

Fuzzy Language in Literature and Translation: a case study of *The Da Vinci Code* and its two Chinese versions

Shao Lu

Southwestern University of Finance and Economics, China

annieshaolu(a)gmail.com

ABSTRACT

Precision in language is relative and conditional while fuzziness is an absolute and universal predicate. Based on this understanding, the present research project attempts to introduce the notion of ‘fuzziness’ into translation research. It contends that on both the operational level of translation practice and the abstract level of translation theory, there is such a feature of ‘fuzziness’: On the one hand, the translator is faced with the need to handle the fuzzy language in his/her texts during the translation process; and on the other hand, there is the problem of a theoretical fuzziness when the translator tries to decide or discuss what approaches to take in solving the problems of fuzzy utterances and texts.

To support this argument, the thesis draws on the bestseller *The Da Vinci Code* and its two Chinese translations as a case study. The analyses of the data from the chosen novel show that there are three kinds of fuzziness which may be described as (a) extratextual (or background) fuzziness, (b) textual (or internal) fuzziness and (c) mixed (or combined) fuzziness; and that when these features of fuzziness are realised in language form three dimensions of fuzziness may be distinguished, namely fuzziness on the temporal and spatial dimension of language, fuzziness on the dimension of culture and fuzziness on the dimension of rhetorical features. Each dimension is then further divided into two aspects: one involving the denotative and connotative meanings of the language used while the other its pragmatic significance. It is argued that a dialectical relationship exists between what is ‘fuzzy’ and what is ‘precise’ in literary language, and that this dialectics applies to the process of translation as well. Alongside this argument, it is suggested that the best approach to the translation of fuzzy utterances is that by which ‘fuzziness’ is matched with ‘fuzziness’. From this basic approach, a whole series of strategies and techniques may be derived, including the matching of different types and different degrees of fuzziness.

In its effort to search for some scientific, or less subjective, way of assessing the fuzziness of language and the extent of equivalence in fuzziness between a TT and its ST, this project applies to its data analysis ideas obtained from ‘fuzzy set theory’, ‘fuzzy mathematics’ and ‘Shannon/information entropy’. The scientific method is then followed by the more conventional type of textual analysis. Drawing insights from both fuzzy linguistics and fuzzy logic, the author hopes that this study of *The Da Vinci Code* and its Chinese translations could be more comprehensive. It is hoped that the detailed analysis of the various kinds of fuzziness in the texts will help bring about an enhanced understanding of how the notion of fuzziness functions in both the practice and the study of translation.

The thesis consists of six chapters. Chapter One, the introduction, describes the background, aims, research questions, methodology, scope and significance of the research. Chapter Two is a general literature review of the theories on fuzziness. Chapter Three begins with a classification and definition of fuzzy language from a translation studies perspective. Then, it goes on to offer a cognitive discussion of the pragmatic inference apparatus involved in

interlingual communication, before proposing an interpretation of the Buddhist translational concept of *Bu Ge* (不隔) or “Leaving nothing unexplained (in the act of translation)”. Chapter Four discusses the propositions that multi-valued logic and the concept of super-truth value can be applied in the handling of fuzzy features of language, and that more flexible translation methods can be employed in the actual operation of translation. The chapter demonstrates how a scientific method can be employed to assess the fuzziness of utterances - this is mainly done by analysing the fuzziness in the reader’s understanding of the information content of given texts. Chapter Five reports detailed findings of the textual analyses of examples selected from *The Da Vinci Code* and its Chinese translations. Finally, Chapter Six summarises the research findings of the project. Constraints are pointed out, and suggestions made for possible future studies in the field.

KEYWORDS: assessment, Chinese versions, equivalence in fuzziness, fuzzy language, information entropy, literature, *The Da Vinci Code*, translation.

Completion of thesis

Place: Hong Kong Baptist University, China

Year: 2008

Supervisors: Professor Tan Zaixi and Dr Ester Sin Man Leung

Original language: Chinese

文學作品中的模糊語言與翻譯

——以 *The Da Vinci Code* 及其兩個中譯本的研究為例

提 要

語言的精確性總是相對的，有條件的；模糊性則是絕對的，普遍存在的。

本研究基於這一思想認識，嘗試將“模糊特性”的概念引入翻譯研究，認為：無論在具體的翻譯操作，還是抽象的翻譯理論中，“模糊特性”是一種絕對存在的屬性；一方面，譯者在翻譯操作上需要處理文本中的模糊語言問題，另一方面，在確定和討論用什麼方式處理文本或語言模糊的問題時，譯者又面臨理論層面“模糊”問題。

本研究以當代英文暢銷文學作品 *The Da Vinci Code* 及其兩個中譯本為個案，對源文本中的模糊語言及其在目標文本中的處理方法展開研究，通過研究認為，*The Da Vinci Code* 存在三種模糊：外部模糊、內部模糊、綜合模糊。根據模糊語言各自的特點和屬性，本研究將它們分別劃歸為三個層面，即語言時空層面、文化時空層面、修辭時空層面的模糊。在語言時空層面，模糊語言的表現形式可以是語義模糊和語用模糊；在文化時空層面，模糊語言的表現形式，可以來自於文化意義或文化背景上的模糊；在修辭時空層面，模糊語言的表現形式通常在於修辭意義或修辭手段運用層面上的模糊等等。翻譯中對於上述模糊語言的處理最常用的手法是以“模糊”譯“模糊”，再從這一基本手法衍生出“以較多的模糊譯較少的模糊”、“以輕度模糊譯強度模糊”或“以強度模糊譯輕度模糊”等無限多的方法和策略。

本研究以模糊語言學的思想為立足點，一方面汲取模糊集合論的精髓，運用模糊數學和信息“熵”的運算公式，對讀者群理解模糊話語的概率進行計算，嘗試提出對模糊語言的較為科學的量度方法；另一方面，在模糊語言學、模糊邏輯、模糊哲學核心理念的基礎上，運用文學的手段，對 *The Da Vinci Code* 英文源文本及其兩個中譯本模糊語言選例進行具體分析，較全面地認識模糊特性在翻譯實務和翻譯研究中的展現與運作。

全文共分六章。第一章為導論，介紹本研究的背景、目的、研究問題、方法、範圍、意義；第二章回顧模糊理論的發展歷史，闡釋模糊理論並梳理各分支流派的發展進程；第三章在對模糊語言進行解釋的基礎上，圍繞語言模糊性的語用推導機制與語際翻譯機制，從理論層面闡釋譯者在翻譯過程中所建立的模糊語言認知意識，提出文學翻譯之“不隔”主張，以深化對模糊語言翻譯的認識；第四章提出翻譯學“模糊特性”的設想並進行闡

釋，由邏輯思維角度切入，探討翻譯學“模糊特性”的邏輯基礎，審視模糊特性和翻譯研究之關係，用語言學慣於借用的“科學”的方法對模糊話語的模糊度進行量度；第五章以 *The Da Vinci Code* 為考察對象，從源文本中找出模糊話語，考察分析其特點和特徵，再分別從兩個中譯本來看譯者對這些模糊話語所採取的各種處理手法；第六章為總結，歸納研究中的主要發現，並指出局限，對後續研究提出建議。