

On the English to Chinese Translation Strategies of Domestication and Foreignization in Spells of *Harry Potter*

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Abstract The magical world in *Harry Potter* series is based on the western wizard culture and magic legends, which is processed through the author's rich imagination. Some of the spells and magical creatures are imaginary. There is no way to look it up in the dictionary, and there is no other translation to refer to. Therefore, translating new spells and magical creatures are a challenge to the translator's imagination and sense of humor. The success of the Chinese version of *Harry Potter* affirmed the efforts of the translators, also proved the credibility of the translation and translators. The paper will take readers further found that the spell translation is ingenious with the perspective of domestication and foreignization translation strategies.

Key words: spell translation, domestication and foreignization, *Harry Potter* spells.

Introduction

Harry Potter is a series of seven fantasy novels created by J.K. Rowling from 1997 to 2007, which tells the story of the hero Harry Potter's life and adventures at Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry. The series was converted into eight films by Warner Bros. In 2000, the People's Literature Publishing House acquired the simplified Chinese language rights for the British *Harry Potter* series, which began its journey of in China. The simplified Chinese version of the *Harry Potter* series has sold more than 17 million copies in 20 years, making it a bona fide best-seller. The magic world of *Harry Potter* has many attractive factors, and the spell is one of the biggest highlights, but also the biggest difficulty. The translators, Ma Ainong and Ma Aixin, perfectly represent the soul of magic culture by the flexible treatment of the spells in the original works.

Importance and Difficulty of Spells Translation

In December 2016, Ma Ainong, the translator of *Harry Potter*, told students about his relationship with literary translation at Nanjing University (*Harry Potter* Spell List, n/d). When it comes to *Harry Potter*, she says, the magic spells are the hardest to get right. Mentioning *Harry Potter*, Ma Ainong first expressed sincere respect for the predecessor translator Cao Suling. Cao Su Ling translated the first half of *Harry Potter* and the *Philosopher's Stone* and identified the translation methods of several important names and objects. Beyond that, the most difficult things for translators are the magical and ubiquitous "spells". Because these "spells" are unprecedented, which are impossible to find in any dictionary (Chen, 2009: 21-22; Guo, 2009: 34-38). Therefore, it takes a lot of efforts of her and her sister to translate them. They wanted to make the spells close to what it meant originally, but short and catchy at the same time. As the main translator of the *Harry Potter* series, Ma Ainong has always been involved in the *Harry Potter* translation. Ma was once asked by a reporter what was the biggest difficulty she had met in translating the *Harry Potter* books since the first *Harry Potter and the Philosopher's Stone*.

Ma Ainong said that in the process of her translation, the enjoyment she got was more than the difficulties she encountered. At the beginning of translation, the greatest impediment is the challenge of imagination. The high-quality translation of the *Harry*

Potter series is one of the most important factors for its popularity in the Chinese market. As one of the most interesting points in the original work, the translator also restored and reproduced it very well. The translator's outstanding contribution to spell translation mainly comes from the following two aspects. Firstly, the translation is accurate. One of the difficulties in translating the Harry Potter series is that the English words related to magic can't be found in the dictionary. The problem for the translator is to analyze the context and the role of the words from the context (Wu & Yan, 2009: 34-36; Zhou & Cheng, 2015: 115-118, Zhu, 2009: 56). Since the root of most magic words is Latin, the translator needs to figure out the meaning from the root and then find out the exact meaning. In this work, the translator restores the meaning of the original text very well. Secondly, there is innovation in translation. The translation of the *Harry Potter* is a recreation made by the translators. As the translation progresses, Ma Ainong, the main translator, believes that it is necessary to use shorter and more sonorous words to express the power of spells. Therefore, her translation mainly adopts the method of free translation, translating spells into which are in line with the reading habits of Chinese readers, such as “神锋无影”, “幻影移形”. The translators' pursuit of accuracy and spirit of innovation makes the spells translation of the Harry Potter series follow the principle of “faithfulness, expressiveness and elegance” (Ke, 2005: 42; He, 2016: 21-26; Wang, 2002: 24-29).

