

Research Article

# Chinese-English Translation of Curse Words in *A Dream of Red Mansions*: Literal Versus Free Translation

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## Abstract

This research paper delves into the translation strategies for curse words from Chinese to English within the context of literary works, specifically focusing on "A Dream of Red Mansions," a classic Chinese novel. The study acknowledges the cultural aversion to curse words due to their offensive nature and association with negative emotions. However, it emphasizes the importance of these words in literature, where they contribute to the authenticity and expressiveness of the text. The paper is structured into three main sections. The first section provides a comparative analysis of curse words in English and Chinese, highlighting their common offensive traits and the cultural nuances that differentiate their usage. The second section presents a detailed examination of various translation strategies applied to curse words in the novel, including literal translation and free translation. The third section discusses the challenges translators face when bridging cultural barriers and offers recommendations for achieving faithful and expressive translations. The study underscores that curse words extend beyond their everyday negative connotations and are integral to the literary expression. It concludes that translators must possess a deep understanding of both the source and target languages' cultural contexts to effectively translate curse words. The recommended approach involves understanding the literal and extended meanings of curse words, considering the context, and employing a combination of literal and free translation strategies to maintain the essence and emotional impact of the original text.

## Keywords

Curse Words, Translation Strategies, Cultural Barriers, Literary Works, Faithfulness, Expressive Translations

## 1. Introduction

The use of curse words is often avoided by individuals with higher levels of education. Particularly in official statements and academic reports, curse words are not only infrequent but also deemed intolerable. The aversion towards curse words can be attributed to several reasons. Firstly, curse words are viewed as impolite, bothersome, and even repulsive expressions, causing recipients to feel offended and humiliated. Consequently, the use of curse words tends to

escalate conflicts and lead to unnecessary disputes. Secondly, individuals who employ curse words are commonly perceived as rude, ill-tempered, and disagreeable, which diminishes their prospects of establishing positive interpersonal relationships. Lastly, swearing words are typically associated with negative emotions such as anger, depression, frustration, and embarrassment, which are themselves disliked by the general public [6, 7].

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In the context of daily interactions, it is feasible for most individuals to reduce or even eliminate the use of curse words in both spoken and written communication. However, translators encounter a predicament when confronted with curse words present in literary works, including numerous renowned novels [2, 4, 11, 17]. Removing or substituting curse words in translation would undoubtedly lead to an unfaithful rendition of the original work, compromising its expressiveness. Despite their seemingly uncivilized and abrasive nature, curse words are intrinsic components of these works. Consequently, translators are obligated to approach the translation of curse words with utmost care and faithfulness. In fact, curse words extend beyond the expression of negative emotions in daily life, which is one of the fundamental reasons for their prevalence in literary works and the subsequent need for translation.

This study aims to analyze the common translation strategies employed by Chinese-English translators when handling curse words. The main body of the study report is divided into three parts. The first part establishes a comparative perspective between English and Chinese with regard to curse words, briefly introducing translation approaches. The second part, integral to the study, focuses on *A Dream of Red Mansions*, a globally recognized Chinese classic, and provides a compilation of Chinese-English curse word translations. The third part delves into strategies for translators to overcome cultural barriers while preserving the essence of the original work, offering recommendations accordingly.

## 2. Comparison Between English and Chinese: A Perspective of Curse Words

### 2.1. Overview

Curse words are prevalent in both English and Chinese languages, encompassing a wide range of expressions. These words are frequently employed to convey negative emotions such as boredom, depression, dissatisfaction, and anger, which are universally experienced by individuals across different cultures. Thus, there are certain commonalities in the use of curse words. However, it is important to recognize that cultural disparities between English-speaking and Chinese-speaking countries and regions give rise to significant differences in the nature and usage of curse words in the two languages. Therefore, before delving into translation strategies for curse words, it is essential to examine the shared and distinct characteristics of curse words in English and Chinese.

### 2.2. Common Features

#### 2.2.1. Offensiveness

Curse words inherently possess the quality of being offen-

sive within specific cultural contexts, often containing elements of taboo [1, 14]. For instance, the word "street" (街, jiē) in both English and Mandarin Chinese does not function as a curse word, as it lacks any taboo connotations. However, in Cantonese, it can potentially acquire the status of a curse word under certain cultural circumstances (e.g., 扑街, pū jiē, meaning "poor guy"), although this aspect falls beyond the scope of this study. Similarly, the word "method" (方法, fāng fǎ) is highly unlikely to be considered a curse word, as it not only lacks offensiveness in both English and Chinese but is also commonly used in formal and academic contexts without any extended meanings that would categorize it as a curse word in either language.

