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A Study on the English Translation of Cultivation-related Terms of address in A Record of a Mortal's Journey to Immortality

YuCheng Huang
Yangtze University, Jingzhou, 10489, China

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Abstract

Against the backdrop of the cross-cultural communication of online literature going global, cultivation-related address terms, as core symbols carrying the cultivation worldview and cultural connotations, their translation quality is crucial to the understanding and acceptance of overseas readers. This paper takes the "Three-dimensional Adaptive Transformation" theory of Eco-translatology as the framework, takes A Record of a Mortal's Journey to Immortality and its English translation on Wuxia World as the research objects, and analyzes the English translation strategies and transformation effects of cultivation-related address terms combined with a self-built terminology database. The research shows that the translator has achieved translation balance through three-dimensional adaptive transformation, which not only provides practical reference for the translation of similar online literature, but also provides empirical support for the application of Eco-translatology in popular literature.

Keywords

Three-dimensional Adaptive Transformation; Xuanhuan Fiction; A Record of a Mortal's Journey to Immortality; Address Terms

1. Introduction

Against the upsurge of cross-cultural communication of Chinese culture driven by the global spread of online literature, A Record of a Mortal's Journey to Immortality has become a benchmark work for the overseas dissemination of xuanhuan online literature with its grand cultivation worldview and rich culture-loaded words. As core linguistic symbols in the novel that identify characters' identities, cultivation levels, sect relationships, and good-evil positions, cultivation-related address terms not only carry traditional ethics such as "respecting teachers and valuing the Dao" and "cultivation supremacy" as well as unique values in cultivation culture, but also face translation challenges brought by the differences between Chinese and English address systems. Their translation quality directly affects overseas readers'

understanding of the plot logic and cultural connotations.

Currently, there are three main English translations of A Record of a Mortal's Journey to Immortality, namely the official Webnovel version, the Wuxia World version, and the Gravity Tales version. The English translation selected in this paper is the Wuxia World version, which is translated by the well-known translation team Johnchen & DoubleDD. It has high translation quality, fluent and natural language, and proper handling of culture-loaded words, and is deeply loved by overseas readers. About 2100 chapters of the whole book have been fully translated, with a website rating of 92% positive reviews, making it the most widely spread version of A Record of a Mortal's Journey to Immortality overseas. This paper takes the "Three-dimensional Adaptive Transformation" theory of Eco-translatology as the framework, combined with a self-built terminology database of cultivation-related address terms, to explore the adaptive transformation strategies and pragmatic effects of cultivation-related address terms translated by Johnchen & DoubleDD in the linguistic dimension, cultural dimension, and communicative dimension, aiming to provide practical reference for the translation of culture-loaded words in similar cultivation online literature, and meanwhile enrich the empirical application of Eco-translatology in the field of popular literature translation.

2. Three-dimensional Adaptive Transformation and the Research on English Translation of Address Terms

"Three-dimensional Adaptive Transformation" is a core concept of Eco-translatology theory. This theory deeply integrates ecological thoughts with translation research, and summarizes translation methods as adaptive selection and transformation in the linguistic dimension, cultural dimension, and communicative dimension. (Hu Gengshen, 2011) Specifically, the adaptive transformation in the linguistic dimension requires translators to adjust the linguistic form of the source text at different stages and levels according to the linguistic norms and expression habits of the target language, so as to achieve fluency and naturalness of the target text; the adaptive transformation in the cultural dimension focuses on the essential cultural differences between the source language and the target language, aiming to accurately convey the cultural connotations of the source text and avoid cultural misunderstanding and discount; the adaptive transformation in the communicative dimension takes the effective transmission of bilingual communicative intentions as the core, ensuring that the target text achieves the same communicative function as the source text in the cross-cultural context.

