

Explore Impact of Cultural Differences Between Taiwan Region and the Chinese Mainland on English Literary Translation: Take the Example of Two Translation Versions of Harry Potter and the Philosopher's Stone

Yue Huang^{1,a,*}

¹Department of E-commerce, Minjiang University, Fuzhou, 350108, China
a. 3212903122@stu.mju.edu.cn

*corresponding author

Abstract: This study explores the cultural disparities between Taiwan and the Chinese mainland and their impact on English literary translations within these regions, focusing on the Taiwanese and mainland Chinese versions of “*Harry Potter and the Philosopher's Stone*”. Employing text close reading and comparative analysis methods, this research unveils significant translation differences stemming from the subcultural nuances inherent in Taiwanese culture. These variations manifest in alterations to the book's title, personal names, and sentence structures in the respective translations. In essence, both the Taiwanese and mainland Chinese translations contribute to the rich tapestry of Chinese literary translation history. Recognizing these disparities and capitalizing on their individual strengths is vital for the advancement of Chinese literary translation. This analysis underscores the significance of understanding and appreciating cultural distinctions in literary translation, ultimately enhancing the quality and depth of cross-cultural literary exchanges.

Keywords: subculture, cultural differences, impact, literary translation, *Harry Potter*

1. Introduction

It is an undeniable fact that there are cultural differences between Chinese Taiwan and the Chinese mainland. Some researchers have analyzed the cause for this difference, and a large number of experts have studied the impact of this difference in people's daily lives, like Mandarin differences, idiom differences, and daily communication differences. However, not many scholars have studied the impact of the differences on the translation of literature works between Chinese Taiwan and the Chinese mainland, which is beneficial for the development of translation on both sides of the Taiwan Strait by absorbing the advantages of these differences between the two regions. Furthermore, it would greatly help the cultural studies of the Chinese mainland and Taiwan region if the translation differences are found, leading to further study on the cultural differences.

This paper aims to analyze the impact of cultural differences on English literary translation. The paper will utilize textual close reading and textual comparisons, using two translation versions of *Harry Potter and the Philosopher's Stone* as the example: translated by People's Literature Publishing House of the Chinese mainland and the Crown Publishing House of Taiwan province respectively, in order to study the cultural differences and social environment behind it. The *Harry*

Potter series, written by J. K. Rowling, is famous for its imaginative and easy-to-read nature as a children's book. The *Harry Potter* series has been translated into over 75 kinds of language versions nowadays, which is suitable for analyzing translation differences, especially the first one of the series. *Harry Potter and the Philosopher's Stone*, the first one of the whole series, is easy to analyze for its easy-to-reader nature. In addition, the book contains a lot of Western word conventions that fit well with the topic of this paper.

This essay will first show how this cultural difference is manifested in the two translation versions. Afterwards, the essay will analyze the reasons for these textual differences. Finally, the paper will summarize the effects of cultural differences between the two places on the translation of English literature and make suggestions for the literary translation between the two regions.

2. The Source of Cultural Differences

The paper analyzes how the differences arise before starting the formal study, which is helpful in studying the impact of this difference on English literature. Through research, the author found that the Taiwanese culture can be regarded as a subculture of the Chinese mainland. A subculture, according to M. Gordon, a sociologist at the University of Pennsylvania, is a kind of culture that a subculture is a subdivided part of a people's culture but belongs to a unified whole [1]. Here are the reasons for the emergence of subcultures.

It is natural that many countries naturally influenced Taiwanese translations, for Taiwan has been occupied by different countries since ancient times. In 1895, the Qing government lost the Sino-Japanese War and ceded Taiwan to Japan. During this period, Japan practices "Mainland Hinterland Prolongationism" toward Taiwan, which means popularising the Japanese language and encouraging people to live a Japanese-style life [2]. Therefore, the literary works and literary translations were greatly influenced by Japanese culture. In 1949, the Kuomintang government retreated to Taiwan. During this period, Taiwan, the United States, and other Western capitalist countries had close contact. As a result, the Taiwanese translation style was influenced by Western culture.

In contrast, the development of literary translation on the Chinese mainland is less influenced by foreign cultures. Although Japan also influenced the Chinese mainland in 1895, the influence was soon overshadowed by the New Culture Movement's wave of vernacular translation. Moreover, In 1990, Liu Miqing's *Modern Translation Theory* marked the establishment of the modern translation theory system. The Chinese mainland's translation work has also gradually become scientific and systematic under the leadership of the government.

3. Translation Differences Between Two Versions

3.1. Book Title Translation

The original title of the first book in the *Harry Potter* series is called *Harry Potter and the Philosopher's Stone*. "The Philosopher's Stone", which means "贤者之石" in Chinese, but the mainland version translated it as 哈利波特与魔法石 (hā lì bō tè yǔ mó fǎ shí), and the Taiwanese version is called 哈利波特与神秘的魔法石 (hā lì bō tè yǔ shén mì de mó fǎ shí), which means "magic stone" and "mysterious magic stone" respectively. Here are some reasons for the differences in the translation of the book title between Taiwan and the mainland.

