TRANSLATION AS TRANSFORMATION: ON THE TREATMENT OF PUNS AND WORDPLAY IN ENGLISH TRANSLATIONS OF *JINPINGMEI*

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Abstract:

The novel *Jinpingmei* is rife with various forms of language play, which produces special stylistic or poetic effects and contributes to characterization. Language play in *Jinpingmei* gives rise to cognitive effects on the reader and poses a serious challenge to interlingual translation. However, it has hitherto received little attention from translation studies researchers. The issue of how different forms of language play are treated in English translations of *Jinpingmei* has not been touched upon. This article aims to fill the gap by analyzing and discussing the translation of puns and wordplay in *Jinpingmei.* It takes a cognitive-pragmatic view and draws upon a relevance-theoretic approach to examine the way in which puns and wordplay is rendered into the target language. Within the relevance-theoretic framework, translation is viewed as an "*interpretive use of language*" and the relation between source and target texts is based on interpretive resemblance rather than equivalence (Sperber & Wilson, 1986; Gutt, 1991). The analysis undertaken in the article is based on two English translations of *Jinpingmei*. Following Delabastita's (1996) taxonomy of puns and transferring strategies, the article examines the translators' translation strategies and assesses the degree of relevance and interpretive resemblance achieved in the two translations vis-à-vis the source text. Research results demonstrate that most puns and wordplay are lost or misconstrued in translation and that the translators exhibit different patterns in their approaches to translating wordplay in *Jinpingmei*. Moreover, the degree of interpretive resemblance achieved in the two translations differs significantly. The article concludes that the translators' choice is influenced by translational skopos, the sociocultural context of translation and reception, and the (un)translatability of wordplay effected by the linguistic and cultural difference between Chinese and English.

Keywords: puns and wordplay, *Jinpingmei*, interlingual translation, relevance theory, interpretive resemblance

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1. Introduction

The main aim of this article is to describe and analyze the solution-types adopted for the rendering of Chinese wordplay into English. Wordplay and puns in Chinese literary texts often pass unnoticed in the mainstream of academia. This can be explained by the fact that Chinese puns usually appear in the form of proverbs, folk riddles, and enigmatic sayings (He, 2010). As a sort of culture-specific phenomenon, puns and wordplay can often pose a great challenge to translators particularly when the source language (SL) and the target language (TL) differ markedly. This article sets out to explore the treatment of various forms of language play in the English translations of *Jinpingmei*, a premodern Chinese novel contributed by Xiao Xiaosheng in 1617. The novel has been very popular in the Chinese-speaking world and it has also been adapted for film and TV series. The setting and plots are quite arresting but there exist a few scenes of erotic depiction which incur much criticism from scholars and readers alike. The novel is written in the third person and stretches for a period of around fifteen years. It tells a story relating to all possible topics on the everyday life of a merchant-official and his family, mistress, and friends. The story is told in an easy-going, humorous, and at times breathtaking way with the purpose of amusing and, perhaps, shocking its implied readers.

The novel *Jinpingmei* is selected as the case study because it houses a relatively large number of idioms, folk riddles, and enigmatic sayings, providing much aesthetic enjoyment for the reader. Therefore, it offers an interesting area for studying the translation of language play, which has rarely been touched upon in the context of Chinese-English translation scholarship. Language play in *Jinpingmei* plays a central role in depicting characters, advancing the plot, and fleshing out novelistic themes. How language play is treated in translation directly influences the target reader's perception and interpretation of the story and characters. In this light, the present article attempts to analyze and discuss the translation of puns and wordplay in *Jinpingmei*. It takes a cognitive-pragmatic view and draws upon a relevance-theoretic approach to address the following questions: (1) How are the different forms of language play in Jinpingmei dealt with in the translation process? (2) To what extent is interpretive resemblance achieved in the translations vis-à-vis the source text? (3) What factors contribute to the translators' choice-making while dealing with the transfer of language play? Before answering the above questions, it is first necessary to review some relevant literature and to clarify some methodological issues in the subsequent two sections.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Towards a Definition

For the purpose of this study, terms such as language play, wordplay and puns are used interchangeably. As with the definition of wordplay, different scholars define the term in several ways. For instance, Leech characterizes wordplay as "*a foregrounded lexical ambiguity which may have its origin either in homonymy or polysemy*" (Leech, 1969, p. 209). Kathleen Davis identifies wordplay as "*the systemic operation of language, which relies for the production of meaning upon an already understood system of rules and lexical relations, as well as upon a (usually) disambiguating*

context" (Davis, 1997, p. 25). Delabastita attempts a working definition which is more inclusive and comprehensive. Precisely, Delabastita (1996, p. 128) defines wordplay as: "*[T]he general name indicating the various textual phenomena in which structural features of the language(s) used are exploited in order to bring about a communicatively significant confrontation of two (or more) linguistic structures with more or less similar forms and more or less different meanings.*" (original emphasis)

From this definition one could observe that the communicative context is a central element of wordplay. Elsewhere, Delabastita (2018) writes that "*wordplay somehow has to express a communicative intention or achieve a rhetorical effect to be recognized as such*" (p. 50). Hence, the importance of communicative effects yielded by wordplay is emphasized. Apart from that, the interaction between linguistic structures and meanings regarding wordplay is also foregrounded in the definition as quoted above. Delabastita's definition is suitable for identifying the many forms of language play in the novel *Jinpingmei*. It has acquired much attention in the domain of translation studies as can be seen in several scholarly articles (e.g. Klitgård, 2005; Díaz Pérez, 2008; Sato, 2019). Therefore, it will be adopted for the purpose of the present research. Additionally, Delabastita also deals with the typology of wordplay. He classifies puns into four major kinds based on "*the types and degrees of formal similarity between the two components of puns*" (Delabastita, 1996, p. 128). Specifically, the four categories refer to homonymy (puns with the same sound and spelling), homophony (puns with the same sound but different spelling), homography (puns with different spelling but identical pronunciation) and paronymy (puns with slight differences in both sound and writing) (ibid.). Significantly, Delabastita also proposes a range of strategies and tactics to describe wordplay translation, which will be outlined in the next subsection.

