

JURNAL LINGUISTIK Vol. 28 (2) November 2024 (034-047)

Reader's Perception and Translator's Adaptation Strategies of Cultural humor in the English Translation of *The Scholars*

¹Li Ne, ²Syed Nurulakla Syed Abdullah, and ³Muhammad Alif Redzuan Abdullah

¹line921013@163.com, ² syedakla@upm.edu.my, ³ muhammadalif@upm.edu.my

^{1,2,3} Department of Foreign Languages,
Faculty of Modern Languages and Communication,
Universiti Putra Malaysia. Serdang

Tarikh terima : 19 Ogos 2024

Received

Terima untuk diterbitkan : 20 November 2024

Accepted

Tarikh terbit dalam talian : 30 November 2024

Published online

Abstract

Due to linguistic and cultural differences, translating Chinese humour into English has always been a challenging task. This study primarily assesses whether translators successfully convey humour in their translation by evaluating readers' perception of humour in the translated text, thus achieving cultural transmission and communication. The research data is drawn from the cultural humour of the Chinese humorous novel *Rulin Waishi* and its English translation *The Scholars*. Using a questionnaire survey, the study examines readers' perceptions of cultural humour in the translated text. Using Verschueren's adaptation theory, the study applies a qualitative method to investigate the translation strategies from four aspects: structural adaptation, contextual adaptation, dynamic adaptation, and salience in the adaptation process, with the aim of transferring both the surface and deep cultural meanings of Chinese humour into English. The results of the survey show that almost all readers believe that the translator has successfully transferred the cultural humour of the original text into the translated version. In addition, during the adaptation process, the translator employed specific translation techniques such as transcoding (with or without explanation), paraphrasing, omission, and substitution. These methods were dynamically applied to adapt the source text to the target language at both the formal and contextual levels, ensuring the humour of the original was conveyed more effectively. This study offers English-speaking readers an opportunity to appreciate Eastern humour, whilst deepening their understanding of Chinese humorous literature.

Keywords: Evaluation; cultural humor; Adaptation; *Rulin Waishi*; *The Scholars*

Persepsi Pembaca dan Strategi Adaptasi Penterjemah terhadap Humor Budaya dalam Terjemahan Bahasa Inggeris The Scholars

Abstrak

*Disebabkan oleh perbezaan linguistik dan budaya, penterjemahan humor Cina ke dalam bahasa Inggeris sentiasa menjadi tugas yang mencabar. Kajian ini menilai terutamanya sama ada penterjemah berjaya menyampaikan humor dalam terjemahan mereka dengan menilai persepsi pembaca terhadap humor dalam teks terjemahan, seterusnya mencapai pemindahan dan komunikasi budaya. Data kajian diperoleh daripada humor budaya dalam novel humor Cina *Rulin Waishi* dan terjemahan bahasa Inggerisnya *The Scholars*. Menggunakan tinjauan soal selidik, kajian ini meneliti persepsi pembaca terhadap humor budaya dalam teks terjemahan. Berdasarkan teori adaptasi Verschueren, kajian ini menggunakan kaedah kualitatif untuk meneliti strategi terjemahan dari empat aspek: adaptasi struktur, adaptasi konteks, adaptasi dinamik, dan penonjolan dalam proses adaptasi, dengan tujuan untuk memindahkan makna budaya yang cetek dan mendalam daripada humor Cina ke dalam bahasa Inggeris. Hasil tinjauan menunjukkan bahawa hampir semua pembaca percaya bahawa penterjemah berjaya*

memindahkan humor budaya daripada teks asal ke dalam versi terjemahan. Tambahan lagi, dalam proses adaptasi, penterjemah menggunakan kaedah terjemahan khusus seperti transkodifikasi (dengan atau tanpa penjelasan), parafrasa, penghapusan, dan penggantian untuk menyesuaikan teks sumber dengan dinamik kepada teks sasaran pada peringkat bentuk dan konteks, sekali gus menyampaikan humor daripada teks sumber dengan lebih berkesan. Kajian ini memberikan peluang kepada pembaca bahasa Inggeris untuk menghayati humor Timur dan meningkatkan pemahaman mereka terhadap kesusastraan humor Cina.

Kata kunci: Penilaian; humor budaya; Adaptasi; *Rulin Waishi*; *The Scholars*

1. Introduction

Translating Chinese humor into English is a significant challenge due to linguistic and cultural differences. A successful translator must effectively convey the humor while considering how the intended audience perceives it. This approach is crucial for achieving cultural transmission and effective communication, as seen in the translation of Rulin Waishi's humorous Chinese novel and its English counterpart, *The Scholars*.

A Wu Jingzi and *Wulin Waishi*

Rulin Waishi is a classic long novel of ancient Chinese literature. Written by Wu Jingzi, the novel uses a chapter format to masterfully satirise the flaws of the imperial examination system and reflects the true scenarios and fates of Confucian scholars under this system. The novel contains many dialect words from the Jianghuai region, mainly using the local dialect of Wu Jingzi's hometown of Quanjiao. This use of dialect reflects the local customs and skillfully recreates the cultural milieu of the time, offering a vivid portrayal of the various scholars and literati of the late Qing dynasty. It is regarded as a masterpiece of humorous and satirical Chinese literature. *Rulin Waishi* also serves as an encyclopaedia of daily life in ancient China, filled with distinctive features of Chinese culture. The book covers a wide range of traditional Chinese cultural elements, including the imperial examination system, social customs, seasonal festivals, folk entertainment, marriage and funeral practices, clothing, tea and wine culture, and popular beliefs. It paints a comprehensive picture of social life during the Ming and Qing dynasties. The language in this book is rich in local characteristics, it is colloquial and concise, and widely used among the people. It includes dialects, idioms, colloquial expressions, proverbs, two-part allegorical sayings, slang, idiomatic expressions, maxims, and popular sayings. These colloquial expressions not only have strong ethnic and regional characteristics, but also contain the profound insights of contemporary scholars who viewed social phenomena through a Confucian lens.

