A Study on the Reception Comparison of 
Fingersmith Among Chinese and English 
Readers—Analysis of Evaluative Discourses Based 
on Python

Chen Pei

School of Humanities and Social Sciences, Xi’an Polytechnic University, Xi’an, Shaanxi, China.

Abstract

Based on Python data processing technology, this study collects readers’ comments on Fingersmith from Chinese mainstream book social platforms and Western mainstream book social platforms. The comments are used to construct a text database, which is then quantified after cleaning and noise reduction. Sentiment analysis and semantic network analysis are conducted to reveal readers’ emotional attitudes and dimensions of concern. By comparing the comments of Chinese and English readers, this study reveals that both groups are interested in the storyline. However, Chinese readers show more interest in feminism-related topics, whereas English readers focus primarily on the storyline and the author’s writing style. The study highlights the disparity in attention between Chinese and English readers, indicating cross-cultural distinctions. It emphasizes the importance for translators to maintain cultural nuances when translating. Additionally, it suggests that Chinese translators and publishers should embrace the feminist movement by introducing feminist-related Western literature to Chinese readers.

Keywords

Fingersmith, Python, readers’ comments, sentimental analysis

1. Introduction

Fingersmith is a novel by British author Sarah Waters that was published in 2002, has been translated into various languages, and has received critical praise worldwide. The novel, set in nineteenth-century England, explores the lives, classes, and genders of those at the bottom of the social scale. The Fingersmith’s plot twists and turns, with suspenseful and exhilarating situations. Waters’ descriptions are rich in detail and history, transporting the reader to nineteenth-century London. The work delves into life and class difficulties at the bottom of the social ladder, giving readers a better knowledge of human greed and duplicity. Readers can enjoy human beings’ richness and diversity, as well as comments on life and human nature.

The foreign translation of literary works has an important significance and role in promoting cultural exchange and dissemination, promoting literary innovation and development, and facilitating the development of translation and research. Generally speaking, researchers usually examine it from several dimensions such as book sales, library collections, readers' borrowing, media, or professional readers' evaluation (Gao & Yang, 2022). It is also a good method to compare the attention dimensions and emotional attitudes of readers' comments in the source language and the target language. With the development of the Internet, more and more readers tend to post their reading...
experiences to forums for sharing. Researchers can use this as a corpus for data mining. The most common way to use natural language processing for sentiment analysis is to use Python for data analysis. A few scholars have used this tool to analyze the reader evaluation for the acceptance of Chinese literature overseas, but few scholars have studied the translation effect of foreign literature in China from this perspective. Given this, this study utilizes the Web Scraper data mining tool to analyze the Chinese readers’ reviews of *Fingersmith* in Douban Book Social Information Platform as the Chinese corpus, and the English readers' reviews of *Fingersmith* in Amazon and Goodreads as the English corpus. With the help of Python and other technologies, the corpus is subjected to discourse sentiment analysis, semantic network analysis, visualization of readers' emotional attitudes and themes of concern, and comparison with English-language readers' evaluations, aiming to explore the acceptance effect of this work in China, and at the same time provide a reference for all kinds of subjects who are committed to translation and publication.

2. Data Processing

2.1 Text Data Acquisition

For the acquisition of Chinese review texts, the author utilized the Web Scraper data mining tool to crawl the short reviews and book reviews of *Fingersmith* in Douban. Due to the limitation of the number of comments displayed in the forum, the number of short comments collected by the author is 750, totaling 46,675 words, and the number of book reviews is 184, totaling 168,840 words. For the acquisition of English review texts, also using the Web Scraper data mining tool, the author collected relevant reader reviews about Finger Smith on Amazon and Goodreads platforms respectively. Among them, the number of reviews on the Amazon platform is 1080, totaling 78,897 words; the number of reviews on the Goodreads website is 1351, totaling 202,418 words.

