



Study on the Reception and Dissemination of the Moss Roberts' English Translation of Sanguo Yanyi

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ABSTRACT

The assessment of literary translation's quality constitutes a significant yet intricate undertaking. A pivotal aspect of this evaluation is gauging the reception of the translated work among its intended readership. By scrutinizing the reception and dissemination of English renditions of classical Chinese literature among international audiences, we can gain a deeper understanding of the impact various translations have on readers. This, in turn, can offer invaluable insights and serve as a foundation for informed decisions regarding the translation of such works, thereby facilitating the international promotion of Chinese literature and ultimately enhancing the global influence of Chinese cultural soft power.

Keywords: *Sanguo Yanyi*; reception; dissemination; octopus collector; KHCoder; high-frequency word analysis; semantic graph analysis

1. Introduction

Moss Roberts is widely recognized in the translation community both domestically and internationally. His English translation of *Sanguo yanyi* titled *Three Kingdoms: A Historical Novel* has been hailed as "a scholarly translation", offering a fresh interpretation to this literary masterpiece. Literature stands as the tangible representation of textual existence, and literary translation bridges the gap, playing a pivotal role in cultural exchange. Translations, inherently tailored towards readers, necessitate the consideration of reader reception theory. Overseas readers' evaluations offer a barometer for gauging a translation's effectiveness and its impact on cultural dissemination. This not only facilitates our understanding of the preferences and concerns among overseas readers, offering invaluable references to inform future translation and marketing endeavors, but also empowers us to pinpoint deficiencies in current translations that necessitate refinement or rectification.

For this study, we have selected to examine both Moss Roberts' full-fledged English translation of *Sanguo yanyi*. Our methodology involves a thorough exploration of overseas readers' reviews on Amazon and Goodreads, coupled with an analysis of the dissemination impact of the translations. This approach aims to assess the level of acceptance these works have garnered abroad, ultimately aiming to facilitate the worldwide dissemination of Chinese literary masterpieces and enhance China's cultural influence on a global scale.

2. Research Design

2.1 Data Sources

This study collected reader reviews of Moss Roberts' English translation of *Sanguo yanyi* on the official websites of Amazon and Goodreads. Among them, 176 reviews were collected from Amazon's official website, and 460 reviews from Goodreads' official website, totaling 636 reviews.

2.2 Data Collection Tool

The Octopus Data Collector is a robust data collection tool specifically designed for acquiring internet data. It can customize the crawling rules and target website options to cater to user

requirements, ensuring efficient and accurate data gathering. This tool proves invaluable for market research and public opinion monitoring, providing substantial support for decision-making processes.

In this study, we utilized the Octopus Data Collector to gather reader review data from specific translations on Amazon and Goodreads' official websites. Upon accessing the review page, we initiated data recognition procedures while enabling the page-turning function to ensure comprehensive collection of all review information. Following completion of the collection process, we performed deduplication and deletion operations on the acquired data before ultimately exporting it as an Excel table containing reader reviews for future utilization.

2.3 Data Analysis Tool

KHCoder is a powerful text analysis tool designed for processing large amounts of text data, providing multiple text analysis methods and visualization functions. Using KHCoder, users can easily perform operations such as keyword extraction, cluster analysis, and co-occurrence network analysis to better understand and interpret text data. These functions are of great value in academic research and business analysis. In this study, KHCoder is used to clean and segment the reader review data first and then to generate word frequency lists and keyword semantic maps to gain a deep understanding of readers' focuses and emotional preferences.

3. Analysis of High-Frequency Words

The cleaned review data was stored in the form of Excel spreadsheet files and opened with the text analysis tool KHCoder. After creating a new project in KHCoder and importing the spreadsheet file, data processing was performed. After the processing was completed, keywords were extracted by clicking the options in the toolbar and a word frequency list was generated, as shown in Figure 1.

#	Word	POS / Conj.	Frequency
1	be	Verb	860
2	I	PRP	402
3	it	PRP	274
4	book	Noun	217
5	have	Verb	197
6	you	PRP	164
7	not	Adv	157
8	read	Verb	144
9	story	Noun	92
10	translation	Noun	91
11	chinese	Adj	83
12	do	Verb	79
13	version	Noun	71
14	character	Noun	66
15	Kingdoms	ProperNoun	64
16	they	PRP	61
17	very	Adv	59
18	volume	Noun	59
19	get	Verb	57
20	he	PRP	57
21	that	W	55
22	good	Adj	54
23	novel	Noun	54

Figure 1: High-frequency Words in Reader Reviews of the English Translation of *Sanguo yanyi* by Moss Roberts

Through index operation, we conducted a comprehensive analysis of each high-frequency keyword individually. Our findings revealed that readers expressed particular interest in the following aspects: the portrayal of characters in the novel (as indicated by high-frequency words such as "have", "character", "read"), the historical and cultural backdrop of the dynasties depicted in this story (as indicated by "Chinese", "story", "novel", "kingdoms"), as well as a comparative examination between Moss Roberts' complete translation and an online abbreviated version (as indicated by "translation", "version"). Numerous comments from readers emphasized their motivation to delve into this book for gaining insights into authentic Chinese history and culture. They were captivated by its esteemed status as a literary classic and sought to savor its allure through reading. Consequently, they experienced disappointment upon perusing the abbreviated version; several comments even advised against purchasing it if one desires an immersive encounter with the charm of the original novel. According to numerous readers' feedback, a primary issue with the abridged version lies in its rushed conclusion which results in an unsatisfactory ending during the reading process.

