A Case Study on Ren Rongrong's Translation of Charlotte's Web From the Perspective of Translational Poetics

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Abstract

Andre Lefevere believes that translators must adapt the translation to the requirements of the times in the translation of literary works, so the language of the translation is inevitably manipulated by the dominant poetics. Children's literature is a work that is instructive to children and can arouse children's interest in reading, whose language requires vitality and attractiveness, therefore the linguistic level of children's literature translation is bound to be manipulated by translational poetics. In the light of Levefere's poetics of translation, the paper attempts to analyze Ren Rongrong's translation of Charlotte's Web and finds out that the translated version's poetics have actually changed, including lexicon, syntax and rhetoric, to restore the characteristic language form of the original text. And it concludes amplification, literal translation and those translation methods which applied in it, with the desire for providing an innovative theoretical direction for the study of translation of children's literature.

Key words: Translational Poetics; *Charlotte's Web*; Children's Literature

INTRODUCTION

"Children's literature is not produced by children, but a kind of literature written by adults to children as a whole. Therefore, children's literature fundamentally embodies the cultural expectation of 'adults' (adult society)" (Wang, 2006, p.45). However, adult literature pays more attention to the relationship between art and society, life and people's hearts, while children's literature is a kind of specialized literature containing the cultural expectations of adult society for the next generation. Therefore, while enriching the knowledge of children, it should also stimulate children's interest in unknown knowledge. In one word, children's literature should be interesting and meaningful. So when children's literature is translated, its original language features should be retained in the translation as far as possible, so as to maximize the charm of the original text. And Andre Lefevere holds the view that translators must adapt the translation to the requirements of the times in the translation of literary works, so the translation's language is inevitably manipulated by the dominant poetics. He assumes that the environment should not be immediately subject to directly influenced by the inventory component of the poetics of a literary system once the formative stage of the system is past, but the functional component of poetics is more likely to undergo direct influence from outside the system. (Lefevere, 2004, p.34) In his *Comparative Children's Literature*, O'Sullivan Emer also points out that "the poetics of children's literature studies the aesthetic elements and literary forms of this branch of literature". (Emer, 2004, p.194) Therefore, the linguistic level of children's literature translation is bound to be manipulated by translational poetics. Nonetheless, compared with the translation of adult literature, that of children's literature has actually flourished after the reform and opening up in China. Then, there have been so many theoretical researches on the analysis of children's literature from the perspectives of Skopos Theory, Adaptation Theory

and Reception Aesthetic. However, it can be noticed that Translational Poetics has hardly been applied as the theoretical exploration of the relevant translation. Therefore, there is an actually innovative perspective to deeply explore the translation of children's literature from the viewpoint of Translational Poetics. The paper chooses *Charlotte's Web*, a classic of children's literature, to analyze Ren's translation from three linguistic levels, including lexicon, syntax and rhetoric. And it will induce some practical translation methods to provide actual research experience to those scholars who aim to translate children's literature.

1. TRANSLATIONAL POETICS

The term of poetics could date back to Aristotle, the great ancient Greek philosopher and aesthete. In his book *Poetics* (Aristotle, 1997), through discussing six elements—thought, spectacle, song, plot, character, diction, he had done a systemic research about theories of aesthetics and literature and then pointed out that poetics is a general name for style, theme and literary devices. In fact, Aristotle researched the genre, the function and nature of poetics instead of merely giving an actual definition of the term, which paved the way of researching poetics in the future. The first scholar of great significance to translation poetics is Henri Meschonnic, who reflects Aristotle's Poetics in his theory of translation poetics. According to his masterpiece *Pour la Poétique, Epistémologie de l'écriture, Poétique de la traduction* (Meschonnic, 1973), translation is not a kind of "replica", but a kind of creation. Moreover, literature translation has its particularity that entails the scope of poetics and cannot be thoroughly analyzed only by linguistic means, so it should be analyzed by poetics. Therefore, Meschonnic regarded poetics as a more comprehensive and systematic theory than purely linguistic theory, which expands the field of its theoretical application. American scholar Willis Barnstone elaborated his unique viewpoint of translational poetics in his monograph *The Poetics of Translation* (Barnstone, 1993), generalizing the four categories of poetics. Barnstone gave new connotations to poetics and poetics gets developed in translation studies. In some sense, translational poetics gradually becomes alienated from Aristotle's poetics. Drawing upon the notions of polysystem and those brilliant scholars, André Lefevere took up poetics, as one manipulative constraint of Manipulation Theory, to highlight that both the inventory and functional components of the poetics are likely to influence the language characteristic of translated version. He broke the limitations of traditional poetics on translation studies and linked translational poetics with cultural backgrounds.