First, both the two translation methods are a kind of domesticating translation. According to Nuti, domesticating translation is to adopt an ethnocentric attitude to conform the foreign language text to the cultural values of the translated language and bring the original author into the translated language culture [3]. In ancient European legends, the Alchemists could refine a medicine that could cure

diseases and immortality and turn base metals into gold, the Philosopher's Stone. Nevertheless, most Chinese do not know about this legend. However, people worldwide, including China, all know what a magic stone is. Thus, by translating in this way, the reader can understand what the book is about immediately.

Furthermore, after translating "the philosopher's stone" as "the magic stone", the Taiwanese translation adds an adjective before the magic stone: mysterious. The difference in translation is because Taiwanese translations were influenced by Japanese, European and American cultures as early as 1895. Therefore, the translation style is relatively casual and can be seen as a kind of free translation, which means the translator added his understanding of the magic stone, which is an extension of the meaning of the word [4]. However, the translation of the Chinese mainland is more rigorous and systematic because of the New Culture Movement and the release of Liu Miqing's *Modern Translation Theory* in 1990; the Chinese mainland has gradually become more and more strict and systematic. So the translator used literal translation; the original title is translated directly, without any words not written in the title.

3.2. Name Translation

There are many different characters with different personalities in the *Harry Potter* series. Noticeably, the Taiwanese and the Chinese mainland versions translate the name differently.

The Chinese mainland translates all the names using transliteration so that readers can associate approximate English names by pronunciation. However, the Taiwanese version is not only according to the pronunciation but also according to personalities and images. For example, Draco Malfoy is translated as 德拉科·马尔福 (Delake Maerfu) in the Chinese mainland version. However, it is translated as 拽哥·马份 (Zhuaige Mafen), and the first character 拽 refers to someone self-assured and cool, which naturally gives people the image of this character as competitive and conceit.

The following are the reasons for the observed disparity. First, the Chinese mainland translation is particularly concerned about avoiding the similarity of foreign names to Chinese names when translated, while the Taiwanese translation is on the contrary [5]. This is also a translation difference due to free and literal translation strategies. Second, Taiwanese translation often strives to solve the problem within two or three words, except for a few Soviet-European names, which generally do not exceed four characters [5].

3.3. Dietary Terms Translation

It is clear that cultural differences exist between mainland China and Taiwan and between China and the West, among which, the differences in diet are particularly obvious. Diet is fundamental to human survival, Chinese and Western no exception, but there are great differences between China and the West on how to "diet". In a word, they have two different styles of food culture [6]. As shown in table 1, it illustrates two different ways of translation between the Chinese mainland and Taiwan region.

It can be seen from Table 1 that the words doughnut and bacon are translated as 油饼 and 熏鲜肉 in the mainland version, which means "oil cake" and "smoked salted meat" respectively. The main cause for this translation difference is that doughnuts and bacon are not part of the Chinese traditional diet, they are all traditional British delicacies. Chinese readers can easily understand by translating them into oil cake and smoked salted meat, two traditional Chinese foods translated with Chinese readers in mind. So, treatment can be seen as a kind of domesticating translation.

On the other hand, the Taiwan region has been seriously influenced by various aspects of Western culture, including introducing Western diets [7]. Thus, the readers in Taiwan can understand doughnuts and bacon even if the translator uses the method of foreignizing translation.

Table 1: Comparison of Translation Differences Involving Food-Related Terms.

Number	Source text	Mainland text	Taiwan text
1	It was on his way back past them, clutching a large doughnut in a bag, that he caught a few words of what they were saying. (P9)	他拎着装在袋里的一只大油饼往回走,经过他们身边时,他们的话断断续续 续飘入他的耳鼓。(P31)	就在緊抓著一個裝在袋子裏的大甜甜圈擦身走過時,幾句片段的話語飄進了他的耳朵。(P19)
2	Uncle Vernon entered the kitchen as Harry was turning over the bacon. (P20)	弗农姨夫来到厨房时,哈利正在翻熏咸肉。(P12)	德思礼姨丈在哈利忙着把培根翻面时走进厨房。(P34)

3.4. Long Sentences Translation

These sentences below are an example of long sentence translation:

Source Text: *He was tall thin and very old, judging by the silver of his hair and beard, which were both long enough to tuck into his belt.* (P12, Bloomsbury Publishing House, 1997)

Mainland

Text:

他个子瘦高,银发和银须长到都能够塞到腰带里了,凭这一点就可以断定他年纪已经很大了。(P5, People's Literature Publishing House, 2000)

Taiwan

Text:

他又高又瘦,而且非常老,这是從他那銀白閃亮,長的足以塞進腰帶的頭髮和胡須來判斷。(P23, Crown Publishing House, 2000)

A few differences between the two translations can be seen in the example sentences above. First of all, the sentence structure and wording of the Taiwanese version are generally identical to the source text, with the subject clause “他又高又瘦,而且非常老”, and the sentences that follow are all attributive clauses used to modify the subject. However, the mainland version does not treat it this way at all. The subject of the mainland text is “他”, which means “him” in English. Furthermore, the order of the sentences is completely disrupted. The subject clause of the source text, “He was tall thin and very old”, is split into two parts, “He is very thin” and “(He is) very old”, which are located at the beginning and end of the sentence, respectively. The attributive clause in the source text, “judging by the silver of his hair and beard, which were both long enough to tuck into his belt”, is adjusted to the middle of the mainland text.

In addition, some differences in terminology between the two places can be seen in these two sentences. In Taiwan text, the word “来”, which means “come” in English, is used in the sentence “这是從他那銀白閃亮,長的足以塞進腰帶的頭髮和胡須來判斷”. In traditional Chinese syntax, words like “来” that indicate action are generally not used as connectives. However, the Taiwan region has deflated the word into a connective with no real meaning due to the influence of the Minnan dialect [8].

In a word, the mainland text's structure is relatively loose compared to the source text, while the Taiwan text is long and has far more attributive clauses than the mainland text.

There are some reasons for these differences. Firstly, According to the Syntax theory, Chinese sentences are relatively loose. Most sentences are short sentences that contain time, place, person, and event. In a word, the Chinese sentence does not necessarily have to contain a complete subject-verb-object structure; omitting one or two parts does not affect the integrity of the sentence. Compared to Chinese sentences, Western sentence structure is very rigorous. No matter what the

sentence is, it has the most basic subject-verb-object structure. However, the subject can be a sentence. Each part of this sentence can be modified by one or several subordinate clauses, and complex sentences can contain many subordinate clauses so that English sentences can be very long and tightly connected by conjunctions. Western language customs influence Taiwan province, so it naturally follows Western sentence structure grammar when translating.

Noticeably, the Minnan dialect has also largely influenced Taiwanese syntactic structure. The Minnan dialect was introduced to Taiwan by immigrants from southern Fujian Province during history. About 80% of Taiwanese people speak the Minnan dialect, the most widely used dialect in daily life and other areas besides the “Taiwanese national language”. The absorption of the Minnan dialect in the Taiwan region has developed from words and phrases at the beginning to whole sentences at the later stage. The influence of the Minnan dialect has also spread to Taiwan’s grammatical structure. The syntax structure of the Taiwan region has also become more and more similar to that of the Minnan dialect.

In a word, the most important feature of mainland Chinese terminology is that it focuses on semantics. That is, the semantics before and after the whole sentence are basically the same, whereas in the Taiwan region, due to the influence of the West, the sentence expression focuses more and more on grammar and seeks consistency in the grammatical form [9].

4. Reflection

After analyzing, the specific manifestations of the impact of cultural differences between the two regions on the translation of literary works are roughly as follows. Firstly, the translations of book titles may be different. The Taiwan region often translates the book’s title by adding some words that reflect their own understanding of the book and some words that fit the characteristics of the book, which is a certain degree of free translation. Instead, the Chinese mainland usually adopts literal translation. Secondly, the two translators took completely different approaches to translating people’s names. In addition to using transliterate translation, the Taiwan region will add character traits and the author’s understanding and expectations of the characters when translating, while the mainland adopts transliteration only. Thirdly, the Chinese mainland often replaces Western food in Western literature with Chinese food that the Chinese readers are familiar with in translations, while the Taiwanese translators adopt a similar approach to literal translation, translating the dietary terms directly. Lastly, there is a big difference between the two regions in the structure of the translated sentences. In the process of sentence translation, the sentences translated in Taiwan and the English original remained basically the same in terms of subject and other sentence structures, and the overall structure of the sentences was as compact as English sentences. In contrast, Chinese mainland sentences often shift the sentence order in translations, especially converting the long attributive clauses in English into other components.

The paper also finds some cultural reasons for these translation differences. Firstly, the influence of Western culture on the Taiwan region has led to a relative Westernization of its sentence structure. Additionally, the proliferation of Western cuisine in Taiwan has resulted in a convergence of Taiwan’s food culture with that of the West. Consequently, translated literary works from the Taiwan region frequently feature Western foods that may be unfamiliar to readers from the mainland. Secondly, As several different cultures have influenced Taiwan, this has ultimately led to a more casual style of translation in general, which is why adjectives not found in the original text are added to translations and why characters’ names are translated with their own interpretations of these characters. In contrast, the Chinese mainland is less influenced by foreign culture.