Conversely, the word "shit" (屎, shǐ) serves as a curse word in both English and Chinese due to its inherent offensiveness when used to compare something to excrement. Notably, certain words considered curse words in English may not hold the same status in Chinese, and vice versa. For instance, the Chinese term 破鞋 (pò xié), which directly translates to "worn shoes" in English, signifies promiscuous women in Chinese. Conversely, the English word "goose" (鹅, é), which solely refers to an animal in Chinese, is commonly employed as a replacement for the term "idiot" in oral communication.

#### 2.2.2. Aggressiveness, Scornfulness, and/or Irony

Cursing, as a linguistic phenomenon, is characterized by its intrinsic attributes of aggression, scorn, and irony, although these emotions may not always be overtly expressed in every context [12]. The selection of curse words is heavily influenced by the social status and educational background of the individual employing them, reflecting the complex interplay between language, social dynamics, and personal characteristics.

Aggressive curse words are commonly employed by males to shout abusive language [5]. When individuals are enraged during quarrels, they tend to unintentionally resort to aggressive curse words. Both English and Chinese languages abound in aggressive curse words, such as "son of a bitch" (王八蛋, wáng bā dàn), "bastard" (混帐, hùn zhàng), and "fuck you" (他妈的, tā mā de). In terms of offensiveness, aggressive curse words are least likely to be used to express positive emotions.

Scornful curse words are primarily utilized by individuals who perceive themselves as superior in terms of social status, talent, and morality. These individuals may intentionally employ scornful curse words to underscore their superiority or unintentionally use them out of contempt. However, due to their belief in their own superiority, they are less inclined to use aggressive curse words, commonly used by the less educated, for fear of tarnishing their personal image. Instead, they employ scornful curse words, which are less offensive than aggressive ones but still unfriendly, such as "chick" (小

丫头, xiǎo yā tou), "loser" (废物, fèi wù), and "peasant" (乡下佬, xiāng xià lǎo). Scornful curse words may be employed to express positive emotions, particularly in conversations between parents and children.

Ironic curse words are the least "curse-like" as they lack explicit vulgarity and some may even appear modest and elegant. Consequently, they may not be immediately identified as curse words at first glance. Nonetheless, they are used to mock people in an implicit and indirect manner. Users of ironic curse words are often well-educated individuals who seek to express negative emotions without damaging their personal image. Some ironic curse words are primarily employed to convey neutral emotions, while others are even used to express positive emotions, such as "mama's baby" (妈宝, mā bǎo), "the princess in the castle" (城堡中的公主, chéng bǎo zhōng de gōng zhǔ), and "model worker" (劳动模范, láo dòng mó fàn). Thus, the offensiveness of ironic curse words is highly context-dependent.

### 2.2.3. Interlingual Similarities Between Chinese and English Curse Words

Cursing, as a linguistic phenomenon, encompasses a range of offensive language that exists within a given linguistic system and is widely accepted as offensive [12]. Across languages such as English and Chinese, curse words often involve associations with excrement and excretory organs. For instance, phrases like "beat the shit out of sb." (把某人揍出屎来, bǎ mǒu rén zòu chū shǐ lái), "asshole" (混蛋, hún dǎn), and "kiss one's ass" (溜须拍马舔屁股, liū xū pāi mǎ tiǎn pì gu) exhibit similar expressions and meanings in both languages. This shared association with bodily waste reflects a common tendency to draw upon taboo subjects to convey strong emotions or to express contempt.

Furthermore, curse words frequently involve references to animals, which are often regarded as inferior to humans. This usage serves to denigrate individuals by likening them to animals and implying negative qualities or behaviors. In both English and Chinese, examples such as "beast" (畜牲, chù shēng), "pig" (猪, zhū), and "foolish donkey" (蠢驴, chǔn lú) are employed to describe someone immoral, ignorant, or stupid, respectively. These animal-related curse words exhibit similarities in their expression and meanings across the two languages.

