

学校编码: 10384  
学号: 12020141152708

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UDC \_\_\_\_\_

厦门大学

硕士学位论文

脏话翻译中的缺失的研究  
——以莫言小说《丰乳肥臀》为例

An Analysis on the Loss in Foul Language Translation  
—A Case Study of Mo Yan's *Big Breasts and Wide Hips*

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论文提交日期: 2017年7月  
论文答辩时间: 2017年8月  
学位授予日期: 2017年9月

答辩委员会主席: \_\_\_\_\_  
评阅人: \_\_\_\_\_  
2017年 月

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## Abstract

The present research investigates the loss of foul language in its transference from Chinese to English. The present research on the loss in foul language translation is done with two self-built sub-corpora, one in Chinese and the other in English, containing 415 items of foul expressions respectively, all of which are extracted from Mo Yan's novel *Big Breasts and Wide Hips* and its English version. Considering that previous studies tend to do researches on the loss with materials extracted from various sources, and to focus on over-loaded translation, omission, and mistranslation individually rather than include them all, the present research embraces over-loaded translation, mistranslation and omission, and in accordance with the characteristics of foul language, adds ineffective free translation into the investigation.

The present research first offers quantitative analyses on the loss in foul language. To demonstrate the severity of the loss in the translation of foul expressions, the analysis is based on the categorization of the loss. The research then goes further to give qualitative analyses on groups of foul expressions that exhibit heavy loss.

The aforementioned analyses on the loss in foul language translation in Mo Yan's *Big Breasts and Wide Hips* show that 105 out of 415 foul expressions are lost, and most losses fall into the categories of over-loaded translation and ineffective free translation (accounting for 74.26% in total), both of which are heavily affected by cultural differences. In addition, the pie chart on the distribution of the loss shows that most losses are under the groups of morality and animals (taking up 74.00% in total), both of which are of or invested with rich culturally-specific associative meanings in foul language, and it also indicates that few losses are in categories such as excreta, sexual organs and disabilities where English and Chinese cultures have much in common in foul language. Our findings illustrate that foul expressions on morality and animals, are more likely to be lost in the forms of over-loaded translation and ineffective free translation.

**Key Words:** foul language; translation; loss

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## 摘要

本文以莫言小说《丰乳肥臀》中的脏话及 Goldblatt 的英译, 研究中英语言转换中脏话翻译缺失状况。研究根据以上小说自建两个子语料库, 每个分别由 415 条脏话组成。鉴于此前脏话翻译缺失相关研究倾向于以来源杂乱、散乱的语料作为研究对象, 鲜少基于统一的来源, 且倾向于研究缺失以下的一项或两项, 未曾把过载翻译、省略、误译等结合起来研究, 本文结合脏话的特征, 在包揽过载翻译、省略、误译等的前提下, 另增加了无效意译, 以莫言小说中的脏话翻译为例对脏话翻译缺失进行研究。

本文首先根据缺失分类, 对小说中脏话缺失进行定量研究, 分析脏话在翻译过程中缺失之严重; 再对造成严重缺失的门类进行定性分析。

通过以上分析, 本研究发现莫言小说《丰乳肥臀》的 450 条脏话表达中, 有 105 条缺失; 同时, 还发现绝大多数缺失为缺失类型中的过载翻译及无效意译(共占比 74.26%), 且此二者深受文化差异影响。针对以上缺失, 依据脏话分类所绘饼状图显示: 绝大多数缺失落入脏话类型中的伦理道德类及动物类(占比 74.00%), 此二者饱含文化赋予的附加意义; 而在中英文化更相通的例如排泄物类、性器官类、残疾类脏话中, 极少出现翻译缺失情况。本研究的发现表明, 伦理道德类与动物类脏话更易以过载翻译与无效翻译造成缺失。

**关键词:** 脏话 翻译 缺失

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## Chapter One Introduction

### 1.1 Research Background

Foul language was once known as “訾言” (商鞅, 1974) in ancient China, which means evil speaking or defamation. The official record of disrespectful words could be dated back to the Qin dynasty in *Shih Chi* (司马迁, 2011) where Fan Ceng called Liu Pang “竖子”, which is “guy” in English literally or “little bastard” if you want an exact equivalent. In Song and Yuan dynasties when the scripts for story-telling emerged, vulgar language was popular in literary language.; the Ming and Qing dynasties saw it widely used in novels such as *A Dream in Red Mansions*, *Water Margin* and *The Golden Lotus*, and foul expressions such as “蹄子 (hoof)”, “畜生 (brute)” and “鸟 (cock)” are very common in those novels. In modern times, especially after the May 4<sup>th</sup> Movement, when naturalism prevailed in the literary world and avocations of individuality were popular; as a result many writers were even proud of their use of foul words in their works. Nowadays, however, due to the regulation and purification of Chinese, foul language is less often seen in written materials than in daily use and on social networking platforms.