Domestic study on translational poetics started from the 1990s. Yuan Xiaoyi and Xu Jun's *The Discussion of "Poetics of Translation"* (Yuan & Xu, 1995) is one of the most explicit essays on it in academia. They discussed Meschonnic's translation poetics and found it can promote the development of translation theories without the restriction of traditional linguistic, which offered a new angle for Chinese scholars to analyze translation. And Fei Xiaoping's book, *The Politics of Translation: Translation Studies and Cultural Studies* (Fei, 2005), indicated that cultural studies became a premise when the study of poetics of translation was needed to be involved in. He also considered that the cultural translation poetics functions as a new approach in translation study and the Chinese translation theories. Yang Liu revealed the manipulation of poetic status, poetic attitude and classical literary forms on poetic rewriting in different cultural contexts as well as the crucial role of typical translational poetics in the evolution of literature, culture and society. She also found that translational poetics was a sort of cultural strategy which should be adopted by translators to make translation practice.

The paper will choose Lefevere's translational poetics of Manipulation Theory to make an analysis of classical children's literature. Nevertheless, through searching for the relevant documents online and in the library, it is found that there are fewer academic researches on the translation of children's literature from the perspective of the translational poetics than that of adult's literature, which shows there is an innovative perspective to do a deep study. According to Lefevere, no matter how much a translation work has processed, it is the poetics that actually take the place when a translator has to consider a balance between the linguistics matter and poetical matter. (Lefevere, 2004, p.39) And Ren Rongrong's Translation of *Charlotte's Web* adopted more colloquial language to adjust its linguistic expression, which made the translated one more acceptable in the dominant poetics. Therefore, it will analyze Ren Rongrong's translation of *Charlotte's Web* from the perspective of translational poetics and induce specific translation methods from three linguistic levels.

2. THREE LINGUISTIC LEVELS OF TRANSLATIONAL POETICS IN THE TRANSLATION

Translational Poetics is composed of inventory and functional components: the former one is an inventory of literary prototypical characters, devices, genres, motifs and situations and symbols." (Lefevere, 2004, p.27) It is the crucial concept that Translational Poetics could influence the language characteristic, including specific literary system, form and any linguistic units. So when literature is translated, its poetics has to change to that of the other language. However, what impacts will the translated literature manipulated by poetics make when the audience is a child whose knowledge is not abundant? The part

of paper exemplifies the manipulation on three linguistic levels, that is, the lexical level, the syntactical level and the rhetoric level, to concretely probe into the influence of translational poetics on the selection of translation strategies.

2.1 On Lexical Level

The first distinguish use of langue is the use of Vernacular Chinese. Ren chooses the Vernacular Chinese to translate the original test as a mean to test whether the vernacular Chinese can surpass the classic Chinese. So he adopts the Vernacular Chinese, which is easier for children to understand the whole story and enjoy the original sense than the Classic Chinese. For instance, onomatopoeic word and reduplicative word are widely used in Ren's translation, which makes it more colorful and dynamic.