As an important linguistic unit carrying social relations and cultural connotations, the translation research of address terms has always been a hot topic in linguistics and translation studies. In foreign studies, the "power relation" and "solidarity relation" theory proposed by Roger Brown and Albert Gilman provides a core framework for the analysis of the interpersonal function of address term translation;

domestic scholars have carried out discussions from multiple perspectives such as culture, pragmatics, and function. Li Xianjin (2011) summarized five major strategies for address term translation, such as domestication, foreignization, and simplification, emphasizing that translation should take into account both semantic equivalence and pragmatic equivalence; Teng Yanjiang (2006), based on systemic functional grammar, proposed that address term translation should achieve interpersonal function equivalence, conveying the speaker's identity, attitude, and social relations; Zhu Qing (2006) proposed the translation strategies of "deepening, weakening, and transforming", providing specific paths for the translation of address terms with complex semantics; Zhao Yingling (1997) systematically analyzed the social-pragmatic functions of address terms, pointing out that the translation of address terms needs to adapt to the context and interpersonal relationships.

Address terms are not isolated linguistic symbols, but form an ecosystem with linguistic, cultural, and communicative attributes. Their generation and use are restricted by multiple ecological factors such as linguistic norms, cultural backgrounds, and communicative relations. The three-dimensional transformation framework of Eco-translatology is highly compatible with the multi-dimensional attributes of the address term ecosystem; its adaptive selection analysis carried out from the three dimensions of language, culture, and communication can systematically and holistically interpret the English translation of cultivation-related address terms; at the same time, it can break through the limitations of single-perspective research and accurately match the dual translation needs of cultivation-themed address terms to carry cultural connotations and realize interpersonal communication. Although existing research has formed a relatively mature theoretical and strategic system, for this ecosystem of address terms in xuanhuan cultivation themes, this paper attempts to systematically analyze the English translation of cultivation-related address terms in A Record of a Mortal's Journey to Immortality using the "Three-dimensional Adaptive Transformation" of Eco-translatology as the theoretical analysis framework.

3. Three-dimensional Adaptive Transformation in the English Translation of Cultivation-related Address Terms in A Record of a Mortal's Journey to Immortality

3.1. Definition, Scope and Classification of Cultivation-related Address Terms

Combined with the self-built social relation terminology database of A Record of a Mortal's Journey to Immortality, "cultivation-related address terms" can be defined as linguistic symbols in the novel that are different from daily general address terms and are specially used to identify the core attributes of cultivators, specifically covering cultivators' identity positioning, cultivation levels, sect affiliation, and

good-evil positions, and are key carriers for constructing the cultivation worldview and conveying interpersonal rules; based on the terminology database, their scope is clearly divided into four categories, namely basic address terms (such as "cultivator", "male cultivator", "female cultivator", "fellow cultivator", which define the basic identity of cultivators), sect address terms (such as "master", "uncle master", "inner sect disciple", "enforcement elder", which reflect the master-disciple inheritance and official ranks within the sect), hierarchy address terms (such as "senior", "junior", "scoundrel", "demon cultivator", which convey attitude differences based on cultivation or position), and force-specific address terms (such as "sacred ancestor", "true lord", "fairy", "demon lord", which identify the exclusive identity of specific races or factions); they can be further classified by functional dimensions into identity identification type (clarifying the basic attributes of cultivators), level differentiation type (highlighting differences in cultivation and status), emotional attitude type (carrying emotions such as praise, criticism, awe, etc.), and force affiliation type (distinguishing sects and good-evil positions). This classification not only fits the corpus characteristics of the terminology database, but also lays a foundation for the subsequent analysis of adaptive English translation strategies for different types of address terms combined with the "Three-dimensional Adaptive Transformation" of Eco-translatology.

3.2. Adaptive Transformation in the Linguistic Dimension

"Adaptive selection and transformation in the linguistic dimension" refers to the translator's adaptive selection and transformation of linguistic forms in the translation process. This adaptive selection and transformation in the linguistic dimension is carried out in different aspects and levels. (Hu Gengshen, 2011) As a distinct linguistic phenomenon, address terms deeply carry the respective normative systems and expression logics of Chinese and English, and there are significant differences between the two in address structure, usage scenarios, and semantic transmission. If this essential difference is ignored in the translation process and the surface form of the source language address terms is mechanically copied, it will easily lead to adaptation conflicts between the target text and the translation ecological environment of the target language, causing the dilemma of "acclimatization" for readers. Therefore, translators need to be guided by the cognitive habits and reading expectations of target language readers, reasonably adjust and flexibly transform the linguistic forms of source language address terms that are contrary to the target language norms, and on the basis of retaining the core semantics and cultural connotations, realize the natural circulation of the target text in the target language context and achieve effective cross-language communication.

