THE UNIVERSITY OF QUEENSLAND

Master of Arts Thesis

The Translation of Honorifics and Self-deprecatory Expressions in

_Honglou meng_ from Chinese to English

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Submission Date: 24 Oct 2008

A thesis presented in partial fulfillment of the requirements of the Master of Arts in Chinese Translation and Interpreting program at the University of Queensland

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The accomplishment of this thesis is due to many people’s help. I would like to express my deepest gratitude to my supervisor, Dr Rosemary Roberts who was always there to talk to me and give me advice and encouragements. Many thanks to Dr Ko, Prof. Chen and Dr Patton. I am also grateful to the librarians in the SS&H library and classmates who helped me. Like I said, it is too many to mention.
ABSTRACT

This paper is mainly based on Brown and Levinson’s negative politeness strategies and Mona Baker’s translation strategies to analyze how the translators of the Chinese novel, *Honglou meng*, employ these strategies to render honorifics and self-deprecatory expressions in *Honglou meng* from Chinese into English. It compares the two English translations and observes the translators’ tendencies in both translations. The findings suggest that David Hawkes’ translation is esthetically crafted language and more target-oriented, whereas Yang Hsien-yi and Glays Yang’s translation is not such natural-sounding English and more source-oriented. This paper also states that a comprehensive theoretical frame in this area is yet to be established.

Keywords: source-oriented, target-oriented, equivalence, politeness
The Translation of Honorifics and Self-deprecatory Expressions in *Honglou meng* from Chinese to English

1. Introduction

1.1 Background and motivation

In this study, I investigated the translation of honorifics and self-deprecatory expressions in the classic Chinese novel *Honglou meng* from Chinese to English. *Honglou meng* is a novel based on 18th-century Chinese aristocracy. China is a land of courtesy and proprieties which are part of her culture. This is reflected in how people address each other. Honorifics and self-deprecatory expressions are commonplace in ancient China and carry a lot of cultural connotations. Those culture-specific terms have posed a problem for translators for quite a long time. Though some honorifics are rarely used in contemporary Chinese society, they are still being used in certain formal contexts such as business letters. My study deals with the 18th-century Chinese, it can still be useful to modern-day translators.

1.2 Rationale of my study

Eva Hung in her article “All in the family?: translating names and honorifics in Chinese fiction” has dealt with honorifics in the modern Chinese fiction and Leo Hickey in his article “Politeness in translation
between English and Spanish” discussed different types of politeness in British and Spanish society. Little work, however, has been done regarding the 18th-century Chinese novel. There has also been little research carried out to date on the translation of Chinese self-deprecatory expressions. My work will contribute to adding more in that area of translation studies.

This current study is theoretically grounded in Geoffrey’s politeness theories and Nida’s equivalence theory. Data analysis is carried out on the bases of Nida’s equivalence theories and Brown and Levinson’s negative politeness strategies.

1.3 Structure of literature review, methodology and data analysis

My literature review starts out by introducing Nida’s formal equivalence and dynamic equivalence definition. I then expand on Mona Baker’s theories about non-equivalence problems and translation strategies used to tackle those problems. Because the data is about people’s conversation, I list Grice’s cooperative principles with which the interlocutors (that is, people who participate in the conversation) should comply. Due to the limitations of Grice’s cooperative principles, I also introduce Geoffrey’s politeness principles to complement Grice’s cooperative principles. I then go on to explain the negative politeness strategies developed by Brown and Levinson. Comrie’s contentions about the classifications of
honorifics are also introduced.

In my methodology and data analysis section, first I examine the translation of Chinese honorifics into English and then look at the translation of Chinese self-deprecatory expressions into English. I employ Comrie’s theories to classify my honorific data and use the strategies that were introduced in the literature review section. Self-deprecatory expressions are examined one by one due to the lack of previous work in that area. The limited work that has been done in this area is also introduced in this section. Finally, I summarize the results and findings in the conclusions section.

2. Literature Review

2.1 The translation theories of Eugene Nida and Mona Baker

Eugene Nida discarded the old terms such as ‘literal’, ‘free’ and ‘faithful’ translation in favour of ‘types of equivalence’. He argues that “there are fundamentally two different types of equivalence: one which may be called formal and another which is primarily dynamic.” “Formal equivalence focuses attention on the message itself, in both form and content. In such a translation one is concerned with such correspondence as poetry to poetry, sentence to sentence, and concept to concept. Viewed from this formal orientation, one is concerned that the message in the receptor language should match as closely as possible the different
elements in the source language” (Nida, 1964a, p159). A gloss translation in which the translator strives to recreate as literally and meaningfully as possible the form and content of the original typifies formal equivalence. Hence, from Nida’s point of view, we can consider that formal equivalence is oriented towards the source language and source culture (source-oriented). In Nida’s opinion, a formal-equivalence translation “attempts to reproduce several formal elements, including: (1) grammatical units, (2) consistency in word usage, and (3) meanings in terms of the source context. The reproduction of grammatical units may consist in: a) translating nouns by nouns, verbs by verbs, etc. (b) keeping all phrases and sentences intact (i.e. not splitting up and readjusting the units); and (c) preserving all formal indicators, e.g. marks of punctuation, paragraph breaks, and poetic indentation.” (Nida, 1964a, p160)

In discussing dynamic equivalence, Nida argues that “……one is not so concerned with matching the receptor-language message with the source language message, but with the dynamic relationship, that the relationship between receptor and message should be substantially the same as that which existed between the original receptors and the message.” (Nida, 1964a, p159) He then argues that a dynamic-translation Therefore, we can consider that dynamic equivalence is oriented towards the target language and target culture (target-oriented).