The original: Rain spattered against Mrs. Zuckerman's kitchen windows and came gushing out of the downspouts. (Ren, Trans., 2011, p.65)

Translation: 雨水噼里啪啦地打在朱克曼太太的厨房窗上，咕咚咕咚地涌出水管。(Yuan & Xu, 1995, p.123)

Analysis: Because poetics is composed of two components: inventory component and functional component. The inventory component is known as various language units. So the way Ren deal with the translation of onomatopoeic words can partially reflect his translational poetics. The word "spatter" can be actually translated into"溅"while the word "gush" also could be replaced by"涌". What's more, Ren adds the onomatopoeic words to emphasize the verb, which not only satisfy children's eye but also have the ability to appease their ears. And the addition of onomatopoetic words"噼里啪啦"and"咕咚咕咚"highlights the sound information with the enhancement of the expressive of the language, which also builds the basic background for the development of the story. So the choose of onomatopoeia proves the creativity of translational poetics.

The original: The night seemed long. Wilbur's stomach was empty and his mind was full. And when your stomach is empty and your mind is full, it's always hard to sleep. (Ren, Trans., 2011, p.72)

Translation: 这一夜好像特别长。威尔伯肚子空空的，可是心满满的，都是心事。一个人肚子空空，心事重重，总是睡不好觉的。(Yuan & Xu, 1995, p.140)

Analysis: The sentence depicts Wilbur's psychological activity. In order to describe Wilbur's hungry and eager mood to see Charlotte, Ren obviously uses four reduplicative words "空空的"，"满满的"，"空空"and "重重"to translate "empty" and "full", which vividly reproduces the image of the pig so that the young readers seem to have seen Wilbur with his own eyes. Reduplicative word, one of the traditional linguistic devices, is frequently used to intensify the meaning of the original single words. The use of reduplicative words enhances the readability and attractiveness of the

translation, which also shows that Ren applies different translation methods under the guidance of Translational Poetics, because "a poetics, any poetics, is a historical variable: it is not absolute." (Lefevere, 2004, p.35) And the statistics of Ren's translation shows a total of 657 reduplicated words in the version.

The original: "Wilbur grunted. He gulped and sucked, making swishing and swooshing noises, anxious to get everything at once." (Ren, Trans., 2011, p.87)

Translation: "威尔伯呕呕地叫。它大口大口地吃，大口大口地喝，大口大口地吃，大口大口地喝，发出稀里哗啦、呼噜哗啦的声音，急着要一口气吃个精光。" (Yuan & Xu, 1995, p.165)

Analysis: Ren employs the onomatopoeia words"呕呕"，"稀里哗啦"and"呼噜哗啦"to simulate the voice of Wilbur, which creates successfully a spoken style that Ren tells a story to children instead of a translated work. The onomatopoeia is used so properly that it gives people a musical feeling of transition from vision to hearing. He also applies reduplicative words as adjectives to translate the verbs "gulped" and "sucked" of the original text. To be honest,"大口大口地吃"and"大口大口地喝"are only used once, which expresses abundantly the desire of Wilbur to food. However, they appear repeatedly in one sentence, which not only creates antithesis for having the same function as the original text, but also implies Ren actually makes appropriate translation methods with the influence of Translational Poetics.

2.2 On Syntactical Level

The second brilliant feature is the adjustment of syntax in Ren's translation from Translational Poetics. Lefevere believes that the dynamics of the system is froze or certainly controlled each dominant poetics, which achieves this goal more easily in systems with undifferentiated patronage. (Lefevere, 2004, p.27) As far as syntax is concerned, the structure of Chinese is totally different from English, because English is a hypotactic language while Chinese belongs to paratactic language, in other words, long and complex sentences are preferred in English, which are not exactly the same with Chinese. Moreover, the translator has to make some adjustments in these structures when translating, especially in children's literature, since a child would easily get distracted and bored when the sentences are too long and complex. Besides, the passive sentence can be found frequently in English, which could bring flexible expressions and avoid the monotony of sentence patterns. Ren, of course, makes some proper changes in the sentence structure, because there are almost active sentences in Chinese instead of passive sentences.