Outside China, as Montagu (Montagu, 2001) documents, swearing has its footprints “across Egyptians, Hebrews and Babylonians through Elizabethan England to middle class of contemporary America”. Though it is hard to locate the earliest record of its use and demonstrate its overall development, its penetration in literary works, audiovisual materials, and people’s daily life is so obvious that nearly everyone can offer one or two examples at once. The literature also shows that there are serious researches demonstrating that swearwords may be a factor in reducing stress and pain (e.g. Stephens, et al., 2009).

In history and at present, basically all languages on the earth display swearwords. But the composition and the use of swearwords from different languages are not homogeneous, but diverse. Therefore, when it comes to translation, which transfers expressions from one language to another, the distinction between foul expressions

from different languages and different cultures, is especially sharp and causes trouble and problems in translation. As it will be argued in the present research, in such cases, the loss of foul language is inevitable. However, there are very few studies which focus on foul languages from the perspectives of cultural consideration and its translation.

Against such a background, the current research attempts to observe the loss in foul language translation, which is based on foul expressions extracted from Mo Yan's novel 《丰乳肥臀》(莫言, 2012) and its English translation *Big Breasts and Wide Hips* (hereafter abbreviated as BBWH) by Howard Goldblatt (Goldblatt, 2012).

## **1.2 Research Purpose and Significance**

As it will be introduced in the following chapter, foul language is a non-normal language which is not allowed in normal written language (朱晓旭, 2014), and studies on it or its translation are few and far between. Among the few studies on the translation of foul language, most explore translation strategies, or the regulation of the translation. The present research aims at the product of the translation of foul language, and explores the loss in foul language translation. The present research hopes to enrich the limited studies on the translation of foul language, and to provide suggestions for future translation practice on foul language.

## **1.3 Research Data**

The present research uses two self-built sub-corpora, one in Chinese and the other in English. Foul expressions of the parallel corpus are extracted from Mo Yan's novel BBWH. Both sub-corpora are made up of 280 sentences and 415 items.

Mo Yan's novel BBWH is taken as the data source for three reasons. Firstly, the novel boasts research value. Mo Yan once said, "...you can skip my other novels, but you must read *Big Breasts and Wide Hips*" (Yardley, 2012). The novel is one of Mo Yan's representative works and it covers sex, violence, females, wars and politics. It is

very popular over the world (Yardley, 2012), and has been translated into many languages. Its importance and popularity render the novel worthy of research.

Secondly, the novel contains a large number of foul expressions. The wide use of foul language in the novel could be a result of Mo Yan's past experience and education background. Mo Yan was born to a peasant family in 1955, and had received little formal education. His education background along with his life in rural areas leaves indelible marks in his works, most of which portray lower-class nobodies where vulgar words and expressions are standard configuration.

The last but not least reason attributes to the authoritative and reliable English translation. The novel was translated by Goldblatt, whose translation looks to be "near-universally regarded as the leading English-language translation of fiction from the Chinese (Yardley, 2012)". His rich experience in translating Chinese novels and especially Mo Yan's novels renders his translation of BBWH more reliable, which, to a large extent, makes contribution to the feasibility and credibility of the data source and the investigation.

The present research has extracted all foul expressions from the novel, except those truncated in the translation. In Goldblatt's early works of translation, "truncations and alterations are relatively common (贾燕芹, 2016:222)". The novel in question is no exception. In translating BBWH, Goldblatt has struck out not a few contents, most of which are on small characters of little importance. The loss of foul expressions used in the above-mentioned situations is not investigated in the present research because they are related to truncation instead of translation.

The software used to process the data is AntConc. The version installed for the present research is AntConc 3.2.4w (Windows) 2011. The Chinese sub-corpus and the English sub-corpus are processed in AntConc separately, and wordlists of the two sub-corpora are exported, and then statistic results necessary for the following quantitative analyses are produced for the present research.

## 1.4 Thesis Structure

The present research consists of five chapters. Chapter One serves as an introduction, providing information on the research background, research purpose and significance, research data and the thesis structure.

Chapter Two presents reviews of relevant researches on foul language. The chapter is divided into three parts. Part one gives a brief review of foul language, including its definitions, functions and categories. Part two provides an overview of the previous researches on foul language at home and abroad. Part three makes a thorough review of the previous researches on foul language translation.

