Early Practice of Chinese Europeanized Grammar—Take the Plural of the First-Person Pronoun in The Pilgrim’s Progress in Mandarin as an Example

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The Pilgrim’s Progress in Mandarin translated by the British missionary William Chalmers Burns in the 1860s is regarded as one of the typical representatives of the early Europeanized vernacular texts. Compared with the ancient vernacular, the frequency of the inclusive usage of “wômen” has increased significantly, which is directly influenced by the plural usage of first-person pronoun in English. Tracking back the origin of Chinese Europeanized grammar is an important part of the study of modern Chinese grammar, which not only is helpful to have a clear understanding of the characteristic of Europeanized grammar in the pre-development stage of modern Chinese, but also can lay a certain foundation for the comparative study of Europeanized grammar in different periods. In addition, this study can also provide linguistic basis for investigating the influence of western missionaries’ Chinese translation on the formation of new literature.

Keywords: The Pilgrim’s Progress in Mandarin, the plural of the first-person pronoun, Europeanized grammar

Introduction

It is generally believed that the mature modern vernacular Chinese is gradually formed and developed rapidly after the May 4th. Meanwhile, the Standard Mandarin has also undergone remarkable development, including the emergence and development of many phenomena known as Europeanized grammar. Based on this understanding, since the 1940s, most of the academic research on Chinese Europeanized grammar has taken the language materials since the May 4th Movement as the research object.

In recent years, with the gradual deepening of the research, people began to rethink and reexamine the origin of the Europeanized vernacular, to discuss when and how the ancient vernacular was transformed into the Europeanized vernacular; awareness is obtained as follows:

After continuous translation and integration, probably after the 1860s, the ancient vernacular gradually withdrew from the historical stage of missionary translation, and the Europeanized vernacular began to appear. These texts are the earliest Europeanized vernacular texts and the earliest vernacular literature. (Yuan, 2007, pp. 123-128)

The Pilgrim’s Progress in Mandarin which was translated by the British missionary William Chalmers Burns and published in the 1960s is the typical representatives of the above-mentioned early Europeanized vernacular texts.
Lai Tsz Pang John has a very direct and clear statement:

This work not only reflects the well acknowledge of the translator’s Chinese, but also clearly reflects the traces of English-speaking translators’ Europeanization of Chinese. It is actually an excellent model of studying the Mandarin in the late Qing Dynasty, the evolution of Chinese and the source of vernacular literature in the 20th century. (2012, p. 188)

Taking the relevant plural usage of first-person pronouns in the text as an example, through comparison with the ancient vernacular text represented both by *A Dream of Red Mansions* and *The Tale of Heroic Sons and Daughters* and the later translation which has a great influence by Xi Hai, this paper preliminarily discusses the features of Europeanized grammar in *The Pilgrim’s Progress* in Mandarin and the value of its study.

**The Increase of the Frequency of Inclusive Usage of “Wǒmen” and Its Reason**

Wang Li (1958 [2015, p. 267]) claims that, by the late pre-modern period, “wǒmen” and “zānmen” had a clear division; the former is exclusive, not including the interlocutor; the latter is inclusive, including the interlocutor. In the brief table drawn by Taitian Chenfu (1958 [2003, pp. 103-104]), the above difference still exists between them until the Qing Dynasty.² Lv Shuxiang and Jiang Lansheng (1985, pp. 64-66) also hold that they are exclusive and inclusive respectively; namely, the former includes “wǒ” and the third party, and is opposite to you. The latter includes you and “wǒ (men)”, and is opposed to the third party. Meanwhile, Lv Shuxiang and Jiang Lansheng (1985, pp. 64-66) also pointed out that in the Northern Mandarin, people who read a little often think that “zānmen” is too vulgar, and use “wǒmen” to instead it.

