

# On Novel Dialogue Translation from the Perspective of Adaptation Theory: A Case Study of Katherine Mansfield's Short Stories

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**Abstract:** Dialogue is the most important and wonderful part of the novel. Dialogue has its communicative, sociocultural and verbal features and it plays an important role in revealing the character's personality, reflecting the social reality, attracting the reader's attention and advancing the story plot. Adaptation Theory was put forward by Verschueren in 1999. The key of the theory is that language use is a process of making dynamic adaptations and it emphasizes that the process of language use is a continuous linguistic choice based on the inside and outside surroundings of language with different degrees of salience. This paper attempts to investigate novel dialogue translation from the perspective of Verschueren's adaptation theory.

## 1. Introduction

### 1.1 Purpose and significance of the Study

As a popular style of literature, novels cultivate the readers' taste and give people a lot of enjoyment and novel translation needs to be explored deeply and completely. And also the context can influence the understanding of the text of the translators. So much stress should be laid on the choice-making of the translation in the term of contextual analysis and on the application of context adaptation in novel dialogue translation. The paper intends to exemplify the possibility and significance of novel dialogue translation by using Verschueren's adaptation theory.

### 1.2 Research Methods

The paper will conduct case studies of Katherine Mansfield's short stories from the perspective of dialogue translation. The aim is to add an extra instance of adaptation theory in illustrating novel dialogue translation and uncover the relationship between novel dialogue translation and context theoretically. The data collected for the paper are the dialogues in Katherine Mansfield's short stories. Some typical examples will be selected to serve the purpose of the research.

## 2. Literature Review

### 2.1 An Overview of Novel Dialogue

Novel dialogue is extremely important and can not be replaced in displaying characters, outlining plots, illustrating details of a story and creating the whole aesthetic effects in a novel. So it is clear that dialogues can effectively portray the characters in novels and display characteristics and emotions of the characters. We can recall the vividness of the dialogues in short stories of Katherine Mansfield. Through dialogues, the author advances the story gradually and readers can understand the personality, level of education and social status of the characters in novels and social background the character live profoundly.

#### 2.1.1 The Nature of Novel Dialogue

Language is the most important tool for people to communicate with each other and also is the carrier of thoughts. In addition, there are several functions related with language, namely informing, ordering, persuading, etc. But in a novel the discourse may have different implication. Authors express their ideas through the characters in novels, especially the dialogues between the characters.

What's more, the dialogue between characters plays an important role in novels: specifically plumping the figure, highlighting the contradiction and developing the plot. So we can know that the implicature is the important feature of novel dialogue. It needs to be studied thoroughly.

### **2.1.2 The Functions of Novel Dialogue**

Dialogue can advance the plots, show the theme of the novel and attract readers' attention. Dialogue is available for dealing with the conflict during the process of promoting the story in novels. And also dialogue plays an important role in setting the scene and mood of stories. It is also like a needle stringing everything together and binding them into a whole. Dialogue can reveal the writing style of authors, such as, refined, implicit, simple, fresh, and lively. Authors have particular written and spoken styles which different from others in their works. The language in writing embodies style and writing style reveals characteristics and creative personality of authors.

## **2.2 Novel Dialogue Translation and Adaptation Theory**

### **2.2.1 Novel Dialogue and Pragmatics**

Dialogues in Katherine Mansfield's short stories have already got wide attention of scholars, but they are still worthy of further studies. In order to appreciate them comprehensively, much attention should be given to explore dialogue implications.

Pragmatics studies how people use language to communicate with each other. That means how people can understand the utterances in a specific context, so the pragmatic theory can benefit a lot to understand novel dialogues. The first step to translate novel dialogue is to understand the meaning of them completely in a certain situation. It is natural to analyze the novel dialogue by using adaptation theory which is a pragmatic theory.

### **2.2.2 Pragmatics and Translation**

The pragmatic approach used to explain novel dialogue translation focuses on the discovery and transference of intended forces. Dialogue is the most direct way for characters to communicate in novels. We can understand novel dialogues accurately and profoundly with the help of using pragmatics. Some scholars have got some achievements on the translation in the perspective of pragmatics and they select literary works as examples to illustrate that pragmatics theory can be a great guide for analyzing literary translation. Therefore, it is natural to adopt pragmatic to novel dialogue translation.

