

Monkey King: Journey to the West Lesson Plan 2
Examining Translation
Created by Emily Pearson

Overview:

The second lesson will ask students to consider how the translator’s choices influence the way readers understand *Monkey King*. The lesson will open with a class discussion of the text’s tone before moving into a brief lesson on translation studies. The class will end with an activity that asks students to compare an excerpt from Lovell’s translation of *Monkey King* with a corresponding excerpt from Andrew Yu’s unabridged translation.

Objectives:

By the end of the lesson, students will be able to:

- Identify the different equivalencies that translators may chose and articulate how those choices may shape a translation.
- Compare two different translations of *Monkey King: Journey to the West* and discuss how the translators’ choices change the experience of reading the text.

Class Structure:

2 minutes: Framing activity

- Present students with the following passages. The first is the original text of a Tang dynasty era poem by Wang Wei. The second is a character-by-character translation of the same poem (Weinberger 2-4).

<p>1 (text)</p> <p style="text-align: center;">鹿柴</p> <p style="text-align: center;">空山不見人， 但聞人語響， 返景入深林， 復照青苔上。</p>	<p>3 (character-by-character translation)</p> <table style="width: 100%; border-collapse: collapse;"> <tr> <td style="width: 10%;">Empty</td> <td style="width: 20%;">mountain(s) hill(s)</td> <td style="width: 10%;">(negative)</td> <td style="width: 10%;">to see</td> <td style="width: 10%;">person people</td> </tr> <tr> <td>But</td> <td>to hear</td> <td>person people</td> <td>words conversation</td> <td>sound to echo</td> </tr> <tr> <td>To return</td> <td>bright(ness) shadow(s)*</td> <td>to enter</td> <td>deep</td> <td>forest</td> </tr> <tr> <td>To return Again</td> <td>to shine to reflect</td> <td>green blue black</td> <td>moss lichen</td> <td>above on (top of) top</td> </tr> </table>	Empty	mountain(s) hill(s)	(negative)	to see	person people	But	to hear	person people	words conversation	sound to echo	To return	bright(ness) shadow(s)*	to enter	deep	forest	To return Again	to shine to reflect	green blue black	moss lichen	above on (top of) top
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- After students familiarize themselves with the original text and the character-by-character translation, present them with the following passages (all are translations of the same 8th-century poem by Wang Wei):

Passage A

So lone seem the hills; there is no one in sight there.
But whence is the echo of voices I hear?

The ray of the sunset pierce slanting the forest,
And in their reflection green mosses appear. (W.J.B. Fletcher, 1919)

Passage B

Empty mountain: no man is seen,
But voices of men are heard.
Sun's reflection reaches into the woods
And shines upon the green moss. (Wai-lim Yip, 1972)

Passage C

Empty mountain:
no one to be seen.
Yet—hear—
human sounds and echoes.
Returning sunlight
Enters the dark woods;
Again shining
on the green moss, above. (Gary Snyder, 1978)

- Ask students what the three passages have in common and how they differ from the character-by-character translation. Then, use their answers to spark a discussion of the importance of translators' choices.

13 minutes: Introduction to translation studies

- Remind students that we are reading a *translation* of a very old text, and that a translator must make certain authoritative calls on how to represent the text. Ask students what they think a good translation *should do*. If possible, list their answers on the board.
- Point out that translation is sometimes (incorrectly) seen as a simple task: “Translation has been perceived as a secondary activity, as a ‘mechanical’ rather than a ‘creative’ process, within the competence of anyone with a basic grounding in a language other than their own; in short, as a low status occupation” (Bassnett 13).
 - Ask students how they think of the task of translating.
- While translators often try to keep their renditions close to the original, this requires making decisions about what features of the original text to prioritize. Bassnett identifies four types of equivalencies in translation, which cannot all be prioritized (Bassnett 33)
 - *Linguistic equivalence*: word for word translation
 - *Paradigmatic equivalence*: equivalent elements of grammar
 - *Stylistic equivalence*: functional equivalence of elements in both original and translation aiming at an expressive identity with an invariant of identity meaning
 - *Textual equivalence*: equivalence of form and shape
- Return to the students' list of what a good translation should do. Ask them which expectations may be at odds with one another. Ask what they would prioritize if they were translating something. Finally, ask them what they think Lovell's translation of *Monkey King* might be prioritizing.

15 minutes: Small-group close reading of a passage from Lovell's translation

- Place students in group of 3-4 and have them to reread Monkey and Tripitaka's first encounter:

Back at the foot of the mountain, they discovered—as advertised—a stone casket containing a monkey; his head and hands had squeezed through the gaps, and he was gesticulating wildly. “What took you so long, master? Get me out of here, and I’ll keep you safe on your journey to the west.” The monkey was not looking his best: his eyes blazed above hollow cheeks; his head was carpeted with lichen, grass, and moss; wisteria was growing out of his ears.

Boqin got close enough to pluck some of the grass from his temples and the sedge from his chin. “I’ve nothing to say to you,” Monkey informed him saltily. “But send that monk over here.”

“What for?” Tripitaka asked.

