

Studies on the Acceptance of Yang Xianyi's Translations of *Pygmalion* from the Perspective of History of Effect

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ABSTRACT. *George Bernard Shaw and his works, exert profound influences on the world, including millions of Chinese readers. Pygmalion was translated by Yang Xianyi in 1956 and retranslated in 1982, 1987 and 2002 respectively. History of effect is important concept of hermeneutics. According to the principle of history of effect, any text is characterized by its positive practical significance. Gadamer's idea of hermeneutics is helpful for our understanding of the necessity and significance of retranslation. The target text is the afterlife of the source text in time and space. In terms of the history of effect, this paper is devoted to a deep insight into Yang's translating process of Pygmalion during four different periods of time and to further analyses of the theoretical foundation and specific characteristics of creation and polishing in retranslation, which is designed to offer references for retranslating literary works and the study of Yang Xianyi's thoughts on translation.*

KEYWORDS: *George bernard shaw, Yang xianyi; Pygmalion; Gadamer; The history of effect*

1. Introduction

In 1912, Shaw wrote *Pygmalion*, which has been staged all over the world. Shaw's plays have also attracted much attention from Chinese scholars and translators. Lin Yutang published his translation of *Pygmalion* in 1929 and it was also put on stage. In 1956, Yang Xianyi's first *Pygmalion* came into being. Yang published three translations in 1982, 1987, and 2002.

Yang's *Pygmalions* enjoyed great popularity among foreign language learners as well as scholars of translation studies. Their discussions and studies are mainly centered on the 1982, the 1987 and the 2002 translations. His first translation is seldom mentioned in the academic research. In 1994, 1995 and 1999, Wen Jun carried out comparative studies of Yang's 1982 and 1987 translations. He found there are nearly 500 changes in the 1987 translation, compared with 1982 translation, which shows Yang's different attitudes towards translation and his pursuit of improvement. In the following years, there are also some other studies on Yang's translations, which mainly focuses on the linguistic features or the translation techniques, such as Sun Fangqin (1998) and Si Guo(2004),. Some M.A. theses in China also try to make a thorough study on Yang's translations of *Pygmalion* on the micro-and-macro level, such as Jin Hua (2007), Yuan Suping (2008), Guo Yaohan (2010), Zheng Jiahui(2013)as well as Chen Lingxiao (2018).

Social, cultural and philosophical implications are also included in the discussion on the translations. Liang Yanjun (2008) makes a study on the relationship of the social register and literal translation through the comparative study between Lin Yutang's and Yang Xianyi's translations . Ma Xiaoxing (2013) analyzes Yang's Chinese four translations from the perspective of translation ethics.

The paper will employ history of effect to analyze Yang's four translations to obtain a clear insight into Yang's thoughts on translation and the mechanisms of retranslation.

2. History of Effect and Translation Studies

Gadamer[1] gives his definition of effect of history as follows:

“Real historical thinking must take account of its own historicity. Only when will it cease to chase the phantom of a historical object that is the object of progressive research, and learn to view the object as the counterpart of itself and hence understand both. The true historical object is not an object at all, but the unity of the one and the other, a relationship that constitutes both the reality of history and the reality of historical understanding. A hermeneutics adequate to the subject matter would have to demonstrate the reality and efficacy of history within understanding itself. I shall refer to this as ‘history of effect’. *Understanding is, essentially, a historically effected event.* “

The interpreter and the interpreted text are historical beings. The text and the interpreter communicate with each other in the same progressive process. Gadamer thinks the work of art is the work of history of effect, Consciousness of being affected by history is primarily consciousness of the hermeneutical situation. Situation means that we are standing outside the text and therefore are unable to have any objective knowledge.

“The illumination of this situation-reflection on effective history-can never be completely achieved; yet the fact that it cannot be completed is due not to a deficiency in reflection but to the essence of the historical being that we are. To be historically means that knowledge of oneself can never be complete.”[1]

Due to this openness, the truth will “display itself to us gradually in the effect of history. Without the consciousness of effected history, we cannot understand and even we can acquire the knowledge and truth in the history.”[2] In this sense, the history of effect makes the basis for understanding being and truth. The historicity of the text and understanding is the key concept of the principle of the effect of history which emphasizes the connection between the history and the reality in which classical works display great significance.