2.2 Procedures and Tactics of the Translation of Wordplay
In terms of the translation of wordplay, Chiaro argues that puns are often culturally loaded, and their translation must go beyond the formal linguistic features and shift the focus to the foreign sociocultural codes (Chiaro, 1992, p. 78). This observation roughly concurs with Delabastita (1994, p. 223) who points out that;

> "*[…] the semantic and pragmatic effects of source text wordplay find their origin in particular structural characteristics of the source language for which the target language more often than not fails to produce a counterpart, such as the existence of certain homophones, near-homophones, polysemic clusters, idioms or grammatical rules.*"

In view of the potential difficulty in the translation of puns, Delabastita (1996, p. 134) proposes eight different strategies and techniques based on his study on puns in Shakespeare's works and their interlingual transfer. The range of techniques is listed in the following:

- Pun to Pun: the ST pun is rendered into a TT pun;
- Pun to non-pun: the ST pun may be substituted with a non-wordplay reference;
- Pun to related rhetorical device: the ST pun is supplanted by a different rhetorical device (repetition, alliteration, rhyme, irony, etc.) to recapture the effect of the ST pun;
- Pun to zero: the ST pun is omitted in the TT;

- Pun ST = pun TT: the ST pun is directly copied in the TT;
- Non-pun to pun: an ST passage with no pun is rendered into the TT containing a pun, possibly aiming to compensate for the ST puns lost elsewhere in the TT;
- Zero to pun: totally new textual material is added in the TT, with a pun included;
- Editorial techniques: adding footnotes, endnotes or the translator's comments in paratexts.

While several scholars have described strategies of translating wordplay in literary texts (e.g. He, 2010; Díaz-Pérez 2013), Delabastita's proposed strategies listed in Table 1 can be considered the most useful for describing the translation of wordplay in the present study. Delabastita explains that the strategies mentioned above are often combined in several ways in the act of translation. This study will draw upon the above-mentioned strategies and tactics to describe translational shifts concerning the transfer of puns and wordplay in *Jinpingmei*. In the next section, the relevance-theoretic approach will be introduced.

3. Relevance-Theoretic Approach to the Translation of Puns and Wordplay

In this section, I present the theoretical framework used to guide the analysis of wordplay translation in this study. The focus is on relevance theory.

Wordplay and puns represent a hard nut to crack in the act of interlingual translation due to the sociocultural gap between different languages. This is especially so when it comes to Chinese-English translation because the two languages belong to different families and untranslatability may easily occur. However, this does not mean that wordplay and puns are totally untranslatable. As noted by Jakobson, "*all cognitive experience and its classification are conveyable in an existing language. Whenever there is deficiency, terminology may be qualified and amplified by loan-words or loan-translations, neologisms or semantic shifts, and finally, by circumlocutions*" (1959, p. 234). Jakobson's observation suggests that translating wordplay is possible depending upon the appropriate solutions adopted. In this study, relevance theory is used as an analytical tool in guiding the description of wordplay translation from Chinese to English. Relevance theory is an important theoretical model within the sphere of cognitive pragmatics. It is grounded on the assumption that successful communication is largely dependent on the hearer/addressee's recognition of the speaker/addresser's intentions based on a shared cognitive environment. Two core concepts lie at the heart of relevance theory: the principle of relevance and interpretive resemblance (Sperber & Wilson, 1986). The former assumes that any act of communication should assume that the communicator intends their utterance to be relevant. In so doing, the receiver can perceive the intended meaning without expending unnecessary processing effort. The latter points to the degree of similarity in signification between the original utterance and a different one used to reinterpret it. In the parlance of Sperber and Wilson, "*The speaker guarantees that her utterance is a faithful enough representation of the original: that is, resembles it closely enough in relevant aspects*" (Wilson & Sperber, 1988, p. 137). Interpretive resemblance depends on how many implicatures and explicatures the original utterance and the represented one share. The more the utterances share, the higher the

degree of interpretive resemblance will become. Hence, interpretive resemblance is a matter of degree.

Relevance theory applies to describing the phenomenon of interlingual translation. Gutt is among the first scholars to use the theory to study translation. According to him, translation could be defined as "*interlingual interpretive use*" and the task of the translator is to seek "*optimal relevance*" for the target audience based on the principle of relevance so as to ensure successful communication (Gutt, 1991, p. 30). Here the "*optimal relevance*" refers to "*an expectation on the part of the hearer that his attempt at interpretation will yield adequate contextual effects at minimal processing cost*" (Gutt, 1991, p. 31). Gutt argues that "*a translation would be a receptor language text that interpretively resemble the original*" (2000, p. 105). In the relevance-theoretic framework, three significant dimensions should be considered in the act of translation: the intended meaning conveyed in the ST, the situational context in which the ST is intended to be interpreted and the cognitive environment on the part of the receiver.