### **2.2.3 Adaptation Theory in Novel Dialogue Translation**

From what we talk about above, we can easily get that adaptation theory is applicable and practical to analyze and study translation. It has the following advantages in translation analysis.

First, adaptation theory has great theoretical and practical value in analyzing and explaining the usage of language. It studies the translation comprehensively and scientifically. It states that the language use is the choice-making process. So actually it is adaptation theory that is a practical guide of translation. Second, adaptation theory supplies us with specific descriptions of the certain context for translators. The language and structure are perhaps properly used in a source language, but it may be unacceptable in a target language. Therefore, since we have discussed the benefits of adaptation theory in the above descriptions, we can draw a conclusion that it is proper and necessary to get further study about adaptation theory in translation.

## **3. Mental World Adaptation to Novel Dialogue Translation: A Case Study of Katherine Mansfield's Short Stories**

### **3.1 A Brief Introduction to Katherine Mansfield and Her Short Stories**

Katherine Mansfield (1888-1923), born in New Zealand, is one of the greatest short story writers in the twentieth century of English Literature. She is regarded as one of the pioneers and innovators of short stories of English.

There are more than one hundred short stories published which can be divided into five volumes: In a German Pension in 1911, Bliss and Other Stories in 1920, The Garden Party and Other Stories in 1922 and The Dove's Nest and Other Stories in 1923. A fifth collection, Something Childish and Other Stories, was published shortly after her death. These achievements established her outstanding position in English literature as a short story writer.

### 3.2 Adaptation to the Mental World

In order to make sure that target readers can get similar affect to that of source readers. Translators should do plenty of work to make choices. In translation process, the mental includes emotions, personality, wishes, motivations, affection of language users: authors and translators, even readers. The mental world of the language users plays an important role in the choice-making process. There are three elements involved in novel dialogue translation and they will be illustrated in detail, namely the writer's intention, the characters' personality and the target text readers' cognitive ability. All the three elements will be analyzed to illustrate the adaptation of mental context in dialogue translation.

#### 3.2.1 Adaptation to the Writer's Intention

Language is a medium, an instrument with the help of which writers communicate with translators and readers, exchange thoughts and achieve mutual understanding. Language is directly connected with thoughts; language fixes in words, and words combined into sentences, the result of thoughts in cognition, and thus makes possible exchanges of ideas among language users.

In addition, translators should bear in mind that translation should fully reflect writers' idea and attitude, so we name this process as adaptations to writer's intention. Target readers are also another important factor translators should concern about. From authors' point of view they do not know the potential readers but still can roughly figure out which parts they can share with readers. The following example and analysis vividly show the adaptation to writer's mental world.

##### Example 1

"It's some mistake, nobody ever ordered so many."

"It is quite right, yes I ordered them. Aren't they lovely? I was passing the shop yesterday, and I saw them in the window, and I suddenly thought for once in my life I shall have enough canna lilies. The garden party will be a good excuse." "Don't you agree, Laura?"

"Oh, I do, mother". (Katherine Mansfield' Selected Stories, 1957: 61)

"大概是弄错了吧,"她轻轻说道。"没有人订过这么多的花。"

"没错,"她平静地说道,"是我订的。多可爱的花呀" "我昨天经过花店,在橱窗里看到这些花,突然产生了一个念头:这辈子总该有那么一回,把美人蕉百合花 买个够。花园茶会正好给了我这么一个好机会。""同意吗,劳拉?"

"啊, 当然同意, 妈妈。"(未发现的国土, 1991:247)

Before the garden party, Laura feel much puzzled about so many lilies, and then she gets answer from her mother. In the above dialogue, "Aren't they lovely?" is not just "花儿不可爱吗?". If so, it can not convey the author's intention to readers. Here the author wants to express the self-centered and the luxury mother. So it is perfect to translate it into a declarative sentence. In the dialogue the corresponding equivalent of "enough canna lilies" is "充足的美人蕉百合花". It can not concisely convey what the author wants to express. "买个够" is vivid and also reflects the luxury of Laura' mother, who is a luxury and success upper-middle-class housewife. The sentence "The garden party will be a good excuse." is translated into "花园茶会正好给了我这么一个好机会." The translator adds a Chinese word "正好" to show that Laura's mother finds excuses for herself for the cost and also makes it sounds reasonable. A simple answer "I do" is translated into "当然同意". The answer "当然同意" sounds that Laura completely agrees with her mother and pleasantly accept mother's idea, but the fact is exactly the opposite. If it is translated into "同意", It can not convey the mind of the author. Therefore, the translator adapts to the author's mental world correctly.

