

Original Paper

A Corpus-Based Study on the Chinese Translation of *Run Away* from the Perspective of Androgyny

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Abstract

Run Away, the collection of eight short stories written by Nobel laureate Alice Munro examines the lives of Canadian women throughout the last century. As a female writer's novels, it inevitably flashes valuable female consciousness. From the perspective of androgyny, this thesis will explore the gender awareness in Li Wenjun's Chinese version on the lexical level by investigating corpus data and analyzing specific cases. This study holds that male translators with androgynous perspectives could cross the gender border and translate from other gender's perspective to make feminine elements visible.

Keywords

feminist translation, androgyny, Run Away, Li Wenju

In the 1980s, translation studies started to shift from the “linguistic turn” to the “cultural turn”. Studies outside the limits of linguistics and traditional literary theory, such as the political, social, and historical aspects of translation, have begun to garner great attention. Meanwhile, the feminist movement also extended to the academic field. Thus, translation and feminism had a historical encounter.

1. Gender, Translation and Androgyny

“The influence of second-wave feminism has endowed both feminist writers and their translators with the authority and the means to disregard Authority.” (Flotow, 1991, pp. 69-84) Based on feminist ideology and rooted in the translation practice of female translators, feminist translation theory has become a heated research topic since its birth in the 1980s. Supporters of feminist translation theory believe that the translated works should enjoy the same status as the originals. Therefore, the translator is no longer inferior and submissive to the author, as he or she has the right to demonstrate his

subjectivity and creativity during the translation. Thus, feminist translation theory broadens the field of translation studies, that is, the influence of the translator's gender on literary translation.

Butler (1999) concludes that as a discourse, translation offers translators space to perform their gender identities, yet it also exerts constraints upon their gender performance. Some female translators contend that they are more willing to translate female writers' work as they have a sense of alienation from male writers' work. However, in reality, translators may be assigned to translate the works written by another gender, which requires translators to intentionally cross the gender border and translate from the other gender's perspective.

"Female translators challenge the notions of fidelity, transparency, and definitive meaning in traditional translation with creative and non-traditional strategies..." (Flotow, 1991, pp. 74-79) However, racial feminist interventionism is often criticized as "too emotional, too subjective, too sectarian and too idealized, so it cannot develop into a real research method." (Levine, 1992, pp. 78-85)

Therefore, as a complement to its inherent weakness, androgyny plays an important role in preventing feminist translation from going too extreme. Androgyny means "the translator could interpret the original not only from his/her own gender's side but also the other gender's." (Mu, 2008, pp. 97-101) It is feasible and possible for male translators to reproduce the feminine consciousness of the original by empathizing with the author. There are several studies on androgyny in the domestic academic circles. Liu (2004) believes that "If a female translator can grasp the toughness of a male writer, or male translator the tenderness of a female writer, the translated text must be perfect." Li (2008) concludes that the concept of androgyny can make up for feminist translation theory's limitations. Chen (2014) contends that although the translator's feminist awareness is important, it should perform in moderation. Their opinions substantiate that men can ruminate and translate from a female's perspective. At present, the studies on androgyny in China are mainly conducted in the theoretical field and the application. There are few corpus-based studies from a gender perspective, so this study will fill in this gap. This paper also hopes to explore the significance of the androgynous translation theory and thus enrich relevant translation studies.

2. Language of Women

In the early 1970s, the concepts of "language of women" emerged, and Lakoff (1975, pp. 45-78) proposed eight features of female language, such as weak curse words, overused hedges, and fillers, overly standard grammar, and so on. Talbot (1998, p. 20) points out that "women consistently tended to use more of the features associated with the prestige 'Standard' variety of a language than men do." Linguists in China began to investigate the gender difference in language in the late 1970s. In his book *Gender Linguistics of Chinese*, Sun (2012, pp. 59-71) pointed out that in terms of lexical aspects, Chinese share some similarities with English, as Chinese women tend to adopt euphemisms, color words, and exclamations to express their opinions. Li (2007) believes that translators can use every possible translation strategy to make the feminine visible in the language, so that the translated text

may be more readable. Yang (2002) contends that “In most cases, the differences are not absolutely clear-cut, but simply differ in inclination and preference.” Therefore, there are many factors behind the gender differences in language. However, it is undeniable that there are differences in the language adopted by males and females. If the male translator can emphasize the females’ feelings and shows his empathy in his translation, the translated text will be a perfect and harmonious cooperation between the author and the translator.

