

The differences in dialogue styles between English and Chinese in Thunderstorm

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Abstract: Research based on stylistic markers provides an accurate method for describing language style, and the application of stylistic markers in English learning has gradually garnered attention from scholars. The analytical applications of stylistic markers in language are also pertinent to English language learning. This paper explores the use and differences of dialogue styles in both the original “Thunderstorm” and its English translation, starting from the formal and informal markers of stylistic markers. The analysis focuses on the properties of three categories of formal markers: syntax, vocabulary, and rhetoric, as well as the attributes of two categories of informal markers: the internal qualities of the work and the integration of the recipient’s perspective.

Keywords: Formal Markers; Informal Markers; “Thunderstorm”; Dialogue Style

1. Introduction

Style is not an elusive quality of writing but a system of symbolic representations that can be manifested in “forms.” This symbolic system of style consists of stylistic markers that can be recognized by the translator in the linguistic forms of the original text. In other words, the style of the original work is a system of markers that can be understood, and the means of recognizing style lies in mastering the system of stylistic markers (Liu Miqing, 2005). Stylistic markers can be divided into “formal markers,” which focus on phonetic and morphological variations, and “informal markers,” which focus on aesthetic effects. This paper will analyze the dialogue style of the original text and its translation through a comparative analysis of three categories of formal markers—syntactic markers (i.e., an analysis of the syntactic characteristics of the original text), lexical markers, and rhetorical markers—as well as an analysis of the intrinsic qualities of the work through informal markers and the integration of the recipient’s perspective.

2. Formal Markers

2.1 Lexical Markers

2.1.1 Kinship Terms

In Chinese, kinship terms not only differentiate based on gender and generational rank but also take into account age, paternal and maternal lineage, as well as blood and marital ties. In contrast, English kinship terms primarily distinguish only between gender and generational rank. For instance, if a father has several sons, they would be referred to as the eldest son, second son, third son, and so forth. English lacks the complexity of the Chinese system, as it does not differentiate based on paternal or maternal lineage, age, or even clan affiliations, with some terms not distinguishing gender at all (Liu Meiyan, 1970). The formation of such kinship terms is related to the cultural differences between the East and West. Eastern culture, particularly in China, places a greater emphasis on blood relations and family. Ancient China was long rooted in a feudal society dominated by agricultural culture. Residents of mainland China relied on the land, and within the context of a self-sufficient agricultural economy, families often consisted of three or four generations living together. This arrangement established extended families, sometimes comprising dozens or even hundreds of members, as relatives by blood or marriage resided under one roof. Furthermore, China has traditionally been a nation that values rituals and propriety, not only in external social relations but also within the family. This significance is evident in the complex and extensive system of kinship terms in Chinese. Thus, such a society fundamentally values seniority and hierarchy in kinship relations, which also symbolizes identity, status, and authority, leading to a particular attentiveness to language when using terms that reflect different identities, ages, and generational ranks. In contrast, Western societies are primarily based on a commercial economy, which results in smaller family units typically consisting of parents and minor children. In these families, the

relationships are simpler and more informal due to the smaller number of individuals, so a few simple terms are sufficient for everyday communication (Liu Meiyuan, 1970). In Chinese, there are specific ways to address elders, such as “grandfather,” “grandmother,” “older brother,” etc., to show respect; directly calling them by their names is considered inappropriate. On the other hand, in countries influenced by Christian culture, there is an emphasis on the equality of all individuals, regardless of their wealth or status. This ideology has permeated their interpersonal relations, and in everyday life, it is generally acceptable to address elders by their names, often reflecting a sense of intimacy.

For example, the translator uses “Mrs.” to represent the Chinese term grandmother and “Madam” for lady; “Master” for young master, implying that readers know that Zhou Chong is the second son, and thus directly adds his nickname afterward; “Sir” for master; which notably removes the hierarchical relationships depicted in the Chinese forms of address. The Old Servant refers to the elderly lady as “my dear,” which is absolutely unacceptable in China as it clearly violates the relationships of respect and hierarchy. In contrast, the English expression conveys a sense of intimacy and aligns with the Western concept of equality among all individuals.

2.1.2 The Use of Personal Pronouns and Substitutes

The use of personal pronouns in English is more varied than in Chinese. For instance, in the English translation. English and Chinese belong to different language families and handle subjects differently. In Chinese, subjects are often omitted (Liu Meiyuan, 1970). This is particularly evident in oral discourse, where the protagonist’s firm tone and extreme distrust towards the male lead reflect the intensifying conflict between them. The contrast between the original work and its translation is quite pronounced.