Consequently, any translational decision-making would need to consider the target recipients' cognitive environment and their existing background knowledge. By doing so, communication success can be guaranteed to a great extent. Relevance-theoretic approach redefines the relationship between the source and target texts. The relationship is based on interpretive resemblance rather than equivalence. Key concepts, such as optimal relevance, interpretive resemblance, contextual effects, and cognitive environment, could be used to assess and evaluate the transferring strategies employed by the translator in terms of wordplay rendition. In this sense, an analysis of wordplay in *Jinpingmei* and its English renderings could benefit greatly from relevance theory. Given that wordplay and puns are special stylistic devices to communicate figurative meanings in literary works, the translator's task would be to recreate the intended meanings and effects of the ST that could be perceived by the target audience.

4. Methodology

In this article, a qualitative analysis is carried out using the case of the Chinese novel *Jinpingmei* and its two English translations: *The Golden Lotus*, translated by Clement Egerton, and *The Plum in the Golden Vase*, completed by David T. Roy. For the purpose of this study, the corpus selection is generally guided by Delabastita's working definition of wordplay. Therefore, wordplay instances are identified through close reading of the ST. They are then extracted from the ST, along with the English counterparts retrieved from the translated versions. This can help constitute coupled pairs for contrastive analysis. As stated, this case study uses Delabastita's model to analyze and contrast the translators' strategies.

Following the relevance-theoretical framework, the study tries to assess the degree of relevance achieved in the two English translations and to what extent the translated texts interpretively resemble the ST counterparts. Moreover, the analysis also reflects on some factors influencing translation solutions. However, it is not practical to take all the instances of puns and wordplay in *Jinpingmei* for discussion due to space constraints. Thus, the article focuses on several representative samples that are relevant for the present study. To ease discussion,

Egerton's version is marked TT1 and Roy's is labeled TT2. The next section presents a detailed translational analysis regarding puns and wordplay in *Jinpingmei*.

5. Analysis of Puns and Wordplay in Translation from the Relevance-Theoretic Perspective

This section gives a detailed analysis on the English translations of instances of wordplay in Jinpingmei. Noticeably, puns and wordplay in *Jinpingmei* often appears in the form of xiehouyu 歇後語, two-part allegorical sayings commonly found in vernacular Chinese novels. Normally, a xiehouyu is made up of two phrases linked by a dash (e.g., 冬瓜花兒-醜的沒時了). The first phrase usually appears in the form of a metaphor, allowing the reader to pause for cuing its intended meaning or hidden sense of humor. The second phrase usually carries the intended message or connotations used for elaborating on the first one. In the following, each of the chosen examples is analyzed and discussed to identify various translation strategies used for handling puns and wordplay in *Jinpingmei*.

Example 1:

ST: 金蓮道：「賊小肉兒，不知怎麼，聽見幹恁勾當兒，雲端裡老鼠—天生的耗。」

Jinlian is talking to Yulou and she sees Chunmei going to Ping'er's room. Chunmei's purpose is to see if Ximen is staying in Ping'er's room. In this scene, Jinlian is praising Chunmei for her cleverness and quick wit. Chunmei is Jinlian's maidservant and she seems to know whatever her master thinks and wants. In the ST, Jinlian uses the wordplay 雲端裡老鼠—天生的耗 to express special liking for Chunmei. The last character 耗 has a similar pronunciation to the character 好, constituting a homophonic pun. It is implied that Chunmei is a very nice person. Note that homophony is a common phenomenon in the Chinese language and is closely related to the Chinese culture. Because of the homophonic pun, the humorous tone derived from Jinlian's speech is well displayed.

Egerton: *"Look at those young rascals," Jinlian cried. "Why are they doing this? They are like rats flying in the skies…"*
Roy: *"You lousy little piece!" said Chin-lien. "I don't know why it is, but whenever you get wind of a job like this, you seem to think it's: Like a rat stationed in the clouds: The 'furry pest' Heaven has to offer."*

Lefevere contends that metaphors emerge as concepts that "*[…] are linked in such a way as to increase the illocutionary power of the passage*" (1992, p. 37). Evidently, the wordplay in the ST increases the illocutionary power of the utterance. It is thus crucial to convey the illocutionary force of the ST in translation. In Example 1, the ST wordplay is dealt with differently in the two English versions. The strategy used in Egerton's version is pun→related rhetorical device. The wordplay is converted into a simile, which detracts from the meaning intended by the ST. The

result is a decline in the overall contextual effects. The humorous effect yielded by Jinlian's playing on words is not accessible to the TT reader. Roy's translation keeps close to the Chinese text. The strategy used is a combination of pun→non-pun and pun→related rhetoric device because the ST wordplay is rendered by a non-punning phrase in the TT. The translation retains the structural features of the ST, at the cost of the implicit layer of meaning intended by Jinlian. Hence, the translation exhibits a high degree of foreignization, in Venuti's (1995) terms. It highly resembles the original on the formal level instead of the connotative one. The following example further illustrate this point:

Example 2:

ST: 那潘金蓮最快，插口道：......羊角蔥靠南牆─越發老辣！若不是大姐姐帶攜你，俺們今日與你磕頭？

Jinlian has a conversation with her husband, Ximen, when other members of the family are present. Jinlian shows her displeasure with her husband's behavior by teasing him with a joke. The wordplay in this textual segment centers on the enigmatic saying 羊角蔥靠南牆─越發老辣, which implies that a person can become thick-skinned enough to cope with taunts. The plant 羊角蔥 is compared to Ximen, who is brazenfaced or shameless and is not easily upset by criticism or unpleasantness. Here Jinlian's wordplay suggests that Ximen is not mature or sophisticated at all since he is still young in Jinlian's eyes. Again, the punning phrase shows Jinlian's wit and humor when interacting with her husband. The conversational atmosphere is amusing and relaxing.

