

Translation of Puns Based on Dirk Delabastita's Theory on Pun Translation: A Case Study of *The Trials of Apollo 2: The Dark Prophecy*

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Abstract:

Pun is a prominent linguistic structure in English literature and its translation has always been a major problem for translators. This thesis agrees with Dirk Delabastita's view that puns, with certain techniques, can be translated into another language with their functions intact. With Dirk Delabastita's theory on the translation of puns, this thesis analyzes *The Trials of Apollo 2: The Dark Prophecy* by Rick Riordan and its Simplified Chinese version *Yuyan Anying* translated by Weiming Gao, focusing on the accuracy and the use of the language of the pun translations. The results show that the Simplified Chinese version has some excellent translations and some flaws. It obtains a better use of editorial techniques to help explain the translation than the other methods mentioned in Dirk Delabastita's theory. Furthermore, since the main readers of the original book and the translated version are both children and teenagers, the request for humorous language will rise and the translated version needs improving to meet this request. Some of the author's suggestions for improvements are given accordingly.

Keywords: pun, translation, analyzation, *The Trials of Apollo 2: The Dark Prophecy*, Dirk Delabastita's theory

1. Introduction

Translation is an important tool for communicating between cultures with different languages.

Yi-Ling Liu stated that translation is like a bridge, connecting aspects in all fields, such as literary and cultural studies, psychology, and linguistics. He said that while translating a particular language into a different one to communicate the same dramatic impact, there may be linguistic difficulties due to the distinctions between the Western and Eastern (Chinese and English) language systems and civilizations. Successful translation hinges on the target audience's ability to comprehend the surprising impacts of wordplay and references in the translated works. The strategies used by translators also affect the target readers' comprehension of the text [1].

However, although much research has been conducted and many papers have been published in the field of translation, many obstacles remain to be overcome. One of them is translating puns(wordplay) [2]. As early as 1994, Dirk Delabastita noted that pun (wordplay) translation is a "unique" problem for translators and scholars who study in this field [3].

Pun is an important and often-used rhetorical device in English literature. Dirk Delabastita mentioned that "puns are textual phenomena" [4]. The definition offered by the Oxford Dictionary is "the use of a word in such a way as to suggest two or more meanings or different associations, or of two or more words of the same or nearly the same sound with different meanings, to produce a humorous effect" [5]. According to the Collins English Dictionary, "a pun is a clever and amusing use of a word or phrase with two meanings, or of words with the same sound but different meanings" [6].

In his studies, Dirk Delabastita outlines punning as a linguistic phenomenon that exploits similarities and differences in language structures to create contrasting meanings. He sorted the similarities into four types: homonymy (similar in sounds and spelling), homography (differs in sounds but with similar spelling), homophony (similar sounds but with spelling that differs), and paronymy (slight difference in sound and spelling). He also distinguishes puns as vertical and horizontal. The vertical kind occurs when two linguistic structures with similar meanings appear within the same passage, while the horizontal kind

refers to their adjacency. As a result, Delabastita classifies puns into eight distinct categories in total. Dirk Delabastita holds the view that wordplay is translat-

able and in fact, the translators have the following nine methods to choose from [4], shown in Table 1:

Table 1. Conclusion of Dirk Delabastita’s methods on pun translation

1	PUN→PUN	by translating the source text (in later text referred to as ST) pun into a target text (in later text referred to as TT) pun
2	PUN→NON-PUN	The TT transforms the ST pun into a word or word group that is not a pun structure. The word or word group might have preserved only one of the meanings of the ST pun
3	PUN→RELATED RHETORICAL DEVICE	the pun in ST is superseded by some rhetorical device related to wordplay (such as rhyming, repetition, etc.) in the TT
4	PUN→ZERO	the pun in ST is deleted completely in the TT
5	PUN ST=PUN TT	copy the ST pun and put it into the TT without really translating it
6	NON-PUN→PUN	make up for the lack of an ST pun by putting a renewed pun into the TT
7	ZERO→PUN	put an emerging pun in the TT
8	EDITORIAL TECHNIQUES	add footnotes explaining the translated ST pun in the TT
9	ADDITIONAL TECHNIQUE	all the methods mentioned above can more or less be combined in various ways