In addition to bodily functions and animals, curse words can target specific social or ethnic groups. These derogatory terms are associated with flagrant social groups, such as "street walker" (站街女, zhàn jiē nǚ), "rascal" (地痞, dì pǐ), and "backstabber" (阴险小人, yīn xiǎn xiǎo rén), as well as discriminated social groups, such as "home wrecker" (小三, xiǎo sān), "negro" (黑鬼, hēi guǐ), and "nerd" (书呆子, shū dāi zi). The use of curse words to target these groups reflects underlying prejudices and discrimination within society.

## 2.3. Differences

### 2.3.1. Religious Influence

In English, a notable feature of curse words is the presence of Christian elements. Words such as "devil," "hell," "heaven," and "damn" are commonly used as curse words. For instance, in situations where one is being bullied, they might exclaim, "God damn it!" Similarly, when annoyed by someone, an individual might say, "Let the devil take you!" These Christian elements can be used in a variety of ways, including as mere emphatic components without concrete meanings. For example, when one intends to make someone leave, they might say, "Get the hell out of here!"

However, it is worth noting that Chinese curse words are not as closely associated with religious elements. While English has a rich tradition of using Christian-related terms in cursing, Chinese curse words tend to draw upon different sources for their offensive vocabulary. The absence of explicit religious references in Chinese cursing can be attributed to the dominant religious and cultural traditions in China, where Confucianism, Taoism, and Buddhism have historically played more significant roles.

### 2.3.2. Cultural Influence

Ancestor worship holds a significant place within the Chinese cultural system [13]. As a result, a notable aspect of curse words in Chinese is their association with seniority and familial relationships. Terms such as "ancestor" (祖宗, zǔ zōng), "grandson" (孙子, sūn zi), and "grandfather" (爷爷, yé ye), which are rarely employed as curse words in English, are commonly used in a derogatory manner in Chinese. For instance, when a Chinese individual is being bullied, they might exclaim, "Fuck your 18 generations of ancestors (操你十八辈祖宗, cāo nǐ shí bā bèi zǔ zōng)!" Similarly, when annoyed by someone, an individual might say, "You grandson, shut up (你这孙子, 闭嘴, nǐ zhè sūn zi, bì zuǐ)!" This linguistic phenomenon reflects the deeply rooted influence of filial piety culture in China.

The prevalence of curse words related to ancestors and grandchildren in Chinese can be attributed to the cultural significance of filial piety, which emphasizes respect for one's elders and ancestors. Within this cultural framework, insulting or disrespecting one's ancestors or seniors is considered highly offensive. Thus, curse words that invoke familial relationships and seniority can be particularly potent in Chinese discourse.

It is important to note that while the tradition of filial piety worship may not be as prominent as it once was in China, these curse words still persist within the Chinese language system. It is noteworthy that such curse words are not limited to use by older generations but are also commonly employed by the younger demographic.

## 3. Translation Strategies: Curse Words Between English and Chinese

### 3.1. Common Translation Strategies

#### 3.1.1. Literal Translation

Literal translation, also known as word-for-word translation, is indeed a common translation strategy used between languages such as English and Chinese, except in cases where significant cultural differences require a different approach. In some instances, curse words in English and Chinese share similar meanings and usage, making it acceptable to translate them between the two languages using the strategy of literal translation.

For example, the Chinese curse word "小娘养的"(xiǎo niáng yǎng de) can be translated as "son of the bitch" in English. While literal translation may seem to be the most faithful and accurate approach, it is important to consider the perspectives of authoritative organizations such as the Chartered Institute of Linguists (CIoL) and UNESCO. They emphasize that extreme literal translation can result in unnatural expressions that hinder readability, despite its accuracy [15].

To a significant extent, this limitation arises because literal translation often fails to capture the extended meanings and cultural connotations present in the source texts. Curse words, like many other linguistic expressions, are embedded within specific cultural contexts and carry nuanced implications. A purely literal translation may overlook these cultural nuances, resulting in an inaccurate or unnatural rendering of the original meaning.