3. Research Procedure

3.1 Self-Built Corpus Design and Text Collected

The research samples chosen by the author is the Chinese version of *Run Away*, translated by Li Wenjun and originally written by Alice Munro. As a master of short stories, Munro’s writing style is stunningly transparent, subtle, and precise. Meanwhile, she is capable of writing ordinary life without boring her readers, a profound grasp of human emotion and psychology.

As the winner of TAC’s Lifetime Achievement Award in translation, Li Wenjun is widely known as Faulkner works’ translator. His classic translations include *The Sound and the Fury* and *Absalom, Absalom!*. In an interview, Li Wenjun affirmed Alice Munro’s meticulousness and profoundness in observing women’s inner world, and he felt honored to convey the female characteristics of Munro’s work (Wang, 2014, p. 151).

Searching “*Run Away* Chinese Version” in CNKI, there are insufficient studies on Li Wenjun translation in China at present, with a total of 16 related studies. Only one journal focuses on its feminine awareness from the perspective of feminist translation theory. Among them, only two studies analyze the translated text based on the self-built parallel corpus. In general, it appears that studies of its Chinese version seem to be just at the beginning and consequently quantitatively unimpressive, leaving much space for further exploration.

Based on a self-built parallel corpus, Sun (2014) finds that functional equivalent theory can be utilized in the translation of personal pronouns. Yin (2016) takes Li Wenjun’s translation as the research sample to study its tendency of explicitation in fictional translation. It is worth noting that most of the studies only include *Run Away*, the first short story in the collection, and few related studies cover the whole collection. Therefore, a corpus-based analysis from the perspective of androgyny is deficient.

3.2 Corpus Building and Research Questions

First, the electronic version of the text was collected; Second, the author adopts Segmentor to segment the files. Third, by utilizing ParaConc, the two texts are aligned at the sentence level. The self-built corpus covers 204,643 characters in Chinese and 104,941 characters in English, and it consists of eight short stories, which are: *Run Away*, *Chance*, *Soon*, *Silence*, *Passion*, *Trespasses*, *Tricks*, and *Powers*. Their corresponding Chinese and English characters are shown in the following table. Meanwhile, This study will answer the following questions. (1) How the androgyny is manifested in his translation? Can it convey the feminine element of female writer’s work? (2) How is gender consciousness in Li

Wenjun's translation reflected on the lexical level?

Table 1. The Number of English and Chinese Characters in the Parallel Corpus

Self-built Corpus								
Works	Runaway	Chance	Soon	Silence	Passion	Trespasses	Tricks	Powers
English	13,892	12,176	11,876	10,295	12,046	12,226	10,636	21,794
characters								
Chinese	26,837	23,709	24,060	21,326	23,192	23,434	20,389	41,676
characters								

3.3 Research Methods

The author selects typical cases on the lexical level to analyze the translator's feminine consciousness. The following methods are adopted: quantitative method and qualitative method. The concrete analysis will be divided into three aspects: the addition of modal particles, the adoption of reduplicated words, and the emotion enhancement of comparatives. The statistical tools are AntConc 3.41 and ParaConc 269.

4. Case Analysis

4.1 The Addition of Modal Particles

There are plenty of sentence-final particles added by the translator which does not exist in the original. In Mandarin, sentence-final particles serve various semantic and pragmatic functions, such as indicating mood or attitude. "In the case of E-C translation, adding modal particles can make the characters' thoughts more coherent and the logic of the translated text will be more explicit." (Liu, 2010, p. 11)

Qi (2009) makes an analysis of the gender difference of modal particles. She finds that women use more “啊”, “呢”, “啦”, and “吧” than men in declarative sentences. Taking the original text's colloquialism style of writing and the female characters she portrayed into account, Li Wenjun add sentence-final particles, such as 呀, 呢, 嘛, 吧, to indicate characters' surprise, tenderness, or kindness. According to Table 2 (below), there are 909 sentence-final particles in Li Wenjun's version.

Table 2. Frequencies of Sentence-Final Particles in Li Wenjun's Translation

	呀	呢	嘛	吧
Frequency	178	365	56	310
%	20%	40%	6%	34%

Example 1: “Yes.” No more, she thoughts. No more.

Li’s translation: “是的。”别再说了，她想。别再往下说了吧。

Juliet was accosted by a strange man on the train, who said that they could “chum around” together to spend the boring journey. “At those words, chum around, a cold turbulence rose in Juliet.” This frivolous statement made her feel demoralized and anxious. As an intellectual who loves classical literature, Juliet clearly knew that she is not sexually attractive to males. Although Juliet despised the public’s pursuit of sexually attractive females, at the same time, she was deeply mired in inferiority and uneasiness. Therefore, the man’s words activated her inner conflicts, which forced her to resist this conversation. Although she showed an unusually indifferent attitude towards the man, she still feared the suppression imposed by patriarchy. Therefore, translating “No more.” into “别再往下说了吧” instead of “别再说了” vividly reproduces Juliet’s inner indecision and struggle.