Dirk Delabastita also points out that puns(wordplays) are complex linguistic structures. When analyzing, interpreting, and translating puns(wordplays), we should look at them through four dimensions: formal similarity, based on language structure, semantic difference, and communicative significance [7]. In addition, Delabastita found that sometimes it is easy for translators to overlook the historical and social background of the ST language. Therefore, these are factors translators should also take into account [8].

In other studies, Ying Wu and Qi Pan categorized puns differently than Delabastita. They divided puns into five kinds: the Homophonic pun, the Paronomasia, the Anta-laclasis, the Sylleptic pun, and the Asteismus [9]. Among them, the first and second kind is similar to Delabastita’s categorization. Wu and Pan suggested considering the cultural background of the ST language as well and when translating puns, translators should compare the variance between the ST language and the TT language.

This research agrees with Dirk Delabastita on the idea that pun (wordplay) is translatable [4]. Thus, this paper examines the suitability of pun(wordplay) translations in existing translations, using *The Trials of Apollo 2: The Dark Prophecy* as a case study. In this book, the author Rick Riordan used a significant number of puns and wordplays. Additionally, this paper considers that the primary audience for this book consists of children and teenagers. Therefore, the translated edition should prioritize the pre-

cision of the conveyed message and the incorporation of engaging language.

2. Background of the Material

2.1 The Writer

Rick Riordan, the author of *The Trials of Apollo Series* (in the following text referred to as TOA), was born in San Antonio, Texas, on June 5, 1964. Riordan started his teaching career after earning a teaching credential from UT San Antonio and a double major in English and history from the University of Texas in Austin. For fifteen years, he was an educator in San Antonio and California. During his years as a teacher, Rick Riordan got ideas for the names of his later novels, including *Percy Jackson and the Olympians series* (referred to in the following text as PJO), one of his best-selling series.

For more than twenty novels for young readers, which undoubtedly involve the Percy Jackson series, Rick Riordan is given the title of the #1 New York Times bestselling author. While working as a full-time teacher, Rick Riordan also took up writing mystery novels for adults. He turned to children’s fiction when he began telling *The Lightning Thief* (the first book of PJO) as a nighttime story to his first son. After *The Lightning Thief* was finished and published, Riordan stopped teaching and began writing as a full-time job.

Rick Riordan has enjoyed Greek mythology since his

middle school years and later also taught mythology with a high passion. In PJO, TOA, and *The Heroes of Olympus series* (referred to in the following text as HOO), he combined Greek mythology with modern life in the US.

Today, Rick Riordan resides in Boston in the company of his two sons and wife and works as a writer full-time.

2.2 Introduction of the Original Book and the Simplified Chinese Version

The Dark Prophecy is the second volume of TOA. First published in 2017, it was translated into Simplified Chinese by Weiming Gao and published by Jieli Publishing House a year later. The translator Weiming Gao has translated many books by Rick Riordan, including the HOO series and the first book of TOA—*The Hidden Oracle*.

In *The Dark Prophecy*, Apollo, the Greek god of the sun, music, archery, plagues, poetry, and many more, is still trapped in a mortal body. As a punishment from his father Zeus, Apollo is stripped of his divinity and has to reclaim all the ancient oracles as a mortal teenager named Lester Papadopoulos before he can go back to being a god. In the book, Apollo leaves Camp Half-Blood and travels halfway across North America to look for the second oracle—the cave of Trophonius, alternatively named the dark oracle. Apollo has to free the oracle from the hands of the Triumvirate—an evil league made up of three Roman emperors who should have died centuries ago but are now very much alive. In this book, Apollo discovers the identity of the second emperor Commodus, a bloodthirsty maniac with a serious grudge against him. And, Apollo must defeat him while lacking godly powers.

