Why Do We Still Need to Learn Foreign Languages Today?

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1 Case Study: Chainsaw Man

1.1 Nayuta's Insulting Words

If you read Chapter 133 of *Chainsaw Man* (referred to as CSM), there is a panel (Fig.1) where Nayuta asked Denji to say cursing words to Yoshida.



(a) Japanese original. (b) English translation. (c) Simplified Chinese. (d) Traditional Chinese.

Figure 1: The same panel comes from *Chainsaw Man* Chapter 133, in three different languages.

In Fig.1a, we can observe that the author of *Chainsaw Man*, Fujimoto, used the Japanese word "ファッキュー" in the original panel, which is a direct derivation of "fuck you" in English. When pronounced in Japanese, it sounds identical to its English counterpart. However, in the English translation (Fig.1b), the phrase "ファッキュー" was rendered as "eff off", which is considered British slang. This choice of translation is inadequate as it is too mild and fails to capture the intended impact. The Cambridge Dictionary includes a note about this slang, stating, "although offensive, this is less offensive than fuck off", thus emphasizing the avoidance of the explicit phrase "fuck you". Consequently, the English translation in this instance falls short compared to the other translations in Chinese.

In the case of the Chinese translations (Fig.1c and 1d), we observe an interesting contrast between the simplified Chinese version (Fig.1c) and the traditional Chinese version (Fig.1d). The simplified Chinese translation employs a paraphrase approach, restating the meaning of "ファッキュー" in a much more offensive manner as "草你妈", which is a commonly used but highly offensive Chinese slang. On the other hand, the traditional Chinese translation follows a metaphrase approach, opting to retain "fuck you" in English. The assumption is that Chinese readers would understand this phrase in English. This choice provides a more suitable translation, striking a balance between being too weak, as in the English version, and too strong, as in the simplified Chinese version.

Why is the extent of using this word important? We need to revisit the background of the *Chainsaw Man* story before we delve deeper.

1.2 Denji and Nayuta, their Education Backgrounds and Personalities

Denji, having never attended school due to his tragic fate, once engaged in a teacher-student game with Raze (Fig.2a) and felt a connection to it. This experience holds significant importance for him. As a result, when playing the role of Nayuta's brother, Denji excelled in raising Nayuta as a well-behaved child (Fig.2b). Nayuta even turned down Fami's invitation to collaborate in saving the world because she prioritized attending school (Fig.2c).



(a) Denji with Raze in Ch42.



(b) Nayuta in school in Ch131.



(c) Nayuta with Fami in Ch131.

Figure 2: The so called "school devil".

1.3 Do You Really Know How Cute Nayuta Is?

Taking the background into consideration, let's revisit Fig.1. It becomes evident that the simplified translation (Fig.1c) is excessively vulgar for Nayuta, who is depicted as a well-behaved character. The use of the highly impolite phrase "草你妈" doesn't align with her personality. On the other hand, the direct adaption of "fuck you" in Fig.1d captures a sense of cuteness that better suits Nayuta's character. As previously mentioned, we excluded the English translation (Fig.1b) from the discussion. To further illustrate this point, consider the character "King" from *One Punch Man* and the popular meme associated with him (Fig.3a). In the meme, King employs similarly insulting slang as Fig.3b, which matches his intimidating appearance and is therefore appropriate.



(a) Meme of King from OPM. (b) Same as Fig.1c.

Figure 3: The use of language plays a significant role in shaping the portrayal of characters.

Given these backgrounds, we can understand why Nayuta requested Denji to utter "fuck you" to Yoshida instead of saying it herself. As a well-behaved child, Nayuta is not at an age where she would use such adult language, despite being aware of its meaning. This adds a layer of cuteness to the panel, emphasizing Nayuta's innocence and the contrast between her desires and her understanding of societal norms.