The usage of “wǒmen” has changed in modern Chinese: Generally, “zānmen” includes the interlocutor; “wǒmen” doesn’t include the interlocutor; however, “wǒmen” can include the interlocutor on some occasions.³ Wang Li (1958 [2015, p. 267]) also pointed out that in modern Beijing dialect, someone uses “wǒmen” to include the interlocutor. If the above is relatively vague, the following statement is very clear. Zhang Bin (2010, p. 186) believed that “wǒmen” can be used in both the exclusive and inclusive; “zānmen” cannot be used in the exclusion. Zhang further pointed out that in terms of style, “wǒmen” is a universal style and “zānmen” is a colloquial style, which is generally not used in formal occasions. Lv Shuxiang and Jiang Lansheng (1985, p. 66) also believed that nowadays there are many people, maybe most of whom often use “zānmen” in their daily talk, and “wǒmen” in a formal way, and use “wǒmen” to replace “zānmen” in giving a speech or writing an article.

**The Increase of the Frequency of Inclusive Usage of “Wǒmen”**

According to whether the interlocutor is included or not, and the semantic connotation of “wǒmen” in the specific context, we investigate its usage in the four texts, and the results are as follows:

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¹ There are more than 130,000 characters in *The Pilgrim’s Progress* in Mandarin; in order to make precise comparison, on the basis of relative coherent content of the texts, we extracted roughly the same amount of samples from *A Dream of Red Mansions* and *The Tale of Heroic Sons and Daughters*; the former is from Chapter 15 to 31 (about 134,000 characters) and the latter is from Chapter 14 to 23 (about 138,000 characters). The number of the characters of *The Pilgrim’s Progress* translated by Xi Hai is 175,008, which is a little larger than *The Pilgrim’s Progress* in Mandarin. If the same quantity is selected from it, the integrity of the content will be affected to some extent, and it is not convenient to compare the contents in the two versions; therefore, we did not sample from the Xi Hai translation.

² The Qing Dynasty was based on *A Dream of Red Mansions* and *The Tale of Heroic Sons and Daughters*.

³ Refer to *Modern Chinese Dictionary* (7th edition), p. 1631.
The table shows that there are three main usages of “wōmen”; the first two basically present opposite relationship. Although there are a certain amount inclusive usages of “wōmen” both in *Dream* and *Tale*, its frequency is much lower than exclusive. The inclusive usage has relatively fixed objects, and Jia Zheng and “qingke” mainly use “wōmen” to include interlocutor in *Dream*, and “anlaoye” in *Tale*. The usage of inclusive in *The Pilgrim’s Progress* in Mandarin is different from both *Dream* and *Tale*, which is nearly 15% points higher than exclusive. The frequency of inclusive is nearly 18% points higher than exclusive in the text translated by Xi Hai. It can be seen that the usage of “wōmen” almost shows no difference in the two versions. In view of this, when discussing the specific usage of “wōmen” in *The Pilgrim’s Progress* in Mandarin, the following lists the corresponding content from the text translated by Xi Hai.

Some inclusive usage of “wōmen” includes you apparently in *The Pilgrim’s Progress* in Mandarin, or is opposite to the third part obviously, or includes you and meanwhile is opposite to the third part. These usages are far from the traditional usage of “wōmen” basically, and they are shown as follows:

Firstly, “wōmen” includes you apparently, for example:

(1a) Jīdūtū dào: xiōngdì bié guǎi wǒ…wàng nǐ jiānlìang. Mēitú dào: làoxiōng kěyǐ fāngxīn, wǒ bù guǎi nǐ, wōmen yù zhe zhe kǔnān, dàoliāor bìdìng yǒu yīchǔ, nǐ bù yīhuò. (Burns)

(1b) Jīdūtū shuò: hǎo xiōngdì…yīnwèi wǒ bùshì chūyú āyì. Pànwàng shuò: wǒ de xiōngdì, bié fāngzāixinshàng, wǒ hui yuānlìang nǐ de; èrqǐ wǒ hài xiāngxīn zē jiàn shì dui wōmen hui yǒu yīchǔ de. (Xi Hai)

In 1a, the second and third “nǐ” refer to “jīdūtū”; “wōmen” said by “mēitú” includes “nǐ” apparently. In 1b, “nǐ” refers to the same person as the second and third “nǐ” in 1a; “wōmen” also includes “nǐ”.