B The Yangs and *The Scholars*

The early translations of *The Scholars* were mostly abridged versions, and the translators were all Chinese. In 1939, Ge Chuan published the first chapter of an abridged version in an English magazine by the University of Chicago Press, which is still the earliest known English translation. Xu Chengbin abridged the fifty-first chapter, entitled "Four Extraordinary People", which was published in the *World Journal* in 1940. Chichen Wang translated the second and third chapters about Zhou Jin and Fan Jin who passed the imperial examination, under the title "*Two Scholars Who Passed the Examinations*", which appeared in the anthology *Chinese Wit & Humour* edited by George Kao in 1946. In 1973, H. C. Chang abridged the thirty-first and thirty-second chapters, and the translations were included in his book *Chinese Literature: Popular Novels and Dramas*. To date, the only complete translation by Yang Xianyi and Gladys Yang, published by Beijing Foreign Languages Press in 1957 under the title *The Scholars*, is also the translation used for this study. The translation of *The Scholars* into English is a process of interpretation that depends not only on the explanation of the individual cultural elements, but also on the accuracy and specificity of the partial meanings in the context of the whole text. Therefore, the complete translation by Yang Xianyi and Gladys Yang is of great significance for the understanding, interpretation and dissemination of traditional Chinese culture.

C Humor in Chinese Literary Works: A Microcosm of Culture

The meaning of "humour" in English and in ancient China is different. In the Western context, "humour" refers to the use of wit, self-deprecation, banter, and charm to evoke a sense of joy and amusement in others. In contrast, Chinese humour is often about exposing the contradictions in things through banter

or using metaphors and exaggerations to expose, criticise or make fun of bad or foolish behaviour to criticise and satirise. In contrast to the pure liveliness of Western humour, ancient Chinese humour served as an entertaining yet instructive form of admonition, often reflecting the wisdom of ancient Chinese scholars.

Humorous elements are deeply rooted in the Chinese psyche. Although we cannot converse directly with the ancients, the humour of the ancients can be found in various historical records, fables, novels, legends, and notes. The term "humour" was first phonetically translated into Chinese by Lin Yutang as "幽默" (yōu mò). However, the word "幽默" already appeared in the pre-Qin period. Qu Yuan wrote in the *Huai Sha*(怀沙): "

滔滔孟夏兮，草木莽莽。伤怀永哀兮，汨徂南土。响兮杳杳，孔静幽默

In the boundless growth of plants and trees in the surging early summer, my heart is deeply hurt, and I grieve as I head south. The bright day turns to dusky twilight, profound silence, and serenity. (Zhu, 2019)

Here "幽默" means quiet and silent. The ancient "幽默" and the modern "humour" introduced by Lin Yutang seem to be completely different and unrelated.

The term that comes closest to the modern concept of humour in Chinese literary history is "戏谑" (xì xuè). In *The Book of Songs: Wei Feng: Qi Ao*, Wei Wugong's humour and appropriate speech are praised with the lines: "善戏谑兮，不为虐兮" (True, 1985), meaning that he was humorous and kind without being hurtful. This phrase is considered the origin and standard of ancient Chinese humour. In addition, "诙谐" (huī xié) is another term frequently used in antiquity for humour. *The Book of Han: Biography of Dongfang Shuo* rated Dongfang Shuo:

朔虽诙笑，然时观察颜色，直言切谏，上常用之。

Although Shuo was fond of jest, he would observe and assess the situation and speak candidly and admonish directly, and the Emperor often made use of him.

The commentary by Yan Shigu explains: "诙 means jesting, and 诙笑 means humorous speech. 诙 is pronounced huī, and similar terms are 诙嘲 and 诙谐" (Ban, 2007). This indicates that Dongfang Shuo's speech was witty and amusing and provoked laughter. Thus, "jesting" and "joking" are terms related to humour.

Moreover, "滑稽" (huájī) is closely related to humor. *The Records of the Grand Historian: Biography of Huaji* states:

淳于髡，齐之赘婿也。长不满七尺，滑稽多辩。

Chunyu Kun was a son-in-law in Qi. He was not quite seven feet tall but was witty and a good debater. (Han, 1982)

This indicates that those who are considered "滑稽" had eloquence and humour. The humour scholar Xue Baokun argues that the essence of "滑稽" is a form of witty and subtle humour that is an integral part of Chinese culture (Yang, 1980).

Lu Xun (1927) believed there is no clear boundary between humour and satire. China has a long tradition of satirical literature, dating back to the Xia and Shang dynasties. The satirical poems in the *Book of Songs* further promoted this spirit. *Wei Feng: Shu Shu*, for example, compares the fat rulers of Wei to big rats, using a metaphor to satirise greedy, stingy, and exploitative aristocrats with a humorous touch. *Tang Feng: Chou Miao* mocks the miserly who refuse to enjoy their wealth, creating a sharp contrast between their riches and their miserliness. The poet ends each stanza on a sarcastic note:

宛其死矣，他人是愉

You're about to die; others will be delighted,

宛其死矣，他人是保

You're about to die; others will be assured,

宛其死矣，他人入室

You're about to die; others will enter the room. (Gao, 2018) implying that others will gladly enjoy their hoarded wealth after their death. These poems, while satirical, also bring a touch of humour, making readers smile.