Chapter Three elaborates on the concept of loss in foul language translation. The chapter is divided into four parts, centering respectively upon the definition of the loss in foul language translation, and over-loaded translation, ineffective free translation and mistranslation and omission.

Chapter Four is devoted to the analyses of loss in foul language translation in the novel BBWH and the outcomes of the analyses. The chapter is divided into three parts. Part one provides quantitative analyses on the loss in the forms of over-loaded translation, ineffective free translation and mistranslation and omission, and the main findings of those quantitative analyses. Part two displays the distribution of loss in foul language translation according to the category of the loss. Based on the quantitative analyses, together with the main findings, part three offers intensive qualitative analyses on the groups which contain most of the losses.

Chapter Five serves as a conclusion. It sums up the major findings of the research, points out the limitations of the present research, and offers the suggestions for future study.

## Chapter Two Literature Review

### 2.1 Foul Language

Rarely has foul language been investigated either at home or abroad. Many scholars avoid doing research on foul language (Wajnryb, 2005:viii), not to mention to establish a relatively complete system of knowledge on the term. The literature so far does not provide an agreed definition of foul language. In addition, scholars seem to have different understandings when it comes to the functions and categories of foul language.

#### 2.1.1 Definitions

In the Chinese dictionaries, *Xinhua Dictionary*, the official Chinese dictionary, has not taken in the compound of characters “脏话” yet, and the *Modern Chinese Dictionary* (中国社会科学院语言研究所词典编辑室, 2016:1622), defines foul language as “obscene words (its original expression: 下流的话)”. In online Chinese dictionaries (e.g. 汉典), it is found that they all offer the same definition—“filthy words intolerable to the ears; uncivilized words (its original expression: 污秽不堪入耳的话; 不文明的语言)”. It seems that definitions given by the Chinese dictionaries tend to emphasize the dirtiness of the language.

In the English dictionaries, the *Oxford Advanced Learner's English-Chinese Dictionary* presents a definition for foul language as the language that includes “rude words and swearing (霍恩比, 2008:1125)”; the *Longman Dictionary of Contemporary English* defines foul language as the “language that is full of angry swearing, and that therefore offends people (艾迪生·维斯里·朗文出版公司辞典部, 1998:595)”; the *Collins CONBUILD Advanced Learner's English-Chinese Dictionary's* definition for “foul language” is: “foul language is offensive and contains swear words or rude words (Sinclair, 2006:440)”. The definitions given by the latter two English

dictionaries take both the content of the foul language and its effects on its addressee into consideration.

In the Chinese literature on foul language, Xuan (轩治峰, 2003) believes that foul language is the kind of language using vulgar or evil words to insult others or/and to vent the speaker's discontent. Zhu (朱晓旭, 2014) complements the statement by defining foul language as a non-formal language phenomenon with an obvious purpose to abuse, insult and degrade the addressee. Liao (廖德明, 2009) agrees with Zhu on its obvious purpose, but he claims that foul language is universal though non-normal, and adds that it could not be tolerated by the normal language for its properties of breaking norms and challenging taboos. Shi (时翠红, 2014) directly takes "obscene words" as the English equivalent of "脏话", and defines it as the kind of language that is used "to insult, hurt others with evil and vulgar words". Different from those mentioned above, Zhang (张国省, 2013) states that "foul language" is a concept contrasting to "clean language", and it refers to a type of language that derives from taboos, human excreta, sexual intercourse or sexual organs and is used to insult and/or curse its listeners and make them feel embarrassed, offended or gross. Thus, from the review of the Chinese literature on foul language, it could be concluded that foul language is universal (廖德明, 2009) and non-normal (朱晓旭, 2014), and it contains vulgar words/characters (轩治峰, 2003; 时翠红, 2014) that derive from taboos, human excreta, sexual intercourse or sexual organs (张国省, 2013), and is used to insult or curse its listeners (轩治峰, 2003; 朱晓旭, 2014; 时翠红, 2014; 张国省, 2013) to make them feel embarrassed, offended or gross (张国省, 2013).

In the English literature on foul language, it is found that words such as "swearing", "swearwords", "cursing", or "trash" are often used to refer to foul language. According to Jay (1992), swearing refers to the use of taboo language with the purpose of expressing its user's emotional state and communicating that information to its listeners. Andersson and Hirsch (1985:5) claim that a swearword has three characteristics—it has to refer to taboo and/or stigma (sign of social unacceptability); it is not expected to be interpreted literally; it can be used to



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