

On Goldblatt's Translation of Address Forms in *Frog* —Based on the Functional Equivalence Theory

Li Liping, Song Xueying

The School of Foreign languages Southwest Petroleum University, Chengdu, 610500, Sichuan, China

Abstract: In *Frog*, Mo Yan draws a vivid picture on the family planning policy carried forward in a Chinese village. There are various address forms and rich communicative contexts in the novel. Based on the Functional Equivalence Theory, this paper makes a comparative analysis on address forms varying with the context in Goldblatt's translation, aiming to explore the translator's ways to translate certain kinds of address forms and reproduce the original message and communicative backgrounds. It is found that Goldblatt's version features flexibility and suitability of wording in translating address forms. He tries to convey the cultural connotations and identity information implied to readers of the target language. Hence, misunderstandings that easily arise from studies on the Functional Equivalence Theory and translation practice are cleared up. First, formal equivalence is a contrast to functional equivalence rather an opposing pair, sometimes even facilitating the latter. Second, although there are conventional translation methods for specific texts such as names, the translations are not invariable. The translator should give priority to readers' reactions and deal with the target language flexibly, so as to achieve the text function as possible. But it's also revealed that some errors are caused by the translator's misunderstandings of Chinese culture. Hence, a translator is expected to keep learning the non-native working language and its inherent culture.

Keywords: Functional Equivalence, *Frog*, Goldblatt's translation, address forms

1. Introduction

Frog, written by Mo Yan, is based on how the family planning policy puts into effect in rural China. With a time span of nearly sixty years, a story on the job of Gugu, Wan Xin, is told by a storyteller, Wan Xin's nephew, to show the difficult implementation of the family planning policy in Gaomi which locates in the Northeast of China. Through a dramatic narrative, the writer analyzes the complex spiritual world of the grassroots workers who have made great contributions to the cause of family planning. The novel, featuring a number of real and living characters, creates diverse dialogues and results in various address forms with different communicative purposes.

Howard Goldblatt's translation, *Frog, A Novel*, is taken as the research object of this paper. As a famous sinologist, Goldblatt was hailed as the midwife of Chinese modern and contemporary literature by Updike, a famous American writer. Chinese scholars have done a lot of researches on the novel, but there aren't many on Goldblatt's English version. Besides, most of previous researches only focus on translator's subjectivity and the translation of culturally loaded words. Few scholars have shifted their attention to address forms in the novel. Set in a special social background, *Frog* boasts of a variety of characters and unique address forms. When translating it, translators must consider the different functions of those address forms that are affected by the specific cultural environment and communicative context. Therefore, it is necessary to conduct researches on existing translation of those forms in the guidance of the functional equivalence theory, so as to obtain workable reference. In this paper, the analysis will start with the functions of the address forms in the original text, and then go to the translation strategies and methods Goldblatt adopts to reproduce the different functions of similar address forms in different contexts.

2. Nida's Functional Equivalence Theory

The concept of Functional Equivalence is born in Eugene A. Nida's commitment to the definition and exploration of translation activities carried out from the perspective of readers' response. In *Toward a Science of Translating*, Nida first proposed Formal Equivalence and Dynamic Equivalence, the latter one of which was preferred. Therefore, Nida defines translation as "Translating consists in reproducing

in the receptor language the closest natural equivalent of the source-language message, first in terms of meaning and secondly in terms of style." (Nida, 2004:12). Later, he explained the concept in *The Theory and Practice of Translation* as "Rather than force the formal structure of one language upon another, the effective translator is quite prepared to make any and all formal changes necessary to reproduce the message in the distinctive structural forms of the receptor language." (Nida & Taber, 1982:4). After that, he replaced Dynamic Equivalence into Functional equivalence and clarified that translation is communication.

Nida's functional equivalence theory breaks away from the debate over literal translation and free translation. It prioritizes readers' feelings and proposes a new standard for evaluating translation quality based on readers' experience, giving translators more freedom in decision-making while putting forward more requirements on their capabilities. Under the guidance of the functional equivalence theory, the translator's ultimate goal is to convey the message in the original language to target readers of the receptor language. Therefore, the translator is expected to understand differences between the receptor language and the original one in grammar, culture, customs and other aspects. In this way, the translator becomes able to adjust the structure and expressions of the original language appropriately, so that the target readers can have similar feelings readers of the original text. For example, a translator should replace "white as snow" to "white as fur" in a culture without snow.