However, it is important to note that while there are differences in translations between the Taiwan region and the Chinese mainland, they are all part of the Chinese literary culture. Moreover, with the increasingly frequent interactions between people on both sides of the Taiwan Strait since the reform

and opening up of the mainland, the languages of the two regions have shown a trend of integration. Many Taiwanese words have been absorbed into the mainland lexicon, and Taiwan has also absorbed some mainland words. In terms of grammar, under the influence of Taiwan's national language, many "new" usages have begun to appear on the mainland [10]. In a word, instead of being detrimental to cultural development, such differences can promote the diversity of the Chinese culture.

5. Conclusions

The paper analyzes the impact of cultural differences between the Taiwan region and the Chinese mainland on English literary translation by comparing three versions of *Harry Potter and the Philosopher's Stone* and finds out that both the Chinese mainland translation and Taiwanese translation are products of its own cultural development. Japan and the West influenced the Taiwanese literary style, and gradually became a Chinese culture subculture. The development of Chinese mainland translation is relatively independent and less influenced by foreign cultures. Therefore, the Chinese mainland translation system is relatively systematic and rigorous, which can be seen in the differences between the two regions in translating book titles, characters' names, dietary terms, and long sentences.

However, although the cultural differences caused some literacy translation differences in these two places, they are all part of Chinese literature history. Moreover, English literary translations in China will be further developed due to this translation difference if the Taiwan region and the Chinese mainland can learn from each other's translation characteristics and merits.

The paper analyzes the impact of cultural differences between the Taiwan Region and the Chinese Mainland on English Literary Translation, with the following contributions and limitations, as well as some suggestions for follow-up research.

Firstly, the paper can help study the cultural differences between the Chinese mainland and Taiwan region. Moreover, it is beneficial for the two regions to recognize the reasons for the differences in literacy translation and better understand the specific manifestations of the differences between them. With a full understanding of these, it is conducive for the two places to learn from each other's translation characteristics and advantages, which can help the development of literary translation in the two places. It could be helpful to Chinese culture studies and subculture studies.

However, the paper has some limitations, too. The study only adopted three versions of *Harry Potter and the Philosopher's Stone* as example, which means the study results have some limitations. The influence of cultural differences on the translation of literary works between the two regions, the reasons for the cultural differences and the specific manifestations of these cultural differences that are mentioned in this paper may have omitted some parts. In addition, This paper merely mentions and does not go into depth on some important concepts when studying culture, like subculture.

There are a few suggestions for future research based on the limitations that are mentioned above. Firstly, the choice of texts for the study could be expanded and not limited to just one book, so the results of studies would be much more comprehensive. Secondly, future studies can be more in-depth regarding culture, cultural differences and other culture-related concepts since the paper only focuses on the impact of cultural differences between the two regions on literary translation.

References

- [1] Gordon, M. (1947) *The Concept of the Sub-culture and Its Application*. *Social Forces*, 10, 26.
- [2] Wang, DY. (2020) *The Difference Between Taiwanese Translation and Mainland Translation: Take the Mainland Translation of Harry Potter and the Taiwanese Translation as an Example*. *Overseas*, 10, 66-67.
- [3] Li, R. (2007) *Theories of Naturalized Alienation in the Translation of Film Titles*. *Movie Review*, 15, 56-57.
- [4] Zhang, SZ. (1993) *Study on New Definitions of Literal and Free Translations*. *Journal of Jiangsu University Natural Science Edition*, 1, 119-124.

- [5] Zheng, QW. (1989) *Differences in the Cross-strait Translation of Names*. *China Publishing Journal*, 7, 87-92.
- [6] Zhou, XP. (2003) *The Differences between Chinese and Western Cookery Cultures and the Translating of Chinese Menu*. *The Northern Forum*, 2, 107-110.
- [7] Kang, YJ. (2013) *A Comparative Study of Two Chinese Versions of Harry Potter and the Philosopher's Stone from a Sub-cultural Perspective*. Hebei Agricultural University, Baoding, Hebei.
- [8] LV, XL. (2009) *An Analysis of the Lexical-Grammatical Incursion of the Southern Min Dialect into the "Taiwan National Language"--Taking the Dialectal Language of Taiwan Film and Television Works in Recent Years as an Example*. *Fujian Tribune (The Humanities & Social Sciences)*, z2, 88-90.
- [9] Xie, LJ., Kang, H. (2010) *Contrast between Chinese and English Sentences and Correction of Syntactical Errors*. *Journal of Beijing Polytechnic College*, 2, 140-144.
- [10] Hou, CS. (2003) *On Grammatical Differences of Modern Chinese Between Taiwan and the Main Land Oil the Basis of Contemporary Taiwan Novels—Along with an Analysis on the Tendency of Convergence of the Language of Both Sides*. *Journal of Yan'an University (Social Science Edition)*, 4, 98-102.