> Egerton: Jinlian said. "*Like the onion that grows by the south wall, the older you grow, the hotter you get. Why, if it were not for the Great Lady, we shouldn't be paying any reverence to you today*."
> Roy: "*Pan Chin-lien, who was always quick on the uptake, interjected, "… You're just like: The ramshorn scallion that grows by the southern wall; The longer it stays there the hotter it gets. … If it weren't for our elder sister, who do you think would be kowtowing to you today?*"

As can be seen in Example 2, the ST wordplay is literally rendered in the English versions. The technique is pun→related rhetoric device. The denotative sense is conveyed accurately, but the connotative information, such as the subtle humor and satirical tone, is obscured. The TT reader may expend more processing effort to discover or infer the implicit meaning based on the situational context. For instance, 越發老辣 is rendered as "the older you grow, the hotter you get". The target audience might perceive Jinlian's husband as an old and hot person according to the logical contextual similarities. This is because the association between onion and the adjective "hot" could be easily perceived based on the cognitive environment of the TT reader. In this sense, the degree of interpretive resemblance between the ST and the TT remains low. Jinlian's utterance is given a different interpretation in the English texts. Let us move on to the following case.

Example 3:

ST: 鄭愛香兒笑道：「這應二花子，今日鬼酉上車兒─推醜，冬瓜花兒─醜的沒時了。」

In the dinner party, Bojue is mocked by Zheng Aixiang for his recklessness and impertinency. In the ST, the character Zheng Aixiang plays on the quasi-homophones 推 and 忒 to poke fun at Bojue. The word 忒 is an intensifier, which means "too" or "very" in English. The ST wordplay evokes the caricature of Bojue who is described as very ugly and lacking good manners. The main advantage of the use of wordplay here is that it helps to convey the speaker's intention in a euphemistic manner without causing offence. Further, the language play renders the conversation entertaining and intriguing.

> Egerton: "*Aixiang smiled. "Ah, dear Beggar Ying," she said, "you are like the devil in a cart with a lot of ugly-looking melons, so ugly that there are even none for you*."
> Roy: "*This Beggar Ying the Second," said Cheng Ai-hsiang, "is worse than ever today. He puts his 'ugly' 'niece' on a pushcart: the better to parade his 'ugliness'. Like the flowers of the wax gourd: he stinks in and out of season*."

In Example 3, both the referential and associative meanings of the ST wordplay are distorted in Egerton's translation. No interpretive resemblance between the ST and the TT could be identified. The translation runs counter to the joke's function as banter and humor. Thus, it fails to communicate the relevant message to the TT reader as both denotative and connotative senses are not relayed in the TT. The comical flavor of the original disappears without a trace, depriving the TT reader of the ST-intended playfulness. The second version by Roy gets close to the ST in the sense that it reveals part of the implicit information involved in the ST wordplay. It gives the meaning that Beggar Ying (Bojue) is not a good guy. Zheng Aixiang's negative evaluation on Bojue is partially reflected in the TT, which could invoke in the cognitive environment of the target reader the intended meaning behind the ST wordplay. Due to interpretive resemblance, the TT reader could have a better understanding of the subtle irony running through the character's speech. Let us continue to see the next example.

Example 4:

ST: 西門慶道：「怪奴才! 八十歲媽媽沒牙─有那些唇說的? 李大姐那邊請你和他下盤棋兒，只顧等你不去了。」

Ximen invites Jinlian to play a board game with Ping'er, but Jinlian hesitates and does not want to do that because she is not happy with Ximen's favoritism. In the ST, the wordplay is based on the homophony between the Chinese characters 唇 and 陳. The pun implies that Ximen asks Jinlian not to find excuse to reject his order. Instead, Ximen intends to invite Jinlian to partake in their game immediately. Yet, he expresses his intention in a euphemistic manner.

> Egerton: *"You marvelous little slave!" Ximen said, "you are like an eighty-year-old woman who has lost her teeth but can still make shift to chatter without them. Your Sixth Sister wants to play chess, and we have waited for you a long time."*
> Roy: *"You crazy slave!" said Hsi-men Ch'ing. "An eighty-year-old crone may lack teeth, but she's still got plenty of lip. Sister Li is inviting you over to her place to play a board game with her. She's been waiting all this time and you still haven't come."*

In the first translation, the intention of the original humorous message is recaptured in the TT, as evidenced by the word "chatter". The translated wordplay roughly fits the specific context and is accessible to the TT reader. However, in the second version, the wordplay is rendered verbatim with the formal feature prioritized. The translation only gives the literal meaning of the ST, failing to convey the intended contextual effects. In other words, Roy's version reflects the same semantic ambiguity as the original text does. Due to the lack of optimal relevance, the TT reader needs to expend extra processing effort to figure out what Ximen really means based on the situational context in the exchange. A similar point could be observed in the following case:

Example 5:

ST: 月娘便道：「莫不孟三姐也臘月裡蘿蔔—凍個心，忽剌八要往前進嫁人？」

Yueniang is thinking that Yulou might decide to remarry someone else after the death of her husband. In fact, Yueniang hopes that Yulou could continue to stay in the household. Here Yueniang expresses her anxiety about Yulou's decision. In this fragment, the wordplay in the ST centers on the Chinese character 凍, which is a homophony of 動. Here it literally means that it is usually hard to move a frozen turnip's heart in harsh winter. The homophonic pun, in turn, evokes associations of the concept of changing one's mind. Naturally, in the context of this exchange, the wordplay implies Yulou's sudden decision of leaving the household and remarrying others.