However, simultaneously, the complete translation has garnered widespread acclaim. The success of the translation can be attributed not only to the translator's astute strategies that captivate readers and compel them to finish the book but also to their effective resolution of the issue pertaining to obscure and difficult-to-remember character names in the text. In terms of translation strategies, the translator adeptly combines foreignization and domestication, with a significantly higher emphasis on foreignization. This approach renders the narrative easily comprehensible while preserving its exotic allure, leading numerous readers to laud it as the finest complete rendition of *Sanguo yanyi* they have ever encountered. To address difficulties in the numerous names, the translator adopts English names for characters based on those used in "The Warring States BASAKA," a popular game centered around this historical period. Consequently, many history enthusiasts who purchase this version of translation are emboldened by their ability to successfully navigate through and fully experience this literary masterpiece. Despite its positive feedback from the majority of readers, some readers have offered suggestions for improvement concerning certain aspects of the translation. For instance, a minority of readers contend that Moss Roberts' English translation is inadequate in its efforts to retain certain subtleties inherent in the original work, ultimately resulting in a dilution of its unique essence. Additionally, several readers have noted that Volume 1's footnotes in the complete version appear at the end of Volume 2—an arrangement which causes inconveniences for readers' cross-reference.

4. Semantic Graph Analysis

In this study, the review data was saved as an Excel spreadsheet file and opened in the KHcoder text analysis tool. A new project was created in KHcoder, and the spreadsheet file was imported, followed by data pre-processing. After the data processing was completed, the corresponding options were selected in the toolbar to extract vocabulary and perform hierarchical cluster analysis. In this way, the semantic map of reader reviews (Figure 2) was obtained.

its established position as a literary classic, as well as a thorough assessment of its intricate character traits, its portrayal of chaotic world patterns, and the noble qualities that permeate its narrative. Through the course of their immersive reading experience, a preponderance of readers offers remarks that are both effusive and timeless, conveying a profound affection and nostalgia for the vividly drawn characters that populate the pages of the book.

Moreover, readers often display a keen interest in delving into the rich historical tapestry that serves as the backdrop for the story, with the aspiration of gaining a deeper understanding of the cultural intricacies and nuances of the Shu and Han Dynasty through their exploration of the novel. When it comes to evaluating different translations in their reviews, a discernible trend emerges: a majority of readers tend to bestow higher praise upon Moss Roberts' complete English translation, viewing it as a meticulous and faithful rendition of the original. Conversely, feedback pertaining to the online abbreviated version often reflects a measure of dissatisfaction, with many expressing regrets over having purchased it, or confusion stemming from mistakenly acquiring an incorrect edition.

5. Discussion

The strategic imperative for present China's development revolves around mastering international communication and bolstering the capabilities in this realm. Undoubtedly, translation assumes a pivotal role in forging these abilities, serving as the linchpin in bridging linguistic and cultural divides. Nevertheless, when venturing into the overseas dissemination of literary works, the exploration of reader reception becomes paramount. It is solely through empirical observation of readers' behaviors and emotional responses that we can delineate an optimal translation strategy—one that finds harmony between the cultures of the source and target languages, culminating in a balanced and unbiased translation approach.

Drawing from the aforementioned research and analysis, it is evident that in our future endeavors to promote the dissemination of English translations of *Sanguo yanyi* and other esteemed literary works abroad, a pivotal aspect to consider is the readership. It is imperative to prioritize their needs and, whenever feasible, adopt foreignization translation strategies. Ensuring a seamless reading experience that fully preserves the original content's tone and essence is paramount. Furthermore, to enhance the reader's engagement, it is crucial to conduct comprehensive reader analysis and adeptly incorporate novel forms of media prevalent in this information age. This includes, but is not limited to, embracing English character names from popular games adapted from the same source material and domesticating traditional translations, thereby creating a more immersive and accessible reading experience for a wider audience.

The translation of Chinese classic works demands a rigorous and meticulous approach, as they encapsulate the enduring, solemn, and elegant essence of Chinese civilization. Given the diverse cultural backgrounds that shape distinct thinking patterns, it is imperative to acknowledge these differences and handle them with an open and inclusive mindset. Our attitudes and methods in bridging these cultural divides fundamentally determine our ability to effectively communicate

Chinese narratives to a global audience. Furthermore, to tell Chinese stories well, we must pay attention not only to the narrative itself but also to the reader's positioning, arrangement, promotion, and other aspects that play a pivotal role in enhancing the overall reading experience.

The introduction of traditional classical literature and esteemed books overseas is not solely aimed at promoting the international dissemination of Chinese literature, but also serves to elevate the soft power of Chinese culture, fortify cultural confidence, and cultivate a sense of national pride. While globalizing these literary treasures remains a pivotal objective, we must also appreciate their potential to catalyze global influence and effect change on a broader scale. As we progress in this endeavor, it is imperative to acknowledge and harness the transformative power that classical books can wield in the international arena.

Conflicts of Interest: The author(s) declare(s) that there is no conflict of interest regarding the publication of this article.

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