

The Application of Embodied Cognitive Linguistics in the English Translation of Two-Part Allegorical Saying—An Analysis of Examples From *A Dream of Red Mansions*

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As a kind of widely circulated folk language, two-part allegorical saying (“xiehouyu”) carries the wisdom of the Chinese people and is characterized with humor and vivid imagery. Taking the two English translation versions of *A Dream of Red Mansions* as examples, this paper analyzes the English translation of two-part allegorical saying based on the core principle of Embodied Cognitive Linguistics (ECL), “Reality-Cognition-Language”, and explores how the English translation of two-part allegorical saying reflects the three dimensions of ECL.

Keywords: two-part allegorical saying, *A Dream in Red Mansions*, Embodied Cognitive Linguistics, translation

Introduction

A Dream of Red Mansions, one of the four great classical novels of Chinese literature, portrays the lives of a group of women in a noble family. The novel frequently employs two-part allegorical saying to vividly depict the characters and elaborate on the plot. Chinese linguist Wang Yin introduced Embodied Cognitive Linguistics (ECL), an adaptation and localization of Cognitive Linguistics, marking a significant innovation in the development of linguistic theories in China. This paper analyzes the translation of two-part allegorical saying in *A Dream of Red Mansions* using the core principle of ECL, “Reality-Cognition-Language”. By examining the English translations by Yang Hsien-yi and Gladys Yang (referred to Yang’s translation), and by British sinologists David Hawkes and John Minford (referred to Hawkes’ translation), the study explores how the three aspects of the core principle are reflected in the translation of two-part allegorical saying.

Embodied Cognitive Linguistics and Two-Part Allegorical Saying

Embodied Cognitive Linguistics

ECL emerges from an extensive introspection and evolution of Cognitive Linguistics and its philosophical underpinnings, accentuating the importance of “Humanism” and “Materialism” within language inquiry, thereby elevating its theoretical sophistication to greater heights. In China, Wang Yin first proposed the concept of ECL in 2014 in his paper “Embodied Cognitive Linguistics From the Perspective of Postmodern Philosophy”. To

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better highlight the basic theoretical orientation and research content of Cognitive Linguistics, Wang suggested using the term “体认” (Embodied Cognition) instead of the Western term “认知” (Cognition), attempting to localize Cognitive Linguistics into ECL. ECL adheres to the core principle of “Reality-Cognition-Language”, emphasizing that language results from “interactive experience” and “cognitive processing” of the real world (Wang, 2021a). Wang applied this core principle to translation studies, explaining why cross-cultural communication and translation are possible.

Two-Part Allegorical Saying

Two-part allegorical saying is a unique cultural and linguistic expression that conveys profound philosophy and wisdom in a concise manner. It generally consists of a “metaphor-explanation” structure, with the first part setting up the metaphor and the second revealing the meaning, forming a unity or correlation between the two. Originated from daily life experiences, two-part allegorical saying’ comprehension and cognition can be varied due to different personal experiences, making it an embodied form of expression (Wang, 2020).

Analysis of Two-Part Allegorical Saying Translation in *A Dream of Red Mansions* From an ECL Perspective

In this study, a selection of two-part allegorical sayings from *A Dream of Red Mansions* is examined, utilizing the translations by Yang’s and Hawkes’ translations as case studies, to delve into the application of the fundamental tenets of ECL.

Two-part allegorical saying utilizes specific experiences involving “people, events, and objects” (Embodiment) to metaphorically convey intended attributes (Cognition), with the essence residing in the harmony and interplay between the “Embodiment” and “Cognition”. ECL elucidates this process through the lens of “Embodiment” (i.e., interactive experience), wherein individuals perceive distinct individuals, occurrences, and objects within the tangible or conceivable realm, thereby forming the initial segment of these two-part allegorical sayings. Drawing upon “Cognition”, they distill the abstract, sagacious second part. The symbiotic relationship between these elements gives rise to the third facet of the core principle—“Language”. Consequently, the construction of the two-part allegorical saying in Chinese follows a similar cognitive trajectory: from sensory perception to rational comprehension, subsequently transitioning into linguistic expression (Wang, 2019), facilitating a seamless shift from the “signifier” to the “signified”, thereby bridging connections among “people, events, and objects”.

The core principle of ECL, “Reality-Cognition-Language”, emphasizes that translation should not merely involve word-for-word conversion but should also consider the objective laws and facts of the real world, and the cognitive meanings behind the literal meanings. According to the main principles of ECL, language originates from interactive perception and cognitive processing of reality. Translation, therefore, is a mapping-construction between two sets of principles and elements, illustrated as follows (Wang, 2019):

- Generation mechanism: Embodiment Cognition,
- Chinese: Reality-Cognition-Language,
- English: Reality-Cognition-Language,
- Two-part allegorical saying: First Part-Second Part.