History of effect helps us to realize the necessity and significance of retranslation. Within different social and cultural backgrounds, the translator has different interpretations of the same original text. Huang Yuanshen points out that

“A classic literature work is like a rich mine, which cannot be understood only in one time. Many different translations of the literature work are the products of understanding and interpreting respectively in different times. After the interpretation of the literature work again and again we get nearer and nearer to its true meaning. As for the literature work, it is itself after it appears. Due to the translators’ different aesthetic viewpoints, aesthetic tastes and value orientations, which also change with the change of the time, there is a need for different translation of the same literature work in different times.”[3]

In this sense, retranslation can be regarded as the reflection of the translators’ creativities of different times. From this point, the retranslation of the classic literature work should be necessary.

At the same time, we should also note there are also some limitations in translation studies with the concept of history of effect. There is a tendency that the effect of history overvalues the translator’s subjectivity and creativity in translating process. The text is open to the reader and the meaning of the text is formed during the reader’s as well as the translator’s interpretation of the text. However,

“As for the producing process of the translation, the translator certainly is restricted by the interpretation tradition of the culture and language, so he cannot show his creativities in such cases and he even has no rights in choosing the source text for translating.”[4]

Therefore, the history of effect is helpful for explaining certain translation phenomena but it can never be abused for interpretation.

3. History of Effect and the Acceptance of Yang’s Pygmalions

3.1 Language Consciousness and History of Effect

Language evolves and changes all the way, with peculiar traces of various historical contexts. Thus the acceptance of a certain target text, according to the concept of history of effect, relies on our consciousness of language, which also both help the translator surpass themselves and help the reader obtain new understandings.

(1) Diction

The Chinese characters come into being when China enters in the era of civilization and thus help record the Chinese language. In ancient times, there were four methods to coin new Chinese characters: pictographic characters or pictographs, self-explanatory characters associative compound characters and pictophonetic characters. There were also two methods to use these characters: mutually explanatory or synonymous characters and phonetic loan characters. It is known there are many unsimplified words and non-standardized variants of words during the long history. During the translation of Buddha scripts and western classical and technological works, there also appeared many new words, which play a great role in the formation of Modern Chinese. As for the time when the modern Chinese lexicon starts forming, Cao Wei [5] thinks the translation of the western works in nineteenth century starts this evolution in Chinese lexicon history. After the May 4th Movement, volumes of western works were translated into Chinese because revolutionary pioneers wanted to search for the way to make China an independent and wealthy nation. Thus many westernized expressions were borrowed from the west. There was a great need for standardizing the modern Chinese with different roots: the classical Chinese,

the westernized Chinese due to the translation and many dialects. Zhou Enlai[6] in 1958, stated the three missions in the wording reform. The first one is to simplify the Chinese characters. In 1956, 1964, 1977, and 2001, respectively, the State Language Commission published four editions of the standardized forms of Chinese characters.

Yang published his four translations in 1956, 1982, 1987 and 2002. This span of time nearly conforms to appearance of the standardized forms of Chinese characters by the State Language Commission.

Yang's translation of *Pygmalion* in 1956 was printed in unsimplified Chinese characters. Although the State Language Commission had published the first series of the standardized forms of Chinese characters, the total standardized forms of Chinese characters counted only 1700, and there were more than 1000 Chinese characters needing to be simplified. Wu Yuzhang[7] says: "in the next three years, the State Language Commission will simplify nearly half of the 6000 to 7000 common-seen Chinese characters. Only in this way the simplifying work can be accepted as a finish." So Yang's translation in 1956 was published in unsimplified Chinese characters.

Because of the publicity of the standardized forms of Chinese characters in different time under different circumstances, there are some differences between these standardized forms of Chinese characters, such as the translations of George Bernard Shaw, *Xiao Bona*(萧伯纳) and *Xiao Bona*(肖伯纳), the Chinese characters *Xiang*(像) and *Xiang*(象), the Chinese phrases *Na'me*(那么)(那末).