“I’ve got some questions for you. Did the King of the East send you to seek scriptures in the west?”

“He did indeed. Why do you ask?”

“I am the Great Sage Equal to Heaven. Five hundred years ago I rebelled against the Jade Emperor and the Buddha pinned me underneath this mountain as punishment. A while back, Guanyin stopped by on her journey east to find a scripture pilgrim. She said that if I swear off violence, worship the Law of the Buddha, and escort the scripture pilgrim to the west, the Buddha will reward me. I’ve been watching and waiting for you ever since,”

Tripitaka beamed. “Well, that’s wonderful. But how can I release you from this stone box? I have no ax or drill?”

“Easy. The Buddha stuck a plaque on top of the mountain engraved in gold. Lift that up, and out I pop.” (121-122)

- Ask students to answer the following questions:
 - What happens in this scene?
 - Describe the key players. Who are they? What do they look like? How do they interact?
 - What is the tone of this scene? What are some specific words or phrases that helped you determine the tone?

15 minutes: Small-group close reading of a passage from another translation

- Present the small groups with Tripitaka and Monkey's meeting from Anthony Yu's unabridged translation:

Tripitaka had to agree and led his horse down the mountain. They had traveled only a few miles when they came upon a stone box in which there was indeed a monkey who, with his head sticking out, was waving his hands wildly and crying, “Master, why have you taken so long to get here? Welcome! Welcome! Get me out, and I’ll protect you on your way to the Western Heaven!” The priest went forward to look more closely at him. “How does he look?” you ask.

*A pointed mouth and hollow cheeks;
Two diamond pupils and fiery eyes.
Lichens had piled on his head;
Wisteria grew in his ears.*

*By his temples was more green glass than hair;
 Beneath his chin, moss instead of beard.
 With mud on his brow,
 And earth in his nose,
 He looked most desperate!
 His fingers coarse
 And calloused palms
 Were caked in filth and dirt!
 Luckily, his eye could still roll about,
 And the apish tongue, articulate.
 Though in speech he had great ease,
 His body he could not move.
 He was the Great Sage Sun of five hundred years ago.
 Today his ordeal ends, he leaves Heaven's net.*

Undeniably, a courageous person, the Guardian Lui went up to the creature and pulled away some of the grass at his temples and the moss beneath his chin. He asked, "What do you have to say?" "Nothing to you," said the monkey, "but ask that master to come up here. I have a question for him."

"What's your question?" asked Tripitaka. "Are you someone sent by the great king of the Land of the East to go seek scriptures in the Western Heaven?" asked the monkey. "I am," said Tripitaka. "Why do you ask?"

"I am the Great Sage Equal to Heaven," said the monkey, "who greatly disturbed the Heavenly Palace five hundred years ago. Because of my sin of rebellion and disobedience, I was imprisoned here by the Buddha. Some time ago, a certain Bodhisattva Huanyin had received the decree of Buddha to go to the Land of the East in quest of a scripture pilgrim. I asked her to give me some help, and she persuaded me not to engage again in violence. I was told to believe in the Law of Buddha and faithfully to protect the scripture pilgrim on his way to worship the Buddha in the West, for there would be a goodly reward reserved for me when such merit is achieved. I have therefore been maintaining my vigilance night and day, waiting for the Master to come to rescue me. I'm willing to protect you in your quest of scripture and become your disciple.

When Tripitaka heard these words, he was filled with delight and said, "Though you have this good intention, thanks to the Bodhisattva's instruction, of entering our Buddhist fold, I have neither ax nor drill. How can I free you?" "No need for ax or drill," said the monkey. "If you are willing to rescue me, I'll be able to get out." Tripitaka said, "I'm willing, but how can you get out?" "On top of this mountain," said the monkey, "there is a tag stamped with the golden letters of our Buddha Tathāgata. Go up there and lift the tag. Then I'll come out." (307-308)

- Ask students to answer the following questions in their small groups:
 - What happens in this scene?
 - Describe the key players. Who are they? What do they look like? How do they interact?

- What is the tone of this scene? What are some specific words or phrases that helped you determine the tone?

30 minutes: Class Discussion

- Bring the class back together, and ask them the following questions:
 - What changes about the key players between Lovell and Yu's translations?
 - Are there any major differences in what *happens* in the scene between the two translations?
 - How does the tone differ between translations?
 - What details, if any, does Lovell omit in abridging this scene?
 - In what ways are these two texts equivalent? [It may be useful to remind students of the equivalencies covered at the beginning of class]

Sources:

Bassnet, Susan. *Translation Studies*. 3rd ed. Routledge, 2002.

Lovell, Julia, translator. *Monkey King: Journey to the West*. By Wu Cheng'en. Penguin, 2021.

Weinberger, Eliot, editor. *Nineteen Ways of Looking at Wang Wei: How a Chinese Poem is Translated*. Mt. Kisco: Moyer Bell Limited, 1987.

Yu, Anthony C., translator. *The Journey to the West*. By Cheng'en Wu. Vol. 1, revised ed., University of Chicago Press, 2012.