### 3.2.2 Adaptation to Personality and Emotion of Specific Characters

Just like the communication in real life, in novels the characters always use different linguistic strategies to conduct a conversation. The character's intentions influence what to say and how to say. In fact the translation process is a special kind of communication to translators. Only when translators fully understand the character's intention in a novel dialogue can he or she do a great translation. So eventually translations are perfectly conducted in the process of making adaptation to his or her intentions.

#### Example 2

"You'd like almost everything about Russian life," he said warmly. "It's so informal, so impulsive, and so free without question. And then the peasants are so splendid. They are such human beings, yes, that is it. So you know what I mean?"

"Yes, I know perfectly what you mean," she said. (The Collected Stories of Katherine Mansfield, 2006: 135)

"凡是俄国生活中的东西，几乎都叫你喜欢，"他热烈地说着，"毫无疑问，它是那样非同一般，那样富于冲动力，那样自由自在。而那儿的农民是那样的好。他们都是那样的人，是的，就是那样。你明白我的意思吗？"

"是的，我完全明白你的意思，"她说。(曼斯菲尔德短篇小说选，1984:220)

The man promises to travel to Russia with Vera, but he eventually completes the travel all by himself, leaving Vera behind. At this very moment, he shows off his experiences in the best spirits to Vera. Vera is put in a completely awkward position. In the dialogue, the author uses the adjective "so" for four times and "such" for one time. The equivalent translation in Chinese of "so" are "如此", "真的". However, the two translations can not vividly indicate the emotion of the character. The translator translates "so" and "such" into "那样" in Chinese which expresses an obvious emotion of showing off, indifference and selfishness of the man. Therefore, the translator adapts to the man's personality and emotion and also conveys it to the target readers successfully.

### 3.2.3 Adaptation to Cognitive Ability of Target Readers

When translation is conducted, translators should bear the target readers and the cognitive ability of the presumed readers in mind, including gender, age, educational background, life experience and so on, and then translators can do a wonderful communication. What's more, the position of the presumed readers is also very important. But in fact in the process of translation there must be some understanding gap between writers and presumed readers, so the essential work of translators is to make the translation easily accepted by target readers.

#### Examples 3

"But I thought you said you did not mean to interfere", said Laura.

"My darling child, you would not like a logical mother, would you? Do not do that, there's the man". "Bank them up, just inside the door, on both sides of the porch, please", said Mrs. Sheridan. (Katherine Mansfield' Selected Stories, 1957: 61)

"但是我还以为你说话算数，真是不会插手的哩，"劳拉说。

"我亲爱的孩子，如果你妈妈真是一个一板一眼的人，你是不会喜欢的吧？别这样。花店伙计来了。""来，把花盆排好，就靠门里边，沿着门廊，一边一排，"谢里登太太说。(未发现的国土，1991:247)

Laura talks with her mother, Mrs. Sheridan. Mrs. Sheridan promises not to interfere with anything about garden party, but actually she orders so many flowers for the party and arranges everything in her own mind. In the dialogue, the word "logical" means in accordance with some rules. The expression "一板一眼" is a totally fixed phrase in Chinese, which means rhythm in music or a set pattern of behavior and speech. So the translator adapts to the readers' cognitive ability and for target readers it is not so difficult to understand the text.

### 3.3 Enlightenment of Adaptation Theory on Novel Dialogue Translation

In the above descriptions, translators make proper choices and adaptation in the process of

translation which is acceptable to target readers. According to Verschueren, the choice-making process of strategies is a complicated process of communication. Translators should make choices in every possible level of structure within the limitation of strategies chosen. Translation strategies are an indispensable content in translator training. The importance of dialogue translation in novels requires translators should pay much attention to strategies.

#### **4. Conclusion**

Dialogue is an inevitable resource to conduct research on its translation and cross-cultural communication. Dialogue translation is a significant and indispensable element of novels which can not be neglected. Adaptation theory affirms that there is no absolutely perfect translation since translation is a choice-making process, such as the choice of translation strategies, sentence structures, even a single word. This thesis studies how the translator makes contextual adaptations in the perspective of adaptation theory in novel dialogue translation. Eventually the study gets some enlightenment on the strategies of novel dialogue translation and the selected examples demonstrate that adaptation theory is a valuable approach to analyze novel dialogue translation.

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