> Egerton: *"That is Sister Meng," Yueniang said. "I shall never remarry."*
> Roy: *"It must be Sister Meng the Third that he's referring to," said Yueh-niang. "It would seem that: Even during the twelfth month the frozen heart of the turnip is capable of being moved. All of a sudden, she wants to better her condition by marrying someone, does she?"*

In Example 5, the portion of the text containing wordplay is omitted from Egerton's version, with no attempt for compensation. The strategy is pun→zero. While the translation does not echo the verbal intricacies of the original, it at least appears concise and fluent. Contrary to Egerton's omission strategy, Roy renders the ST wordplay in a faithful way. The translation retains the surface meaning but requires the TT reader to infer the shades of meaning associated with the ST pun. Due to the lack of adequate cognitive effects, the target audience may require great processing effort to recover the implicit content of the character's utterance based on the context. On some occasions, it is found that the translators of both versions keep rendering the

ST puns into English in a literal way, but happen to recreate a similar punning effect, so that the TT reader could access the cognitive effects, i.e. the ironical or comical effects, intended by fictional characters. Examples (6) and (7) may serve to illustrate this phenomenon.

Example 6:

ST: 李瓶兒道：「……媽媽子，不虧你這片嘴頭子，六月裡蚊子—也釘死了！」

Ping'er is talking to Mother Feng in her room. Because Mother Feng is very talkative and eloquent, Ping'er cracks a joke with her in the conversation. In this extract, the wordplay is based on the allegorical saying 六月裡蚊子—也釘死了, which literally means that mosquitoes in summer are usually evil and like biting people. The Chinese characters 釘 and 盯 are homophonic to each other, which refer to somebody who shows curiosity about other people's affairs. Here in the ST, Ping'er's words imply that Mother Feng is like the mosquito in summer since she always likes to gossip behind others.

> Egerton: "…*Well, old woman, your mouth has been stopped. You are like the mosquitoes that come in the fourth month, those that have such a deadly bite.*"
> Roy: "*Old Mother, that mouth of yours, true to form, is as lethal as: The mosquitoes in the sixth month: They bite you to death.*"

In Example 6, the two translations are similar in rendering the ST wordplay. The translation strategy is pun→related rhetorical device. The punning phrase in the ST is rendered into a metaphorical expression. While there are no signs of wordplay in the translated texts, the communicative effect yielded by the metaphors could be captured by the TT reader for understanding the character's implicature. As stated earlier, a relevance-theoretic approach to translation stresses the principle of relevance, i.e. the translation should yield adequate contextual effects for the target addressee to grasp the explicatures or implicatures of the target text. In this sense, the two translations can be said to have achieved optimal relevance to the intended audience. The same is true of the next case.

Example 7:

ST: 西門慶笑道：「我問你這梅湯，你卻說做媒，差了多少！」王婆道：「老身只聽得大官人問這媒做得好。」

When Mother Wang prepares an order of damson punch and serves it to Ximen, Ximen expresses appreciation for her kindness and hospitality. The wordplay in the ST centers on the characters 梅 and 媒, which are homophones in Chinese. The word 梅 in the dialogue refers to a type of fruit in China and is homophonic to 媒 which means matchmaking. Mother Wang's

playing on the two words injects a note of humor into the conversation. The wordplay is intended for suggesting Mother Wang's willingness to act as the matchmaker between Ximen and Jinlian.

> Egerton: *"I was talking about damsons, not damsels," said Ximen. "You are getting a little mixed up." "It was damsels you are thinking about, nonetheless," the old lady retorted.*
> Roy: *"It was damsons I asked about," said Hsi-men Ching, laughing in turn, "but you're talking about damsels. There's quite a difference between the two. "All I heard, sir, was something about fixing damsels," said Dame Wang, "so I thought you were talking about the way I fix them up."*

Obviously, the renderings of the ST wordplay in the two English versions roughly correspond to the Chinese counterparts. In particular, the English words "damsons" and "damsels" are homophonic to each other, which at the same time recreates the punning effect of the ST. There is a high degree of interpretive resemblance between the ST and the TT. The reformulation of ST wordplay in English in this instance evokes in the TT reader a similar pleasurable and playful response. Notably, in *Jinpingmei*, there are some wordplay instances which are highly culture-specific and have double meanings in the specific context. Josep Marco writes that "the more culturally specific a pun, the more difficult it will be to translate it […] and therefore the more creative the translator will have to be […]" (2010, p. 286). In the following, I attempt to consider six representative instances. I aim to show whether the ST-intended cognitive effects associated with wordplay are accessible to the TT reader.

