

Translation Aesthetics in Children's Literature

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Abstract—Despite the fact that children's literature is an important branch of the literary polysystem, it was neglected as a peripheral subject for long. It is not until in recent years that much attention is increasingly poured into it due to the rapid development of economy and booming cross-cultural exchanges. Currently, the newly-developed children's literature is gradually occupying a dominant position and winning children's favor. Translated works are no exception. Numerous classic children's literary works from abroad are translated and retranslated. People tend to care much about translation activities, yet forget to formulate the theoretical framework. The thesis attempts to explore how to incorporate translation aesthetics into children's literature translation. Children's literature is characterized by its artistry, which is no doubt linked to children's unique disposition. Children's rich imagination, their acute sense of color, rhythm and children-favored animated images, etc. should be given priority in the process of translation. Based on Liu Miqing's interpretation of translation aesthetics, the thesis will be developed from the perspective of the aesthetic object, the aesthetic subject and their respective aesthetic constituents. Further discussion is given as to the realization of aesthetic transference and representation in translating children's literature under the guidance of translation aesthetics.

Index Terms—children's literature, translation aesthetics, aesthetic representation

I. INTRODUCTION

A. Concept of Translation Aesthetics

It has been globally accepted that aesthetics is of great significance to translation theory, particularly literary translation. Scholars and translation theorists strive to obtain a refreshing perspective from the integration of the two branches of subjects. The combination of aesthetics with translation theory — translation aesthetics has experienced a long historical development both in China and the western world. In *A Dictionary of Translation Studies* compiled by Fang Mengzhi (2004), translation aesthetics is aimed at tracing the aesthetic origin of translation, exploring the significance of aesthetics to translation, recognizing the scientific and artistic quality of translation from the perspective of aesthetics, putting forward aesthetic standards applicable to different literary styles based on fundamental aesthetic methodology, analyzing, illustrating and settling aesthetic problems of inter-lingual transferences.

B. Translation Aesthetics in China

Translation aesthetics, as a matter of fact, is deeply rooted in the soil of China's culture and civilization. In other words, translation aesthetics is essentially the foundation of both the classical and modern translation theory in China.

In China, the nature of beauty and the relationship between beauty and truth have always been a major concern in aesthetics since ancient times. The aesthetic thought can be traced back as early as to the times when Confucius (551-497B.C.), a world-famous philosopher and educator whose thoughts and principles dominate China for more than 2000 years, established the Confucian aesthetics which stressed that harmony could find its place in the "supreme beauty" and "the unity between beauty and truth". Subsequently, Lao Zi (about 571-471B.C), a philosopher in the Spring and Autumn Period of ancient China, followed the steps of Confucius and further illustrated his philosophy of beauty and truth with his dictum from *Dao De Jing* (Classic of the Dao), that "words that are faithful are not beautiful while words that are beautiful are not faithful." (2005) This indicates his preference for literal faithfulness and objection against beauty in form. His idea is often cited to clarify the dispute between fidelity to the original and artistry in translation. However, his principle of literal translation evoked heated debate and met with strong criticism from advocates who were in favor of free translation. One of the most distinguished representatives is Xuan Zang (604-662 A.D), the most prolific monk-translator of Buddhist sutras. He didn't deny the necessity of being faithful to the source works, yet intelligibility in language form or readability for target readers could never be neglected.

The debate on translation aesthetics, like the correlation between content and form rose and fell for centuries. Not until in the year 1896 did the famous translator Yan Fu initiated his three-character principle of "faithfulness, smoothness and elegance". The criterion of elegance is the proposed from the perspective of aesthetic translation. The principle has made such a tremendous influence in the development of translation theory that until now translators are still studying them in depth and trying to seek some guidance in their translation practice. (Wang Bingqin, 2005)

Based upon Yan Fu's idea, Lin Yutang wrote *On Translation* in 1933, where Lin put forth the concept of translation being art, and a triad of principles on translation: Faithfulness, Fluency, and Beauty. According to his systematic analysis, faithfulness and fluency are supposed to be taken as the very foundation of literary translation, while beauty indicates the trend in pursuing the ideal artistic effect. That explains why he has been considered as a representative of

the “translation-as-art” school.

In the 1950s, Fu Lei, a famous Chinese translator put forward his principle of “spiritual resemblance” or “spiritual resonance”. He believed that aesthetic ideas made distinctions between the West and China. So translators should be responsible for representing the artistic beauty of the original language, rather than translating word for word.