For example, the translator rendered *yi* as “I say,” which conforms to the characteristics of spoken dialogue in drama. The translator clarifies the subjects “I” and “we,” emphasizing the performers of the actions, which benefits the understanding of the recipients, namely the Western audience.

2.2 Rhetorical Markers

Another significant difference between English and Chinese is that English emphasizes substitution, while Chinese focuses on repetition. In English, aside from rhetorical needs, there is rarely a repetition of the same word or structure within sentences. In contrast, repetition is commonplace in Chinese, which is related to the cultural emphasis on balance and the aesthetics of symmetry. This is a key point we must pay special attention to when translating between Chinese and English. In English, pronouns are often used to replace nouns that have recently appeared, whereas Chinese tends to repeat nouns. The substitution structures in English primarily include pronouns (such as personal pronouns, demonstrative pronouns, indefinite pronouns, and relative pronouns), as well as words like “so” and “do.” The expressions of *tian* in Chinese and English differ, such as “God” and “In Heaven’s name.” “God” is said by Lu Shiping, while “In Heaven’s name” is spoken by Fan Yi. The difference in these two expressions subtly reflects the different social statuses of the two characters. Fan Yi, having received formal education, tends to use a more literary style, while Lu Shiping, born into servitude and lacking education, uses language that is more simple and colloquial.

3. Non-formal Markers

The Intrinsic Quality of the Work: Analyzing the Themes and Emotions, i.e., the Overall Content Issues Translator Wang Zuoliang agrees with Yan Fu’s proposed translation standards of “faithfulness, expressiveness, and elegance.” His translation style is characterized by a “faithful and expressive” approach. Wang Zuoliang fully considers the features of the original work and skillfully handles them, ensuring that the translation maintains a high degree of consistency with the original in terms of meaning, form, and style. The translation aligns well with the original intent while adhering to Chinese expression habits, allowing readers to naturally accept and understand it, resulting in a strong emotional resonance. Due to the differences in linguistic style between English and Chinese, the author does not translate word-for-word in a manner that is strictly aligned with the original text, but instead adopts a perspective that takes into account the audience—namely, Western viewers and readers. This results in a translation that remains faithful to the original while also suiting the aesthetic preferences of Western audiences. In Chinese, the phrase “*bu shi*” effectively conveys the emotional state of the character, but for English viewers, simply repeating “No” or “Not” would fail to evoke the intensity of the character’s emotions. Therefore, the translator chose to translate it into slightly longer phrases such as “No! I’m not!” and “No, I’m not his mother!” Although this approach sacrifices the original’s formal structure, it becomes

more fluid and coherent, maintaining the rhythm of the original while being vivid and easily understandable for English-speaking audiences (Yang Ziqian, 1993).

4. Conclusion

This article conducts a comparative analysis of the stylistic markers in the original and translated versions of *Thunderstorm*. It finds that the English translation not only exhibits the original text's concise, understated, natural, flexible, and easily comprehensible dialogic language but also reflects the spoken characteristics of dramatic language. The translator and faithfully conveys the dialogic style of the original. Given that the linguistic systems and expression habits of Chinese and English differ due to cultural contrasts, it is inevitable that the translated dialogues may diverge from the artistic and aesthetic qualities of the original. However, the translator has fully considered the perspectives of the audience—namely, Western viewers and readers—ensuring that the thoughts and spirit of the original work are effectively communicated to the recipients. This consideration represents one of the translator's successes.

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Funded Project:

- (1)2023 Anhui Provincial Vocational and Adult Education Society Research Project "Research on the Integration of Local Culture into Public English Teaching in Higher Vocational Education under the Strategic Background of Cultural Confidence — Taking Hui Culture as an Example" (Project Number: AZCJ2023052)
- (2)2023 Provincial-Level Quality Engineering Project Initiatives in Higher Education Institutions of Anhui Province"Exploration and Practice of Multimodal Construction Path for Integrating Hui Culture into Higher Vocational English Teaching under the Background of the 'Belt and Road' Initiative" (Project Number: 2023jyxm1342)
- (3)2024 Anhui Province Higher Education Institutions Scientific Research Project Approved Topics"Research on the Diversity of Red Tourism Resources and Its Ecological Translation Path in the Context of the 'Belt and Road' Initiative: A Case Study of Interpretive Texts in Anhui's Red Tourist Attractions" (Project Number: 2024AH040335)