Example 8:

ST: 兩個尋了一遍回來，春梅罵道： 「奴才，你媒人婆迷了路─沒的說了，王媽媽賣了磨─推不了的了。」

Chunmei and Qiuju are searching for their master Jinlian's shoes in the courtyard. Both fail to find them out and Chumnei blames Quju for their failure. In this scene, the wordplay in the ST centers on 你媒人婆迷了路─沒的說了 and 王媽媽賣了磨─推不了的了, both of which are culture-bound and contribute to the creation of humorous effects. It is put in the mouth of Chunmei, an unconventional character, who implies that Qiuju should have no excuse to find but to assume the responsibility. The application of two instances of wordplay to a single utterance contributes to aspects of characterization and plot. It shows that Chunmei enjoys a different status as she could make provocative remarks in front of her fellow servants in the hierarchical household in which a complex network of interpersonal relationships is at work.

> Egerton: *After searching a long time they began to go back. On the way Chunmei scolded Qiuju. "You are like a go-between on the wrong track," she said. "What are you going to say now? You're as bad as old Goody Wang buying a mill. What's the good of it?"*
> Roy: *After searching the entire garden, they returned empty-handed. Ch'un-mei mocked her, saying, "You slave, you're in the same pickle now as: The go-between who lost her way: you've no occasion to speak; or Dame Wang who sold her grindstone: you've no way to grind your axe."*

In Example 8, Egerton's strategy is pun→related rhetorical device. The ST wordplay is converted into two figurative sentences. The metaphors used in the TT yield adequate contextual effects for the TT reader to infer the intended meaning without involving extra processing effort. The strategy used helps to convey the vein of humor running through the character's speech in the TT. The situation is slightly different for Roy's version. The denotative meaning and the formal structure of the ST wordplay are reproduced in the TT. Yet, the intended sense is left for the TT reader to weigh and consider. According to relevance theory, there is a low degree of interpretive resemblance between the ST wordplay and the English counterpart. Hence, more processing effort is demanded to recognize the illocutionary force of the utterance considering the situational context. Let us turn to the next example.

Example 9:

ST: 你乾淨是個毯子心腸—滾上滾下，燈草拐棒兒—原拄不定把。

Huilian becomes extremely angry with Ximen because the latter has not kept the promise to provide timely help for her husband who is ultimately imprisoned. In this excerpt, the playing on words renders the character's speech lively, humorous but satirical. The two instances of wordplay are of the same connotations, implying that the interlocutor, Ximen, is unreliable for not keeping his promise.

> Egerton: "*You have a mind just like a ball. It does nothing but bob up and down. You can't keep steady long enough to hold a candle.*"
> Roy: "*You've got: The mind of a ball: Bobbing down, bobbing Up. You're like: A walking stick made of rush: Not to be relied upon.*"

For the English versions, Egerton takes great liberties to rewrite the ST wordplay. The result is an interpretation that roughly fits the co-text. Likewise, Roy interprets the implicit meaning in an explicit way. For instance, the last sentence "*A walking stick made of rush: Not to be relied upon*" interpretively resembles the ST by spelling out the intended implicature. The translation reflects the goal and function the ST wordplay has in the source culture, preserving some laugh-provoking aspects. Hence, there seems to be a high degree of interpretive resemblance between the ST and the two target texts.

Example 10:

ST: 鄆哥道：「你正事馬蹄刀木杓裡切菜—水泄不漏......」

Yun Ge is interrogating Mother Wang about the death of Wu Da in the street. Mother Wang does not want to reveal any details about the incident since she herself is one of the killers. In this excerpt, the wordplay centers around a colloquial expression reflecting the speaker's rustic humor. The idiomatic expression 水泄不漏 implies that Mother Wang is a very shrewd

person who never betrays confidential matters, because she is afraid of being involved in the murder case.

> Egerton: "*And you are one of those people who would scrape a bowl clean with a knife. You don't mean to lose even a single drop of gravy...*"
> Roy: "*Yun-ko said, "You don't give much away do you? Truly: You do your chopping in a wooden ladle with a horseshoe blade: Not one drop escapes; Not even half a drop ever hits the floor...*"

The misinterpretation of the ST wordplay in Egerton's version gives a different meaning which does not coincide with the Chinese version. In Venuti's (1995) terms, it is a domestication of the ST. The translation changes the meaning of the whole utterance, making it enigmatic to the point of illogicality. The misreading may lead the target reader to think that Mother Wang is very hungry, which disrupts the textual cohesion of the plot. The relevance of the TT to the ST is minimized with interpretive resemblance disappearing. The humorous tone derived from the ST wordplay is lost, naturally. In contrast, Roy's version interpretively resembles the original. To illustrate, the opening sentence "*You don't give much away do you?*" offers the reader key "*communicative clues*" (Gutt, 2000, p. 134) in understanding Yun Ge's speech in this exchange. The target audience can have access to the intended meaning of the ST without investing much processing effort. Also, the exotic effect derived from the translated wordplay is accessible to the TT reader.

Example 11:

ST: 晚夕，西門大姐在房內又罵經濟：「賊囚根子，…… 毛司裡磚兒—又臭又硬」。

After Ximen Dajie discovers Jingji's clandestine affair with Jinlian, she becomes very angry. This exchange is further complicated by the wordplay 毛司裡磚兒—又臭又硬, which is actually an idiomatic swearing in this context. The wordplay involves several aspects both culture-specificity and of Chinese sense of humor in general. It is a bawdy allusion to Jinlian who is compared to bricks in the privy. The language play suggests that Ximen Dajie has special hatred for Jinlian because of the latter's lascivious nature.