3. The definition and types of address forms

In *The Contemporary Chinese Dictionary*, there are two types of address forms. One is defined as "people's titles derived from kinship and other social relations to show people's identities, such as father, teacher, factory director, etc. The other one, slightly different from former one, is defined as "the name used in greetings to indicate the relationship between the two interlocutors" (2010: 157). Through comparison, it can be found that the latter refers to the way that people address each other in face-to-face communication, such as the titles involved in dialogues in the novel, while the former refers to a wider range, such as "teacher" mentioned as an example in the definition, which can be used both in face-to-face communication and in descriptive passages to mention a person. Therefore, in term of definition, the latter is actually covered by the former.

As seen from the definitions, address forms reflect a person's such identity attributes as social relations, status, and occupations. Therefore, they can be roughly categorized into kinship terms and social terms. The social terms also include those kinship ones extensively used in social contexts without kinship (Cao Wei, 2005: 63). In Chinese culture, it's common to call a strange man about ten years older as Elder Brother (大哥) to show respect. These two types of terms can also be used face to face in specific contexts. Due to obscurity inherent in language habits, whether those address forms can be used face to face conventionally or not won't be discussed further in this paper. This paper only involves translation of names, kinship terms and extensively used kinship terms in *Frog, A Novel*.

4. Translation of address forms in Goldblatt's *Frog, A Novel*

The address form is not only a significant component of daily communication but also an effective approach to message delivery and emotional exchange in literature. Address forms in daily life mainly convey information to the other interlocutor, while they in literature can largely contribute to the portrayal of characters, the creation of the communication context and the suggestion of characters' relationships. Due to the differences between China and most English countries in cultural background, values and thinking model plus with dynamic functions of address forms, it's really necessary to get some tips and enlightenment from existing literature translation so as to facilitate the hard translation work.

4.1 Names

Names in different cultures originate from distinctive values and beliefs. The translator can't ignore any cultural connotation embedded in names. In the novel, there is a traditional custom in northeastern Gaomi, that is, "naming children after body parts and human organs to wish them a stronger body". Mo Yan makes a deliberate introduction on the custom at the beginning of the novel, so Goldblatt did not simply keep Chinese Pinyin of those organs in his translation. For example,

[1] 先生, 我们那地方, 曾有一个古老的风气, 生下孩子, 好以身体部位和人体器官命名.譬如陈鼻、赵眼、吴大肠、孙肩.....(Mo Yan, 2017:5)

... Nose Chen, for instance, Eyes Zhao, Colon Wu, Shoulder Sun... (Goldblatt, 2015: 6)

The translation here is consistent with the form of English names, such as translating "陈鼻" into "Nose Chen". But in later chapters, the translation is different.

[2]当然也有没改的, 譬如陈耳, 譬如陈眉.(Mo Yan, 2017:5)

... We still have Chen Er (Ears) and Chen Mei (Brow). (Goldblatt, 2015: 6)

Most names in later chapters are translated in the second way. When an organ name appears for the first time, transliteration through Chinese Pinyin is adopted with the first name behind the last name, and then the meaning of the first name is supplemented in brackets. When the same name appears again, only Pinyin is used without supplemented meaning. For example, "陈鼻" first appeared in the paragraph introducing the naming style at the beginning of the novel, translated as "Nose Chen". When it appeared again in subsequent paragraphs, the name was translated as "Chen Bi (Nose)" and only as "Chen Bi" when repeated later. By comparing the context, the different functions of the two example names in the original text can be perceived. The name in e.g. [1] is listed to introduce the naming style without the intent to refer to anyone, while the one in e.g. [2] refers to those who didn't change their names. Therefore, the first way of translation, by pursuing formal equivalence, is meant to attract the target readers' attention to the special literal meaning of the first name through the familiar form, and also to arouse readers' interest in the special custom. The latter two ways of translation in later chapters are more functional. Transliteration is combined with interpretation to explain the special meaning of Chinese characters in Chinese names, such as the interpretation and translation of two CHUNs respectively meaning lip and purity in the following example, so as to convey the implicit information in homophones of the original name.