The Chinese translation of George Bernard Shaw in 1956 is *Xiao Bona*(萧伯纳) which is the unsimplified Chinese characters. The translation of Shaw in 1982 changes is changed into *Xiao Bona*(肖伯纳). The translations of George Bernard Shaw in 1987 and 2002 are *Xiao Bona*(萧伯纳). *Xiao*(萧) is the simplified form of *Xiao*(蕭)[8]. State Language Commission in 1977 also published its another edition of the standardized forms of Chinese characters, which came to its end in 1984, for this edition arose many confusions in using this so-called simplified forms. In this edition, *Xiao*(萧) is simplified to *Xiao*(肖). As the surname *Xiao*(萧) and *Xiao*(肖) caused great confusions among the Chinese people themselves, Zeng Shi[9] and Xiao Feng[10] both think we should only use *Xiao*(萧) as the surname.

Xiang(像) appears 55 times in Yang's 1956 and 2002 translations of *Pygmalion*. In the other two translations of *Pygmalion* we can also see *Xiang*(象), For example:

Xiang(像) is the unsimplified form of *Xiang*(象) in the first edition of the standardized forms of Chinese characters in 1956 and in 1964 by the State Language Commission. In 1986, the State Language Commission[11] republished the 1964 edition of the standardized forms of Chinese characters, while it is explained in a note that "some changes are made in the new edition compared with the 1964 edition. *Die*(叠), *Fu*(覆), *Xiang*(像), *Luo*(囉) are no longer treated as the unsimplified forms of *Die*(迭), *Fu*(复), *Xiang*(象), *Luo*(罗).

The Chinese phrases *Na'me*(那么) and *Na'me*(那末) appear respectively in Yang's four translations four times. For example,

The word *Na'me*(那么) just makes the sentence sounds natural. The State Language Commission [12] also publishes its 2001 edition of the standardized forms of words. *Na'me*(那么) is recommended in common usage although *Na'me*(那末) is not considered as the wrong.

Although there're great improvements in choosing the standardized forms of Chinese characters, there are also some words and phrases being shifted back to not standardized translations. For example,

(2) Punctuation Marks

In the classical Chinese works, we have no such punctuation marks as those used nowadays. "The punctuation marks in modern Chinese are introduced to China in the late 19th century and the early 20th century, which plays a great positive role in the formation of the modern Chinese." [12] The State Language Commission has published a series of doctrines in standardizing the usage of punctuation marks. In 1994, the State Language Commission published the edition version of the *Punctuation Law* in which the punctuation marks are clearly defined and examples are given for usage, and thus the punctuation marks as the national standards are used in printing works and writing works. There are many the same or similar punctuation marks in usage between Chinese and the English, while there are some differences, such as a slight-pause mark used to set off items in a series(.). Such a pause mark is not available in English. It is different from the comma which has the similar usage for setting off items in a series but pauses much longer. There are two such usages in Yang's 2002 translation. For example,

We can know that poetry, philosophy, art and science here are listed in the series of items. Being translated into the modern Chinese, slight-pause marks (,) are needed here. In the *Use Of Punctuation Marks*, a slight-pause mark is used to set off items in a series (,).(GB/T 15834-1995) A slight-pause mark here can show Higgins' feeling and tone. He speaks very quickly and ironically. If commas are used here, it will pause much longer, which will reduce effect of the sentence.

In the front of each act of *Pygmalion*, there comes a setting, which tells where and when the story happens. In the setting, the protagonists of this act will also be present. The settings of each act, here only including the settings in the front of each act and the settings in the middle of each act, are bracketed. With the development of translation and the increasing knowledge on English, the reader wants to read the authentic source text and accurate and readable target text. For example,

We can find that Yang adds only one half part of a bracket in his 2002 translation. Si Guo[13] also points this problem that there is something wrong with the punctuation marks. In the end of the paragraph, there is a punctuation mark, while Yang adds one part of the punctuation in the beginning of the sentence. According to the usage of punctuation marks, this is indeed a mistake. The other three translations of this setting are in a smaller font size to show that this paragraph is the setting of the act. In the rolling of the drama, there come more punctuation marks like this. When the punctuation marks are used in the middle of the act, Yang translates them differently. For example,

In the middle of the act, the translations of the setting show a slight difference. The 1956 and 1982 translations of setting in the middle of the act are also in a smaller font-size, while the 1987 translation is added with one part of the brackets as the 2002 translation.

(3) Measurement Units

Diction in the drama must be clear since language must be immediately understood by the audience; in the theater, there is no such thing like reading a text because the reader is only opposed to the dialogue, so the dialogue must be interesting and understandable despite the need for simplicity and economy. So the good dialogue must be suited for oral expression.