Chinese address terms are highly refined, represented by kinship address terms and social address terms, which need to distinguish blood/marriage relations, seniority/juniority, legitimate/concubine, and paternal/maternal lines. Cultivation-related address terms further subdivide sect and good-evil exclusive

address terms such as "master", "uncle master", "true lord", "demon lord". English address terms are highly generalized, without subdivision of legitimate/concubine or seniority/juniority. Kinship address terms are generally referred to as "uncle/aunt/cousin", and social address terms focus on "title + surname" (Mr./Mrs./Dr.) or generalized honorifics (Sir/Madam).

Example 1:

只是粗略地扫了一眼后，就恭敬的上前施礼道：“弟子韩立，拜见师尊！”

“嗯！你起来吧！我旁边的是你师娘，你也见过一下吧！”李化元对韩立的恭敬态度很满意，就一指身侧的少妇说道。（第二百三十七章，《参见》）

He only took a quick look and stepped forward, respectfully saluting, “Disciple Han Li greets Master!”

“En! You’ve come! This is your master’s wife, greet her as well!” Li Huayuan was greatly satisfied with Han Li’s respectful and solemn bearing and pointed to the young woman at his side. (Chapter 237 Paying Respect)

In this translation, the translator translates "师尊" as "Master", which not only fits the semantic meaning of "authoritative elder between master and disciple" in English, but also retains the reverent connotation of "higher than ordinary masters" in cultivation culture - the generalized "Mentor" or "Teacher" is not used, avoiding the loss of cultural hierarchy. There is no direct corresponding address term for "师娘" in English. The translator did not force domestication (such as translating it as "Aunt"), but through the structure of "master’s wife", clarified its identity association as "the spouse of the master", which not only retains the dependence of "师娘" on "师尊" in Chinese, but also eliminates cultural ambiguity through the explicitness of the grammatical structure. However, the sentence "我旁边的是你师娘" is spoken by the master Li Huayuan. The author believes that translating this sentence as "This is my wife" is more in line with daily expression habits. Although the translator noticed the translation strategy of "master’s wife", he did not consider the fluency of expression habits.

3.3. Adaptive Transformation in the Cultural Dimension

Chinese address terms carry patriarchal hierarchy and hierarchy ethics, and cultivation-related address terms such as "senior"/"junior", "sacred ancestor"/"scoundrel" strengthen cultivation levels and good-evil positions. English address terms weaken hierarchy and emphasize individual equality. Even relatives can call each other by their first names, and most social address terms have no hierarchy differences. "Sir" and "Madam" are only general honorifics and do not reflect class differences.

Example 2:

“你们以后可以叫我墨老，”老者说完停顿了一下又道：“叫我墨大夫也行。”(第五章，《莫大夫》）

...

“墨老！”“墨老！”墨大夫背部紧挨着太师椅，手里拿着一本书正津津有味地看着，似乎完全没有注意到二人的到来，也没听到二人的招呼声。（第六章，《无名口诀》）

“The two of you can call me Old Mo.” The old man huffed and considered for a moment before saying: “Doctor Mo is also acceptable.” (Chapter 5 Doctor Mo)

...

“Old Mo!”

“Old Mo!”