2.2 Text processing and analysis

Python is currently the most common and efficient way to process natural language, and its jieba is currently an efficient participle component based on Python to process Chinese text participles. In addition, the Natural Language Toolkit (NLTK) is a widely used Python natural language processing toolkit developed by Steven Bird, Edward Loper, and Ewan Klein in 2001. It provides many useful features and tools (Bird, Klein, & Loper, 2009). For sentiment analysis of Chinese text, SnowNLP can be used. SnowNLP is a class library written in Python, which can conveniently process Chinese text content. The operation process is as follows:

First, preliminary deletion. In the short review of the Chinese text of *Fingersmith*, we mainly deleted some URLs, irrelevant content pure emoticons, etc. The number of text characters after deletion was 46642. For the English reviews of *Fingersmith* on Amazon, we mainly deleted some garbled codes and non-English characters, and the number of characters deleted was 78334. For the English review on Goodreads, we cleaned non-English languages. The number of characters in the cleaned data is 181046.

Second, text preprocessing. The process is as follows: firstly, the Chinese text is processed by word segmentation; secondly, numbers and stop words are removed. The deactivated words used are the deactivated word list published by the Natural Language Processing Laboratory of Harbin Institute of Technology. The English text was pre-processed with text segmentation, deletion of stop words, stemming, and punctuation removal.

Finally, sentiment analysis and semantic network analysis are performed. First, the SnowNLP package was used to analyze the text for sentiment analysis. Then the analysis results were presented in the form of histograms and cloud diagrams. Finally, ROST CM, developed by Prof. Shen Yang of Wuhan University, was used to draw semantic network diagrams and visualize the comment texts of the readers. Secondly, we used the sentiment analysis method that comes with the NLTK package to analyze it. Finally, the data were presented in the form of bar charts and cloud charts. In addition, we used WORDij, a set of data science programs that automate many aspects of natural language processing, to analyze the English text for semantic networks (Danowski, 1992).

3. Analysis and Discussion of Results

3.1 Comparison of Emotional Attitudes of Chinese and English Readers

In terms of emotional attitudes, the proportion of positive (positive) emotional keywords in all the comments of Douban platform readers is 67.01%, the proportion of neutral (neutral) emotional keywords is 8.86%, and the proportion of negative (negative) emotional keywords is 24.13%.
First, the plot reversals in the novel have been recognized by readers. Many readers pointed out that a series of plot reversals in the novel are fascinating, for example, one reader commented that "the plot has many twists and turns, and the reversal after reversal mentioned in the synopsis is true. The end of the first part shocked me with goosebumps." Other readers believe that the plot reversal makes this novel extraordinary, not reduced to a monotonous romance novel, "again and again flip the plot story so that it does not fall into a monotonous romance novel, the two heroines are very different ways to express their love interpretation of love is not just one kind of". From the positive reviews, it is clear that the plot reversal attracts readers to continue reading, and the novel's plot reversal is the highlight of the book.

Second, the focus on women's destiny in the novel has gained readers' attention and support. Among the positive comments, some readers lamented the fate of women and summarized the way out for women in the Victorian era in the context of the times, and most of the readers thought that the fate of women in that era was miserable and oppressed. For example, some readers commented that "in that era, there were only four places for women to go: deep houses, thieves' dens, asylums, and mental hospitals." In addition, other readers expressed their support for women's struggle and their affirmation of women's fight for freedom.

Third, the Chinese translation of the novel was recognized by readers. Readers found the translation of Ah Lang's version of The Fingersmith to be generally very good and fluent, with authentic wording and expression. "Ms. Hua's writing is already beautiful and stovedupped enough, and together with Alang's subtle translation, it makes readers intoxicated and unable to extricate themselves," "The translation is excellent, with a lot of attention paid to the background of each person's character to choose the way they speak and the words they use."

For English readers, the proportion of positive emotional keywords is 11.46%, the proportion of neutral keywords is 83.88%, and the proportion of negative emotional keywords is 4.65%. It shows that Fingersmith is more popular in foreign countries in general, but its degree of enthusiasm is far less than that of domestic readers. Through further exploration, it is found that foreign readers' evaluation of Fingersmith is neutral, mainly because they focus on the book to talk about and analyze, compared with the comments of domestic readers, the comments of foreign readers are more analytical and therefore involve less emotional color.

For example, some readers analyze the content in their comments, "In Fingersmith, Waters introduces us to a cast of thieves and con artists, dubbed Fingersmith, one of which (Sue) narrates the story in part 1., while others will explain the source of their book "I bought and read this book on the recommendation of a friend and I will attempt to give a little I bought and read this book on the recommendation of a friend and I will attempt to give a little review of it here without giving away much of anything." English readers pay more attention
to the book itself when evaluating the book, the emotional characteristics are not prominent, and they are more objective.