[3] 传播这消息的人姓肖名上唇.....名字中的“唇”字, 见报时也改为“纯”字.(Mo Yan, 2017:14)

The source of this account was Xiao Shangchun (Upper Lip)... from the *chun* that meant 'lip' to the one that meant 'purity'. (Goldblatt, 2015: 16)

As a conclusion, formal equivalence is neither necessary nor absolutely undesirable. Even if there is a more recognized translation form for certain content, translators can also consider other forms. Namely, the English name form of the first name before the last name is abandoned and the Chinese form of writing the last name first is adopted with supplementary explanations when necessary. By doing so, the ultimate goal is to convey the most information. However, in some cases, formal equivalence can also play a special role. For example, adopting a structural form to which the target readers adapt is conducive to arousing readers' interest. The translator should consider the different roles of a certain content in various contexts with an eye to the overall effect of the text, finally realizing the purpose of conveying information. For example, organ names can arouse readers' interest at the beginning of *Frog*, but only refer to characters in later chapters, so that different ways of translation can be flexibly adopted. Therefore, formal equivalence and functional equivalence are not completely contradictory, while the latter one should be the fundamental pursuit of translation.

4.2 Kinship terms

In Chinese system of kinship terms, there is a clear distinction between clans, maternal relatives, and wives' relatives, while in English it is more ambiguous, leading to asymmetries in translation. In Goldblatt's version, the sinologist is also exploring ways to deal with such asymmetries, such as adopting the foreignization strategy and retaining the pronunciation of kinship terms.

[4] 提起这些“老老婆”, 姑姑就恨得咬牙切齿.(Mo Yan, 2017:11)

Whenever these women entered the conversation, my aunt- Gugu- ground her teeth in anger. (Goldblatt, 2015: 12)

The translator first translates "姑姑" into "aunt", and then adds Pinyin, "Gugu". It's actually a measure to emphasize the double meanings of this term. Throughout the whole novel, it can be found that the term of "姑姑" has two functions: 1) as a kinship term, 2) specifically referring to the main character in the novel, the gynecologist Wan Xin. Hence, the translator has to first judge whether the term only refers to a certain person or functions as an address form indicating kinship. The difference lies in whether there is "我(my)". When there is, more emphasis goes to the relationship between the speaker and the main character. "姑姑" has to be translated into "aunt" which naturally reminds readers of the character's identity and social connection. When "姑姑" appears alone, it only refers to the leading role of the story. In this case, it's better to translate the term as "Gugu". After all, nouns that begin with a capital letter can easily create an exclusive sense. This is why it makes sense that the translator usually translates "我姑姑" as "my aunt" and "姑姑" as "Gugu".

On the whole, it seems reasonable that the translator regards "姑姑" as the exclusive title of the main

character. Wan Xin is the only aunt of the novel. As long as "aunt" is mentioned, even if it is not obviously stated who it is, a consensus has been reached among the writer, the translator and readers that the title refers to no one but Wan Xin. That being the case, translating "姑姑" as "Gugu" instead of "aunt" can enhance the referential meaning of the title and establish a principal image of Wan Xin.

Nevertheless, though it has been explained in e.g. [4] that Gugu means aunt through "my aunt-Gugu-", readers who aren't familiar with Chinese culture may misunderstand Gugu as the name of the leading role, which possibly goes away from the writer's original intention to lay stress on Wan Xin's identities as both the leading role and a sister of the storyteller's father. From a long-term perspective, "Gugu" needs to be frequently used by E-C translators to introduce it into the English language and culture, so as to distinguish it from "aunt" in English meaning father's or mother's sisters. This is a cause requires time. Future generations can use it directly in later translation of Chinese works, making it gradually a generally accepted loan word.