In this paper, I only deal with the difficulty of finding equivalence at
word level when translating honorifics and self-deprecatory expressions from Chinese to English. Therefore, it is important to look at the common problems of non-equivalence at word level. However, before that is done, it is useful first to introduce the four main types of meaning in words and utterances which are as follows: propositional meaning, expressive meaning, presupposed meaning and evoked meaning. Based on the theories of Cruse, Mona Baker contends that “The propositional meaning of a word or an utterance arises from the relation between it and what it refers to or describes in a real or imaginary world, as conceived by the speakers of the particular language to which the word or utterance belongs. It is this type of meaning which provides the basis on which we can judge an utterance as true or false.” “Expressive meaning relates to the speaker’s feelings or attitude rather than to what words and utterances refer to.” For example, the difference between Don’t complain and Don’t whinge does not lie in their propositional meanings but in the expressiveness of whinge which suggests that the speaker finds the action annoying. “Presupposed meaning arises from co-occurrence restrictions, i.e. restrictions on what other words or expressions we expect to see before or after a particular lexical unit.” “Evoked meaning arises from dialect and register variation.” (Mona Baker, 1992, p13-15) Mona Baker in her book In other words: a coursework on translation argues that there are main eleven situations which cause non-equivalence.
1. The situation when one translates culture-specific concepts. For example: the word *Speaker* (of the House of Commons) has no equivalent in many languages.

2. The situation when the source-language concept which is known in the target culture is not lexicalized in the target language.

3. The situation when the source language word is semantically complex.

4. The situation when the source and target languages make different distinctions in meaning. For example, Indonesian language makes a distinction between going out in the rain without the knowledge that it is raining and with the knowledge that it is raining.

5. The situation when the target language lacks a general word. For example, Russian has no equivalent for *facilities*.

6. The situation when the target language lacks a specific term.

7. The situation when there are differences in physical or interpersonal perspective.

8. The situation when there are differences in expressive meanings.

9. The situation when there are differences in form. Certain suffixes and prefixes which contribute to evoked or expressive meaning are very difficult to translate if there is no exact counterpart in the target language.

10. The situation when there are differences in frequency and purpose of using specific forms. If the translator uses the specific forms with a
higher frequency, this makes the translated text sound unnatural.

11. The situation when there are loan words in the source text.

(Adapted from Mona Baker, 1992, p21-25)

2.2 Strategies used to deal with non-equivalence in translation

According to Mona Baker, there are eight main strategies used to deal with non-equivalence at word level. Here I shall introduce only those five of the eight strategies which are relevant to the data I am examining in this study. They are as follows: 1. Translation by a more general word. This strategy is used particularly in the area of propositional meaning when there is no equivalent specific word in the target language. 2. Translation by a more neutral/less expressive word. This strategy is used when there is no equivalent word with the same expressive meaning as the word in the source language. 3. Translation by cultural substitutions. “This strategy involves replacing a cultural-specific item or expression with a target-language item which does not have the same propositional meaning but is likely to have a similar impact on the target reader.” (Mona Baker, 1992, p31) 4. Translation using a loan word or loan word plus explanation. This strategy is used to tackle culture-specific words. 5. Translation by omission. “If the meaning conveyed by a particular item or expression is not vital enough to the development of the text to justify distracting the reader with lengthy explanations, translators can and often
2.3 Grice’s cooperative principles and Geoffrey’s politeness principles

According to Grice, interlocutors are expected to observe a general principle of communication which is the cooperative principle. As Grice puts it “Make your conversational contribution such as is required, at the stage at which it occurs, by the accepted purpose or direction of the talk exchange in which you are engaged”. There are a number of maxims associated with the cooperative principle which are Quantity, Quality, Relevance and Manner. Grice elaborates on their functions as follows:

1. Quantity: Give the right amount of information:
   a) Make your contribution as informative as is required
   b) Do not make your contribution more informative than is required

2. Quality: Try to make your contribution one that is true
   a) Do not say what you believe to be false
   b) Do not say that for which you lack adequate evidence

3. Relevance: Make your contributions relevant to the current exchange

4. Manner: Be perspicuous
   a) Avoid obscurity of expression
b) Avoid ambiguity

c) Be brief

d) Be orderly.

(Adapted from Grice 1975, p45-46)

Geoffrey N. Leech in his book *Principles of Pragmatics* argues that Grice’s cooperative principle (CP) in itself cannot explain why people are often so indirect in conveying what they mean, or what is the relation between sense and force when non-declarative types of sentence are being considered. “There have also been objections to Grice’s CP on the grounds that it does not stand up to the evidence of real language use. For example, it has been argued that conversational constraints such as those of the CP do not work because the majority of declarative sentences do not have an information-bearing function. It has also been argued that the maxims of the CP are not universal to language, because there are linguistic communities to which not all of them apply.” As a result, Geoffrey argues that one of the main purposes of socio-pragmatics is to discover how different societies conduct maxims in various ways, for example by giving politeness a higher rating than cooperation in certain situations. He thinks that the politeness principle is not just another principle to be added to the cooperation principle, but is a necessary complement, which rescues the cooperation principle from serious
trouble (Geoffrey N Leech, 1983, P80). Geoffrey N Leech argues that “Politeness concerns a relationship between two participants whom we may call self and other. In conversation, self will normally be identified with s [i.e. speaker], and other will typically be identified with h[i.e. hear]; but speakers also show politeness to third parties, who may or may not be present in the speech situation. The label other may therefore apply not only to addressees, but to people designated by third-person pronouns. The importance of showing politeness to third parties varies: a key factor is whether or not the third party is present as a bystander; another is whether the third party is felt to belong to s’s or to h’s sphere of influence.

To take a clear case: s has to be more polite in referring to h’s spouse than in referring to s’s own spouse. Even in this area, however, there are cross-cultural variations: in some societies, a man discussing his wife will treat her as ‘self’, and therefore feel free, perhaps even obliged, to denigrate her; but in other societies, he will treat her as ‘other’.”