In the 1960s, Qian Zhongshu, a productive scholar in the study of translation theories, proposed the concept of “transfiguration” or “sublimation” in literature translation. In his opinion, the top standard of literary translation is sublimation which can help to avoid the awkward way of translation and meanwhile maintain the original flavor of the source text despite the different language usages between the source text and the target one. (Wang Bingqin, 2005)

In brief, the translation notions mentioned above, taken as a whole, carry the typical features of China’s classic aesthetics and contributed a lot to the Chinese traditional translation theory. Based on previous studies on the traditional translation aesthetics home and abroad, modern translation aesthetics is steadily heading for maturity. In the last two decades, a considerably large number of scholars, linguists and aestheticians attempted to apply this newly developed theory to direct their translation practice. Actually, some of their studies have born rich fruit, monographs and papers coming out in succession such as those of Liu Miqing’s and Xu Yuanchong’s.

Liu Miqing is a high prolific translation theorist. He is also one of the first theorists who presented the idea of translation aesthetics. In 1996, his paper *Translation in the Perspective of Aesthetics* was published in which he stated the undeniable relationship between aesthetics and translation. He believed that studies of translation from or into Chinese were definitely related to strict observation of the basic translation rules from the perspective of aesthetics. In 1999, Liu Miqing published his book *Modern Translation Theory* and brought with new scientific and systematic modern Chinese translation theories. In 2005, another book *An Introduction to Translation Aesthetics* written by Liu built the theoretical framework of translation aesthetics. Xu Yuanchong (2006), another distinguished translation theorist and translator in modern period, wrote *On Translation* and proposed his translation theories-- “Three Beauties”, that is, beauty in sense, beauty in sound and beauty in form through translation practice in poetry. Specifically, he set a certain translation criterion and built a theoretical framework to meet the standardized requirements of verse translation. On the other hand, the author also noticed that it was rather difficult to fulfill the ideal of conveying all the three beauties simultaneously in verse translation. In 2006, he wrote the book *The Art of Translation*, in which his preference for translation as a form of art is clearly expressed.

C. *Aesthetical Function of Children’s Literature*

The reason why a literary work could be a genuine literary work lies in its literary beauty. (Liu Miqing, 2005) Children’s literature as a genre of literature, also possesses its artistic beauty. The process of creating or appreciating children’s literature is undeniably an aesthetical activity. As children’s literature tends to be children-oriented, the artistic beauty of children’s literature cannot be accomplished without considering children’s psychological characteristics. Accordingly, children’s literature is a kind of literary art incorporating beauty of language with children’s aesthetical tastes and psychological characteristics. As a matter of fact, children’s literature is multi-functional, namely, entertaining, educational, and aesthetical. However, the first two functions are realized on the basis of the third one. In other words, children’s appreciation of children’s literature, whether simply for fun or education, might better be conducted in a children-friendly manner which could arouse their interest in reading and ultimately touch their innermost soul with the artistic beauty of both content and form. Take fairy tales for example, animals, plants and almost everything in it can speak and express their feelings just like human beings, and their vivid utterances, lovely images, picturesque settings, etc. altogether bring about an imaginary story with the aid of children’s language and imagination. The plot and the theme, whether revealed or veiled in the story help children distinguish the beauty from the evil. Thus, children can enjoy their reading and at the same time, build up their aesthetic awareness through reading books.

Wang Quangen (1994), an expert in the study of children’s literature, points out that writers of children’s literature should not only understand children’s ways of thinking and characteristics of their aesthetic awareness, but play a dominant role in guiding and facilitating them in reading abilities. Adults, as the major composer and aesthetic subject of children’s literature are responsible for accomplishing its functions, nourishing children’s minds with knowledge, purity, beauty and fantasy.

D. *Summary*

Throughout the glorious history of China, the traditional study of literary beauty can be traced back to several thousands years ago. As a part of the literature in general, it’s believed that it is not until the late Qing dynasty that the translation of children’s literature appeared. After a century’s development, though gaining much more attention than ever before, children’s literature in China has still been in a peripheral status in literary polysystem. It is true of the translation of children’s literature. Still, some distinguished Chinese scholars are dedicated to the glorious cause such as Bing Xin, Ye Shengtao, Ba Jin and Zhang Tianyi and some other children’s translators whose works are endeared by children readers even today.

Translation of children’s literature has a profound significance. First of all, the translated children’s literature provides a channel for children to learn about the outside world and builds a bridge among children of different cultures. Secondly, the translated children’s literature serves as a supplement for Chinese children’s literature and enriches the

resources of Chinese literature. Translators and writers can draw the essence from the translated children's literature. They borrow the feature, the style in various forms from the foreign literature to produce works that is entertaining, educational and aesthetic for Chinese children.