4.3 Extensively used kinship terms

Chinese people often choose the closest address form in the system of kinship terms according to the characteristics of the addressee, and express an intimate feeling by including non-relative members into the kinship network (Li Changbao, 2001: 95). In English, however, the similar extensive usage of kinship terms is usually more common among familiar people than among strangers, such as calling a friend of parents or an acquainted neighbor as Uncle Tom. Therefore, the translator needs to accurately grasp the communicative function of the original text and find a suitable method to convey to target readers the social intention and identity connotations contained in such extensively used kinship terms.

[5] 陈鼻道:好,小兄弟,你有自己的想法.....(Mo Yan, 2017:97)

Good for you, young man... (Goldblatt, 2015: 115)

For example, in this sentence, "小兄弟" is translated into "young man". Compared with the literal translation of "little brother", Goldblatt's way surpasses it largely in readability and compatibility with English language habits, since "little brother" contains an intimacy that is improperly close for the communication context where the two interlocutors aren't very familiar with each other. What's even worse, readers may wrongly consider one of the speaker as the other's family member. In contrast, "young man" enables target readers to realize that a close dialogue is being made between an older person (Chen Nose) and a younger person ("my little cousin").

In essence, the wording difference between Goldblatt's version and the literal translation results from different senses of distance between Chinese and western cultures. There have been studies that found the intimacy distance and social distance are closer in China than in most English countries. Based on this conventional cultural difference, an experienced translator as Goldblatt has to play an active role in converting an address form that is relatively intimate in a culture into a less intimate one in another culture, only to reestablish a similar communication context in the target language without raising misunderstandings.

[6]老娘手里有枪,立马儿就崩了你.....姑姑当时是个十七岁的大姑娘,竟然自称“老娘”,把很多人逗笑了。(Mo Yan, 2017:20)

... but if a woman like me had a gun ... The crowd tittered at her use of 'a woman like me'. (Goldblatt, 2015: 23)

In this example, "老娘" originally referred to an elderly mother, but has been gradually used as a self-proclaimed title by powerful women to assert their dominance. There seems to be no single English address form that can convey the same connotations in the same tone, so Goldblatt translated it as "a woman like me". It's appropriate in the context where "Gugu" threatens the other speaker, since she has to demonstrate that she has such a hot temper that no one can tread on her. Readers may unconsciously consider what "a woman like me" would do and perceive the latent powerful quality of the speaker. However, the same translation doesn't match well with the context in the next clause. As "the crowd tittered", there has to be a conflict to create comedic effects. In the original text, the conflict happens between Gugu's age of seventeen years old and the semantic connotation of an elder woman implied by the "老娘". Therefore, "a woman like me" is semantically inadequate to reproduce the comic conflict of the original text, making it difficult for the target readers to understand why it can tickle someone when a "17-year-old girl" claims to be "a woman like me".

It can be seen that the translation of some address terms is reasonable in some contexts, but not appropriate in some other contexts.

5. Mistranslation in Goldblatt's version

There are also several mistranslated or insufficiently translated address forms in Goldblatt's version.

Hudson proposed that the key to understanding the kinship system of different languages is accepting the unique concepts in different systems (Wardhaugh, 2000: 225). In Chinese kinship system, relatives of the same generation are clearly ranked and the biggest one is endowed with authority over other little sisters and brothers. Though it's common to neglect the complex ranking and blood relationships inherent in Chinese kinship terms during E-C translation, the translation strategy shouldn't be rigidly consistent now that Goldblatt has been trying to instill Chinese connotations into English sentences. From this perspective, the translation of "大爷爷" in e.g. [7] as "great-uncle" is semantically accurate but not so impeccable because of the omission of the ranking and status of "大" in Chinese. The translator neglects or fails to convey the special cultural connotation of respectable seniorities, so it's advised to translate "大爷爷" as "my oldest great-uncle" here.

[7] 我姑姑是我大爷爷的女儿。(Mo Yan 2017:11)

My aunt was the daughter of my great-uncle...(Goldblatt, 2015: 13)

The fact is that there is cultural default between the writer and Chinese readers concerning the ranking of relatives of the same generation. The concept of respectable seniorities can date back to the long history of hereditary system in China. Though China has abandoned feudalism long ago, people still inherit the habit of exceptionally respecting the oldest one among the same generation. It's an unconscious convention instead of a sign of feudal oppression. Here in e.g. [7], the storyteller deliberately points out that Gugu is the daughter of the oldest great-uncle. There is a possibility that he wants to highlight Gugu's position and authority endowed by her father's respectable ranking, contributing to a round character.