#### 3.1.2. Free Translation

Free translation, also referred to as "sense-for-sense translation," is a translation strategy that prioritizes conveying the intended meaning rather than adhering strictly to the literal words or structure of the source text. It embodies the ideology of paraphrase, aiming to capture the essence and communicative intent of the original text. In the context of curse words, free translation allows for the adaptation of the curse word in the target language based on its offensive or socially accepted connotations.

The literal meanings of curse words in one language may not carry the same level of offensiveness or be widely recognized as curse words in another language. Therefore, when translating curse words, it is often more appropriate to employ free translation to convey the intended impact and offensive nature of the original curse word. For instance, the Chinese curse word "臭婊子"(chòu biǎo zi) should be translated as "fucking bitch" rather than "smelly bitch" in English. Similarly, the English curse word "ass kisser" should be translated as "马屁精"(mǎ pì jīng) rather than "亲屁股的人"(qīn pì gǔ de rén) in Chinese. These examples demonstrate how free translation allows for the adaptation of curse words

to preserve their offensive nature and cultural significance in the target language.

However, it is important to note that free translation may sometimes result in target texts that deviate from the exact wording or structure of the source text. This is because free translation requires the translator to possess a deep understanding of the linguistic, social, and cultural features of both languages involved in the translation process [8]. It necessitates the translator's ability to navigate the nuances and connotations of curse words in both languages to ensure an accurate and effective transfer of meaning.

#### 3.1.3. Calque

Calque, also known as loan translation, is a translation strategy that involves borrowing synonyms or expressions from another language and incorporating them into the target language. It can sometimes be challenging to distinguish calque from literal translation, as calque allows translators to utilize phrases that closely resemble word-for-word translations. This approach enables translators to achieve equivalence in meaning, rather than solely focusing on faithfulness and expressiveness.

For instance, the English curse word "mama's baby" can be translated into the Chinese curse word "妈宝"(mā bǎo). While this is a calque, it may be mistaken for a literal translation by those who are unfamiliar with Chinese culture. Chinese, being open to borrowing words from other languages, commonly employs calque as an approach to achieve equivalence in Chinese-English translation [16].

However, calque also allows for synonyms that may appear entirely different from the original phrases. For example, the Chinese curse word "老鼠的儿子会打洞"(lǎo shǔ de ér zi huì dǎ dòng) should be translated as "like father like son" rather than "a mouse's son can dig a hole." Similarly, the English curse phrase "talk of the devil and he comes" should be translated as "说曹操，曹操到"(shuō cáo cāo, cáo cāo dào) rather than "说魔鬼，魔鬼到"(shuō mó guǐ, mó guǐ dào). Calque is frequently employed in translating slang, idioms, proverbs, and curse words.

#### 3.1.4. Omission and Addition

Omission and addition are integral components of the free translation strategy, as discussed by House [10]. In certain contexts, a faithful and complete translation of source texts may result in lengthy or idiosyncratic paragraphs that risk boring or confusing readers. To maintain essential meanings and expressiveness while ensuring readability, omission becomes necessary. It involves selectively excluding certain elements or details from the translation while still conveying the core message effectively.

Conversely, literal translation can sometimes fall short in capturing the entirety of information conveyed in the source text. In such cases, addition is required to supplement the translation and ensure that important details are not lost. By

incorporating additional information or explanations, translators aim to reduce reliance on footnotes or other supplementary materials that may hinder the reading experience.

## 3.2. A Dream of Red Mansions

### 3.2.1. Brief Introduction

*A Dream of Red Mansions*, authored by Cao Xueqin, is a renowned literary work from the Qing dynasty in China. This novel chronicles the rise and fall of the Jia Family, depicting their journey from opulence to sudden decline. While the novel itself may not abound in curse words, their usage within it is characterized by vividness and expressiveness. Moreover, owing to its status as one of the most celebrated Chinese classics, numerous English translations of the novel exist, providing readers with a range of options. Consequently, this novel serves as a fitting choice for the examination of the translation of curse words from Chinese to English.

### 3.2.2. Curse Words: Examples

It is important to highlight that the publication of *A Dream of Red Mansions* under consideration contains a substantial amount of Tongjia words. Tongjia refers to a linguistic practice commonly employed in Chinese classics, wherein certain inelegant phrases are replaced with more refined expressions. While this publication remains relatively faithful to the original work in terms of its structure and contents, the inclusion of Tongjia words serves to enhance the literary quality of the text.

