal verbs with literal meaning	147	157
Phrasal verbs with aktionsart/aspectual meaning	127	99
Phrasal verbs with figurative meaning	11	5
Phrasal verbs with non-compositional meaning	46	14
Phrasal verbs with reiterative meaning	26	11

Representative Phrasal Verbs Employed by the Two Translators and Their Corresponding Expressive Effects

Example 1.

Source text: 所谓立之斯立。

Gu: What he lays down becomes law.

Legge: He would plant the people, and forthwith they would be established.

In Example 1, Gu uses the non-compositional meaning of the phrasal verb “lay down” to convey the idea “legislate”, which is more idiomatic and concise than Legge’s expression.

Example 2.

Source text: 宗族称孝焉，乡党称弟焉。

Gu: One whom the members of his family hold up as a good son and his fellow citizens hold up as a good citizen.

Legge: He whom the circle of his relatives pronounces to be filial, whom his fellow villagers and neighbors pronounce to be fraternal.

In Example 2 Gu uses the figurative meaning of the phrasal verb “hold up as” to convey the idea “regard as”. Compared with Legge’s “pronounce”, “hold up as” is more appropriate, because the subjects of the sentence are members of his family and his fellow. The verb “pronounce” seems to be too official in this context.

Example 3.

Source text: 子曰：“温故而知新，可以为师矣。”

Gu: Confucius remarked, “If a man will constantly go over what he has acquired and keep continually adding to it new acquirement, he may become a teacher of men.”

Legge: The Master said, “If a man keeps cherishing his old knowledge, so as continually to be acquiring new, he may be a teacher of others.”

In Example 3, Gu uses the non-compositional meaning of the phrasal verb “go over” to convey the meaning “review”, and it is equivalent to the idea of the source text. The verb “cherish” used by Legge is not appropriate here because the source text is intended to convey the idea of reviewing the previous knowledge instead of treasuring the learned knowledge.

Example 4.

Source text: 吾十有五而志于学。

Gu: At fifteen I had made up my mind to give myself up to serious studies.

Legge: At fifteen, I had my mind bent on learning.

In Example 4, Legge uses the phrasal verb “bend on” to convey the meaning “make a resolution” and “devote oneself to”. Legge uses the non-compositional meaning of the phrasal verb to interpret the Chinese phrase “志于” and ingeniously expresses the double meaning of this phrase, while Gu’s translation only expresses the meaning “make a resolution”, which seems to fail in conveying the sophisticated meaning of the original text.

Example 5.

Source text: 寝不尸，居不客。

Gu: In bed, he was never seen to lie straight on his back like a corpse. In ordinary life at home, he would never use formality.

Legge: In bed, he did not lie like a corpse. At home, he did not put on any formal deportment.

Legge uses the figurative meaning of the phrasal verb “put on” to convey the meaning of “assume”, which is more idiomatic and natural than Gu’s version.

Example 6.

Source text: 恶讐以为直者。

Gu: I hate those who ransack out the secret misdoings of others in order to proclaim them, and believe themselves to be upright.

Legge: I hate those who make known secrets, and think that they are straightforward.

Gu here uses the phrasal verb “ransack out” with its literal meaning to emphasize the speaker’s hatred of the ones who think they are upright but expose others’ secrets, while Legge uses phrasal “make know secrets”, which seems to be insipid and cannot express the speaker’s hatred upon the ones that expose others’ secrets.

Conclusion

A corpus-based method was employed to probe into the use of phrasal verbs, a manifestation of translator’s style, in the two translated versions of *The Analects of Confucius*. This study suggests that Gu uses more phrasal verbs than Legge in total and uses more aktionsart/aspectual, figurative, and non-compositional phrasal verbs than Legge in specific. The most obvious differences in their use of phrasal verbs are that Gu uses about two times more phrasal verbs with figurative meaning and three times more phrasal verbs with non-compositional meaning than Legge does. The use of phrasal verbs makes the translation more idiomatic and appropriate. So in

terms of using phrasal verbs in translating *The Analects of Confucius*, Gu as a non-native English speaker seems to have an advantage over Legge as a native English speaker, which breaks conventional thinking that non-native speakers tend to avoid using phrasal verbs because of their syntactic peculiarity and semantic complexity (Wu, 2023). From Gu Hongming's view, Legge's translation was somewhat rigid despite his contribution to the spread of Chinese traditional culture (Gu, 2013). Legge mainly employed a literal translation strategy and thus made it difficult for common English readers to comprehend this masterpiece. On the other hand, Gu tried to use the manner of an educated English reader to state the mind and deeds of Confucius in order to remove the sense of distance and weirdness (Gu, 2013). Admittedly, this study is not without limitations. The clear-cut distinctions of phrasal verbs are difficult to make because certain phrasal verbs can be ascribed to more than one category and the classification of phrasal verbs is somewhat subjective. More research that emphasizes other lexical parameters such as noun phrases or culture-loaded words can be conducted to reveal the varied styles of different translators. Besides, further research can be done about the sentence or paragraph level of translations from Chinese to English to practice and promote our cultural "going out" strategy.

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