Doctor Mo’s back was tightly pressed against his chair as he was currently engrossed in reading the book in his hands. He didn’t seem to have noticed the arrival of the two, nor had he heard their greetings. The two of them were still children after all, so when they saw Doctor Mo ignore them, they were at a loss on what to do, unsure of what would be the best course of action. (Chapter 6 Nameless Oracular Chant)

In this translation, the translator translates the address "墨老" used by Han Li and others to Doctor Mo as "Old Mo", possibly thinking that this translation is a honorific for Doctor Mo in this context. However, the translation method of "Old + surname" such as "Old Mo" cannot reflect the meaning of "respecting the elderly" in Western culture, but may instead carry negative or casual implications. The core reason is the cultural logical difference between China and the West regarding "age" and "address honorifics". Western culture emphasizes "equality" and "youth-oriented values". When "Old" modifies a person's name, it only objectively indicates that the other person is older, without respect, and does not have the extended meaning of "profound qualifications and worthy of respect" carried by "老" in Chinese. In Chinese, the combination of "老" and honorifics (such as "墨老", "老大夫") highlights respect through the superposition of "age + identity", behind which is the ethical concept of "order between elders and juniors"; while in Western culture, there is no such cultural coding of "age = respect", and "Old" itself does not have the function of honorifics. The author believes that the address term "墨老" can be translated as "Master Mo". Combining Doctor Mo's role as Han Li's "master", "Master" can convey the respect of "teacher and master", and at the same time imply the recognition of "profound skills", which is more in line with the dual connotation of "respecting the elderly + teacher's way" in the cultivation context than the simple "Mr. Mo". Alternatively, "Elder Mo" can be used. "Elder" in Western culture can refer to "the elder or senior in a group/community", although it is not commonly used, it can barely convey the meaning of "profound qualifications", which is closer to the honorific extended meaning of "老" in Chinese than "Old Mo", and is suitable for hierarchical scenarios such as cultivation sects.

3.4. Adaptive Transformation in the Communicative Dimension

"Adaptive selection and transformation in the communicative dimension" requires translators, in addition to the transformation of linguistic information and the

transmission of cultural connotations, to focus the selection and transformation on the communicative level and pay attention to whether the communicative intention in the source text is reflected in the target text. (Hu Gengshen, The Research Focus and Theoretical Perspective of Eco-translatology) Pay attention to the conciseness and variation of language expression.

Language plays a crucial role in interpersonal communication. Chinese conveys emotions through address variants, and emotional colors are contained in the address terms themselves. English needs to supplement emotions through adjectives and modal particles, and the address terms themselves are neutral. How to fully and accurately reflect the emotions expressed by Chinese address terms in the target text tests the translator's grasp of the article's emotions and flexible use of translation strategies.

Example 3:

Part 1:

“少说废话，你到底叫我来干吗？要知道，我好不容易找到一个接近张姑娘的机会，就这样白白浪费掉了，若不说出个能接受的理由来，你休想过关！”厉飞雨显得有些愤愤不平，对韩立这次莫名其妙的约他出来，是深恶痛绝。（第七十三章，《厉飞雨的心思》）

“Stop speaking nonsense, what did you call me out for? You have to know that I finally found a rare opportunity to get close to Zhang Xiuer, but I’m wasting it by meeting with you! If you can’t say something worthwhile, then don’t think you’ll be able to get away with it!” Li Feiyu appeared to be distraught and deeply angered by Han Li because he was randomly called out. (Chapter 73 Li Feiyu’s Thoughts)

Part 2:

“现在外面这么乱，我还真的很担心袖儿！”厉飞雨有些紧张了。

...

“好的，你要快点，我实在挂心袖儿的安全。”韩立一听此话，只能无语了。

对方一口一个“袖儿”，说的十分肉麻，让韩立既有几分鄙视，还有几分的妒忌。（第七十七章，《对策》）

“Right now, it’s chaos outside, I am very worried about Xiuer!” Li Feiyu exclaimed with a bit of worry.

...

“Alright, but you have to hurry. I’m really worried about Xiuer’s safety.”

Hearing this, Han Li could only remain speechless.