(Geoffrey N Leech, 1983, P131) He then contends that there are a number of maxims associated with the politeness principle (PP) which are as follows:

1. Tact
   a) Minimize cost to other
   b) Maximize benefit to other

2. Generosity
2.4 Brown and Levinson’s negative politeness strategies

Penelope Brown and Stephen C. Levinson in *Politeness: Some universals in language usage* argue that negative politeness is the most detailed set of linguistic strategies for face-threatening acts (FTA) in western culture. They summarize nine strategies that are commonly used to achieve negative politeness: 1) Be conventionally indirect; 2) Use hedges; 3) Be pessimistic; 4) Minimize the imposition; 5) Give deference; 6) Apologize; 7) Impersonalize the speaker and hearer; 8) State the FTA as a general rule; 9) Nominalize. The first six of these strategies are relevant to the issues of honorifics and self-deprecatory expressions, on which I am focusing in this study, so I will examine those strategies in greater detail below: strategy one is to be conventionally indirect which is realized by
utilizing indirect speech acts that are a marked feature of English usage. For example: by using questions like “May I borrow your car?” or an “if sentence” like “I’d like to borrow your car, if you wouldn’t mind”, one is employing the strategy of being conventionally indirect.

Strategy two is to use hedges. “A hedge is a particle, word, or phrase that modifies the degree of membership of a predicate or noun phrase in a set; it says of that membership that it is partial, or true only in certain respects, or that it is more true and complete than perhaps might be expected.”(Penelope Brown and Stephen C. Levinson, 1987, p145) For example: by using “I wonder” in the sentence “I wonder if (you know whether) John went out”, one is employing the strategy of hedging.

Strategy three is to be pessimistic. This assumes that the hearer is unlikely to be willing to do anything requested of him or her. This strategy makes it easier for the hearer to refuse by expressing doubt regarding the appropriateness of the speaker’s demand. For example, in a sentence like “You couldn’t by any chance pass the salt, could you?”.

Strategy four is to minimize the imposition. For example, in the sentence “I just want to ask if I can borrow a tiny bit of paper”, expressions like just, a tiny bit are used to reduce imposition.

Strategy five is to give deference. Penelope Brown and Stephen C. Levinson argue that there are two ways of realizing deference: one is that the speaker humbles himself; the other is that the speaker raises the hearer.
“That deference has this double-sided nature (either the raising of the other or the lowering of oneself) is clearly shown by the honorific systems of many languages which have both ‘deferential’ and ‘humiliative’ forms.” “Deference phenomena represent perhaps the most conspicuous intrusions of social factors into language structure, in the form of honorifics.” (Penelope Brown and Stephen C. Levinson, 1987, p179)

Even though there has not been much study on the honorific systems of the world’s languages, we can still find some theoretical remarks. Comrie argues that there are three main types of honorific, categorizable in terms of the axes on which the systems are built: the speaker-addressee axis: the relation of speaker to hearer (addressee honorifics); the speaker-referent axis: the relation of speaker to things or persons referred to (referent honorifics) and the speaker-bystander axis: the relation of speaker (or hearer) to ‘bystander’ or overhearers (bystander honorifics). (Comrie, 1976) Brown and Levinson argue that probably all languages encode deference in forms of address. For example, in English words like sir, madam, lady, have original aristocratic connotations. Social factors also encode in language structure and are expressed in language usage. For example, the humbling of one’s self, one’s capacities and possessions which is illustrated in English by a sentence like: “I think I must be absolutely stupid but I simply can’t understand this map.” Brown and
Levinson conclude that “in societies all over the world members of dominated groups or lower strata express deference to dominant members by bumbling, by the kinesics, prosodics and language of slow-wittedness or buffoonery.”

Strategy six of negative politeness is to apologize. “By apologizing for doing an FTA the speaker can indicate his reluctance to impinge on H’s negative face and thereby partially redress that impingement.” Besides the above-mentioned deferential usage of hesitation and bumbling to show this reluctance, there are four methods to indicate regret or reluctance: 1) admit the impingement. One can achieve this by employing expressions like “I hope this isn’t going to bother you too much” or “I’ve probably come to the wrong person, but…….” 2) indicate reluctance. One can achieve this by using expressions like “I hope you don’t mind me saying this, but…….” 3) give overwhelming reasons. One can achieve this by using expressions like “I can think of nobody else who could……”; “I’m absolutely lost……”. 4) beg forgiveness. One can achieve this by employing expressions like “I beg your indulgence...”; “Excuse me, but...”; “Forgive me if……”.

2.5 Previous research work done by Eva Hung and Leo Hickey

Eva Hung in her article “All in the family?: translating names and honorifics in Chinese fiction” examined various examples of different
terms of addresses, especially terms of using the age and status prefixes and suffixes which carry a distinct cultural flavour. The author’s data was collected from modern Chinese fiction and found that the common practice of borrowing kinship terms to address people outside the extended family has caused much difficulty for the translators. The author argued that a borrowed kinship term usually conveys three different attributes, namely, age, status and relationship. Based on her own experience as a teacher and an editor, she found that Chinese translators understand clearly that a borrowed kinship term is revealing of the age, status, relationship of or between two characters whereas English translators tend to skip those connotations. In the end, she raised an open-ended question whether the translator should educate the target language readership about the source language culture or be more literary-minded and oriented to the target readers.

Leo Hickey based his article titled “Politeness in translation between English and Spanish” on accepting Brown and Levinson’s distinction between positive and negative politeness. He thought it would be justifiable to accept that Britain tends to be a negative-politeness society whereas Spain tends towards positive politeness. He carried out a small-scale empirical study on how positive-politeness readers react to examples of negative politeness when translated literally. Leo Hickey found out that English speakers recognize negative politeness whereas
Spanish speakers seem not to identify it as anything in particular. He thought that those literal translations failed to convey the illocutionary force due to cultural differences and then posed the question as to whether translators should continue to render negative politeness literally rather than attempt to convey the illocutionary force.

3. Methodology and Data Analysis

3.1 Methodology

According to Geoffrey N Leech’s theory, Chinese society tends to follow the politeness principle in favour of the cooperative principle which is why there are a lot of honorifics in the Chinese language. This poses a translation problem when there is no exact counterpart in English. In this paper, I extract honorifics and self-deprecatory expressions from the first nine chapters of *Honglou meng* written by Cao Xueqin. Then I collect the English translations as rendered first by David Hawkes and second Yang Hsien-yi and Gladys Yang.