Language Level

When undertaking translation with an emphasis on the “Language” component, intentionally separating the “Embodiment” (initial segment) and “Cognition” (latter segment) serves to safeguard the essence conveyed

through corresponding “Embodiment” and “Cognition” within two-part allegorical expressions, commonly referred to “literal translation”. This meticulous approach ensures that the translated content faithfully mirrors both the structure and significance of the source material, thereby enabling readers of the target language to fully comprehend the original terminology, stylistic presentation, and to glean profound insights into the relevant historical and cultural environment.

Example 1: 那宝玉是个丈八的灯台，照见人家，照不见自己。（《红楼梦》第19回）

Yang’s translation: As for Baoyu, he is like a ten-foot lampstand that sheds light on others but none on itself.

Hawkes’ translation: And as for Bao-yu, he is like a six-foot lamp stand that lights up others but stays dark itself.

The proverbial saying “丈八的灯台，照见人家，照不见自己” encapsulates the common tendency to shine a light on others while neglecting self-reflection, metaphorically rebuking those who harshly judge others yet fail to acknowledge their own shortcomings. Both translators opted for a literal translation approach. Whether it’s Yang’s rendition, “shedding light on others but none on itself”, or Hawkes’ version, “lighting up others but staying dark itself”, both faithfully preserve the original metaphor, effectively conveying the intended meaning and vividly recreating the imagery for the reader’s immersion.

Example 2: 丈二和尚摸不着头脑。（第一回《甄士隐梦幻识通灵 贾雨村风尘怀闺秀》）

Yang’s translation: like a monk of two fathoms who cannot get the hang of it.

Hawkes’ translation: monk of two fathoms who cannot understand what it is all about.

The idiom “丈二和尚摸不着头脑” is widely used to depict a state of utter confusion and bewilderment. Both translations adeptly capture the essence of the original phrase, even though subtle nuances in tone and formality. Yang’s rendition, “get the hang of it”, leans towards a contemporary colloquialism, resonating with modern English usage. Conversely, Hawkes’ interpretation, “cannot understand what it is all about”, adopts a more formal register, maintaining fidelity to the original while offering a polished and refined expression. The utilization of ECL in the translation of two-part allegorical saying within *A Dream of Red Mansions* underscores the significance of comprehending the cognitive and cultural facets inherent in these expressions. Through the implementation of translation methodologies that account for conceptual metaphors and cultural paradigms, translators can aptly communicate the original connotations and cultural nuances. Such an approach not only preserves faithfulness to the source material, but also enhances readers’ understanding and appreciation of the underlying cultural milieu.

Cognitive Level

ECL places significant emphasis on “Materialism” and “Human-centeredness”, positing that human cognition serves as the indispensable bridge between the tangible world and linguistic expression (Wang, 2019). Acknowledging the inherent subjectivity of human perception, translators are tasked with not only faithfully conveying the original author’s concepts, but also integrating their own interpretations and viewpoints. Relying solely on literal translation runs the risk of failing to capture the nuanced semantic features of the source text, potentially leading to misinterpretations among readers of the target language, particularly concerning culturally specific expressions. Consequently, translators frequently opt to directly translate the “cognitive meaning” of certain phrases, thereby facilitating comprehension for the target audience.

Example 3: 梅香拜把子——都是奴才。（《红楼梦》）

Yang’s translation: ... We are all birds of a feather—all slaves here....

Hawkes' translation: ...All of us here are bought good....

(“梅香” was a common name for maidservants in ancient China, later generically referring to maidservants.)

The two part allegorical saying in question comprises two distinct components: the descriptive segment, encapsulated by “梅香拜把子”, and the explanatory aspect, elucidated as “都是奴才”. In this context, “梅香” alludes to the historical role of maidservants in ancient China, while “拜把子” denotes the act of establishing sworn fraternal bonds. Within the rigid social framework of antiquity, individuals bound by servitude could solely forge such alliances amongst themselves, thus giving rise to this proverbial expression. Absent an understanding of the connotations behind “梅香” and the concept of “拜把子” within Chinese cultural contexts, unraveling the essence of the two-part allegorical saying becomes a formidable task. Consequently, both of the translators adopt a cognitive approach to their rendition, aiming to elucidate its significance to readers.

Hawkes opts to translate solely the explanatory element, employing the term “bought goods” to imply servitude and underscore the inherent status of those depicted. On the other hand, Yang's translation leverages the idiomatic expression “birds of a feather”, signifying individuals of similar disposition, while also elucidating the descriptive segment, thereby enhancing accessibility and reception among the intended audience. By incorporating considerations at both linguistic and cognitive levels, the translated rendition effectively preserves the essence of the original expression.

Example 4: 猫儿哭老鼠——假慈悲。(第七回)

Yang's translation: A cat weeping for a mouse is a sham show of pity.

Hawkes' translation: A cat crying over a mouse—shedding false tears.