It is therefore obvious that satire and humour are closely linked in Chinese culture. Humour can expose the truth and absurdities of life through satire and thus stimulate reflection and laughter. The inseparable relationship between satire and humour makes humour more profound and closer to reality.

D Humor Translation: A Challenge to the Translator

When analysing English humorous language, methods from linguistics, psychology and sociology are often applied, focusing on context, linguistic structure and psychological effect to create a multidimensional theoretical framework to explain the mechanisms and effects of humour. In contrast, Chinese theories of verbal humour are simpler and heavily influenced by traditional cultures such as Confucianism, Daoism and Zen. Chinese humour tends to use cultural-specific terms, idioms, and allusions, which are analysed from a literary and philosophical perspective, focusing on cultural backgrounds and linguistic subtleties. Given the fundamental differences in linguistic structures between Chinese and English, it is crucial to investigate whether Chinese humour can adapt to the English analytical framework and what differences exist in the mechanisms and effects of humour between the two languages post-translation. In addition, the effectiveness of humour often depends on specific linguistic and cultural backgrounds, which poses a challenge to the cross-linguistic transfer of humour. This requires translators to make adaptive adjustments during the translation process, including both linguistic and non-linguistic elements.

As humour often depends on context, achieving the same humorous effect in the target language as in the source language means that translators need to be creative and sometimes even reconstruct the original contexts to achieve a similar joke. The translation of humour from the source language into the target language usually involves culture-specific elements such as local colour, historical background or social customs that can be difficult for non-native speakers to understand. For example, there may be no corresponding concepts for certain regional slang or customs in other cultures. This requires translators not only to have a precise understanding of the original meanings, but also to use appropriate methods to transfer these culture-specific humour elements into the target language and culture. In other words, for a successful humour translation, translators must have a deep understanding of both cultures, remain true to the original intent of the humour and at the same time ensure that the readers in the target language appreciate the charm of the humour.

E Adaptation: A Means of Cultural Communication in Translation

Translation is a form of cultural exchange and interaction. The renowned British translation theorist, Susan Bassnett argues that translation is never a purely linguistic activity, but is deeply rooted in the culture of language. Translation means communication both within and between cultures. From the cultural perspective of translation studies, culture is the fundamental unit of translation, and achieving functional equivalence between different cultures is a means, while cultural transfer is the actual goal of translation. Therefore, translation can be regarded as a form of cross-cultural transformation, which is inherently an action, making it a "cross-cultural act". Language is at the heart of the cultural body, and only through the collaboration of language and culture can the body remain alive. Language is an inseparable part of culture. If a translator masters two or more cultures, he or she also masters two or more languages.

The translator's actions in translation are influenced by the purpose of the translation. To achieve the translator's goals, the translator will inevitably use translation strategies during the process to transfer the text from the source culture to the target culture. During this process, the translator often has to choose translation methods that adapt to the target culture. Therefore, the term "adaptation" has attracted much attention in translation theory and is an important concept in translation studies (Baker, 2001, pp. 5-8). From some perspectives, it is believed that "adaptation" means that the translator uses the unique sociocultural phenomena of the target language to replace the sociocultural phenomena in the source language to fulfil the expectations of the target audience. In reality, replacing the socio-

cultural reality of the source language with that of the target language is only a form of adaptation.

To understand the concept of "adaptation," two important points must be considered: the means of achieving adaptation, which is "making changes or adjustments," and the purpose of adaptation, which is the "goal of translation." On this basis, we understand adaptation in translation as changing or adapting the images and even the meanings of cultural elements of the source language to achieve the translator's goals and adapt to the target culture.

2. Literature Review

The concept of "adaptation" holds significant importance in translation studies. Nida first introduced this concept systematically in his works *Toward a Science of Translating* (1964) and *The Theory and Practice of Translation* (1969). Nida argued that the aim of translation is to provide the readers of the target language with a similar understanding and experience as the readers of the original text. Therefore, translation should focus on adjusting and adapting to the culture and needs of the target language audience. Nida's central theory of translation is the *Dynamic Equivalence* theory, which was established in the 1960s. Dynamic equivalence emphasises that the translation should enable the readers of the target language to gain an understanding and experience similar to that of the readers of the original text. According to Nida, the success of a translation lies in the effective communication of information and not in strict adherence to the form of the original text. Dynamic adaptation, which emphasises specific adaptations to the culture of the target language and the needs of the readers, was developed based on dynamic equivalence. Dynamic adaptation focuses not only on functional equivalence, but also on cultural adaptation and contextual adjustment to achieve optimal translation results. Adaptation is a complex process. Hu (2003) believes that translation is a process of adaptation and selection by the translator. The translator must adapt to the linguistic and cultural aspects of both the source and target texts, and take into account the needs of the author, the client and the reader.

With the ongoing evolution of translation studies, a growing trend towards multidisciplinary integration has emerged. The fusion of pragmatics and translation studies has introduced fresh perspectives to the field. The early incorporation of pragmatic research into translation studies is largely attributed to Hatim and Mason (1990). Later, Hickey's edited volume *Pragmatics and Translation* (1998) featured contributions from translation scholars who examine translation through various pragmatic lenses. This approach aligns with Nida's theory of translation, which frequently emphasises the concept of "adaptation" in translation (Nida, 1993: 154; Nida, 2001: 259).

Jef Verschueren systematically proposed the concept of the pragmatic overview, which advances the theory of adaptation and enables a more comprehensive understanding of translation practice. Verschueren argued that the process of language use involves various conscious or unconscious choices motivated by internal or external linguistic reasons. These linguistic choices cover a broad spectrum, including linguistic forms and strategies such as phonetics, morphology, vocabulary and syntax. Verschueren further pointed out that theories of language use should be able to explain this "process of making choices" (Verschueren, 1999: 55-56).