David Hawkes is a British sinologist. He studied Chinese at Oxford University. His most important translated work is *The Story of the Stone*. Both Yang Hsien-yi and Gladys Yang were students of Oxford University. They were married and became prominent translators of Chinese literature into British English during the latter half of the twentieth century at the Foreign Languages Press in Beijing. The reason why I
chose *Honglou meng* is because it is one of the great classical Chinese novels written in the mid-eighteenth century. There were a lot of honorifics and self-deprecatory expressions in that particular period and some of them are never used or much less used nowadays due to the development of the Chinese language over time. An honorific is a word or expression that conveys esteem or respect when used in addressing or referring to a person. Honorifics may refer to the style of language or particular words used in this way, including words used to express respect to one perceived as a social superior. Yiping Chen argues that there are three main kinds of honorifics in *Honglou meng*: 1) terms used to address people of a higher generation 2) terms used to refer to high officials 3) terms used to indicate people’s honorable posts or social status. (Yiping Chen, 2005, p 54)

Self-deprecatory expressions are terms indicating modesty. They are used to refer to oneself or things that are related to oneself especially relatives and friends. Self-deprecatory expressions are used to enhance the honor given to addressees, which have the same function as honorifics. In the first nine chapters of *Honglou meng*, I found that the number of honorifics is greater than the number of self-deprecatory expressions. I decided to examine the translation of honorifics first and then look at the translation of self-deprecatory expressions. I am going to employ Brown and Levinson’s negative politeness strategies together with Mona Baker’s
translation strategies to analyze the translated texts. Furthermore, I am also going to look at how the translators try to achieve formal equivalence or dynamic equivalence through the above-mentioned strategies.

3.2 Data Analysis

3.2.1 The analysis of the translation of honorifics from Chinese to English

According to Comrie’s three main types of honorific, I can classify my examples into three categories.

1. Examples containing only addressee honorifics:


Then Shih-yin excused himself, saying, “Forgive my rudeness.” “Don’t stand on ceremony, sir,” said Yu-cun, rising. (Yang Hsien-yi and Gladys Yang, p 11)

Shi-yin hurriedly rose up and excused himself: “I seem to have brought you here under false pretences.” Yu-cun rose to his feet too. “Please do not distress yourself on my account, sir.” (David Hawkes, p 57)

This conversation happened during the time when Jia Yuncun was making a precarious living as a scrivener and living in a temple. The Chinese word jia is an honorific used to address the hearer, Jia Yucun. Laoxiansheng is the other honorific in this example used to address Zhen
Shiyin. Those Chinese honorifics are used to show politeness and respect to the hearers and there is no exact equivalent in English. The translators employed Brown and Levinson’s strategy six (to apologize) to convey politeness to the hearers. In order to realize the expressive meaning of Jia, Yang Hsien-yi and Gladys Yang used the method 4), that is, begging forgiveness, hence they translated the phrase into *forgive my rudeness* to show the speaker’s respect and politeness to the hearer. By translating the phrase into *I seem to have brought you here under false pretences*, David used method 1) admitting the impingement to convey the speaker’s respect to the hearer. The translators of both versions used *sir* when rendering *laoxiansheng*. As I mentioned in the previous examples, they employed Mona Baker’s translation strategy three to achieve Nida’s dynamic equivalence.

b) 恰值士隐走来听见，笑道：“雨村兄真抱负不凡也！” (Cao Xueqin, 1981, p 8)

He was overheard by Shih-yin, who arrived just then. “I see you have high ambitions, Brother Yu-tsun!” he joked. (Yang Hsien-yi and Gladys Yang, p 12)

Shi-yin, who chanced at that moment to be arriving, smiled. “You are a man of no mean ambition, Yu-cun.” (David Hawkes, p 59)

This conversation happened after Yu-cun chanted the couplet. In this
example, the Chinese word *xiong* is a courteous form of address between men of the same generation and is not the same as the general meaning which is commonly used in a family. Yang Hsien-yi and Gladys Yang used the word *brother* to achieve Nida’s formal equivalence. In addition, they capitalize the word *brother* to make the target readers think that the word may contain some connotative meaning in that particular situation, because targets readers know that the two men are not related in that context. In David Hawkes’ translation, he used Mona Baker’s omission strategy by not translating the expressive meaning of the word *xiong* which makes the translated text lose some of its connotations.

c) 士隐笑道：“今夜中秋，俗谓‘团圆之节’，想尊兄旅寄僧房，不无寂寥之感，故特具小酌，……” (Cao Xueqin, 1981, p 8)

“Tonight is mid-autumn, commonly known as the Festival of Reunion. It occurred to me that you might be feeling lonely in this temple, *brother*. I’ve prepared a little wine in my humble……?” (Yang Hsien-yi and Gladys Yang, p 12)

“Tonight is Mid Autumn night,” said Shi-yin. “People call it the Festival of Reunion. It occurred to me that *you* might be feeling rather lonely here in your monkery, so I have arranged for the two of us to take a little wine together in my study……” (David Hawkes, p 59)

This conversation happened when Shi-yin was inviting Yun-cun to his
house to celebrate the Festival of Reunion. The word *zun* is usually used with another noun to form a courteous address when one is referring to the addressee or people related to the addressee. In this example, *zun xiong* (*zun* combined with *xiong*) is an honorific used by Shi-yin to address Yu-cun. This situation happened after example a), hence Yang Hsien-yi and Gladys Yang continued to translate it using the same word *brother*, whereas David Hawkes used the pronoun *you* which failed to convey the underlying meaning in the source culture.

d) 熙凤听了，忙转悲为喜道：“正是呢！我一见了妹妹，一心都在他身上，又是喜欢，又是悲伤，竟忘了老祖宗了，该打，该打！”(Cao Xueqin, 1981, p 30)

Hsi-feng switched at once from grief to merriment. “Of course,” she cried. “I was so carried away by joy and sorrow at the sight of my little cousin, I forgot our **Old Ancestress**. I deserve to be caned.” (Yang Hsien-yi and Gladys Yang, p 39)