Secondly, “wōmen” is opposite to the third part obviously.

(2a) Yìqiān dui guīzhī dào: bié xiāohuā jīdūtū, tā shí hǎorèn, tā de huà ruò shì zhēn de, tā suǒ qiú bì wōmen suǒ qiú de gēng hào, tā shì wǒ de jiēfāng, wǒ xiāng tòng tā yīkuài qù. (Burns)

(2b) Rōushūn dui wāngzhú shuò, bùyào suibiàn mǎ rèn; rúguò jīdūtū shuò de shì zhēnshì de, tā suǒ zhùqì de dōngxi diquè bǐ wōmen de hào; wǒ dào xiāng gēn wǒ de línjū yìqí qù ne. (Xi Hai)

The interlocuter of “yìqiān” and “rōushūn” is “guīzhī” and “wāngzhú” apparently, and the conversation involves the third party, namely “jīdūtū” (tā), and “wōmen” excludes him obviously.

Thirdly, “wōmen” includes you and meanwhile is opposite to the third part.

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4 This is not to say that “wōmen” always includes you when they appear in the sentence at the same time. The basic basis of judgement is whether the “wōmen” said by the speaker includes the interlocutor. “Wōmen” does not include you in the following example: guīzhī dui jīdūtū dào: wǒ bù kān nǐ de shū, wǒ zhì wēn nǐ, kēn hē “wōmen” huí qù bùkèn ne? (Burns)
(3a) Jīdūtú duì jinzhōng shuō, nǐ néng yàfü zhè è, wǒ hěn xǐhuan. Shuō chǐshăn chǐ suō bùdāng chǐ, zhè huà bùcuò, kàn tā cháng chánrào wōmen, jiào wōmen bā zhǔ hé zhù de dàoli, suàn xìchǐ de, kējiàn tā bù zhīchí le.  
(Burns)

(3b) Jīdūtú duì zhōngxin shuō: hào dixiong, nǐ zhèyàng yǒnggǎn de kàngjù zhègè huádān, wǒ zhēn gāoxìng; jiù xiǎng nǐ suǒ shuō de, wǒ rènwèi zài suǒyǒu de rén dāng zhōng, tā de mìngzi zuì bù qiádāng; yǐnwèi tā gānyú zài jiēshàng gēnsuí wōmen, yào shì wōmen zài zhòngrén miànjìān shòu rú; yějūshìshūǒù, yāo shǐ wōmen yī shānghào de shiqīng wèi chǐ. (Xi Hai)

This type covers the first two types. In the above two examples, “wōmen” includes “nǐ” and excludes “tā” at the same time.

In addition to the above usage, “wōmen” and “zānmen” can also appear in the same sentence, which means that the interlocuter is included. For example:

(4a) Jīdūtú duì yǐqiān shuō: nǐ tíng wǒ de huà, yuányī tóng wǒ qù, wǒ xǐhuan de hén. Nà gūzhī tāng nèng xiàng wǒ, xīngwù le wèi jiàn de shiqīng, juéde kēpà, tā yě bìng tíng tóng lái, bùkěn qǐngyì li le wōmen huí qù. Yǐqiān shuō: zānmen liàng gè zài zhèhěi, qǐng nǐ bā wōmen qù de difang zènmeyāng, nǎlǐ de fúqí zènmeyāng, yǒu zènghāng cái néng de nà fúqí, xiǎngxiàngxi shuògěi wǒ tíng. (Burns)

(4b) Jīdūtú shuō: línjū róushùn, nǐ háo ya? Nǐ kěn gēn wǒ yǐqì qù, wǒ hěn gāoxìng. Róuguó wángù duì xiānzáihái kàn bù jiàn de nàxié fēifán de lǐliàng hē kǒngbù gēn wǒ yòu tóngyáng de gānjué dehuā, tā jiù būzhìyú zhèyáng qǐngyì de gēn wōmen fèndáoyángbiāo. Róushùn shuō: línjū jīdūtú, jírán xiānzái zhī yǒu zānmen lià, qǐng nǐ jiù gāosú wǒ, nǐ suǒ shuō de nàxiē dōngxi jiùjīng shì shènme, zènghāng xiǎngyòng tāmēn, háiyǒu, wōmen dàoé de wàng nár qù. (Xi Hai)