According to Verschueren, both the production and the interpretation of speech involve making choices, and these choices are equally important in both processes. To understand the "process of making choices," one needs to grasp three hierarchical keywords: Variability, Negotiability and Adaptability. Variability refers to the inherent nature of language, which determines the range of possible choices. Negotiability means that decisions are not made mechanically or based on rigid rules or fixed form-function relationships, but are made based on highly flexible principles and strategies. Negotiability suggests various uncertainties: the uncertainty of the language producer (speaker/writer) when making choices, the uncertainty of the interpreter in making choices, and the possibility of continued negotiation after a choice is made. This is precisely the aim of linguistic adaptability. Adaptability, which is also an inherent property of language, enables people to make negotiable language choices from a range of variable factors to meet communication needs. Since the entire "transitivity system" changes to make negotiable language choices, this system encompasses the factors that make up a particular culture. Adaptation is not unidirectional; it involves making language choices based on the existing environment, while the environment changes due to previous choices or adapts to those choices. Variability, negotiability, and adaptability are interrelated properties, with adaptability being the core and starting point for the study of language use. (Verschueren, 1999, pp. 57-63)

In translation, the translated work must adapt to the original text and the culture of the source language as well as to the culture of the target language and its readers, rather than adapting only to the culture of the source or target language. The translated works have to deal with two systems: the source language and the target language. (Hermans, 2004, p.74) In translation, the translator must ensure that the translated text adapts to the meaning and style of the source text, while at the same time adapting to the culture and writing conventions of the target language.

In translation studies, it is pointed out that translation is a decision-making process, emphasising that each subsequent step is influenced by the previous steps and their results. (Venuti, 2000, p.149) Verschueren offers a more comprehensive and convincing view of language use from a cognitive, social, and cultural perspective. Centered around the core concept of "adaptation", Verschueren proposed four perspectives for the study of language use: (1) contextual adaptation, (2) structural adaptation, (3) dynamic adaptation and (4) salience in the adaptation process (Verschueren, 1999, p. 66).

3. Research Methodology

3.1 Study Design

First, a questionnaire survey is conducted to assess the readers' perception of humour in the translation of cultural humour in the English translation of *The Scholars*. Based on the evaluation results, a qualitative method is then applied to analyse the translator's strategies from the perspective of adaptation theory.

3.2 Data Collection

The data for this study comes from humorous language segments that include cultural factors in the source text (ST) of *Rulin Waishi* and their corresponding English translations in the target text (TT) of *The Scholars*. To ensure the diversity of the humorous text, the study mainly selects segments containing idioms, proverbs, two-part allegorical sayings, allusions, dialects, unique Chinese cultural terms and quotations, totalling 167 humorous language segments. Among them are 34 idioms, 46 proverbs, 6 two-part allegorical sayings, 9 allusions, 17 dialect terms, 77 unique cultural terms and 22 quotations.

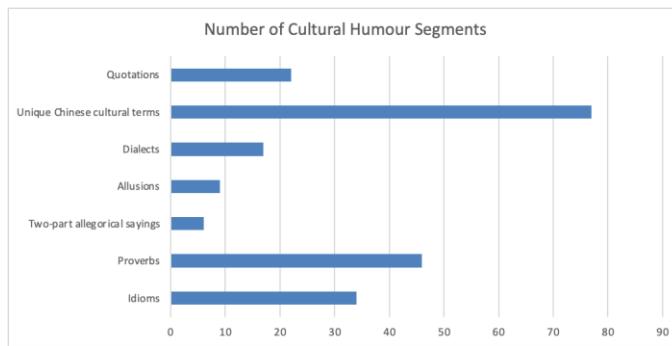


Fig. 1

To ensure the accuracy of the extracted humorous language, we referred to Chen's commentary on *The Scholars* during the manual identification and extraction of cultural humour. The commentary in the book primarily critiques words, sentences, and paragraphs and provides occasional interspersed comments highlighting the hidden humour, satire, and implications. The reviews at the end of the chapters focus on the general themes of the book, the connections and transitions between chapters, the characterisation and the techniques used to structure the narrative. These reviews also deal with cross-referencing between historical events and textual content of the text. They complement each other with historical and literary insights, helping the reader to gain a deeper appreciation and understanding of the work.

3.3 Analysis Framework

Firstly, the 167 cultural humour segments are numbered from 1 to 167. Using SPSS (Statistical Product and Service Solutions), 20 random numbers between 1 and 167 are generated and the corresponding 20

cultural humour segments are selected based on these numbers. A questionnaire survey is then conducted to evaluate the readers' perception of humour in the translations. The evaluation criteria are as follows:

Compared to the ST, the degree of humor conveyed in the TT is:

A - 100%-75%

B - 75%-50%

C - 50%-25%

D - Less than 25%

E - 0

If the degree of humour transmission is between 100% and 75%, it indicates being very humorous; between 75% and 50%, it indicates being humorous; between 50% and 25%, it indicates being somewhat humorous; below 25%, it indicates not humorous; and 0 indicates not humorous at all.

Based on the statistical results, the study determines how readers perceive the degree of humour transferred from the original text to the translation. The study further conducts an in-depth qualitative analysis of the translator's adaptation of cultural humour through structural adaptation, contextual adaptation, dynamic adaptation and salience in translation. This analysis includes:

Comparative analysis: each segment of cultural humour is thoroughly examined to analyse how the surface and deep cultural meanings of Chinese cultural humour are translated into English. The translator's adaptive choices are evaluated in terms of linguistic accuracy, cultural awareness and dynamic balance.