In addition, the translator can't ensure a precise understanding of some Chinese address forms, as explained in the following example.

[8] 嫚啊, 快去叫你姑姑! (Mo Yan, 2017:21)

Man--- my sister's name--- go fetch your aunt, and hurry! (Goldblatt, 2015: 25)

In e.g. [8], "嫚" is translated as "Man" with the subsequent interpretation of "sister's name". It's considerate that Goldblatt supplement "sister's name" to differentiate it from the word meaning male. However, that is undoubtedly a mistranslation, because "嫚" is actually used to address daughters or young girls in some northern dialects of China. It's absolutely not a name. In this sentence, it can be inferred from the context which isn't listed in this paper that the speaker is asking her daughter to do something, but the translator misunderstands the address form as the name of the daughter. Surely the most appropriate translation method here should be to directly bring in the name of the daughter, but her name isn't mentioned in the whole book, so it would be better to translate the address form as "My girl". Since "daughter" is more a written word than a face-to-face appellation, it's advised to use "girl" which is more common in daily life. In addition, the word "girl" can also disclose the identity of the listener as a young lady. Unfortunately, the dialect quality of the original text cannot be translated, which possibly influences the establishment of the speaker's figure as a rural elderly woman.

There are also examples of mistranslations due to misunderstandings.

[9] 姑姑说:嫂子, 幸亏你不识字……(Mo Yan, 2017:24)

It's a good thing you can't read, Auntie, Gugu said. (Goldblatt, 2015: 28)

This example has constructed a clear context. The dialogue takes place between Gugu and the storyteller's mother. The translator seems to fail to understand that "嫂子" in Chinese means "brother's wife" and translates it into "auntie". "Sister-in-law" in English is mostly used in the context of introducing the addressed person to a third one rather than as a face-to-face address form. Hence, it is not necessary to translate "嫂子" here. A more proper choice is to add the communicative object at the end of the sentence: "Gugu said to my mother".

The last kind of mistranslation is caused by the translator's misunderstanding of the communicative context and interlocutors involved in a dialogue, as shown in the following example.

[10] ——斟酒啊! 你们没眼力劲呢? 是心疼酒? ——哪能呢, 姑姑, 您放开了喝——(Mo Yan, 2017:39)

... Of course not, Gugu, Father said. It's for you to drink. (Goldblatt, 2015: 46)

In this sentence, the translator's inaccurate understanding of the context leads to a wrong supplementation of the character engaged in the dialogue. Goldblatt makes a mistake by thinking that the "you" in the previous sentence also includes the storyteller's father. In addition, the translator regards Gugu as a fixed title with a weaker nature of relatives. The combined causes result in a wrongly reproduced communicative context that the storyteller's father calls his sister aunt. Besides, it's also shown that the translator still has inaccurate grasp of Chinese culture. If the translator is more familiar with Chinese table etiquette, he will realize that it is impossible for the younger sister (Gugu) to ask her older brother (the storyteller's father) to fill the glass, since this action on table shows one's respect to the object who gains his position by his seniority in the clan. Therefore, "you" in the former sentence can only refer to the younger generation such as the storyteller and his elder brother and sister-in-law. When Gugu in the latter sentence still refers to Wan Xin, the protagonist of the novel, the interlocutor has changed from the father in previous paragraphs to the younger generation. Based on the change, this part with a different interlocutor engaged should be separated from the previous text, and there is no need to add the interlocutor as what Goldblatt does like "Father said". The paragraphs of the original text are not clearly segmented, and the interlocutors involved often change. Native Chinese speakers can easily tell whether the interlocutor has changed based on the changes in address forms, but the translator cannot clearly identify both sides of the conversation. It can be concluded that translators should continue strengthening the learning of non-native working languages, and develop a comprehensive and in-depth understanding of other cultures, so as to minimize misunderstandings.