In obedience to the command Xifeng at once exchanged her grief for merriment. “Yes, of course. It was just that seeing my little cousin here put everything else out of my mind. It made me want to laugh and cry all at the same time. I’m afraid I quite forgot about you, Grannie dear. I deserve to be spanked, don’t I?” (David Hawkes, p 92)

The honorific occurs in direct speech by Xifeng after Daiyu arrived at her
grandma’s home and was meeting her relatives. The Chinese word *laozuzong* is an honorific used to address senior people of a high position in a feudal family. Yang Hsien-yi and Gladys Yang rendered it into *Old Ancestress* literally which achieved Nida’s formal equivalence. There is no counterpart in English which can convey the connotative meaning of the source text. The word *ancestress* only has its propositional meaning in target readers’ heads. However, they capitalized both *old* and *ancestress* to compensate for the loss of connotations in the source culture. David Hawkes translated *laozuzong* into *Grannie dear* which fails to convey Xifeng’s respect to Daiyu’s grandma and only conveys Xifeng’s affection to the lady Dowager.

e) 宝玉又道：“妹妹尊名？” (Cao Xueqin, 1981, p 38)
“What's your name?” (Yang Hsien-yi and Gladys Yang, p 48)
“What’s your name?” (David Hawkes, p 103)

The honorific is used in direct speech when Baoyu first meets Daiyu (Baoyu’s cousin). As I mentioned earlier, *zun* is an honorific usually combined with another noun to refer to the hearer or things related to the hearer. All the translators rendered *zunming* into your name which failed to convey Baoyu’s display of respect to Daiyu. In this novel, Baoyu is a character who values and respects females a lot, which is why he used *zunming* when asking for Daiyu’s name. In my opinion, a better
translation for this line should be “May I know your name?”. By using a
duestion like this, I am employing Brown and Levinson’s negative
politeness strategy one which is to be conventionally indirect to show
Baoyu’s respect for Daiyu.

f) 拿原告道：“……求太老爷拘拿凶犯，以扶善良……”(Cao Xueqin, 1981, p 43)
The plaintiff testified: “……I beg Your Honour to arrest criminals, punish
the evil-doers and help the widow and orphan……”(Yang Hsien-yi and
Gladys Yang, p 54)

“……I beseech Your Honour to arrest the criminals and to uphold the
course of justice!……” (David Hawkes, p 109)

This conversation happened when Jia Yuncun was dealing with his first
case after assuming the post of prefect of Yingtian. The Chinese word
tailaoye is an honorific used to address government officials by the
ordinary people. There is no exact equivalent in English language. All the
translators rendered tailaoye into Your Honour which follows the
principle of Nida’s dynamic equivalence. This is also and example of the
use of Mona Baker’s strategy three which is translation by cultural
substitutions to achieve dynamic equivalence.

g) 众清客都起身笑道：“老世翁何必如此。近日世兄一去，二三年就
可显身成名，断不似往年仍作小儿之态了。……” (Cao Xueqin, 1981, p 108)

“Your Lordship is too hard on him,” protested his companions, who had risen. “A few years at school and your worthy son is sure to show his mettle and make a name. He’s not a child any more…….” (Yang Hsien-yi and Gladys Yang, p 133)

“Come, come Sir Zheng! You are too hard on him! Two or three years from now our young friend will be carrying all before him! He has left his old, childish ways behind him now – haven’t you boy?” (David Hawkes, p 203)

This conversation happened after Jia Zheng finished lecturing his son, Baoyu. Shiweng is an honorific used to refer to Jia Zheng by the literary gentlemen. In Chinese society, those literary gentlemen used to serve the rich and powerful by their literary work. In this case, they served Jia Zheng who is a high government official, which is why they addressed Jiazheng as shiweng. Yang Hsien-yi and Gladys Yang employed Mona Baker’s translation strategy three (translation by cultural substitutions), by translating the expressive meaning of shiweng into lordship. By doing this, Yang Hsien-yi and Gladys Yang also achieved Nida’s dynamic equivalence. By adding the word sir, David Hawkes followed Brown and Levinson’s negative politeness strategy five (give deference). Shixiong is the other honorific in this example. Even though those literary gentlemen
may be older than Baoyu, they still addressed Baoyu as *shixiong* to show their respect to the hearer, Jia Zheng. To maintain this connotative meaning, Yang Hsien-yi and Gladys Yang translated *shixiong* into *your worthy son*, whereas David Hawkes translated *shixiong* into *young friend*, which failed to deliver the connotative meaning in the source culture.

2. Examples which contain only referent honorifics

a) 那些人只嚷：“快请出甄爷来!” 那些公人道：“我们也不知道什么‘真’‘假’，既是你的女婿，就带了你去面禀太爷便是了。” (Cao Xueqin, 1981, p 14)

“How would we know? We’re here on the prefect’s orders. If you are his father-in-law, you must come and clear this up with His Honour to save us another trip.” (Yang Hsien-yi and Gladys Yang, p 19)

“Tell Mr. Zhen to step outside,” they were shouting. “Hurry!”

“‘Feng’ or ‘Zhen’, it’s all the same to us,” said the runners; “but if you’re his father-in-law you’d better come along with us to see the magistrate.” (David Hawkes, p 67)

In this conversation, the messengers wanted to find Zhen Shiyin, but he was not in. Then the messengers talked to Zhen Shiyin’s father-in-law whose name is Feng Su in a condescending way. The Chinese word *ye* is an honorific used to refer to a male. In that context, Zhen Shiyin once
helped Jia Yucun financially and Jia Yucun is those messengers’ superior which is why they used an honorific to address Feng Su’s son-in-law. The Chinese word *taiye* is an honorific used to address government officials. In this example, *taiye* was used by the messengers to address Jia Yucun who is their superior. All the translators used *Mr* when rendering the word *ye* which shows the speakers’ respect to the referent. Yang Hsien-yi and Gladys Yang translated *taiye* into *his honour*, whereas David Hawkes rendered *taiye* into *magistrate*. Both *his honour* and *magistrate* are culture-specific terms in English society which the target readers are familiar with. Both translations employed Mona Baker’s translation strategy three (translation by cultural substitution) to achieve Nida’s dynamic equivalence. It is interesting to notice that Yang Hsien-yi and Gladys Yang didn’t maintain the connotative meanings when rendering the referent honorifics. They seemed to change their strategy when translating referent honorifics.