Case analysis: The cultural and historical context of the source text and the target text will be analysed to understand the significance of the translation decisions. This includes examining the cultural meanings of certain humorous language and considering how these are explained to the English reader.

3.4 Limitations and Ethical Considerations

This study is aware of its limitations as it focuses on a single work and the specific study of the adaptive translation of cultural humour. The subjectivity of the qualitative analysis and the potential bias of the translator are recognised. Quantitative analysis may not fully reflect the diversity of cultural humour due to the limited number of samples and participants, which could lead to biased or non-generalisable results. Ethical considerations include maintaining the respect and integrity of the original work and its translation, as well as proper citation of all sources. Furthermore, in the questionnaire section, it is crucial to protect participants' personal information and ensure their anonymity.

3.4.1 Expected Outcomes

This study investigates whether the translator has successfully transferred the cultural elements and humorous atmosphere of the original text into the translation by collecting and analysing the readers' feedback on the perception of cultural humour in the translated text. The aim is to gain a deeper understanding of the adaptability of cultural humour in the translation process and to investigate how translators mediate between the source culture and the target culture to ensure a smooth transfer of cultural and humorous elements from the source language to the target language. The aim of this study is to identify the key factors and best practices for the effective mediation of cultural humour in cross-cultural translations.

The research focuses not only on the specific strategies and methods used by translators during the translation process, but also analyses the decisions and judgements made when facing cultural differences. With this study, we hope to gain new perspectives and insights for translation studies and cultural exchange, thus promoting a broader discussion and collaboration between academia and practitioners. The goal is to advance translation theory, improve the quality of translation practice, and promote deeper understanding and better communication between different cultures.

3.5 Study Limitations

This study focuses on the adaptation of *Rulin Waishi*'s cultural humour in his English translation *The*

Scholars. The analysis is limited to selected culturally humorous segments, which may not represent all of the humorous language in *The Scholars*. This limitation may affect the applicability of our findings to the entire book and other humorous literary works. In addition, the questionnaire survey in this study used a random sampling method and did not include all possible samples, which may result in insufficient statistical power and may not fully reflect the adaptive translation characteristics of all cultural humour. The limited number of participants in the survey may not represent the diversity of the overall population, so the survey results may not fully capture readers' perceptions of English translation of cultural humour.

4. Results and Discussion

Questionnaire Survey on *Rulin Waishi* and its English Translation *The Scholars*

A total of 52 valid questionnaires were collected for this survey. To ensure the effective perception of the English translation, all respondents were undergraduate students majoring in English. Among them, 19 had read the *Rulin Waishi*, while 33 had not.

Have You Read <i>Rulin Waishi</i> (<i>The Scholars</i>)?		
	Number	Percentage
Yes	19	36.54%
No	33	63.46%
Total	52	100%

Fig. 2

Based on 20 culturally humorous segments extracted from *Rulin waishi* and its English translation *The Scholars*, a questionnaire was created and administered to a group of 52 readers. The questionnaire asked readers to rate their perception of the humor in the translated segments on a five-level scale: A - 100%-75% (Very Humorous); B - 75%-50% (Humorous); C - 50%-25% (Somewhat Humorous); D - Below 25% (Not Humorous); E - 0 (Not Humorous at All). These levels represent the readers' "direct reading impression" of the translation: A - 100%-75% (Very Humorous); B - 75%-50% (Humorous); and C - 50%-25% (Somewhat Humorous) are considered humorous segments, while the remaining levels are not.

This classification accounts for the subjective nature of humor perception, influenced by individuals' academic and cultural backgrounds. For instance, what participant A considers "Very Humorous" might be "Humorous" to participant B or "Somewhat Humorous" to participant C. Therefore, in the statistical analysis, the first three levels are grouped as one category (Humorous), and the latter two as another (Not Humorous).

According to the survey results, out of the 20 culturally humorous segments, 19 were deemed humorous by readers, accounting for 95%. Only 1 segment was considered not humorous, accounting for 5%. As shown in the chart below, H represents Humorous, and NH represents Not Humorous.



Fig. 3

The results of the questionnaire survey (Fig.4) show that, except for segment number 5, participants believe that the translators successfully conveyed the humor to varying degrees in the other 19 segments.

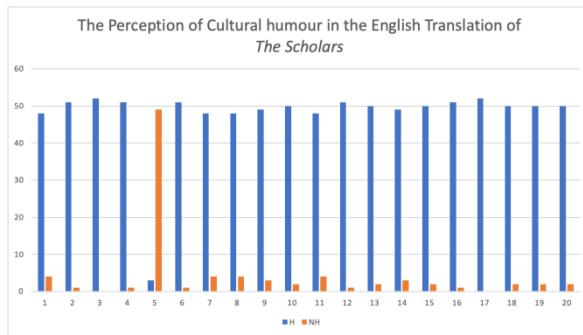


Fig. 4

Next, we conduct a more in-depth analysis. After removing the non-humorous segment number 5, the remaining 19 humorous segments were renumbered from 1 to 19. We found (Fig.5) that most participants' perceptions of humor were concentrated in the "Very Humorous" and "Humorous" categories, indicating that they believed the translation conveyed the original humor to a high degree. The proportion of participants who considered the segments "Very Humorous" was mostly between 50% and 75%, with a few exceeding 75%. The "Humorous" rating was evenly distributed across the segments, usually between 25% and 50%. The "Somewhat Humorous" category had a smaller proportion in most segments, typically below 25%.

In summary, the overall perception of humor by participants indicates that the vast majority found the translation at least humorous, with many considering it very humorous.