II. TRANSLATION AESTHETICS AND CHILDREN'S LITERATURE TRANSLATION

Today, domestic publishing houses are introducing series of books from every corner of the world to help children enjoy the cultural diversity. It is undeniable that children's literature translation is of great significance in cultural exchanges. Yet, compared with the translation practice, the work of translation studies on children's literature still falls a bit behind. Translators and scholars working in this field start to attach much importance to the establishment of its theoretical framework for the convenience of their translation practice. Among it, the integration of children's literature translation and translation aesthetics leaves much space for our study. The exploration that has been done reveals that children's literature also contains its aesthetic value, so its translation should desirably represent the beauty of the source text, and the translated version should fit in with children's aesthetic needs and satisfy the requirements of translation aesthetics. Still, it remains a big issue for our scholars and translators committed in this field as to how translators can explore the aesthetic function and realize the aesthetic value in an effective way.

Aesthetic Constituents in Children's Literature Translation

In the field of aesthetics, the aesthetic object and the aesthetic subject, as two essential constituents, are inseparable as an organic unity. So is the case with the translation aesthetics. They constantly interact, accommodate, compromise and get unified with each other in the process of aesthetic activity in literary translation and ultimately realize the aesthetic representation of the source text. Children's literature, regardless of its distinctive features, possesses all the general characteristics of literary works. When it comes to aesthetic activities in literary translation, children's literature is no exception, involving both the aesthetic object and the aesthetic subject.

1. The Aesthetic Object and Its Aesthetic Constituents

It is generally acknowledged that the aesthetic object refers to all the objective parts that are involved in human's aesthetic activities. The aesthetic object must be bound up with aesthetic subject, hence a unified pair of opposites. Until now, the definition of the aesthetic object in literary translation has not yet been clarified. Fu Zhongxuan states that there are two aesthetic objects: the original text (or the source text) and the translated text (or the target text), as the translation activity involves the conversion of two different language systems (1993), while Liu Miqing (2005) believes the aesthetic object refers to the source text with aesthetic values. Only with that, human's aesthetic requirements could be satisfied. When it comes to the attributes the aesthetic object possesses, he further stressed that it was unfavorable, even futile to pursue or explore the aesthetic value of the target text with no reference to the original one in literary translation. (Liu Miqing, 2005)

As far as the representation of aesthetic values is concerned, translators are required to be able to appreciate the artistic beauty both in the source language and the target one, to accurately transfer and recreate the original beauty in the target text. For that reason, a comparative analysis between the two versions of texts in the process of translating should be made to justify whether the transference of aesthetic values between target text and source one could be attained. Therefore, the author of the thesis personally believes the translated text or the target text should undoubtedly be one of the basic aesthetic objects besides the original one.

In spite of some minor differences in defining the aesthetic object, the two scholars still hold similar opinions as to its aesthetic constituents with different terminology. In this paper, we'll mainly rely on Liu Miqing's theory to examine how these artistic features could be satisfactorily transferred and then represented in another language on the basis of his classification of the aesthetic object.

The importance should be attached to their translation studies both in practice and in theory. As is mentioned previously, children's literary language is distinctive on various levels given their lower cognitive and intelligent level. As a result, how to represent its unique artistic beauty that can cater to children's needs and interests in the process of translation is an issue worthy of careful study. Before that, it would be better for us to clarify a fact that the general differences are primarily based on parataxis in Chinese and hypotaxis in English which lead to different grammatical categories and grammatical usages of a certain word. In this case, it is necessary to make a contrastive survey between the target text and the original one as to how to accomplish an ideal aesthetic effect in children's literature translation.

1.1 Formal Aesthetic System

According to Liu Miqing (2005), the aesthetic object consists of two systems: the formal aesthetic system and the non-formal aesthetic system. The formal aesthetic system, alternatively, the aesthetic semiotic system, is a combination of the external form, internal form and rational form. The external form can be perceived directly by senses, while the internal form is an intermediate stage that helps to access the rational form which ultimately touches upon or reveals the significance hidden behind the form. It's easily understandable that the formal aesthetic system with different layers is upgraded gradually in the process of aesthetic activity. Both the form and the content are inevitably involved in the binary interaction to present the aesthetic value of the source text. Briefly speaking, formal aesthetic constituents are visible and audible. Since formal aesthetic constituents are perceptible by means of diction, syntactical structures, rhetorical methods and texture of a text, we'll take a close look at how the artistic beauties are presented and represented at different levels in the translating process in the part of case study.

