

Hamlet: context of the original version

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Shakespeare uses words in his plays that are often confusing to modern readers. His wordplays, however, are what make his works worth reading. That is why there are available resources that attempt to explain at least some of the context of Shakespeare's words in his plays. One of these resources is a website that offers a translation of the original work into the modern language. The service is called No Fear Shakespeare. The translations, however, does not provide the experience that is brought to the audience that using Shakespeare's words does.

One of the plays that No Fear Shakespeare translates into the modern version is Hamlet. We shall examine and compare how the original version differs in context and complexity from the modern version using Act III scene 4. This is where Hamlet met Gertrude in her room and had killed Polonius. First, we examine that Shakespeare's words, while may be used in its literal sense, is also used to refer to something else.

In fact, the English language is full of connotations and metaphorical usage that it is often easy to undermine the context of Shakespeare's words by modern readers.

Hamlet and Gertrude's exchange of words in the beginning of the scene, for example, use words that, when translated into modern version, lose their symbolic meaning. The word "offended" was translated into the word "insulted" which is not as effective or powerful in use as the original term. "Idle tongue" was translated simply into "foolish" and "wicked tongue" simply into "evil." "Tongue" in the original context is used to refer to the characters' manner of speaking.

Thus, an “idle tongue” means that Hamlet was speaking without meaning, purpose or basis and “wicked tongue” while may mean to be literally evil, may also refer to something with mischief. One must remember that Hamlet is very critical about those around him, treating the other characters with suspicion. He knew that there are those who contrive against him and his mother does not escape his doubts. Thus, Hamlet’s use of “wicked” is more closely applicable to “mischief” than to “evil.” Fact is the term “question” may actually mean “doubt” in the original context.

It is important to note that while the translations closely resemble the meaning of the original, it loses the power of the original. Hamlet also referred to Polonius, although he was unaware that it was Polonius who was behind the tapestry, as a “rat.” One might be easily led in the modern translation that Hamlet simply means to regard the person literally as a rat which justifies killing it. Those aware of the English language know that the term rat could refer to someone who is despicable, or an informer of sort, a spy perhaps.

This meaning is reinforced when Hamlet regarded Polonius as an “intruding fool” later on. Hamlet also regarded Polonius as “wretched” and was translated into simply “low-life,” which hardly compares to the power of the original term that means someone who is in a very unhappy or unfortunate state. The term is also used to express anger, hatred or annoyance. Gertrude’s expression confronting Hamlet stating that he dared to “wag thy tongue in a noise so rude” was simply translated to “talk to me so rudely.”

One could immediately see the richness of the original passage as compared to the translation. While the meaning of the phrase was preserved, the <https://assignbuster.com/hamlet-context-of-the-original-version/>

power and drama of the original was not. The use of figurative speech was also disregarded in the modern translation. For example, when Hamlet cried “Rebellious hell,” the apostrophe was omitted from the modern translation. The lines were translated not as if Hamlet was calling out to hell, hence, does not retain the richness and complexity of the original.

It must be noted that the use of figurative speech makes a literary work an art, and the failure of the translated version to maintain its use in the original passage is a failure to meet the excellence exemplified by the original. The problem that exists in the modern translation of Shakespeare’s plays lies in the context of the meaning of the words, the mystery of its use, and the application of figurative speech. Shakespeare’s words are often richer in context and complex in meaning that it is also the reason of the difficulty to understand some concepts and messages in the play.

The meaning, context and complexity of the words as used in the original version disappear when translated into the modern version. Modern versions of the text are usually taken in its literal sense, thus, the author’s real purpose in using the words disappear. Furthermore, the art of using words by applying figurative speech was not preserved in the modern version. Modern translations of the text, while easier to understand, fail to meet the complexities of Shakespeare’s words and come short in the richness of its context.