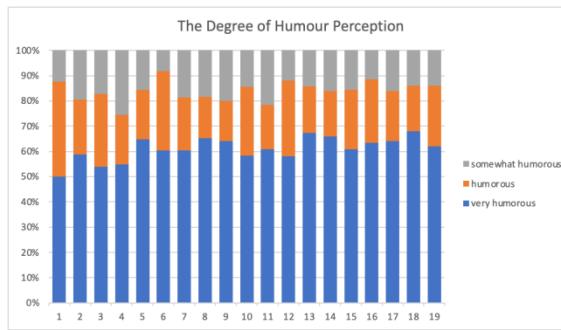


Fig. 5

Based on the results and analysis of the questionnaire survey, we conclude that the translators successfully conveyed the cultural humor of the original text in the translation.

Adaptation Analysis of Cultural Humor in *The Scholars*

According to the comprehensive results of the questionnaire survey, we believe that the translator has successfully conveyed the humour of the original text into the translation. The next step in this study is to refer to the relevant literature and, in combination with Verschueren's adaptation theory, conduct a detailed qualitative investigation of how the translator transferred the cultural humour from the source language to the target language through case analysis and comparative analysis. Specifically, we analyse the adaptation of the language of cultural humour in *The Scholars* from four aspects: Structural Adaptation; Contextual Adaptation; Dynamic Adaptation; Salience in the adaptation process.

● Structural Adaptation

This involves making choices from phonetics to discourse levels to match the linguistic features of both source and target languages. The choice of code and style is crucial to convey the original author's personality and style. Adapting discourse construction ensures that the translation fits cultural and linguistic norms, preserving the original's intentions and style (Ding, 2015; Song, 2007).

In *The Scholars*, numerous poems are quoted. For these poems, the translator endeavored to preserve their original form as much as possible.

Example 1:

ST 正身以俟时，守己而律物

TT Purge yourself of error to await the right season, Watch yourself and practise strict discipline.

"正身以俟时" can be understood as "rectifying oneself or cultivating one's character while waiting for the right opportunity." "守己而律物" can be interpreted as "self-restraint" with "律物" meaning to discipline external things. The translation reads naturally and smoothly in English, overall maintaining the main essence of the original text.

Example 2:

ST 正中书案上，点着两枝通红的蜡烛；中间悬着一轴百子图的画；两边贴着朱笺纸的对联，上写道：“清风明月常如此，才子佳人信有之。”

TT Between two red candles burning on the central desk hung a painting of a hundred children, flanked by a vermilion couplet:

May soft breeze and brilliant moon remain unchanged;

For a brilliant scholar is matched with a beautiful girl!

The translation retains the parallel structure of the original text, with the two clauses corresponding syntactically and retaining the structure of the original. The translation also mirrors the word order and syntax of the original text well, with the first sentence and the second describing the natural scenery and human relationships respectively, thus retaining the imagery of the original. The translation reads naturally and fluently in English, retaining the poetic quality and parallelism of the original while adapting to English conventions of expression.

Through the two examples, though, the translator uses transcoding to directly convey the information of the source text, structurally, the translation effectively adapts to the original's parallel structure, ensuring consistency and coherence in both grammar and meaning.

● Contextual Adaptation

In translation, context encompasses the physical, social, and psychological world of both the author and the reader. Translators must understand these aspects to remain faithful to the author of the source text and adapt it to the target audience. This includes cognitive and emotional considerations, social environment and physical factors such as time and place (Nord, 1997; Hatim & Mason, 1990; Baker, 1992).

The contextual adaptation of cultural humor in *The Scholars* primarily involves adapting to the cultural context. The translator adjusts the expression and style of the translation according to the cultural and social background and individual mental characteristics of the target readers to achieve cross-cultural communication. For example:

Example 3:

ST 牛浦发了急道：“这是那里来的话！你就挥金如土，我几时看见你金子，几时看见你的土！你一个尊年人，不想做些好事，只要‘在光水头上钻眼—骗人！’”

TT “What do you mean?” retorted Niu angrily. “When did I ever have money from you? I've never seen you spending money like water! An old man like you should be thinking of doing good deeds, instead of cheating people all the time.”

In the original text, the phrase "在光水头上钻眼" is a Chinese allegorical saying, where "光水头" is a dialect term for a bald head, and "钻眼" refers to the Buddhist monk initiation ritual of burning nine incense marks on the head. This saying describes someone who is blatantly deceiving others. In the translation, the translator paraphrasing the implied meaning directly, making it easier for readers to understand.

Example 4:

ST 怪不得人说你们‘诗云子曰’的人难讲话！这样看来，你好像‘老鼠尾巴上害疖子，出脓也不多’！倒是我多事，不该来惹这婆子口舌！”

TT “No wonder they say you bookworms are hard to deal with: one might just as well try to squeeze water out of a stone. Well, I should have minded my own business instead of coming here to let myself in for this old wives' gabble.”

The literal meaning of the phrase is that “The tail of a mouse is small, so even if it gets a boil, it won't be too big”. It is used as a metaphor to describe limited talent and lack of capability. In the translation, the translator did not directly translate the Chinese allegorical saying into English. Instead, they used an English idiom with a similar meaning: “one might just as well try to squeeze water out of a stone.” This idiom in English culture primarily conveys the idea of attempting something extremely difficult or nearly impossible. It is often used to describe someone trying to accomplish an unattainable task. By substituting the Chinese saying with an English idiom, the translator not only preserved the original cultural significance but also facilitated better understanding and readability for the target audience. By appropriately adjusting the context, the translator effectively conveys the cultural nuances and humour of the original text, enabling the target readers to fully understand and appreciate the translation.

● Dynamic Adaptation

Dynamic adaptation emphasises the continuous process of meaning generation. The translator must bridge historical and cultural gaps, retain the original context and at the same time make it accessible to modern readers. This involves not only translating words, but also recreating cultural meanings (Verschueren, 1999).