Creation and Classification of Spells

It is no secret that the Harry Potter series is heavily influenced by the classics. JK Rowling studied Latin as a subsidiary subject at the University of Exeter, and often draws upon classical myth, rhetoric, and nomenclature in her writing. In particular, Rowling usually draws her magical words from classical Latin, and many of the translations shed light on the effects (both magical and literary) of these incantations. To celebrate Rowling's imminent birthday, let's investigate the Latin behind these spells, charms, and curses.

The spells in *Harry Potter* can be roughly divided into the following categories:

1. The root or affix is Latin.

For example, the root of Lumos comes from Latin lumen, which means “light”. The motto of Columbia University is Latin “in lumine Tuo videbus lumen”. In Aguamenti, Agua- is a Latin prefix, meaning “water”. In Sonorus, the Latin prefix son- stands for “sound”, which is a magic spell that can make the target increase its volume. Because it can amplify a person's voice, the host or commentator can use this magic spell to amplify in sports competitions and other occasions where many people participate. The root of Obliviate, “obliv-” is from the Latin referring to “to forget”, which can be used to erase certain memories. When muggles witness events, people or objects associated with the wizarding world, their memories are erased by memenogists.

2. Add letters after truncated English words.

Spells created in this way convey the meanings in English words. This type of combination makes up a large proportion of the whole Harry Potter spells. The first spell Harry learns at Hogwarts is Wingardium Leviosa. The word wing means “翅膀” and Levi- is a truncation of the word “levitate”(“使漂浮”, “使升空”), which fits well with the levitation charm.

3. The root is from other languages, such as Italian and Spanish.

For example, the Tarantallegra is a hex. It can causes an opponent's legs to twitch uncontrollably, as if in a kind of jig dance. This spell comes from the word “Tarantella”,

which is the name of a traditional Italian dance. Legend has it that in the mid-14th century, a strange infectious disease appeared around the southern Italian city of Taranto, caused by the bite of a venomous Tarantula spider. The injured can only exorcise toxins from their bodies by dancing wildly until they are soaked in sweat. Thus came the name Tarantella. The latter part of the spell, “Allegra” may have been derived from the word “allegro”, referring to “rapid movement”, or derived from the English word “leg”.

Domestication and Foreignization in Spells Translation

In the ancient Western world, where witchcraft was prevalent, English was not the most common language. As a result, JK Rowling did not choose to create spells in English entirely. This gives English readers a taste of the original experience, so that they can feel the magic of the world better. Latin and other roots are common in English, so it is easy for readers in the English-speaking world to understand these spells. The complicated and strange spells present a degree of difficulty for translators. From the perspective of domestication and foreignization, the translators first need to do a good job in the transmission of heterogeneity. From the perspective of domestication and foreignization, the translator first needs to do a good job in the transmission of heterogeneity. Through translation, the meaning of the spell is clearly conveyed to the reader and the charm of the culture of the source language is displayed. At the same time, the translators should intervene and innovate the target language through their own language. They needed to make the translation readable while retaining the acoustic beauty of the charm translation. Therefore, the translator's choice of domestication or foreignization strategy in spells translation based on plots reflects the translators' moral attitude and the readers' concern about the acceptability of the translation.

Domestication in Spells Translation

In the Chinese version of Harry Potter series, the treatment of spells is the icing on the cake. According to the number of characters, spells in Chinese Harry Potter can be divided into four-character spells and five-character spells. Most of them are been domesticated. Four words can also be divided into idioms, idioms variant, four words, overlapping words, ABAC type, etc. On the other hand, the five-character spells combine both the strategy of domestication and foreignization with remained exotic style and new Chinese rhythm. The two translated spells are catchy and perfectly fit with the background of the British magic society and the Chinese language and culture. Here are a few representative spell translations for analysis.

Idiom

Expulso(飞沙走石) can trigger an explosion. The Death Eaters used it to blow the cafe table off its surface, sending gravel flying into the air and throwing Harry back against the wall with the force of the explosion. This shows how powerful it is. Looking at the spell itself, the word “expulso” comes from the English word “expel”, meaning “驱逐”. However, the etymological meaning of the translation may not reflect the effect of the spell, so the translator translated it according to the effect of the spell as “飞沙走石”. This translation makes the scene of the explosion immediately jump to the page when the spell is spoken, which is unforgettable.