2.3 The Importance of Translating Wordplays in the Translation of The Trials of Apollo 2: The Dark Prophecy

TOA is narrated in the first person using humorous language from Apollo's point of view. To honor Apollo's status as the god of poetry, the author uses a lot of wordplay, such as puns, in the book.

This makes some of the translations in the book a problem. Since this is a children's fiction novel, interesting language is an important factor to consider. Improper translation of wordplay could make the book much less fun to read.

3. Analyzing the Materials

In *The Trials of Apollo: The Dark Prophecy*, there are various kinds of puns (wordplay) such as horizontal homophony puns and vertical puns.

The translator Weiming Gao used different methods to translate the ST puns (taken from *The Trials of Apollo: The Dark Prophecy* by Rick Riordan [10]) into TT (taken

from the Simplified Chinese version *Yuyan Anying* translated by Weiming Gao [11]), some of which match Dirk Delabastita's techniques, such as transliteration (writing English words in Chinese characters while maintaining their emit sound), the "PUN→NON-PUN" method and using footnotes, etc.

3.1 Translation of Horizontal Homophony Puns

Here are examples of a type of ST pun in which a word with multiple meanings appears more than once and each time the same word possesses a different meaning. The given translated version is passable but a few points can be improved.

Example 1:

..., and I never found out what sort of bugs were in bug juice, ... [10]

... 我也没搞明白巴格果汁是用哪种虫子做的 ... [11]

In the case above, bug juice is a kind of artificially colored drink, but Apollo being a god had never heard of it. So, he thinks the drink is made from a certain kind of bug. Here the translator chose to use the technique of transliteration and translate the "bug" in "bug juice" directly to "巴格". However, to add clarity to the TT, the translator can choose to add a footnote to "巴格" saying that it is the transliteration of "bug" and "bug" also means "虫子" in Chinese.

Another option for translation using the technique "PUN ST=PUN TT" and directly "translating" the ST into " ' 虫 子 ' 果 汁 ", adding a footnote explaining what "bug juice" actually is. This way the pun may be more easily understood by children who are not very fluent in English.

Example 2:

"You have a point." I sighed. "But much like the point on my talking arrow, it does us no good. Shall we continue?" [10]

"这一点你说对了,"我叹气道,"但也正像我那会说话的箭所说的一样,对我们毫无帮助。我们继续走吧。"[11]

In example 2, the technique used in the TT is "PUN→NON-PUN". Since in Chinese there is no suitable expression that can mean both "point of view" and "the tip of an arrow", it is better to just directly translate it into the actual meaning conveyed in the ST, regardless of the pun structure.

3.2 Translation of Vertical Puns

In this part, we look at examples of another type of ST pun in which a word with multiple meanings appears only once. The word or phrase can have more than one interpretation in the context.

Example 3:

“You sure you’re okay there, Sunny? You don’t look so hot.” [10]

“你放心，你会没事的，小太阳。你摸起来没那么烫嘛。”[11]

The translation in example 3 is incorrect in many aspects. Josephine speaks this line to Apollo (Lester) and should express concern. “Sunny” is a nickname for Apollo since he is the sun god. By translating it into the TT as “小太阳”，the “PUN→PUN” technique is used. Thus, if the first sentence of the ST in example 3 is translated into TT as “你确定你没什么大碍吗，小太阳？”，it would be more accurate.