According to the above discussion, from the internal point of view, the frequency of the inclusive usage of “wōmen” in The Pilgrim’s Progress in Mandarin occupies an obvious advantage in its all usages; from the external point of view, the frequency of this usage in it is much higher than that in Dream and Tale, which is basically the same as that in the text translated by Xi Hai. This also shows that, this usage has developed mature relatively in The Pilgrim’s Progress in Mandarin.

The Reason of the Increase

The reason why The Pilgrim’s Progress in Mandarin is so different from ancient vernacular is that it is influenced by English to a great extent. According to Swan (2010, p. 639), “we” and “us” can include and exclude listeners and readers. Geoffrey Leech (2013, p. 670) also pointed that “we” (including its object form “us”) refers to the speaker or the writer and others, which may or may not include the listener. Qin Zhanchao (2010, p. 3) held the same view, and it is further pointed out that only in imperative sentences, “le’s” and “let us” have different meanings, and the former includes the interlocutor; the latter excludes the interlocuter. These are the views of English scholars or Chinese scholars engaged in English grammar on the plural of the first-person pronoun in English. In addition, scholars engaged in contrastive study of English and Chinese have the same views; for example, Hu Zhuanglin (2017, p. 66) held that “there is no different pronoun to indicate inclusive or exclusive meaning in English; contrary to this fact, in Chinese ‘zānmen’ is used to imply the inclusive meaning”. Zhao Shikai (1996) pointed out more directly that there are no different personal pronouns to express the meaning of inclusion and exclusion in English. Thus, generally speaking, there is no distinction in inclusion and exclusion
in the plural of the first-person pronoun in English, which is very evident in the translation of ancient vernacular into English, for example:

(5a) Xírén dui bǎoyù lèngxiao dào: “nǐ wèn wǒ, wǒ zhǐdào! Nǐ āi wǎng nǎlǐ qù, jiù wǎng nǎlǐ qù. Cóng jīn zǎnmén liǎng gè diū kāi shǒu, shèng de jī shèng dào dōu, jiào biérén xiào. Héngshù nábiān nǐ le, guò lái zhěbiān yǒu yǒu gè shènhme sīwèr wúfù. Wǒmen zhè qī dōngxi, kěshì bái diànrù le hǎo mǐng hǎo xìng de”. (Dream, Chapter 21)

The corresponding translation of English is:

(5b) “How should I know?” Xiren snorted. “Go wherever you like. We may as well part company from now on, to stop people laughing at our rows and rumpuses. Besides, if you get tired of them over there you’ve a Sier and Wuer here to look after you. The rest of us just a disgrace to our lovely names” (Yang & Yang, 1999)

In 5a, “zánmen” includes “bǎoyù”; however, “wǒmen” excludes him. When translated into English, “we” and “us” are used respectively, without the distinction between inclusion and exclusion.

From the above discussion, we can see that “wǒmen” and “zánmen” have a clear division of labor in ancient vernacular. There are relatively strict boundaries between them. However, the plural of the first-person pronoun corresponding to them in English does not differ from each other. It is precisely in this way that translators are less restricted in translating, thus making that the inclusive usage of “wǒmen” has been used more frequently in The Pilgrim’s Progress in Mandarin.

Let’s look at the following paragraph:

(6a) PLI. The hearing of this is enough to ravish one’s heart...C HR (said to Pliable). The Lord, the governor of the country, hath recorded that in this book; the substance of which is, if we be truly willing to have it, he will bestow it upon us freely. (Bunyan, 1826)

In 6a, “we” and “us” do not include “the lord” and “he”; according to the traditional Chinese expressions and usages, they should be translated into “zánmen”; however, The Pilgrim’s Progress in Mandarin uses “wǒmen” to correspond to them.