b) 子兴冷笑道：“……那政老爷便不喜欢，说将来不过酒色之徒，因此不甚爱惜。独那太君还是命根子一般。……”(Cao Xueqin, 1981, p 19)

Tzu-hsing smiled cynically. “His father was furious and swore he’d grow up to be a dissolute rake. Because of this he’s not too fond of the boy, but the child’s still his grandmother’s darling. ……”(Yang Hsien-yi
“Sir Zheng was very displeased. He said he would grow up to be a rake, and ever since then he hasn’t felt much affection for the child. But to the old lady he’s the very apple of her eye…” (David Hawkes, p 76)

This conversation happened after Jia Yucun bumped into Leng Zixing in a village tavern. Leng Zixing was talking about news from the capital. The Chinese word laoye is used to address males of high official positions. In this example laoye referred to Jia Zheng who carried on a title inherited from his ancestor (the Duke of Ningguo). Taijun is also an honorific used to refer to Jia Zheng’s mother. Yang Hsien-yi and Gladys Yang translated laoye into his father which kept the propositional meaning of laoye, but failed to convey the speaker’s respect to the referent. They maintained the consistency when rendering taijun into his grandmother, and hence lost the connotative meaning in the source culture. According to Brown and Levinson, the English words like sir and lady have aristocratic connotations. David Hawkes used sir and lady to convey the speaker’s respect to the referents. By employing Mona Baker’s translation strategy three, David achieved Nida’s dynamic equivalence.

c) “因此他令尊也曾下笞楚过几次,……” (Cao Xueqin, 1981, p 21)

“More than once, because of this, his father thrashed him within an inch of his life,……” (Yang Hsien-yi and Gladys Yang, p 30)
“His father gave him several severe beatings but it made no difference………” (David Hawkes, p 81)

In this example, the Chinese word lingzun is an honorific used to refer to someone’s father. In this context, Leng Zixing used this honorific to show respect to the referent, Baoyu’s father. In both translations, the translators chose to omit the expressive meaning of lingzun.

d) 子兴道: “……因史老夫人极爱孙女, 都跟在祖母这边, 一处读书,听得个个不错……” (Cao Xueqin, 1981, p 22)

Zixing rejoined: “The Lady Dowager is so attached to these grand-daughters that she makes them study in the Jung Mansion near her, and I hear good reports of them all.” (Yang Hsien-yi and Gladys Yang, p 30)

Zixing said: “Old Lady Jia is very fond of her granddaughters and keeps them all in her own apartments on the Rong-guo side. They all study together, and I have been told that they are doing very well.” (David Hawkes, p 81)

This conversation happened in a village tavern where Jia Yucun and Leng Zixing were having a chat about the news from the capital. The combination word laofuren is an honorific formed by two honorifics which are lao and furen. Yang Hsien-yi and Gladys Yang rendered laofuren into The Lady Dowager which conveys the speaker’s respect to
the referent. The word dowager also indicates her high social position. David translated laofuren into Old Lady which I think is a misinterpretation of the honorific lao. Both translations employed Mona Baker’s translation strategy three to achieve Nida’s dynamic equivalence.

e) 子兴道: “……现有对证: 目今你贵东家林公的夫人, ……” (Cao Xueqin, 1981, p 22)

Zixing said: “For proof, look at the wife of your respected employer Mr Lin,……” (Yang Hsien-yi and Gladys Yang, p 31)

Zixing said: “I can give you proof. Your present employer’s good lady is…. ” (David Hawkes, p 82)

This conversation is a part of the conversation I mentioned in the example c) Jia Yuncun was once a tutor in Lin Ruhai’s home. The Chinese word gui is an honorific used when referring people or things related to the hearer. Gong is also an honorific used to refer to males. Furen is another honorific used to address people’s wives. Yang Hsien-yi and Gladys Yang managed to translate two honorifics which modify the honorific furen in this complicated honorific cluster situation, whereas David Hawkes translated furen into lady by using Mona Baker’s translation strategy three (cultural substitution). His translation also added the word good which here means virtuous and respected; hence he has transferred the honorific from the employer to the wife. In both translations, the
translators achieved Nida’s formal equivalence by doing literal translations.

f) 雨村道：“……这赦老竟无一个不成？” (Cao Xueqin, 1981, p 22)
   “……What about the venerable Jia She? Has he no sons?” (Yang Hsien-yi and Gladys Yang, p 31)
   “……What about old Sir She? Surely he must have a son?” (David Hawkes, p 82)

This conversation is also a part of the above-mentioned conversation happened between Jia Yucun and Leng Zixing. Lao is an honorific used after a person’s first name to show respect to that person. To achieve dynamic equivalence, Yang Hsien-yi and Gladys Yang used a modifier venerable before the referent’s full name to show the speaker’s respect. David misinterpreted the honorific lao into old. By adding sir, he also used Mona Baker’s translation strategy three to achieve Nida’s dynamic equivalence.

g) 宝玉不待说完，便道：“……如此说来，尊翁如今也为此事悬心……”(Cao Xueqin, 1981, p 90)
   “If, as you say, your worthy father is concerned over this……? (Yang Hsien-yi and Gladys Yang, p 113)
   “From what you say, your father is worried about the same problem as
mine……” (David Hawkes, p 180)

This conversation happened when Baoyu first met his nephew Qinzhong. 

_Zunweng_ is an honorific used to refer to the hearer’s father. By using the word _worthy_, Hsien-Yi and Gladys Yang managed to convey Baoyu’s respect to Qinzhong’s father whereas David Hawkes only maintained _Zunweng_’s propositional meaning by omission and failed to convey its expressive meaning.