> Egerton: "*Ximen Dajie said to him: "You villain! … She is like a tile out of the privy, hard and stinking.…*"
> Roy: "*Hsi-men Ta-chieh also took Ch'en Ching-chi to task, saying, "You lousy jailbird! ... Like the bricks in the privy: She is both hard and smelly, ….*"

Evidently, both two English versions have made the ST-intended comical and satirical effects accessible to the target audiences. The translated wordplay has fitted the situational context and can invoke in the cognitive environment of the TT reader the real intention behind the ST wordplay. In particular, the latent bawdiness embodied in Ximen Dajie's utterance is

effectively conveyed in the translations. The result is a high degree of interpretive resemblance between the ST and the TT. The same is true of the next example.

Example 12:

ST: 金蓮道：「南京沈萬三，北京枯柳樹。人的名兒，樹的影兒，怎麼不曉得？雪裡埋死屍—自然消將出來。」

Jinlian and Yulou are talking about their husband's clandestine love affair. Jinlian is not satisfied with Yueniang's attitude toward this matter. In this scene, Jinlian believes that her husband's adultery will be known to others sooner or later. In this example, the wordplay is based on 雪裡埋死屍—自然消將出來, which renders Jinlian's utterance all the more vivid and humorous. The literal meaning is that a body buried in the snow will be exposed as soon as the snow melts. The underlying assumption is that the love affair of Jinlian's husband will turn up in due course even if no one wants to see this happen. What Jinlian intends to convey is that it is of no use for Yueniang to keep this secret, that is, her husband's love affair with his mistress.

> Egerton: "*It's common gossip," Jinlian said. "Everybody knows it. If you bury a body in the snow, it always turns up again when the snow melts.*"
> Roy: Chin-lien said: "*Just as Nanking has its Shen Wan-san, Peking has its withered willows; Just as a man has his reputation, A tree has its shadow. How can she fail to be aware that: If one buries a body in the snow, It will be exposed when it melts.*"

It is noticeable that wordplay is typical of Jinlian's linguistic behaviour throughout the novel, which contributes to her characterization. In this instance, Jinlian's utterance is largely simplified in Egerton's translation. However, the figurative meanings realized in the ST wordplay is reflected in the TT, offering a textual segment that is intelligible to the TT reader. Hence, there is a high degree of interpretive resemblance to the ST. The same holds true for Roy's version. The word-for-word transfer is a typical instance reflecting correspondence between the ST and the TT. It is highly relevant to the cognitive environment of the TT reader. Based on the principle of relevance, the TT reader could recognize the intended meaning present in Jinlin's utterance without involving unnecessary processing effort.

Example 13:

ST: 金蓮道：「……王兵馬的皂隸—還把你不當合的。」玉樓戲道：「六丫兒，你是屬麵筋的—倒且是有靳道。」

Jinlian and Yulou are talking about their husband, Ximen. Jinlian displays her jealousy in the conversation. In effect, she is complaining about Ximen's favoritism. In this exchange, there are two instances of wordplay which are highly obscure and, therefore, difficult to decipher the

intended meaning. The first one, 王兵馬的皂隸—還把你不當舍的, literally refers to somebody who is neglected or marginalized by others because of little or no value. In its immediate context, the wordplay suggests that Jinlian does not want to be ignored by her husband, Ximen. As for 你是屬麵筋的—倒且是有靳道, the character 靳 is homophonic to 勁, which implies that Jinlian is tough, overpowering and determined in order to win her husband's favor. In sum, the wordplay in the exchange exemplifies some features that is typical of Chinese humor and that is intimately tied to Chinese reality.

> Egerton: *"You don't understand," Jinlian said. "… he becomes like General Wang's orderly and looks upon you as one not worth the trouble of even the crudest affection." "Really", Yulou said, laughing, "you are as hot as pepper."*
> Roy: *"You don't understand," said Chin-lien. "… you'll end up being treated like: Warden Wang's lictors; Not even worth a fuck." "Slavey Six,' teased Yu-lou: "You're just like wheat gluten; As hard to masticate as leather."*

Few English-language audiences could be expected to have adequate background knowledge of Chinese culture to perceive the wordplay. As can be seen in Example 13, the two English translations are indeed creative and do evoke a sense of Jinlian's jealousy as far as the first wordplay is concerned. The intended meaning implied by the ST wordplay is conveyed in the two English versions. There are very similar cognitive effects between source and target texts. The cognitive environment of the ST corresponds to that of the TT reader to a great extent. However, there is a slight difference between the two translations regarding the rendering of the second wordplay. Egerton's translation gets more closely to the original meaning intended by the character Yulou. While the ST wordplay disappears altogether in the TT, what the translator achieves is the clarification of the implicature of the ST wordplay. The translation interpretively resembles the ST to a great extent. By contrast, Roy keeps a foreignizing solution which introduces the literal sense to the TT, but which obscures the figurative sense of the original. There is a low degree of interpretive resemblance between the ST and the TT, regarding the second wordplay. Because of the inadequate contextual effects yielded in the TT, the TT reader may need to invest extra processing effort to infer the overtones associated with the ST wordplay. According to relevance theory, the solution by the translator implies an increase in the processing effort required of the TT reader.