Extract. 1

“你快夹着你那毡嘴离了这里……我要不得脸，败了时，你们把王八脖子一缩……” [3]

“Why don't you take your bloody trap out of here?...If I don't, if I'm a failure, oh, you'll just draw your tortoise-head back into your tortoise-shell...” [9]

When *Faithful* (鸳鸯)'s sister-in-law offered to marry her to a noble, she raged at this unwelcome guest using some extremely aggressive curse words. Hawkes employs both literal and free translation strategies in translating this text. The former part of this text can be literally translated into ‘Why not get out of here with your fucking mouth shut?’, but Hawkes uses the phrase ‘bloody trap’ to make the translation more expressive without impairing faithfulness, and thus contributes to the readability of target texts. However, Hawkes literally translates the latter part, because the image of tortoise reminds both English and Chinese speakers of coward, and thus literal translation is not difficult for readers to understand. Based on this example, it can be seen that a translator must select from literal and free translation strategies for curse words, in accordance with the potential contribution to expressiveness and readability. When free translation contributes much to the expressiveness without impairing faithfulness, it is unnecessary and unwise to stick to

the strategy of literal translation for the sake of absolute faithfulness. On the contrary, when literal translation is sufficient in achieving expressiveness, neither is it necessary to pursue free translation.

Extract. 2

“我们臊屁股不臊，管你毡相干？横竖没臊你的爹罢了！……” [3]

“Whether we fuck arseholes or not,” he said, “what fucking business is it of yours? You should be bloody grateful we haven't fucked your dad...” [9]

When accused of anal sex, *Tealeaf* (茗烟) was too irritated not to shout at *Jin* (金荣). Hawkes employs free translation strategy, using “fucking” rather than “cock”, “dick”, or anything alike. This is because the curse word “毡” is actually no more than an intensive particle in the source text, rather than an actual existence or a metaphor. Hawkes uses the curse word “fucking”, which is a common intensive particle in English, in the target text, achieving even higher faithfulness than that literal translation. From this example, it can be seen that free translation is sometimes even more faithful than literal translation in translating curse words, depending on the role of a curse word in the source text. A translator that is familiar with the idiomatic curse words from both languages is able to achieve equivalence in translation.

Extract. 3

“你们这班糊涂王八崽子，我不在家……” [3]

“You pack of misbegotten curs! While I was away...” [9]

This is what *Jia Lian* (贾琏) shouted at his servants who had disobeyed his orders. The curse word “糊涂王八崽子” can be literally translated into “stupid bastards”, but Hawkes uses “misbegotten curs”. The difference between the two expressions is actually implicit but determinant. The curse word “cur” refers to a mad dog which bites anyone it encounters. Considering the contexts, *Jia Lian* was actually accusing his servants of disloyalty and recklessness, rather than foolishness. Thus, the word “stupid” is inevitably unfaithful to the source text. The use of the word “misbegotten” retains the meaning of “bastard”, and the curse word “cur” does vividly portray the disloyalty and recklessness of servants. Hawkes uses a noun for the translation of an adjective, and an adjective for the translation of a noun, achieving faithfulness and expressiveness in translation. From this example, it can be seen that both faithfulness and expressiveness of curse word translation depends on complete comprehension of the contextual factors of the source texts rather than extended meanings only. In specific, literal translation is not always faithful to the source text under specific contexts. The use of curse words in Chinese is often casual and random, without carefully considering the meanings of them. As the consequence, a translator must take contexts into consideration in translating curse words to avoid wrongly employing literal translation strategy.

Extract. 4

“……骂那些浪娼妇们一顿，也是好的。”又指贾环道：

“呸！你这下流没刚性的……” [3]

“...It's a golden opportunity to go and tell these little hussies exactly what he thinks of them.” She pointed at Jia Huan scornfully. “Pah! Spineless creature!” [9]