6. Conclusion

From the perspective of the Functional Equivalence Theory, Goldblatt's translation of address forms in *Frog, A Novel* features a unique structure and strategy, worth of learning and applying for reference. Regarding names, Goldblatt, with an overall view of the full text, weighs the different functions of distinctive names in various contexts and adopts multiple structures, conveying the cultural connotations of Chinese names to the target readers. Regarding the kinship term of "姑姑", the translator uses different methods to distinguish its sociality and exclusiveness to help readers of the target language understand the original text and reduce understanding deviations. Regarding extensively used kinship terms, the translator chooses the expression in the target language that is as close as possible to the original one in terms of identity information and social intentions based on the specific communicative environment.

It is worth noting that Goldblatt is not confined to either the foreignization strategy or the domestication strategy. He makes decisions based on the overall consideration of the novel. For the introduction part, the domestication strategy is employed to improve readers' acceptance. For details that require readers' deep impression, such as characters' names and identity, the foreignization strategy is adopted to attract readers' attention by following the structure of Chinese names and other detailed measures. In addition, Goldblatt gets rid of the traditional view that the translation of names needs to be consistent through the whole text. What's different is that Goldblatt takes names more as a part of textual content than as terms. Considering textual functions of those names, the translator uses such different translation methods as transliteration and interpretation, as well as different structures to show the differences in the social and referential functions of address forms. These two discoveries of Goldblatt's translation of address forms come to a common avoidance of rigid consistency. Despite the consensus in previous research conclusions that translators have to follow through the translation strategies and methods, the study on Goldblatt's translation may provide some new enlightenment for translators who are committed to the cause of Chinese culture going global.

However, there are also mistranslation problems in Goldblatt's version. One of the reasons is that the translator, as a non-native Chinese speaker, cannot fully understand some specific concepts in Chinese kinship system or has a misunderstanding of some kinship terms in certain dialects. In addition, the translator has an inaccurate grasp of certain communication environment in the original text.

The research on Goldblatt's translation of address terms has clarified the misunderstandings that are easy to appear in past learning and researches of translation practice and Nida's Functional Equivalence Theory. First, although the theory of Functional Equivalence is always illustrated in comparison with formal equivalence to manifest the former's rationality, the two concepts are actually not contradictory. Sometimes the former can even promote the realization of the latter. For example, when translating names of organs, the English structure is first used to improve readers' acceptance and achieve the purpose of introduction, and then other translation methods are used to show the particularity of such names. Second, the translation methods of specific words or content are not absolute. Just as

Goldblatt's attempt to translate names and the kinship term of "姑姑" in different ways, the translator must have a careful grasp of the communication context and purpose, and make flexible decisions, so as to translate address forms in the original text as accurately as possible to further target readers' understanding of the text and the original culture.

Acknowledgement

Fund Project:

Name of Fund: Sponsored by Language Research Center for Oil and Gas Resource Areas (SWPU)

Name of Project: On Translator's Subjectivity in Goldblatt's Version of Frog--- From a Sociolinguistic Perspective

Project ID: YQCX2019001.

References

- [1] Goldblatt, H. *Frog, A Novel* [M]. Viking, 2015
- [2] Nida, Eugene. A.& C.R. Taber. *The Theory and Practice of Translation* [M]. Leiden: E.J.Brill. 1982.
- [3] Wardhaugh, R. *An Introduction to Sociolinguistics* [M]. Foreign Language Teaching and Research Press, 2000
- [4] Cao Wei. *Appellations and Address Forms in Modern Chinese* [J]. *Journal of Jiangsu University (Social Science)*, 2005(02):62-69.
- [5] Li Changbao. *On the Differences in National Customs of Kinship Terms between English and Chinese* [J]. *Journal of Sichuan International Studies University*, 2001(02):93-96.
- [6] Mo Yan. *Frog* [M]. Zhejiang Literature and Art Publishing House, 2017.
- [7] Nida, E. A. *Toward a Science of Translating* [M]. Shanghai: Shanghai Foreign Language Education Press, 2004.
- [8] *The Institute of Linguistics of the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences. The Contemporary Chinese Dictionary (5th edition)* [Z]. Beijing: the Commercial Press, 2010.