Another thing is that “hot” here refers to Apollo’s condition. In the previous context, Apollo is looking pale from his visions and his friends finally notice him and show concern. Originally, “hot” does not have a meaning that refers to a person’s health conditions. But in this scene, “hot” is used as a pun to match “Sunny” and Apollo’s identity as the sun god. At the same time, it is used to describe Apollo’s not looking well. However, lacking relevant synonymous substitutions, when the translator is transferring the ST into TT in Chinese, the “PUN→NON-PUN” method is a better choice. Therefore, the second line in the ST should be transformed into the TT as “你的脸色看起来很差”。

Example 4:

Leo plunked the cheese wheel in front of me. “Cut me a wedge of this, my good man. Chop-chop!” [10]

雷奥把一整轮奶酪用力扔在我面前。“给我切一块下来吧，好哥们儿。赶紧的！”[11]

In example 4, the translation of the ST “chop-chop” is also a result of the method “PUN→NON-PUN”. However, compared to example 3, this translation is much better. The TT “赶紧的”，meaning “hurry up”，expressed one of the meanings of ST, which is acceptable for pun translation. Though considering it is a phrase that appears in a conversation, it can be less formal. Thus “快切起来” is another option for the TT.

3.3 Using Editorial Techniques to Help Explain the Translation

Compared to the above, the translator Weiming Gao seems to be more mature in using footnotes to assist her translation. This makes the translation more accurate.

Example 5:

“I know what the Mist is, Leonidas—”

“Hey, I told you never to call me that.” [10]

“我知道迷雾是什么，雷奥尼达斯 [5]——”

“嘿，我说过别再这样叫我了。”

[5] Leonidas, 比利时的一个著名巧克力品牌。[11]

Here, the first line is said by Calypso, and the second line by Leo. When “Leonidas” is referred to as a famous Bel-

gian chocolate brand, its Chinese translation is really “列奥尼达斯”。But here, using the “PUN→PUN” method, the translator transferred it into “雷奥尼达斯” to echo Leo’s name (“雷奥”) and made the pun easier to understand. The footnote offers some background information and tells us the nickname didn’t come out of nowhere.

Example 6:

Otherwise I heard only blue—die—slave, which at the moment seemed an accurate summary of my existence. [10]

除此以外我只听到了蓝色 [4]——死——奴隶，此时此刻，这些词是对我现状的精准概括。

[4] 蓝色在英语中还有忧郁的意思。[11]

The way “blue” is translated into the TT is also very excellent. By choosing to interpret “blue” as the color “蓝色” and not the emotion “忧郁”，it links the previous context with the present. Also, the footnote helps explain Apollo’s comment. Since his first thought of “blue” is the meaning “sad and depressing”。

4. Conclusion

This thesis analyzes the accuracy of some pun translations in the Simplified Chinese version of *The Trials of Apollo 2: The Dark Prophecy*, with the help of Dirk Delabastita’s theory on pun translation. The main findings are as follows.

First, the Simplified Chinese version of *The Trials of Apollo 2: The Dark Prophecy* is only a passable translation version. It has weaknesses as well as strengths. Despite the proper use of footnotes to help explain, some of the translations failed to be loyal to the ST.

Second, most of the translations only used one of the techniques suggested by Dirk Delabastita and lacked the joint use of multiple methods.

Lastly, in most situations, the translator overlooked the necessity to make the TT language more easily understood by children and teenagers and the need to use funny and interesting language.

This thesis implies when doing pun translation for children’s novels, translators’ primary consideration should be the accurate delivery of the information communicated in the ST. This means that if it is not possible to translate the double meaning of a pun, the translator should choose the meaning that fits the meaning and logic of the context in the ST and TT. If possible, use footnotes to explain that there is a pun in the ST here and what it originally meant. Moreover, when translating puns, translators need to consider the history, social, and cultural background of the ST language as well as the multiple meanings of the ST pun and the accessibility and humor of the TT language.

Despite the efforts to perfect this thesis, there are still

some limitations. Due to the author's limited professional knowledge and skills, this research failed to collect and analyze all of the puns in *The Trials of Apollo 2: The Dark Prophecy* and the translated (Simplified Chinese) version. Also, this paper mostly looked at the ST and TT through Dirk Delabastita's theory on the translation of puns.

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