Idiom Variation

Crucio(钻心剜骨) causes the victim to suffer a painful gall torn from the heart, and can even cause a mental breakdown and complete madness if it lasts a long time. The

source word means “酷刑” in Latin, and the translation “钻心剜骨” is actually a translation of the idiom “钻心刺骨”. The original idiom means to drill into the heart, stabbed into the bones, describing the stimulation is very deep. In this case, the translator changed the word “刺骨” to “剜骨”. It literally enhances the effect of making someone painful of the spell and makes it clear to the reader.

Four Characters

Expecto Patronum(呼神护卫) is used to summon a Patronus against Dementors. This spell appears in one of Harry Potter's famous scenes, where Harry uses it to summon a Patronus against the Dementors at a crucial moment. The Latin word “Expecto” means “期待, 期望” and the “Patronum” derives from the Latin “patronus”, meaning “监护人, 守护者”. Thus, it means “我期盼/等候一位守护神” in Latin. In the original work, each person had their own unique “patronus”. As the spell worked, silver gas spewed from the end of the wand, creating a silver animal in the final draft. This spell requires a strong effort to recall a happy event, and it requires a strong positive emotion to evoke it. In this translation, the translator skillfully uses the method of free translation processing. “Expecto” corresponds to “呼”, which expresses the meaning of calling and expecting. Patronum means “护卫”. The character “神” in the middle stands for the “守护神”. This translation is more elegant than literal translation. Besides, “呼神护卫” is “平平仄仄”, whereas “召唤守卫” is “平仄仄仄”. The former is catchier than the latter. Therefore, the translation of this incantation has the advantages of words and rhythm, and is quite ancient style, which is a good translation.

Reduplicated Words

Stupefy(昏昏倒地) comes from the Latin word “stupefacio”, which means “使昏迷” and hence the name of the spell is “stunning spell”. Literally, it causes a person to fall into a coma and become unconscious, with the victim usually falling to the ground unconscious. Hence the literal translation is “昏倒”. Most of the spells in Ma's translation are four characters. In order to be consistent with other spells and not to be confused with daily words, the translator adopts such a reduplicated word.

Another classic example is Riddikulus. The spell sounds a lot like the modern English word “Ridiculous.” Originally, the spell is hilarious. In Chinese version, it is transformed into “滑稽滑稽”. The domestication of the spell also restored the funny charm of the spell itself very well. In the novel, the part where Longbottom casts a spell on Professor Snape to dress him in a dress is also genuinely funny. Most importantly, the repetition keeps its magic charm and childlike charm intact.

ABAC Type

Silencio(无声无息) silences the object. Silence is synonymous with Silencio, meaning “寂静, 悄无声息”. However, as the idiom “悄无声息” is more commonly used. Thus, here it is avoided to use common words in order to emphasize the particularity of magic spells. Accio(飞来飞去), Impervius(防水防湿) are also applied the same translation method. Like idioms and reduplication, ABAC type also balance the rhythm of words well.

Foreignization in Spells Translation

In addition to domestication strategy, foreignization translation strategy is also used in the process of translation mantra. In view of the particularity of Harry Potter as magic literature, I believe that it is definitely important for the target language readers to understand the content. It is also necessary to maintain the mystery and magical properties of the original text. This can make the reader more immersed in the plot where some spells appear, but also help the reader to grasp the development of the whole story. In the Harry Potter translation, the translators mostly adopt the domesticating strategy, but also adopt the foreignizing strategy, in which transliteration is the main method.