Like adult literature, works of children's literature are also written in artistic language which evokes children's interest and stimulates their imagination. On the other hand, it's interesting to note that its language is easier to be understood with the special features of vividness, simplicity and musicality. For instance, modal particles, reduplicated words, onomatopoeia are frequently used to reinforce the desirable effect that children prefer. In addition, what is equally important lies in the right approach to the issue, that is, how to make its syntactic structures understood by children in the light of their cognitive ability and aesthetic acceptability. Last but not least, translators are supposed to strictly observe the norms of a language. If a certain linguistic combination or a rigid grammatical usage is violated arbitrarily, it is likely that young readers even adults will be made confused. As for this point, Yang Shicheng (1994) once put it this way, "I think overemphasis on the techniques of language regardless of the content and the fact that children readers are still in the phase of language learning, may lead to the losses of artistic values for children's literature."(p.82)

1.2 Non-Formal Aesthetic System

Apart from the formal aesthetic system, the non-formal aesthetic system also contributes a lot to the aesthetic charm of literary works. Constituents in the non-formal aesthetic system are non-substantial, abstract and can't be perceived directly. In translation aesthetics, the non-formal aesthetic system is termed as "indefinite, non-quantitative and infinite fuzzy sets or sets of fuzziness." (Liu Miqing, 2005, p141). Although the non-formal aesthetic system is characterized by fuzziness, it is not a mystery that cannot be uncovered. To some degree, non-formal aesthetic constituents are somewhat related to the writer's personality. Therefore, a competent translator should try to feel the same way as the original writer feels about his works. Only in this way can the inherent artistry of the original text be transferred and represented to its utmost. In the part of case study, we'll deal with the point from the angle of aesthetic representation in imagery and feeling. In children's literature translation, the non-formal aesthetic constituents seem a bit complicated and abstract especially for young readers in their early stage. Therefore, translators should turn to some feasible translation techniques for help. Different ways of translation just like literal translation, free translation, foreignization, domestication, etc. can be employed to convey the original meaning as well as its aesthetic information. The most frequent use of imagery in children's literature is a typical feature which has been studied repeatedly. Simply speaking, imagery is an important symbol creating a kind of emotion or atmosphere to strengthen the aesthetic effect. In the process of translation, translators should pay attention to its connotation and cultural differences so that our young readers could have a better understanding of its implicit meaning and the writer's emotion. Considering children's limited comprehension and immature psychology, adults are sometimes encouraged to offer some guidance to children's reading.

2. The Aesthetic Subject and Its Aesthetic Constituents

Just as scholars in the translation academics vary in their opinions about the aesthetic object, they also display different attitudes towards the concept of aesthetic subject. Fu Zhongxuan claims that the aesthetic subject is composed of the three elements, namely, the translator, the editor and the receptor (or the reader). He explains that the translator is the aesthetic subject of the original text, while the editor is the aesthetic subject of both the target and original text. Meanwhile, the receptor or the reader should be an aesthetic subject of the target text. Whereas, according to Liu Miqing's understanding, the aesthetic subject in translation aesthetics refers to the part of the translator. The aesthetic subject is defined in aesthetics theories as the person who is capable of making aesthetic judgment, and actively exploring the aesthetic object once inspired under certain given circumstances. (Lin Li, 1990) This is true of translation aesthetics. Translators are the aesthetic subjects of the source language, while readers are the aesthetic subjects of the target language. In this sense, the aesthetic subject consists of both translators and readers.

2.1 Translator

Translators as a component of the aesthetic subject play an active part in the aesthetic activity instead of passively accepting information from the source text. Based on the opinion of Liu Miqing (2005), translators are characterized by their objectivity and subjectivity. Being objective means translators should transfer the artistic beauty of the source text faithfully and accurately and try to make the responses of both target readers and source readers equivalent. On the other hand, being subjective means translators enjoy certain freedom to cultivate their potential and recreate their translation works so long as they do not distort or depart from the original text either in form or in content. Therefore, a competent translator with a conscientious attitude and subjective dynamics should be endowed with three aesthetic qualities: aesthetic feeling, knowledge, capability and tenacity.

Nowadays, the focus of translation study is no longer confined to the field of linguistics. Scholars and translators gradually think of the translation activities as a way of intercultural communication. Therefore, translators of the younger generation shoulder the responsibility to bridge the cultural gap through their translation activities. Thus, how to cultivate people's cultural awareness and represent cultural charm in the process of translation is a demanding task for us to fulfill.