3. Examples which contain both addressee honorifics and referent honorifics

a) 雨村一面打恭，谢不释，一面又问：“不知令亲大人现居何职？只怕晚生草率，不敢进谒。”如海笑道：“若论舍亲，于尊兄犹系一家，……” (Cao Xueqin, 1981, p 25)

Yucun bowed with profuse thanks and asked: “May I know your respected brother-in-law’s position? I fear I am too uncouth to intrude on him.” Ruhai smiled. “My humble kinsmen belong to your honourable clan. ……” (Yang Hsien-yi and Gladys Yang, p 34)

Yu-cun made an elaborate bow to his patron and thanked him profusely. He then ventured a question. “I am afraid I do not know what your relation’s position is at the capital. Might it not be a little embarrassing for a person in my situation to thrust himself upon him?” Ruhai laughed. “You need have no anxiety on that score. My brothers-in-law in the
capital are your own kinsmen…….”(David Hawkes, p 85)

This conversation happened after Yu-cun heard about the reinstatement of former officials and he was discussing his departure with Lin Ruhai. The Chinese word ling is an honorific usually referring to the hearer or hearer’s family or relatives. In this example, lingqin (ling combined with qin) is used by Yu-cun to refer to Lin Ruhai’s brother-in-law who is a government official. Lingqin not only shows respect to the hearer but also gives respect to the hearer’s relative. Yang Hsien-yi and Gladys Yang translated lingqin into respected brother-in-law which followed Nida’s theory of formal equivalence. The word respected also conveys the connotations in the source culture, whereas David Hawkes rendered linqing into your relation which failed to deliver the connotative meaning.

I have discussed zunxiong in the above examples, however in this example Yang Hsien-yi and Gladys Yang rendered zunxiong in a different way. They used the word honourable to show Lin Ruhai’s respect to Jia Yucun which achieved Nida’s dynamic equivalence. Davide Hawkes again failed to deliver the connotative meaning in the source text.

3.2. The analysis of the translation of self-deprecatory expressions from Chinese to English

In this section, I am going to look at the self-deprecatory expressions to see how the translators deal with this kind of culture-specific terms. Even
though I could not find any established complete theories about self-deprecatory expressions, I can still adopt Brown and Levinson’s theory. Brown and Levinson argues that one can either humble oneself or raise the hearer to achieve deference. The self-deprecatory expressions in the following examples were all related to referring to the speaker himself, hence I don’t need to classify them into sub-categories and I will examine them one by one.

a) 士隐笑道: “非也，适因小女啼哭，……请入小斋，……”
士隐慌忙起身谢道: “……且请略坐，弟即来奉陪。”雨村起身也让道: “……晚生乃常造之客，稍候何妨。”(Cao Xueqin, 1981, p 7)

“Nothing,” was the reply. “My little girl was crying…… come in……”
Then Shih-yin excused himself, saying: “……Do you mind waiting here for a few minutes?”

“……I am a regular guest here, I don’t mind waiting.” (Yang Hsien-yi and Gladys Yang, p 10-11)

“No, no,” said Shi-yin. “It just happened that my little girl was crying,……Won’t you come into my little den,……”

Shi-yin hurriedly rose up and excused himself: “……If you don’t mind sitting on your own here for a moment, I shall be with you directly.”

Yu-cun rose to his feet too: “…… I am a regular visitor here and can easily wait a bit.” (David Hawkes, p 57)

This conversation happened when Zhen Shiyang was talking to Jia Yucun.

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The Chinese word *xiao* is a self-deprecatory word used before nouns to refer to people or things related to the speaker himself. *Di* and *wansheng* are also self-deprecatory expressions used to refer to the speaker himself which in turn shows his respect to the hearer. Both translations used *little* to achieve the expressive meaning of *xiao*. As to the phrase “弟即来奉陪”，Yang Hsien-yi and Gladys Yang used a question to show the speaker’s respect to the hearer, whereas David Hawkes used an if-sentence to render the self-deprecatory word. According to Brown and Levinson’s theory, both translations employed strategy one (being conventionally indirect) to show the respect of the speaker towards the hearer. Regarding the word *wansheng*, the translators of both versions chose to translate the propositional meaning of *wanshang* by using the pronoun *I*.

b) 士隐笑道：“……故特具小酌，邀兄到敝斋一饮，不知可纳芹意否？” (Cao Xueqin, 1981, p 8)

“…… I’ve prepared a little wine in my humble place and wonder if you’d condescend to share it?” (Yang Hsien-yi and Gladys Yang, p 12)

“…… so I have arranged for the two of us to take a little wine together in my study. I hope you will not refuse to join me.” (David Hawkes, p 59)

This conversation happened when Zhen Shiying was inviting Jia Yucun to
his home. The Chinese word *bi* is a self-deprecatory word used before a noun to refer to people or things related to the speaker himself. Yang Hsien-yi and Gladys Yang used the modifier *humble* before *place* to add the expressive meaning of *bi*, whereas David Hawkes chose to omit the expressive meaning of *bi*. *Qinyi* is also a self-deprecatory word which refers to the speaker’s kindly feelings. Yang Hsien-yi and Gladys Yang used the hedge *wonder* to show the speaker’s respect to the hearer. By doing this, they employed Brown and Levinson’s strategy two. They also used the word *condescend* which contains an expressive meaning of raising the hearer to achieve Nida’s dynamic equivalence. David Hawkes translated *qinyi* by using Brown and Levinson’s strategy three to show politeness to the hearer, this makes it easier for the hearer to refuse the kind offer. David Hawkes also managed to achieve Nida’s dynamic equivalence by using that strategy.

c) 封萧忙陪笑道：“*小人姓封，并不姓甄；只有当日小婿姓甄……*” (Cao Xueqin, 1981, p 14)

“*My name* is Feng, not Chen,” he answered with an ingratiating smile.