![Figure 2. Affective attitudes of English readers.](image)

### 3.2 Comparison of Dimensions of Attention of Chinese and English Readers' Works

First, the high-frequency words of Chinese readers' comments are counted, and the results (top ten) are: Mod (621), person (513), Su (491), story (387), no (379), love (327), good (265), know (256), movie (243), and finally (243). It is further analyzed in conjunction with the semantic network of Douban Chinese readers' comments, whose results show that Chinese readers pay more attention to the two aspects of characters and stories. To further expand, readers are not only concerned about the fate, freedom, and love of the two female protagonists in the story but also the fate, freedom, and love of women in the entire Victorian era. For example, on the Douban platform, a reader commented, "A gothic mystery with reversal after reversal, a pure literature full of nineteenth-century treasures, and a women's book overflowing with life experiences." This shows that Chinese readers mainly discuss women's destiny, love, and freedom, which caters to the wave of feminism nowadays and is a promotion for the development of feminism (Choi, Kim, & Evans, 2020). As for the story of the work, readers mainly discussed the plot reversal of the novel. There are both positive and negative aspects. For example, some readers were fascinated by the reversal of the storyline and satisfied with the final ending, "The ending part of the plot, the abruptness of the twist, especially the emotional part at the end, could not be explained. Overall not a favorite story, but wins in portraying the Victorian underclass in all its shapes and sizes, the struggles of certain women."

Secondly, for the English language, the high-frequency words for reader evaluation were counted, and the results were: story (1466), twist (1323), water (1294), character (1256), plot (1248), like (947), maud (887), sue (870), and time (850), PART (771), using a cloud diagram (Figure 3) combined with a semantic network for further complementary analysis. The results show that foreign readers are concerned mainly with the storyline, and author. Moreover, unlike Chinese readers, when talking about the storyline, English readers paid less attention to the fate and freedom of women in the book and talked more about the story itself about the author. For example, one reader commented, "I love Sarah Waters' writing and her fantastic setting of Victorian London with characters from a Dickens' novel." In addition, a number of users have mentioned Charles Dickens, and they think that Sarah Waters' work is very close to Charles Dickens' style, such as "It felt like breaking character, though... reading actual Victorian books, like Charles Dickens, the writing is as slow -- slower! -- but it still keeps me interested, and even the plot
twists don't seem quite so sharp”. They argue that Sarah Waters’ portrayal of the book is Dickensian in style because the author sets the story itself in the Victorian period, and reading the book is like reading a Dickens novel (Xiao & Li, 2023).

4. Conclusion

This study focuses on Sarah Waters’ Fingersmith and conducts information mining on the English online readers’ evaluations. With the help of Python technology for sentiment analysis and semantic network analysis, the study examined the dissemination effect of the work among Chinese readers by comparing the sentiment and attention dimensions with those of English readers. The study breaks through the traditional mode of analyzing the effect using quantitative statistics and thus provides a more scientific way of examining the acceptance effect for the study of literary translation. The study found that Chinese and English readers’ overall sentiment towards Fingersmith was positive, with Chinese readers’ positive comments focusing on plot reversal, women’s fate, and translation, while English readers focused on their comments on the book as a whole. In addition, both Chinese and English readers are concerned with the storyline, but Chinese readers are more concerned with feminist-related topics, which can provide important insights for China’s local literary creation as well as translation publishers. The English readership mainly focuses on the storyline and the author’s writing style, which also reflects the cross-cultural differences. With the development of feminism, Chinese readers also pay more and more attention to topics related to feminism and show great enthusiasm (Li & Wang, 2020). This wave comes from the West, and compared with women in English-speaking countries, we are slightly behind in the development process in this regard (Ma, 2020). Therefore, translators and publishers can choose works related to feminism for translation and publication to meet the needs of the general readers, cater to this wave, introduce excellent Western literature related to feminism for Chinese readers, and provide fresh power for the development of Chinese feminism.

References

Xiao, Kairong & Li, Wanyu. (2023). In the eye of the beholder: A sentiment analysis approach to readers’ reception of translated metaphors in Fortress Besieged. 10.1075/ata.xx.06xia.