Example 5:

ST 这姓景的开头巾店，本来有两千银子的木钱，一顿诗做的精光。他每日在店里，手里拿着一个刷子刷头巾，口里还哼的是‘清明时节雨纷纷’，把那买头巾的和店邻看了都笑。

TT This fellow Jing is a hatter, who started out with two thousand taels as capital; but he's squandered the lot on poetry. Whenever he brushes hats in his shop he recites lines about rain falling during the Spring Festival, until he's become a laughing-stock for all his customers and neighbours.

The original text describes how Jing Lanjian, after losing hope in the imperial examination system, turns to poetry for solace. However, this pursuit depletes his resources and turns him into someone people avoid. This narrative satirises the relentless pursuit of official titles by intellectuals of the time. The phrase “清明时节雨纷纷” quotes a Tang dynasty poem, where “清明” refers to the Chinese solar term, Qingming Festival. During this period, spring is in full bloom, and rainy weather is common, symbolising the Chinese tradition of mourning for deceased ancestors.

Although “清明节” is typically translated as “Tomb-Sweeping Day” or “Qingming Festival,” the translator rendered it as “rain falling during the Spring Festival.” Initially, this might seem like a translation error, as the Spring Festival refers to the Chinese New Year. but, by deliberately substituting the Qingming Festival to better known Chinese New Year, the English reader can have a similar feel as the source text reader. This deliberate choice by the translator is to illustrate Jing Lanjian's disoriented and foolish state, caused by his obsession with the imperial examinations. The translator flexibly handled the translation to convey the original context and the intended meaning.

Example 6:

ST 差人道：“先生，你一个‘子曰行’的人，怎这样没主意？自古‘钱到公事办，火到猪头烂’，只要破些银子把这枕箱买了回来，这事便罢了。”

TT “Is it possible a learned man like you don't know? Fire cooks pork and money works wonders. All you need is some silver to buy the casket; then there won't be any more

trouble."

This excerpt is from Chapter Thirteen, where Qu Gongsun encounters Ma Chunshang and listens to him talk about tips for advancing in studies. Meanwhile, Lou's servant, Huan Cheng, elopes with Qu's maid, Shuang Hong, taking a chest with them. Qu Gongsun reports this to the authorities, but the officers extort all of Huan Cheng's silver and, in Huan Cheng's name, blackmail Qu Gongsun for more silver, pretending it is a ransom for Shuang Hong. The officers suggest that Ma Chunshang pay the silver to settle the matter.

The original saying "钱到公事办, 火到猪头烂" means that money makes things easier to handle, just as enough heat will cook a pig's head until it is tender. It implies that money can achieve anything, and nothing can be done without bribery. The English translation, "Fire cooks pork and money works wonders," not only perfectly conveys the literal meaning but also captures the underlying cultural significance. The translation is also elegantly structured, matching the original's form, making it an exemplary translation.

Through dynamic adaptation, the translator effectively bridges cultural gaps, ensuring that the original text's cultural meanings are fully conveyed in the target language, making it comprehensible and acceptable to modern readers.

● Salience in Translation

Salience refers to the translators' awareness of their choices during the translation process. High salience helps translators understand and reproduce the original meaning more accurately, influencing their translation strategies and objectives. Effective translation requires integrating theoretical knowledge with practical application to facilitate bilingual communication and cultural exchange (Verschueren, 1999).

The translator's specific actions during the translation process reflect their emphasis on adaptation, including deliberately adding or omitting certain content to help readers better understand the cultural elements of the original text. These actions make the text more accessible to the target audience and bridge cultural gaps.

Example 7:

ST 朝奉道：“他的脚步散散的，知他是到南京去北京去了！”陈正公听了这些话，驴头不对马嘴，急了一身的臭汗。

TT “He wanders all over the place. He may have gone to Nanjing or even Beijing.” The horse's mouth didn't fit the donkey's head—this story didn't tally with Whiskers Mao's! Chen broke into a cold sweat.

This passage describes Chen Zhenggong and his friend Mao Erhuzi selling silk in Nanjing. Mao Erhuzi introduces two lending deals to Chen Zhenggong, who is initially pleased but later discovers he has been swindled out of a thousand taels of silver. When the clerk answers Chen Zhenggong's questions, the responses do not match the information Chen possesses. The original text uses the Chinese idiom “驴唇不对马嘴,” which means that the answer does not correspond to the question or that two things do not match. The translator conveys the surface meaning by trans-coding the source text, and to ensure that the implied meaning can be conveyed to readers, the translator then add explanation to achieve better communication effect.

Example 8:

ST 马二先生听了暗笑。又一会，一个问道：“可是李清照？”又一个问道：“可是苏若兰？”又一个拍手道：“原来是朱淑真！”马二先生道：“这些甚么人？料想不是管功名的了，我不如去罢。”

TT At this Ma Chunshang smiled contemptuously. “Is it Li Qingzhao¹?” asked one. “Is it Su Ruolan²?” asked another. “No!” cried a third, and clapped his hands. “It is Zhu Shuzhen³.” “Whoever these spirits may be,” thought Ma Chunshang, “I doubt if they determine official careers. I had better be going.”