6. Findings and Discussion

In light of the above analysis, the present research has generated several important findings, which can be generalized in the following four dimensions:
1) Puns and wordplay studied in this article are treated very differently in the two English translations of *Jinpingmei*;
2) Egerton opts for such translation strategies as deletion, paraphrase, and literal transfer, which makes the target text appear fluent and readable; Roy, however, exhibits a foreignizing tendency and preserves all instances of language play in the translation.

Roy's translation evokes a strong foreign or exotic flavor but the intended meaning of several puns and wordplay are misrepresented. Such a foreignizing approach can often render the target text semantically redundant and unintelligible to the reader;

3) From the perspective of relevance theory, no optimal relevance is achieved by the two translators regarding the translation of wordplay. In some cases, the two target texts yield inadequate cognitive effects (i.e. humor, banter, and satire) intended by the original puns. In other words, the humorous effect or satirical tone derived from the original puns and wordplay are lost in both translations;

4) In other cases, there is a low degree of interpretive resemblance between the source and target texts insofar as the contextual meaning of puns and wordplay is either distorted or lost in both translations.

Based on the above main findings, it is believed that there are several factors which contribute to the transformation of puns and wordplay in English translations of *Jinpingmei*. However, the following three factors are considered most relevant:

Firstly, it can be linked to translatorial skopos. According to skopos theory, translational strategies are determined by the specific function a translation fulfils in the target culture (Reiss & Vermeer, 1984, p. 119). To be specific, Egerton's translation is motivated by his desire for learning Chinese language and culture and for psychology research (Egerton, 1939, p. xii). This explains the fact that the translator uses simple, concise and fluent English to render the Chinese novel *Jinpingmei* without paying much attention to the aesthetic and rhetorical details embedded in the ST. Roy's purpose, however, is to offer a retranslation by keeping faithful to every single detail of the ST. The guiding principle of the retranslation project is translating everything contained in the original work (Roy, 1993, p. xlvii). Hence, it should come as no surprise that the formal structure of wordplay instances as analyzed above are retained in the TT. The translation is highly exotic, showing a degree of defamiliarization. Yet, Martínez-Sierra (2008, p. 237) explains that the use of foreignizing or exoticizing methods might increase the target audiences' processing effort in interpreting the translated wordplay. As Roy's version shows, in many cases, the translation of the ST wordplay suppresses the intended meaning, thereby demanding more cognitive efforts to perceive humor and playfulness conveyed by the ST wordplay.

Secondly, it is the projected readership that each translation is intended for. Egerton's version was published in the 1930s in Britain. During that time, few British readers could be expected to have enough background knowledge about Chinese literature and culture. In order to market the published translation and to attract more assumed readers, Egerton opted to simplify the ST by means of reducing its complexities on both linguistic and cultural levels. Therefore, deviating from the original text is inevitable. That is why many instances of language play in the ST are generalized, rewritten or simply omitted from the TT for fluency, concision, intelligibility and readability. Roy's retranslation, however, was completed between 1993 and 2013 during which time Chinese literature and culture were already familiar to the Western readership. Many English-language readers in North America showed intense interest in learning and studying Chinese literature, and Roy's retranslation offered a timely help for these readers and researchers to get a thorough reading of the novel. As such, the linguistic structure on which wordplay operates is faithfully transposed in the TT with the same level of semantic

ambiguity, aiming at keeping the original flavor and spirit. Hence, Roy's translation may require more imaginative involvement of the TT reader in perceiving the various instances of language play.

Finally, it could be the untranslatability of puns that affects the degree of interpretive resemblance. According to Catford, "*untranslatability occurs when it is impossible to build functionally relevant features of the situation into the contextual meaning of the [translated] text*" *(1965, p. 94). By "functionally relevant features*" Catford means the formal features of the original text, such as polysemy, puns, and wordplay, which have no exact matches in the target language (1965, p. 94). Given that most instances of wordplay in *Jinpingmei* are culture-bound with complex linguistic structures, they are untranslatable to some extent because of the lack of isomorphism between form and content across Chinese and English. Schröter posits that "*the more complex or language-specific a wordplay is, the more likely it is to be simplified, replaced or omitted in the translation*" (2004, p. 167). This partly explains the fact that many instances of language play in Egerton's translation are distorted or generalized and that the implicature derived from some wordplay instances in Roy's translation is also sacrificed.

7. Conclusion

This article aimed to look at the treatment of puns and wordplay in English translations of *Jinpingmei*. It has confirmed that puns and wordplay are subject to different degrees of transformation during the translation process and that the degree of interpretive resemblance can vary and is influenced by such factors as translative skopos, the sociohistorical context, and the (un)translatability involved in different languages and cultures. The study has shown that a relevance-theoretic approach proves useful to describe the translation of puns and wordplay in *Jinpingmei*. The approach also offers new insights into interlingual translation by emphasizing interpretive resemblance between the source and target texts. For reasons of space, the examples included in the article are limited and not always fully elucidated, and the conclusion may not be convincing enough. Further research could incorporate a larger corpus to provide more generalizable conclusions regarding the translation of puns and wordplay in *Jinpingmei* and, possibly, many other Chinese literary works. This study only represents a small step in that direction. It is hoped that the article could lead to further discussion on wordplay translation which has practical implications for promoting cross-cultural understanding.

Conflict of Interest Statement
The author declares no conflicts of interests.

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