The hovering spell Wingardium Leviosa, literally “wing” means “翅膀” and “Levi-” means “升起”, which translates to “羽加迪姆勒维奥萨”. This time, the translator did not translate into a four-character word in accordance with the domestication strategy. This is to cooperate with the content and plot. This spell is very difficult to remember since it is very long and hard to pronounce. Ron was either pronouncing it wrong or stressing it wrong. In addition, the wizard should also pay attention to the chanting, tone of voice and arm movements when uttering it. Ron had trouble with his voice and arm position when learning this spell and Hermione corrected him several times. Therefore, in order to meet the needs of the development of the plot, the translator adopts the transliteration method to translate the spell, that is, the foreignization strategy is adopted here. However, the translation of “羽加迪姆勒维奥萨” does not bring estrangement and strangeness to the reader, but deepens readers’ understanding of the character. The translation is so exotic that it has become one of the most memorable spells in readers’ mind. At the same time, this not only does not bring a sense of disharmony to the plot, but enhances the readers’ grasp of the plot. This highly foreignizing strategy maintains the foreign language and culture of the source and the original style. Moreover, it achieves the equivalence of sound, shape and meaning.

Another typical example is the extinguishing spell “Nox”, which is the counterpart of the luminescent spell “Lumos”. In Latin, “Nox” means “黑夜”. The word is also closely associated with Greek mythology, in which “Nyx”, much like Nox, was the name of the Greek goddess of the night. She was so mysterious and powerful that even Zeus, father of the gods, was afraid of her. In this case, Nox translates as “诺克斯”. Unlike the domesticated translation of Lumos, the strategy adopted here is highly foreignizing. Although the literal meaning of this magic spell cannot be seen by the reader, the sound of the translation is anxious, quick and short. This is very much in line with the fictional purpose of the charm. At the same time, as the function of the spell is described in the following text, even if the translation strategy is foreignization, it will not hinder the readers’ acceptance or affect their reading experience.

Combination of Domestication and Foreignization

Translators have used domestication and foreignization strategies respectively in the translation of incantations, but there are also many cases in which domestication and foreignization strategies are parallel in the translation of single incantations, in which transliteration and free translation are mainly combined.

Avada Kedavra(阿瓦达索命), also known as the Killing Curse and the Death Curse, is one of the three unforgivable curses. The Unforgivable Curse also includes the Crucio and the Imperio. When the spell is successfully cast, the wand shoots out a blinding green light, accompanied by a cluttered sound as if an invisible death were flying through the

air. The victim of the curse dies and leaves no scars. Author J.K. Rowling told the BBC documentary *Harry Potter: A History of Magic* that the Death Curse was inspired by an old Aramaic incantation “Adhaddakedhabhra”, which means “让一切消亡”. It used to be supposed to dispel the disease, but the author sets it up as a Death Curse. Same as the target reader, the word is also a foreign word to the language and culture of the source language. Thus, the translator boldly combines foreignization with domestication. She transliterated the former “Avada” and paraphrase the latter “Kedavra”. In this way, it retains the exotic flavor of the source text, while making it clear how much damage the spell can do. A similar example is the “Alohomora” charm, which refers to the casting of a spell to open a magically locked or hidden door. The translator chose to transliterate “Aloho” as “阿拉霍”, with “洞开” added to the end. By transliteration and free translation, it was translated as “阿拉霍洞开”. This not only preserves the exotic charm of the spell, but also points out its purpose.

Nowadays, the two most representative spells, combined with domestication and foreignization translation strategies, have become two of the most popular spell in the minds of the majority of Harry Potter fans.

Conclusion

With the communication and integration of human culture, the current and future trend of world culture will be the coexistence, interaction and complementarity of globalization and localization. This kind of cultural phenomena will be reflected in the interaction of domestication and foreignization in the process of translation.

Through the analysis of the incantation translation in the Chinese version of *Harry Potter* series, we can see that domestication and foreignization are not mutually exclusive. In the process of translation, they complement each other. Even in some cases, the line between the two is blurry, there is no complete naturalization, there is no complete alienation. As for the choice of translation strategy, no matter which strategy the translator prefers to adopt in the process of translation, it is for the purpose of better spreading and communicating the literature and culture of different nationalities. In this way, readers can understand and accept foreign culture and literature works better and faster. In translation, there is no absolute domestication or foreignization. Only by combining the two, can the translator make a popular and impressive translation.

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