Jia Huan (贾环)'s mother was angry with the arrogance the maids had shown, as well as the cowardice responses of her son. The literal translation of the Chinese curse word “浪娼妇们” is simply “bitches”. However, this translation is neither faithful nor expressive. On one hand, the literal meaning of “浪娼妇们” is technically “slutty women”, but Jia Huan's mother did actually accuse of these maids of arrogant and disrespectful, rather than slutty behaviors. In other words, the curse word is no more than an idiomatic expression without considering meanings. On the other hand, the curse word “bitch” in English is also too commonly used to convey specific information such as arrogance and impoliteness. Thus, Hawkes translates this curse word into “little hussies”, who are commonly referred to as rude, impolite, and undereducated. Similarly, the literal translation of “你这下流没刚性的” is simply “you dirty, cowardice guy”. However, Jia Huan's mother did actually regard her son as humble and undignified. Thus, Hawkes uses the curse word “spineless creature” to achieve complete faithfulness and expressiveness. From this example, it can be seen that word-for-word Chinese-English translation does sometimes end up complete mistranslation. Translators must consider the emotions, contexts, and interpersonal relationships.

Extract. 5

“.....直叫她是个‘母蝗虫’就是了。” [3]

“... ‘Old Mother Locust’ we ought to call her, not ‘Grannie Liu.’” [9]

Dai-yu (黛玉) called Grannie Liu (刘姥姥) an “old mother locust”, who was an old, undereducated country woman. Hawkes employs the strategy of literal translation for this source text. On one hand, Dai-yu compared Grannie Liu to a locust, showing scornful attitudes that are not dependent on contexts. On the other hand, a locust is considered to be footy, negligible, and annoying amongst both English and Chinese speakers. Thus, a literal translation is sufficient. From this example, it can be seen that literal translation is sufficient in achieving expressiveness when the literally translated curse words in the target text have similar extended meanings with those in the source text.

Extract. 6

贾母笑道：“你不认得她，她是我们这里有名的一个泼辣货……。” [3]

“You don't know her,” said Grandmother Jia merrily. “She's a holy terror this one....” [9]

This is the first time Dai-yu met Feng (王熙凤), her sister-in-law, so Grandmother Jia (贾母) introduced Feng to Dai-yu. However, Grandmother Jia called Feng “泼辣货”, which has the literal meaning of “shrew” in English. Hawkes uses “a holy terror” instead of “shrew”, reducing

the aggressiveness, because Grandmother Jia did not actually mean to describe Feng as a rude and impolite woman, but underline her activeness and momentum. From this example, it can be seen that even some considerably aggressive curse words in Chinese can be used in expressing some positive emotions and attitudes. Under such contexts, literal translation is inevitably unsuitable.

Extract. 7

“.....都是侄儿一时吃了屎……。” [3]

“I must have been out of my mind....” [9]

Jia Rong (贾蓉) was apologizing with his knees on the ground to Feng (王熙凤). The Chinese curse word “吃了屎” has multiple extended meanings such as “end up a failure”, “get humiliated”, “wrongly select the worst”, and “suffer transient foolishness”. For this source text, it is evident that the last extended meaning is embodied. However, the English curse word “eat shit” has completely different extended meanings, such as “behave in an undignified way” and “surrender to me”. Thus, literal translation is unsuitable. Hawkes employs the strategy of free translation and translates it into “out of mind”, achieving equivalency in translation.

Extract. 8

“.....如今惯的比祖宗还大！.....” [3]

“... she is as spoiled and pampered as though she were some sort of divinity....” [9]

Bao-yu (宝玉) was so annoyed by his wet nurse in the childhood as to shout. The literal translation of his curse words “比祖宗还大” is “more honorable than ancestors”. However, Hawkes replaces the word “ancestors” with “divinity”, because ancestor worship is not prominent amongst English speakers, who might find it difficult to understand curse words containing elements of ancestor worship. From this example, it can be seen that cultural difference must be considered before an understandable translation can be delivered.

Extract. 9

李贵道：“小祖宗，谁敢望‘请’……。” [3]

“Little ancestor,” Li Gui replied, “nobody's looking for treats...” [9]

Li Gui (李贵) was begging his lord for mercy, so the curse word he used did actually express some ironic emotions with the least offensiveness. Although elements of ancestor worship are also found in the curse words from this text, Hawkes employs the strategy of literal translation. This is because the phrase “little ancestor” delivers some irony that even English speakers can sense without knowing much about Chinese cultures. From this example, it can be seen that the strategy of literal translation is still the first choice as long as expressiveness can be achieved.