“猫儿哭老鼠——假慈悲” stands as a quintessential Chinese idiom, falling under the category of two part allegorical sayings, denoting insincere sympathy. This figurative expression illustrates a facade of compassion portrayed by an individual who lacks genuine concern.

In Yang's rendition, “猫儿哭老鼠——假慈悲” is transformed into “A cat weeping for a mouse is a sham show of pity”, with the direct translation of “假慈悲” as “sham show of pity”. This method preserves the original structure and metaphor, allowing readers to grasp the idiom's essence through literal interpretation. The translation upholds the cultural imagery of cat and mouse, bridging resonance between Chinese and English contexts, thereby ensuring comprehension among English-speaking audiences. Although maintaining formal tone and structure akin to the original, this approach may come across as somewhat rigid.

On the other hand, David Hawkes' rendition reads as “A cat crying over a mouse—shedding false tears”, employing “shedding false tears” to convey “假慈悲”. This translation retains the metaphorical essence while offering a more intuitive and comprehensible phrase for English readers. Its colloquial, fluent, and natural tone enhances accessibility and relatability, effectively conveying the original meaning with ease.

Overall, Yang's translation emphasizes fidelity to the original structure and cultural imagery, while Hawkes' version prioritizes fluency and reader accessibility. English readers on a cognitive level may swiftly comprehend Hawkes' rendition, whereas Yang's translation might demand deeper cultural background for full appreciation. Each approach possesses its merits, catering to distinct audiences and preferences.

Reality Level

Two-part allegorical saying, consisting of two parts, finds its roots in everyday life and finds application in particular circumstances. Consequently, translators, having conveyed the cognitive essence, proceed to imbue the translation with contextual depth, anchoring it within the realm of reality. This process ensures that the

translated expression resonates authentically within its intended usage contexts, fostering a deeper understanding and appreciation among its audience.

Example 5: ……司马牛之叹…… (第四十五回宝钗)

Yang's translation: ...Lamenting one's lack of a brother....

Hawkes' translation: ...All men have brothers only I have none....

The phrase “司马牛之叹” expresses lamentation for being alone and unsupported. Literal translation might confuse readers unfamiliar with Chinese history. Both translators contextualize the phrase, combining cognitive meaning with the specific context. At the time, Lin Daiyu was lamenting to Xue Baochai about having nothing upon arriving at the Jia household. Baochai comforts her by saying she should not compare herself to Sima Niu, who laments his lack of a brother, as she has a brother but still worries for him. This contextual translation more accurately conveys the meaning of the two-part allegorical saying.

Example 6: 猪八戒照镜子——里外不是人。(第六回)

Yang's translation: the monk Pigsy looking into the mirror—No human inside or out.

Hawkes' translation: Zhu Bajie looking at himself in the mirror—Ugly inside and out.

The proverb vividly depicts Zhu Bajie, a character from *Journey to the West*, as being part-human, part-pig, symbolizing someone who deviates from the conventional notion of a “normal person” both internally and externally. This expression carries dual connotations: self-deprecation and criticism, suggesting a sense of inadequacy on both physical and moral levels.

In Yang's rendition, the phrase “The monk Pigsy looking into the mirror—No human inside or out” is employed, directly alluding to *Journey to the West* and elucidating the meaning of “里外不是人”. This approach preserves the original cultural context while unpacking the phrase's significance.

On the other hand, David Hawkes opts for “Zhu Bajie looking at himself in the mirror—Ugly inside and out”, utilizing “Zhu Bajie” (the pinyin for 猪八戒) and interpreting “里外不是人” as “ugly inside and out”. This translation straightforwardly captures the essence of self-deprecation, ensuring easier comprehension for English readers without necessitating cultural background knowledge.

In essence, Yang's translation remains faithful to the source material but may demand a deeper understanding of the cultural context, whereas Hawkes' rendition is more direct and accessible. Both of the translations effectively blend cognitive meaning with contextual explanation, aligning with the reality level. However, Hawkes' approach may possess an advantage in cross-cultural communication due to its simplicity and clarity.

Conclusion

Grounded in ECL's core tenets—Reality, cognition, and language, this study scrutinizes the English translation of two-part allegorical saying from *A Dream of Red Mansions*. Linguistically, both translators start with literal techniques, interpreting from explicit meanings. However, cognitively, they integrate subjectivity, moving beyond strict literalism to aid audience comprehension. Exploring reality further, they interweave cognitive nuances and contextual layers, enriching the narrative with real-world insights for enhanced understanding.

The pillars of ECL guide translators to explore a nuanced landscape transcending mere linguistic exchange. They navigate semantics and delve into cognitive complexities. Translating two-part allegorical saying from Chinese culture demands linguistic prowess and cultural acumen. It involves harmonizing texts with source and

target environments, fostering a discourse that bridges language and culture. By infusing ECL principles, translators capture original narratives, becoming catalysts in global dissemination of Chinese cultural heritage.

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