According to Xu Jun (2010), the goal of translation, to a large extent, manipulates the attitude, principle and approach a translator possibly adopts. Whether a resulting text is successful or not has much to do with the translator's ability in understanding various elements and their relationship. The role that the translator plays in children's literature is evident, hence can never be neglected. As we've discussed previously, translators are required to take the uniqueness of children's literature and children's limited comprehension abilities into full consideration, especially when they hope to

represent the artistic beauty of the original text. This calls for their conscientious attitudes towards the aesthetic judgment, transference and representation in the translating process. For the sake of evoking children's interest and cultivating their aesthetic capabilities, transference of aesthetic elements should be given equal weight, if not more, compared with the fidelity of its content. Therefore, translators are supposed to give full play to their subjective dynamics. Basically, translators should first of all try to put themselves in children's place and release their imagination to the greatest extent based on their life experience, their abundant knowledge and their persistent efforts to realize the goal of serving for children's education.

2.2 Reader

What seemingly matters most is the role of readers since the process of translation currently tends to be more reader-oriented than text-oriented. Readers' responses and aesthetic evaluation can be of crucial importance in deciding to what extent the aesthetic value is represented. Though readers do not directly get involved in the process of translation, they may indirectly influence its reproduction. For instance, they can participate in the translation activities based on their aesthetic outlook, take advantage of their own aesthetic experience, knowledge and imagination to make their aesthetic appraisal and judgment.

In the translation of children's literature, children as the major target reader group, are one of the aesthetic subjects. Just like adults, they have their own aesthetic judgments of the literary works. As we have mentioned before, children are severely restricted by their life inexperience, their lack of knowledge and immature development in mind and body. Their focus in appreciating literary works is totally different from that of adults. In general, what interests them most is the sort of literary works full of novelty, imagination, purity, beauty and so on. Children's literary aesthetic appreciation, particularly in their early stages, relies heavily on intuition. For example, they tend to shift their attention unconsciously from something abstract to concrete ones such as the varied colors, sounds, shapes and the like that appeal to them remarkably. Apart from that, children often do not set a clear goal for their reading. Their simple purpose is to have fun and derive much pleasure from reading. Yet, the truth cannot be denied that children do have their inherent abilities to make aesthetic judgments. Therefore, the most essential task for the translator is to respect children's nature and translate the literary works on the basis of children's cognition and psychology.

III. CONCLUSION

It's universally acknowledged that translation aesthetics is no longer an independent subject which involves interdisciplinary relevance. Its dependence and relevance can be explored from the perspective of translation, aesthetics, linguistics, literature, philosophy, etc. Based on that, it's no point arguing whether translation is a science or art, particularly within the sphere of literary translation. A critical view should be held in identifying the nature of translation.

Take linguistics for instance, its studies are basically not intended for literary translation. However, its observation and analysis of linguistic commonalities can be turned into positive use in guiding translation practice. Translation is an interlingual transfer and communication between two languages. Its complexity is self-evident. However, scientific rules do exist to manipulate our way of rendering in case the basic meaning and general form in the target text deviate too much from the source text. Translators are supposed to regulate and accommodate their way of translation to the dominating core rules between two languages. On the other hand, the process of translation, especially in literary works is not always governed by scientific rules. It has much to do with artistry. Artistic quality is an indispensable feature in literary translation. Therefore, translators are also required to make an artistic distinction among different styles.

Translation aesthetics makes a compromise on the controversial subject. It involves both science and art, and neither of them can be completely rejected in accomplishing the ultimate task of aesthetic representation. It's also the case where translation of children's literature is involved. According to the above scientific analysis of children and children's literature, it can be concluded that children are born with aesthetic sensitivity and children's literature serves as an important medium and tool in cultivating and establishing their correct aesthetic attitudes. As a result, translation aesthetics in children's literature will have to shoulder heavier responsibilities and should never be neglected. In translating children's literary works, representation of aesthetic elements can be dealt with from the aesthetic object's formal and non-formal aesthetic system according to the interpretation of aesthetic representation made by the prominent translation theorist Liu Miqing.

To sum up, translation is essentially an activity based on objective rules and artistic insights. This is applicable to translating children's literary works. As to aesthetic representation, much remains to be done. The requirements of scientific and artistic approaches will be more and more delicate and complicated. The only way out is to combine both approaches and absorb the strengths of each translation theory to facilitate the development of children's literature.

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