The other was constantly muttering “Xiuer”, sounding extremely sappy and making Han Li feel a bit of despise mixed with jealousy. (Chapter 77 Countermeasure)

In the first part, when Li Feiyu refers to his beloved Zhang Xiuer to Han Li, he uses the address term "张姑娘", which is more restrained in emotional expression; we know that when Chinese men and women interact with each other, unless the relationship between the two is very close, the man can only call the woman by her nickname. In the second part, in his anxiety, Li Feiyu is more concerned about Zhang

Xiuer's safety and uses the address term "袖儿", which better reflects his affection and concern for Zhang Xiuer. The comparison between these two parts shows that the choice and use of address terms in Chinese interpersonal communication can often reflect the speaker's emotions and attitudes towards the addressee. (Zhu Qing, Interpersonal Functions of Address Terms and Translation Strategies) In the translation, the translator translates "张姑娘" as "Zhang Xiuer", eliminating ambiguity and anchoring the character's identity. The original "张姑娘" is not a general term. Combined with the context, it specifically refers to "Zhang Xiuer" (Chapter 79 clearly states that "Zhang Xiuer is actually the niece of Elder Li"). The translator did not literally translate it as "Miss Zhang" (which is too generalized and distant), but directly translated it as "Zhang Xiuer" (full name). It not only retains the politeness implied by "姑娘", but also clarifies the character's identity through the real name, avoiding reader confusion, and at the same time fits the context of Li Feiyu's admiration for Zhang Xiuer.

The translator directly translates "袖儿" as "Xiuer", simplifying the address term and enhancing the emotional intensity. The original "袖儿" is the nickname of "Zhang Xiuer", reflecting Li Feiyu's intimate and cherished emotions towards her. The translation directly simplifies it to "Xiuer" (single name). After removing the surname, the address term is more concise and colloquial, perfectly echoing the sappy feeling of "calling 'Xiuer' repeatedly" in the original text, and at the same time matching Han Li's observation perspective of "contempt + jealousy", allowing readers to intuitively feel Li Feiyu's infatuation.

When translating these two address terms, the translator avoids rigid literal translation and fits the characters' states. He did not translate "张姑娘" as "Miss Zhang": because in the original text, Li Feiyu "finally found a rare opportunity to get close", with the enthusiasm of active pursuit, "Miss Zhang" is too formal and distant, while the full name "Zhang Xiuer" is more natural, neither losing respect nor appearing distant.

He did not translate "袖儿" as "Little Xiu" or "Xiu'er" (with a nickname suffix): to avoid being overly deliberate, the single name "Xiuer" conforms to the habit of close people calling each other by their first names in English, which is concise and sincere in emotion.

4. Conclusion

This paper takes the "Three-dimensional Adaptive Transformation" theory of Eco-translatology as the framework, combined with a self-built terminology database, to systematically analyze the English translation strategies and adaptation effects of cultivation-related address terms in A Record of a Mortal's Journey to Immortality. Through the form adjustment in the linguistic dimension, the connotation transmission in the cultural dimension, and the emotional adaptation in the communicative dimension, the translator has achieved a basic balance between

semantic accuracy, cultural uniqueness, and reader acceptance of address terms, providing a feasible path for the cross-cultural translation of cultivation-related culture-loaded words.

However, there are still aspects to be optimized in the translation: first, there is a deviation in cultural dimension transmission. For example, translating "墨老" as "Old Mo" ignores the fact that "Old" has no honorific connotation and implies negative meaning in Western culture. Using "Master Mo" or "Elder Mo" is more in line with the dual respect of "profound qualifications + teacher" in the cultivation context; second, the fluency in the linguistic dimension is insufficient. Translating "师娘" as "master's wife" in Master Li Huayuan's lines is too rigid. Combining the context, changing it to "This is my wife" is more in line with daily communication habits.

Overall, the translator's three-dimensional adaptive transformation strategy provides practical reference for the translation of cultivation-related cultural address terms, and the above improvement directions suggest that address term translation needs to more accurately grasp the differences in linguistic norms, cultural connotation divergences, and communicative function focuses between Chinese and English address terms. While "adapting" to the target language ecology, maximize the retention of the uniqueness of cultivation culture, thereby enhancing the effectiveness and depth of cross-cultural communication of Chinese culture.

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