(6b) Yìqiān dào: nǐ shuō zhèxiē huà…. Jīdūtú dà dào: nǐ suǒ wèn de, nǎlǐ de zhǔ cénggīng shuō guò, jì zài shū shàng, dàlüè shū, ruò shì wǒmen yuányi qù nà fǔ, zhū bìng bábáier de cì gěi wǒmen. (Burns)

The same goes for example:

(7a) C1HR. Ah, my brother, this is a seasonable sight: it came opportunely to us, after the invitation which Demas gave us, to come over to view the hill Lucre; and had we gone over, as he desired us, and as thou wasn’t inclined to do, my brother, we had, for aught I know, been made, like this woman, a spectacle for those that shall come after to behold.

(7b) Nǎshí jīdūtú (duì měitú) shuō: xiōngdì hē, gāngcái dímā qīng wǒmen1 dào nà cāishān qù, jǐnréng jiān zhègé, zhèng shī shìhòu ge. Tā qīng wǒmen2 qù, nǐ de yìsī xiāng yào qù, tāng wǒmen3 guórán qù le, kǒngpà shàngdì xìngfā wǒmen4, bā wǒmen5, zuò bāngyàng, jīng jiè hǒulái de rèn, xiāng zhè fùrén shìde, yè wèi kě ding. (Burns)

In 7a, all of the “we” and “us” refer to “Christian” and “Hopeful”, and exclude “Demas” (“he”); In 7b, the five “wǒmen” said by “jīdūtú” include “měitú”, and exclude the third part “dímā”. The first three “wǒmen” have exactly the same semantic correspondence with sentence of the first and second “us” and first “we”. Although the sentence of the latter two “wǒmen” is a little far from the original text in semantic, they have the same semantic
direction as the first three, which is inclusive.

In a word, the inclusive usage of “wǒmen” in The Pilgrim’s Progress in Mandarin has been significantly increased, which is directly related to the usage of the plural of the first-person pronoun in English.

The Significance and Value of This Study

It is generally believed that modern Chinese is a heterogeneous and non-homogeneous system. For example, Hu Mingyang (1993, pp. 1-4) pointed out that modern Chinese written language is not formed on the basis of a single spoken dialect point, but is influenced by various factors in its formation process, so its composition is very complicated. There are not only oral components based on Beijing dialect, but also Europeanized written language components, both traditional and archaized dialect components, as well as various dialect components. Thus, Europeanization plays an important role in the formation of modern Chinese. For this reason, the study of Europeanization itself is an important part of modern Chinese grammar research. One of the primary tasks of related research is to trace the origin of Europeanization, which is exactly what we do. From the factual part of the foregoing, we can also see that the study not only is helpful to have a clear understanding of the characteristic of Europeanized grammar in the pre-development stage of modern Chinese, but also can lay a certain foundation for the comparative study of Europeanized grammar in different periods.

In recent years, scholars in the fields of translatology and literature have constantly re-examined the impact of Chinese translation by western missionaries on the formation of new literature, and have come to some different understandings from traditional views; for example, Chen Liming (2012, pp. 88-96) pointed that more materials now show that May 4th vernacular text, which has been regarded as the origin of modern Chinese, is not the beginning of Europeanized vernacular, but can at least be traced back to the late Qing Dynasty, even the late Ming early Qing Dynasties. As far as The Pilgrim’s Progress in Mandarin we discussed, Chen pointed that the vernacular used by William Chalmers Burns is no less prevalent than the vernacular pursued by Hu Shi and others. In addition, by investigating the translation of vernacular poetry in the Xu Tianlulicheng Guanhua, Chen believed that the starting point of Chinese modern (vernacular) poetry can be traced back at least to the mid-19th century. In addition to the micro-perspective of poetry translation, there are also macro-perspective studies and analysis. For example, on the multi-angle comparison with ancient vernacular novels, Yuan Jin (2013, pp.168-173) concluded that The Pilgrim’s Progress in Mandarin is the “early form of novel as a genre in modern literature”. Thus, The Pilgrim’s Progress in Mandarin has a decisive impact on the formation of modern literature; to some extent, the relevant research in this paper can provide linguistics basis for the above-mentioned understanding.

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