

# On drama translation assignment

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On Drama Translation Like their contemporary prose translators who were introducing Western fiction to China, budding dramatists were enthusiastic about bringing Western plays to the Chinese stage. The first play was staged in Japan from an adaptation of Lin Shu's translation of Uncle Tom's Cabin. A Chinese student in Japan named Li Shutong adapted the script. The play was put on by members of the Chun Liu (Spring Willow) Drama Society. Their performance marked a complete break from traditional theatrical practices. After the May 4th Movement, complete translations of plays were published and used in productions.

Many established writers began to try their hand at writing scripts for the stage. Also in the introduction of foreign masterpieces, a lot of famous translators were produced. If we have a try at drama, we can find it very difficult, more difficult than the translation of novels. Actually, drama is very different from novel. And drama translation must be done in a much different way. First, drama scripts are written for stage performance. So the translated scripts must be suitable for the audience. But poems, prose and novels are written for reading. Though sometimes foreign scripts are produced only for reading, there are seldom the cases.

Also the foreign playwrights would be against that. Second, drama performance is a comprehensive ways of acting. It is an audio-visual art, which needs lighting, stage properties, and sound effects. The lines by the actors contribute a great deal to the success of the play. The audience relies heavily on the lines of the play. Most of them are ordinary people, but not erudite scholars. The actors usually don't repeat the words except for the sake of laying stress. If the lines are too obscure, the audience will get

confused as a play goes on without a stop. Third, there aren't any annotations in a stage performance.

In a novel, the hidden intention of the characters, the natural and social background, cause and effect of the subtle changes of the emotions can be stated by the narrator. So the readers can grasp the whole text and better understand it. But in a play performance, the audience get information only from the lines of the characters. Further more, foreign playwrights often use puns or allusions in a play. It is really difficult to translate them in simple language due to the cultural differences. For example, an allusion in the original play may be very appropriate and enlightening. But a literal translation of it may cause great trouble to the Chinese. And an annotation for the allusion is not feasible because in stage performance, an actor can't speak the annotation. He can only use sign language, stage properties to imply it. So drama translation sets higher standards for the translations. So the above-mentioned three characters of drama require a popular and simple language of the translation. For example, in the revised version of the translation by Yang xianyi of *Pygmalion* by Bernard Shaw, the translator adds some words, delete some to make the second version simpler in diction and structure.

Example 1: The Mother: (to Clara) Give it to me. (Clara parts reluctantly) Now (to the girl) this is for your flowers. (Act I) [First version] 给 (给) 给我 (给我) (?????) (?????) (?????) (?????) (?????) (?????) (?????) (?????) (?????) (?????) [1](P. 9) [Second version] 给 (给) 给我 (给我) (?????) (?????) (?????) (?????) (?????) (?????) (?????) (?????) (?????) (?????) [2](P. 462) In the first version, the translated sentence "给 (给) 给我 (给我) " seems more faithful and close to the original text. But it is awkward sounding. But the revised version is easier for pronunciation and

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(???????????)????????????????!??!????!??  
 ??????????? ,??? ,?? ,??? [8] (p. 465) The second version of the translation adds the exclamation “??? “. It can vividly show the questioning tone of the bystanders.

If the actors tactfully express it on the stage, which will draw the sympathy from the audience toward the protagonist. Another example of the flexible translation can be shown in “ Romeo and Julie” Friar Laurence: Here comes the lady;/ O, so light a foot /Will never wear out the everlasting flint; / A lover may bestride the gossamers/ That idles in the wanton summer air, / And yet not fall: so light is vanity. [Cao yu’s

version] ????? :???? ,? ,???????? ?????????????? ?????? , ?????????????? ,???????? ???????  
 ????? ,????? [9] [Zhu shenghao’s

version] ??? :????????? ,????????? ,????????????????????? ;????????? ,????????????????????????? ??  
 ??????????????. [10] The second version of the dialogue is better. In the first version, the last sentence “????????????? ,????? “ is obscure. The second version of this sentence”????????????????? “ can fit in well with the profession of Fiar Laurence. It vividly depicts a priest who is greatly concerned about the properties of the church and is devoted to his work. Another important aspect of drama is the scene of movement. In drama performance, the movement of actors will cause conflicts. The conflicts will push forward the development of the story. Then the audience will be interested and follow the show.

So the actor must act on their personalities, intentions and run into conflicts with each other. And language should show the kind of movement. In Thunderstorm by Cao yu, the fierce contradiction between labor and capital  
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can be read in the dialogues. So the language is full of movements. For example: ??? :?????????????? ,????????????????!??? ,????????????????!???? ??????

Hai: You drowned two thousand two hundred coolies in cold blood, and for each life lost you raked in three hundred dollars! I tell you, creature, you've made your money by killing people, and you and your sons stand accursed forever!

And now on top of that you?????? [11](p. 492) Literally, the word “???” is just calling the name of Zhou puyuan in an impolite way. But its translation shows the sharp opposition between him and Zhou puyuan. Also it hints that Hai will retaliate on Zhou. So it is full of movements. In the Importance of being Earnest, Yu guangzhong is also good at showing the movements in the language. For example: Algernon: how are you, my dear Ernest? What brings you up to town? Jack: Oh, pleasure; pleasure! What else should bring one anywhere? Yu guangzhong translates it as “? ,?????!????? ,?????????” [12](p. 26) Yu knows that Jack is a dandyish play boy. In the play, he just comes to Algernon for fun. The translation is far better than “??”. and will agree with his proposal to Miss Bracknell. Finally, dramatic language should be refined and full of emotions. Without poetic sentiment, dialogues are half-dead. [13] The language of drama should have rhythm, be rich in meaning and full of unspoken words. In the dramas by Ibsen, Shakespeare, and Caoyu, we can feel the strong emotions and mellowness of their language. For example, in Caoyu's translation of Romeo and Julie, we are overwhelmed by his coruscating wit.

Julie: Since arm from arm that voice doth us affray,/ Hunting thee hence with hunt's-up to the day. [Cao' version] ??????????????? ,????????????????? [14] In the <https://assignbuster.com/on-drama-translation-assignment/>

original language, the word “ affray” rhymes with “ day”. So the sentence can be read fluently. Cao is clever enough to end each clause with “? ” and “? “, so they still rhyme with each other. Also the rhythm and appeal are attained. Another example of the poetical emotions can be shown in Yang xianyi’s translation of Quyuan by Guo moruo.

“??? ,????????? ,?????????!????????????????? ,???? ,???? ,?????????????!?????? ,??????  
 ??? ,?!??? ,?!??? ,?!????????????????? ,?? ,?? ,???! ” [Cao’s version]