The original: So while the children swam and played and splashed water at each other, Wilbur amused himself in the mud along the edge of the brook, where it was warm and moist and delightfully sticky and oozy. (Ren, Trans., 2011, p.39)

Translation: 因此，当两个孩子游泳、玩耍、用水你泼我我泼你时，威尔伯就待在河边的烂泥里自得其乐，烂泥暖和，湿哒哒的，黏黏糊糊，舒服极了。(Yuan & Xu, 1995, p.43)

Analysis: The former part of the sentence is a compound sentence, in which three verbs are employed to describe their behaviors. "The English sentence is actually and extremely plastic. It can be enlarged, combined, adjusted with almost any degree of fitness to accommodate a writer's thought." (Eastman, 1984, p.184) In order to cater to Chinese young readers' paratactic language expression, Ren cuts the sentence in two conjunctions, since Chinese belongs to chronicle style, and then divides the latter complex structure into a number of simple phrases, simplifying the sentence patterns. Ren wants to subtly display these words "warm and moist and delightfully sticky and oozy" in front of young readers by cutting the sentence at the same places. Therefore, young readers can smoothly read them one by one to imagine the way Wilbur amused himself in the quagmire and get a strong sense of rhythm and are so catchy that it makes children read with a lovely and cordial feeling.

The original: Like Fern, she was truly food of Wilbur, whose smelly pen and stale food attracted the flies that she needed, and she was proud to see that he was not a quitter and was willing to try again to spin a web. (Ren, Trans., 2011, p.151)

Translation: 它和弗恩一样都很喜欢威尔伯，就是因为它的臭猪圈还有发臭的食物，使得夏洛的食物——苍蝇的到来。当它看到威尔伯不是一个知难而退的胆小鬼，试着去再次结网，它依旧为它感到自豪 (Yuan & Xu, 1995, p.97)

Analysis: Crew points out that subordination is a cardinal principle of the writing, which is the placing of certain and essential elements in modifying roles. (Crews, 1974, p.88) Subordination could be obviously seen in the original text, which places barriers to the translation. Meanwhile, Ren who is influenced by Translational Poetics considers that variety in sentence length depends on the age, education and reading experience of readers. Therefore, the English long sentence is transformed into two Chinese short sentences, each of which is composed of two or three parts, and he also adjusts the sentence with the request of paratactic language, which all could make the sentence structure clear and can let children understand the whole sentence smoothly.

The original: Mr Zuckerman cannot be deterred from his plan. (Ren, Trans., 2011, p.67)

Translation: 人们不能阻止朱克曼先生执行他的计划。(Yuan & Xu, 1995, p.99)

Analysis: When the patient is kernel of sentence, English usually use passive sentence to highlight it and convey the main thought, because "our scientific, bureaucratic and massed society is so addicted to the passive voice that you have to constantly alert yourself against its impersonal, drowsy pomp." (Baker, 1985, p.121) However, the passive voice means unpleasant or undesirable things to subject in Chinese, which makes the active voice superior to the passive voice and then brings restrictions to translation. So Ren makes some flexible adjustments, according to the Translational Poetics, to cater for the expression habit of the little target readers. With the comprehension of the original text, Ren adds the generic person"人们" to become the subject, which do not influence the meaning and even turn passive sentence to active one. The translated sentence is apparently understood by children.