The measurement units are the culture-loaded words. In translation of such measurement units which are different from that of the target culture, the translator should put one thing in his mind that the translation of the measurement should be immediately understood by the audience. Yang has made some experiments on translating the measurement units in his translations.

We all know that one mile equals 1.609344 km, and therefore two miles equal about 3.2km and six miles equal about 9.6km. In our daily life, the Chinese people usually use *li* as the common distance unit to measure. If the distance measured by miles is shifted to *li*, it can be easily understood by the Chinese people. In this translation, we can see Yang makes a mistake in using Chinese. The phrases *Bu Chu*(不出, used as adverb, literally meaning inside the distance of) and *Yi Nei*(以内, used as adverb, literally meaning inside the distance of), cannot be used together. So the translation can be changed to *Bu Chu Ershi Li*(不出二十里, no more than twenty *Li*) or *Ershi Li Yi Nei*(二十里以内, no more than twenty *Li*).

We see that literal translation of the English measurements is preferred in the 1982 translation, which may cause some difficulties in understanding for the Chinese readers. So the translator, according to his interpretation of the social and cultural background, makes some changes in other versions for acceptability

3.2 Culture Consciousness and History of Effect

The cultural image in different cultures is quite different. Nida says "the language influence to the culture and cultural influence to the sense of words and idioms are so comprehensive that it is impossible to understand the source text appropriately without considering the cultural background." [14] In order to make his translation acceptable, the translator should pay attention to cultural differences between the source culture and the target culture, and usually adds, deletes or changes the cultural image. For example,

In this example, we can see that Yang translates "I" into *Zan*(咱). *Zan*(咱) is a very common spoken language that is used by the lower class people. It implied in this way the flower girl has received little education. *Zhengjing Renjia de Nv Haizi*(正经人家的女孩子, literally meaning the girl from a respectable family) vividly shows that the flower girl wants to let others, especially Higgins, know she is a good girl who won't commit criminals, because at that moment Higgins is considered as the copper's mark. *Lao Tian Ye*(老天爷, literally meaning God in Chinese traditional religion) is a particular Chinese apostrophe in Taoism. The girl wants to

express that she is innocent and don't want to go the police station. In 2002, Yang translates "help me" into *Bang Bang Wo*(帮帮我, help me). With the development of the society, the Chinese people use *Lao Tian Ye*(老天爷, literally meaning God in Chinese traditional religion) less common among the youth. In the new century, the accurate translation is more welcome in retranslation compared with the former translations.

Mrs. Pearce here gives her own warning when she often hears that Higgins' language is terrible. Higgins swears constantly. It is interesting to note that Mrs. Pearce is not worried by his use of the word "amn". What she opposes to is the use of the adjective "bloody". In England, the word "bloody" "was (and is) considered offensively vulgar. Mrs. Pearce will not even permit the word to pass her lips. She refers to it indirectly, indicating that it begins with the letter 'b.'[4]Of course, it is known to Eliza; she has heard plenty of rough language in her lifetime. But she is now to learn new and better behavior under the instruction of Higgins and Pickering. It will be almost impossible if Higgins uses bad language in front of her. At the same time, it is a great challenge for the translator to translate this culture-loaded word. In Chinese it is not easy for us to find such a vulgar word and a common word with the same alliteration. Yang translates it creatively. We all know that taboo is the custom that is forbidden by the society. Within a short time in a society, the taboo, especially the taboo about sex, will not change too much. Here the translator takes the cultural consciousness and the effect of history into consideration when he translates such culture-loaded words.

4. Conclusion

With the concept the history of effect in hermeneutics, we can find in the analysis of the four Chinese translations of *Pygmalion* that the text is open to the interpreter, so at different ages and in different situations, there is necessity to retranslate some works traveling with social, cultural and linguistic evolvement. The history of effect can explain most but not all of the phenomena in retranslation and the changes made in different versions. It is found that the retranslation usually aims at the surpassing the former translation and that Yang's considerations on the cultural strategy of translation also affect his choice of *Pygmalion*.

Acknowledgments

This work is supported by the Project of Henan Higher Education Institutes Humanities and Social Science Research (No.: 2018-zzjh-239); Project of Henan Agricultural University Science and Technology Innovation (No.: KJCX2016B06);Project of HNPOSS(No.:2019BWX008)

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