## 4. Findings

The analysis of curse words within Chinese-English trans-

lation highlights the importance of considering the emotions conveyed in the source text. Ljung [14] emphasizes that individuals often use different words to express their emotions, irrespective of their literal meanings. Curse words can be employed to express neutral emotions, where their usage becomes habitual and detached from their negative or positive connotations. For instance, when someone exclaims, "Blast it, what a long river!" they are expressing surprise, which is neither explicitly negative nor positive, but rather a result of the habitual use of curse words.

Furthermore, the inclusion of curse words by teenagers, such as "fuck," "fucking," or "hump," in their remarks can be indiscriminate and unrelated to specific circumstances. In these cases, the use of curse words is often an attempt to attract attention rather than convey specific emotions. It is worth noting that curse words can also be employed to express positive emotions. For example, when a mother sees her child cut his finger with a knife and exclaims, "You rogue! Look what you have done!" she is actually expressing care and concern for her child. In this context, the curse word is used due to the mother's heightened worry about the child's injury.

Moreover, the interpretation of curse words heavily depends on various contextual factors, including circumstances and the social status, educational background, and relationship between the speaker and the listener [14]. Curse words do not necessarily convey their literal meanings. Therefore, when using curse words to express different emotions, particularly positive ones, it is crucial to consider these social and cultural factors. For instance, if a girl affectionately says to her close friend, "Bitch, you almost gave me a heart attack!" it is unlikely to lead to conflict since no offense is intended and the friend is unlikely to perceive it as offensive. However, if a woman says the same phrase to a stranger, "Bitch, you are standing in my way!" it is highly likely to result in a confrontation since curse words are seldom used between strangers to express positive emotions.

In the context of neutral emotions, when a courier exclaims, "Fuck, what a heavy box!" the client may feel offended to some extent. Therefore, the use of curse words is widespread, common, abundant, and highly complex, making it challenging for translators to employ a single translation strategy.

It is recommended for the Chinese-English translators, especially those who often translate literary works, to take the following procedures in translating curse words as follows:

- 1) Understand the literal meaning of the curse word;
- 2) Think of the extended meanings;
- 3) Consider the contextual influence on the meaning;
- 4) Check if calque is possible:
  - a) if not, Check if literal translation achieves faithfulness and expressiveness;
  - b) if not, Employ the free translation strategy;
- 5) Check if omission and/or addition is necessary;

- 6) Write down the target text;
- 7) Review the translation for possible defects due to cultural differences and idiomatic expressions whose meanings cover a wide range.

## 5. Conclusion

The accurate and expressive translation of curse words from Chinese to English requires Chinese-English translators to possess a deep understanding of both cultural systems. The usage of curse words in Chinese is characterized by intricate emotions, rich extended meanings, distinct cultural features, and a strong reliance on contextual factors. Consequently, translators must consider all these aspects to avoid mistranslation and effectively convey the intended meaning. By familiarizing themselves with the literal and extended meanings of curse words, translators can grasp the emotions embedded in the source text and account for contextual nuances. Thus, extensive reading of curse words in various Chinese literary works, accompanied by a comprehensive study of Chinese culture, becomes essential for Chinese-English translators.

When direct translation (calque) is not feasible, the strategy of literal translation remains the primary choice in rendering curse words. However, literal translation often falls short in achieving both expressiveness and faithfulness. As a result, free translation, which allows for occasional omission and addition, is more commonly employed. In such cases, translators must exercise their linguistic and cultural competence to capture the intended emotional impact of the curse words.

The procedures recommended in this report hold implications for Chinese-English translators dealing with curse words. By incorporating a comprehensive understanding of Chinese culture and literature, translators can navigate the complexities of curse word translation more effectively. This approach enables them to strike a balance between faithfulness to the source text and the expressive power of the translated curse words.

In conclusion, the translation of curse words from Chinese to English requires translators to possess a deep knowledge of both linguistic and cultural aspects. The strategies of literal translation, free translation, and the careful consideration of contextual factors are vital in achieving faithful and expressive translations. The recommendations presented in this report offer valuable insights for Chinese-English translators, guiding them in their endeavor to accurately convey the emotional nuances of curse words while maintaining cultural sensitivity and linguistic effectiveness.

## Author Contributions

Yang Chen is the sole author. The author read and approved the final manuscript.

## Conflicts of Interest

The authors declare no conflicts of interest.

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