“*My son-in-law’s name* is Chen……” (Yang Hsien-Yi and Gladys Yang, p 19)

Feng Su’s smile became even more ingratiating. “*My name* is Feng, not Zhen. *My son-in-law’s name* is Zhen……” (David Hawkes, p 67)
This conversation happened when Feng Su was answering the messengers’ questions. I’ve mentioned the usage of the self-deprecatory word *xia* in example 1. In this example, *xiaoren* was used by Feng Su to refer to himself in order to show his respect to the messengers who were working for the government department. *Xiaoxu* was used by Feng Su to refer to his son-in-law. All translators chose to drop the connotative meanings of the self-deprecatory expressions in this example to maintain naturalness in English translation.

d) 子兴道：“…… 今日敝友有事，我因闲走到此，不期这样巧遇！”
(Cao Xueqin, 1981, p 17)

“…… My friend’s busy today, so I came out for a stroll and stopped here to rest. I’d no idea I’d run into you like this.” (Yang Shien-Yi and Gladys Yang, p 23)

“…… I came out here on my own because *my friend* has an engagement today. I certainly didn’t expect to run into you here.” (David Hawkes, p 72)

This conversation happened when Leng Zixing bumped into Jia Yucun in a village tavern. In example 2, I have discussed the usage of the self-deprecatory word *bi*. Here, *bi* is used in conjunction with *you* to refer to the speaker’s friend. In this case, neither translation kept the expressive meaning of *biyou* as they did in example 4.

“What a lucky coincidence!” exclaimed Ju-hai. “Since my wife’s death my mother-in-law in the capital has been worried ……”(Yang Hsien-yi and Gladys Yang, p 33)

“It so happens that an opportunity of helping you has just presented itself,” said Ru-hai. “Since my poor wife passed on, my mother-in-law in the capital has been worried about ……”(David Hawkes, p 84)

This conversation happened when Jia Yucun was about to go to the capital. The Chinese word jianjing is a self-deprecatory expression used to refer to the speaker’s wife. Yang Hsien-yi and Gladys Yang omitted the expressive meaning of jianjing whereas David misinterpreted by using the word poor. In my opinion, I suggest that we could use the word humble before wife to show the speaker’s deference to the hearer.


Ruhai smiled. “My humble kinsmen belong to ……”(Yang Hsien-yi and Gladys Yang, p 34)

Ruhai laughed. “You need have no anxiety on that score. My brothers-in-law in the capital are your own kinsmen……” (David Hawkes, p 85)

This conversation happened between Lin Ruhai and Zhen Shiying. The
Chinese word *she* is a self-deprecatory word used to refer to the speaker’s relatives and house. Yang Hsien-yi and Gladys Yang used the adjective modifier *humble* to add the expressive meaning of *she*, whereas David chose to omit that expressive meaning.

g) 宝玉不待说完，便道：“……今日回去，何不禀明就在我们这敝塾中来？……” (Cao Xueqin, 1981, p 90)

“…… why not tell him about it when you go home today, and come and study in our school?……” broke in Pao-yu. (Yang Hsien-yi and Gladys Yang, p 113)

“……so why not tell him about this school when you get back today and ask him if you can join? ……” (David Hawkes, p 180)

This conversation happened between Baoyu and Qin Zhong. As I have discussed the translation of *bi* in example 2, here, I am only going to look at how translators deal with the self-deprecatory expression *bishu*. All the translators just kept the propositional meaning of *bishu*. Yang Hsien-yi and Gladys Yang didn’t add the word *humble* as they did in example 2. David kept the form of translation as he did in example 2.

h) “哥儿已经念到第三本《诗经》，……，小的不敢撒谎。” (Cao Xueqin, 1981, p 108)

“I wouldn’t dare tell a lie, sir,” he exclaimed. “The young master has
studied three volumes of the *Book of Songs, ……*” (Yang Hsien-yi and Gladys Yang, p 134)

“Master Bao has read the first three books of the Poetry Classic, sir, ……, that’s truth, sir. I wouldn’t tell a lie.” (David Hawkes, p 204)

This conversation happened between a master and his servant. The self-deprecatory word *xiaode* not only shows the speaker’s respect to his master but also indicates the social positions of the interlocutors. There is no exact equivalent in English. In order to raise the hearer, all the translators added the word *sir* which carries the aristocratic connotations. By doing this, the translators achieved Nida’s dynamic equivalence.

**4. Conclusions**

Through examining and comparing the two versions of English translations, I found that Yang Hsien-yi and Gladys Yang are more conscious about the translation of honorifics and self-deprecatory expressions and their cultural connotations, whereas David Hawkes tends to skip the connotative meaning by omission. Yang Hsien-yi and Gladys Yang usually used modifiers to add the cultural connotations in the source text. For example, by using modifying words like *humble, worthy,* and *respected* before nouns or by using words like *condescend* which carries an expressive meaning, Yang Hsien-yi and Gladys Yang achieved Nida’s dynamic equivalence. David Hawkes tends to either omit the expressive
meanings contained in the source terms or use words like “granny dear” which are neutral or contain less expressive meanings. In some examples, all the translators used Brown and Levinson’s negative politeness strategies in order to show the speaker’s deference to the hearer. As to self-deprecatory expressions, there are far fewer self-effacing counterparts in English than honorific counterparts in English. All translators employed Brown and Levinson’s negative strategy to achieve the similar impact on the hearer. Because sometimes it is impossible to find a counterpart in English, in their translation all translators chose to raise the hearer to show the speaker’s politeness and respect to the hearer. In some examples, when the self-deprecatory term is referring to something instead of somebody, all the translators chose to skip the connotations, since adding words like humble may make the translation unnatural to the target readers. David misinterprets a self-deprecatory word jianjing into poor wife and an honorific lao into old. It is interesting to observe that Yang Hsien-yi and Gladys Yang tend to drop the connotative meaning in the source culture when dealing with referent honorifics. After the analysis of those examples, I also find that David Hawkes’ translation is more target-oriented and sounds more natural in English, whereas Yang Hsien-yi and Gladys Yang’s translation is more source-oriented and not such natural-sounding English. There are some limitations in my study, my data is well-defined and I only deal with
conversations that are typical in 18-century Chinese. Besides, the theories I employed from Geoffrey, Brown and Levinson are based on oral materials, while my data was directly extracted from written English. However, the subtle difference between oral and written materials won’t have big influence on my research. Those theories are still applicable in my data analysis. More theories about translating Chinese honorifics and self-deprecatory expressions into English are yet to be established.

5. Bibliography