2.3 On Rhetorical Level

Authors of children's literature always use a lot of rhetorical devices, because "the linguistic style in children's literature requires its language speaking meaningful, sounding sweet and reading smooth." (Arbuthnot, 1964, p.18) Therefore, compared with adult literature, children's literature prefers personification, simile and metaphor, in order to stimulate children's imagination and thinking. Rhetoric is the use of different means of language expression in the process of speaking or writing, which also belongs to the branch of Translational Poetics, so that the whole article is more vivid to be read. "A changeable and changing poetics will also dictate which original works of literature are acceptable in a given system." (Lefevere, 2004, p.36) However, owing to the difference cultural information between English and Chinese, rhetoric has also become a major and difficult point in translation. Therefore, for producing a high-quality translation, Ren accurately delivers the original emotion and meaning, but also, to a large extent, transfers the original language characteristic to the target one.

The original: A little maple tree in the swamp heard the cricket song and turned bright red with anxiety. (Ren, Trans., 2011, p.149)

Translation: 沼泽地上一棵小枫树听到蟋蟀的歌声，急得叶子红了。(Yuan & Xu, 1995, p.110)

Analysis: According to Webster's New World Dictionary, the definition of personification is the act of attributing human characteristics to abstract ideas. Maple tree is a plant whose leaves turn red when it is autumn. However, when heard the cricket song, maple tree turned red because of anxiety, which indicates that tree has human's emotion. Because of personification, the original text is so vivid that children can imagine the feelings of the maple tree. The translator identifies the personification and represents it by literal translation to convey the original style as well as the meaning, which can be completely and readily accepted by the target young readers since Chinese children is not strange to that figure of speech.

The original: The next day was foggy. Everything on the farm was dripping wet. The grass looked like a magic carpet. The asparagus patch looked like a silver forest. (Ren, Trans., 2011, p.102)

Translation: 第二天有雾。 农场里什么东西都湿哒哒的。草地上看上去像一张魔毯。那片芦笋地像一片银光闪闪的森林。(Yuan & Xu, 1995, p.78)

Analysis: "Simile is an expressed likeness. The most direct and simplest way of expressing an idea with something else is using similes. Simile is the neuter singular of the Latin adjective 'similes'." (Jiang & Zhong, 2008, p.49) The figure of speech which is distinctly in the original sentence is completely translated into Chinese simile, because the figurative word"像". The choice of translating simile completely not only makes the translation vivid and easy for children to understand, but also allows them to be affected by original text's sentiment.

The original: "A rat is a rat," said Charlotte. She laughed a tinkling little laugh. (Ren, Trans., 2011, p.42)

Translation: "老鼠到底是老鼠，"夏洛说。它发出轻轻的银铃般的笑声。(Yuan & Xu, 1995, p.195)

Analysis: Charlotte laughs at the rat which named Templeton because it stores up the goose's a bad egg. The phrase "a tinkling laugh" in the original text compares Charlotte's laugher to the sound of tinkling bell. The definition of metaphor is "a word with some other meaning which is transferred either from species to genus, or from genus to species, or from one species to another, or used by analogy" (Aristotle, 1997, p.110). In one word, metaphor's feature is that the subject and reference are very obvious while the indicator of resemblance is not appeared. Therefore, Ren retains the form of metaphor and translates it literally into"银铃般的笑声"，which conforms to Chinese children's daily speaking mode and sounds more readable and natural.

CONCLUSION

This paper has deeply researched Ren's translation of Charlotte's Web from a new angle, Translational Poetics, and has demonstrated the manipulation of Translational Poetics from three linguistic levels, including lexicon, syntax and rhetoric. And it is also found that the amplification of onomatopoeic word and reduplicative word, the adjustment of syntax and the literal translation of rhetoric are the most commonly used translation strategy in these above examples, because Ren takes fully into account the particularity of children's literature and the inadequate knowledge of young readers from the Translational Poetics. It is proved that the manipulation of Translational Poetics actually helps translator create a better translated version, which even could stimulate the imagination of children's readers, help them understand the development of the work and feel the emotional changes of the characters. Though the quality and the quantity of the translated children's literature are lagged behind adult literature, Translational Poetics offers a new theoretical method to do the relevant translation research, which could encourage that more and more attention should be paid to the improvement of translation of children's literature.

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