This passage describes Mr. Ma Er climbing City God Hill in Hangzhou, where he overhears a conversation about summoning spirits and reflects on his own thoughts. Li Qingzhao, Su Ruo Lan, and Zhu Shuzhen were all famous female poets in ancient China, yet Mr. Ma Er is unaware of their existence. This illustrates how the rigid examination system limited scholars' knowledge and perspective. The translator provides explanations for Li Qingzhao, Su Ruo Lan, and Zhu Shuzhen in the footnotes to aid reader understanding:

¹A poetess of the twelfth century

²A poetess of the fourth century

³A poetess of the twelfth century

By using transcoding and adding annotations, the translator can handle specific information in the original text without disrupting the reading flow, ensuring that readers of the translation have a similar reading experience to those of the original. American translation theorist Kwame Anthony Appiah proposed "Thick Translation", which involves adding annotations, commentaries, and prefaces to translations, placing the translated text within a rich historical and cultural context, merging obscured meanings with the translator's intentions. (Appiah, 1993) This method enhances the reader's understanding through additional texts and annotations, enabling a clear grasp of the original's essence.

5. Conclusion

Rulin Waishi (The Scholars) is celebrated as one of the great works of humour in Chinese literary history, masterfully blending the essence of Chinese culture with its distinctive wit. The humour in this work not only reflects the author's sharp observational skills but also highlights many social contradictions and issues of the time. Translating such humour into other languages poses a considerable challenge due to its inherent subjectivity and cultural specificity. The translator must possess a deep understanding of the original text's cultural context while creatively adapting it to suit the cultural nuances of the target language. As such, the adaptation strategies employed by the translator are of utmost importance throughout the translation process.

Feedback from readers of the translated text demonstrates that the translator has successfully conveyed the cultural humour of the source language into the target language. This not only allows English-speaking readers to better grasp the cultural humour in Chinese literary works but also deepens their appreciation of its cultural significance and artistic merit. Furthermore, by drawing on Verschueren's adaptation theory, this study examines how translators utilise strategies such as transcoding, paraphrasing, addition and deletion, and substitution to maintain formal and contextual equivalence between the source and target texts, thereby accurately reflecting the original humour. This research not only provides a reference for future studies on humour translation but also broadens the application of Verschueren's adaptation theory within translation studies, enriching the theoretical framework of cultural translation and offering valuable insights for translation practice.

Reference

Al Harbi Emad Obaid, Syed Nurulakla Syed Abdullah, Nik Farhan Mustapha & Zaharom Ridzwan. (2022). How Are The Idioms In 'The Murder On The Links' Translated Into Arabic? *Jurnal Linguistik*, 26 (2), 64-79

Appiah, K. A. (1993). Thick Translation. In (Vol. On "Post-Colonial Discourse": A Special Issue pp. 808-819): The Johns Hopkins University Press.

Baker, M. (1992). In Other Words: A Coursebook on Translation. Routledge.

Baker, M. (2001). Routledge Encyclopedia of Translation Studies. London and New York: Routledge.

Ban, G. (2007). *History of the Han Dynasty*. Zhonghua Book Company.

Ding, X. (2015). *Literary and Cultural Studies* (文学与文化研究). China Social Sciences Press.

Han, F. (1982). *Annotated by Han Feizi*. Jiangsu People's Publishing House.

Hatim, B., & Mason, I. (1990). *Discourse and the Translator*. Longman.

Hermans, T. (2004). *Translation in systems: Descriptive and systemic approaches explained*. St. Jerome Publishing.

Lu, X. (1973). *From Satire to Humor* (Vol. Pseudo-liberal Book). People's Literature Publishing House.

Gao, H. (2018). *Today's Notes on the Book of Songs - Part 1*. Shanghai Ancient Books Publishing House.

Gengshen, H. (2003). Translation as adaptation and selection. *Perspectives: Studies in Translatology*, 11(3), 283-293

Nida, E. A. (1964). *Toward a Science of Translating: With Special Reference to Principles and Procedures Involved in Bible Translating*. E. J. Brill.

Nida, E. A., & Taber, C. R. (1969). *The Theory and Practice of Translation*. E. J. Brill.

Nida, E. A. (1993). *Language, Culture, and Translating*. Shanghai Foreign Language Education Press.

Nida, E. A. (2001). *Contexts in Translating*. John Benjamins Publishing Company.

Nord, C. (1997). *Translating as a Purposeful Activity: Functional Approaches Explained*. St. Jerome.

Rasha Talal Zahrawi, Syed Nurulakla Syed Abdullah, Nik Farhan Mustapha, & Muhammad Alif Redzuan Abdullah. (2024). Exploring Simile Implications in Literary Transcreation: A Study of Al-Manfaluti's Al-'Abarat into English. *Jurnal Linguistik* 28 (1), 33-49.

Song, Z. (2007). *Translation and Culture* (翻译与文化). Nankai University Press.

True, H. (1985). *The Art of Humor* (H. Zheng, Trans.). Taipei: Laurel Books Co., Ltd.

Venuti, L. (Ed.). (2000). *The translation studies reader*. Routledge.

Verschueren, J. (1999). *Understanding Pragmatics*. Oxford University Press.

Zhu, X. (2019). *Annotations on the Songs of Chu*. Shanghai Ancient Books Publishing House.

Yang, B. (1980). *Annotations on the Analects of Confucius*. Zhonghua Book Company.

Authors' Biodata

Li Ne is a PhD candidate in Translation Studies at Universiti Putra Malaysia. She holds both undergraduate and master's degrees in Chinese-English translation. Additionally, she has earned intermediate and advanced interpretation certificates and is a member of the Henan Province Translation Association in China.

Dr. Syed Nurulakla Syed Abdullah is a Senior Lecturer at the Department of Foreign Languages, Faculty of Modern Languages and Communication, Universiti Putra Malaysia. His areas of expertise include literary translation, commercial translation, and interpretation studies, as well as translation across Arabic, Malay, and English.

Dr. Muhammad Alif Redzuan Abdullah is a Senior Lecturer at the same faculty. His specialisations encompass Japanese language and linguistics, comparative applied linguistics, and translation and interpretation studies.