Example 2: Or it may have been from nervousness.

Li’s translation: 不过也可能是因为神经紧张的关系吧。

This sentence reflects the nervous and excited mood of the heroine in *Tricks* before dating. Although last time, they enjoyed a magically pleasant and sweet conversation, they did not exchange contact information. Therefore, it is reasonable for Robin felt uncertain and uneasy, as the hero may forget her or marry someone. Considering her nervousness before dating, Li Wenjun added “吧” at the end of the sentence which not only grasps the delicate feminine emotions that the author hopes to depict but also makes the whole sentence more dynamic and telling.

4.2 The Adoption of Reduplicated Words

According to Wang (1999), there are four types of reduplicated words: AA, ABB, ABBB, and AAB. As a common phenomenon in Chinese, it is a typical artistic mean to display the beauty of Chinese from the aspect of rhythms, forms, and images. Meanwhile, reduplicated words highlight aesthetic values and make language expressive. Therefore, adopting reduplicated words in translation can soften the tone and delicately express women’s emotions.

Due to limited time and effort, this paper only discusses AA-type reduplicated words in Li Wenjun’s translation. By typing regular expression `\b([^\x00-\xff])\2\b` into AntConc, the total number of reduplicated words (AA-type) can be extracted. According to statistics, there are 725 AA-type words in the translated text, and the specific distribution is shown in the following table.

Table 3. Frequencies of Different Parts of Speech of Reduplicated Words (AA-type) in Li Wenjun’s Translation

	Noun	Verb	Adverb	Adjective
Frequency	171	139	296	119
%	24%	19%	41%	16%

Example 1: “Please. Come and get me.”

Li’s translation: “求求你了。来接接我吧”

Carla, when she was 18 and college-bound, ran off to marry her husband, Clark, against her parents’ wishes and has been estranged from them since. And now, getting on a bus to Toronto, she runs away a second time—this time from Clark. However, just as the car drove out of the town, Carla suddenly gave up her precious opportunity to run away. “She is now gradually seeing that the strangeness and horror of the approaching future world is that she can’t integrate into it.” So she staggeringly got off the bus and implored her husband Clark to take her home. Li Wenjun translated the verbs “please” and “get” into “求求” and “接接” respectively. The two reduplicated words clearly reproduce Carla’s vulnerable temperament and her helplessness, which demonstrate his empathy with the female character.

Example 2: ... all soft, rumpled, fuzzy, like an outer skin that was flaky and graying as his real skin must be underneath.

Li’s translation : ...全都是软绵绵、松皱皱、毛茸茸的，像是他长在外面的一层灰乎乎的易剥落的皮肤，而他的真皮肤则隐藏于下。

The translator uses four reduplicated words to depict the sluggishness and slothfulness of the hotel owner. Adjectives such as “soft”、“rumped”、“fuzzy” are translated into “软绵绵”、“松皱皱”、“毛茸茸”, instead of literally translating them as “柔软”, “皱巴” and “模糊”. Through the depiction of physical appearance, the character’s attitude towards life and his psychological state are vividly shown to the readers.

4.3 The Emotion Enhancement of Comparatives

A male translator is ought to unearth and develop his androgynous potential of androgyny, hence steering away from gender stereotypes and biases in translating this work. Therefore, during the translation, he is supposed to fully perform his subjectivity and creativity to make feminine elements visible. For the use of adjectives, women like to use empty adjectives and intensifiers (Lakoff, 1975, pp. 53-57). For example, women often choose hyperbolic adjectives such as *super*, *fantastic*, *marvelous*, and *splendid* to reflect their extreme pleasure, exhilaration, and satisfaction, while men just use some simple adjectives such as *good* or *well*. Considering the uniqueness of the female language and the greater subjectivity the translator can perform in translating comparatives, they are chosen as the research object to analyze the translator’s gender consciousnesses.

By using Ucrel, a free claws web tagger, TXT documents can be tagged. Importing the tagged TXT document into AntConc and searching “AJC” can get the number of comparative adjectives in the original text. There are 130 comparative adjectives in *Run Away*, and the specific distribution is as follows.

Table 4. Frequencies of Comparative Adjectives used in Each Short Stories in the Original Text and the Number of English Characters

	Frequency	English characters
Runaway	19	13,892
Chance	24	12,176
Soon	14	11,876
Silence	12	10,295
Passion	12	12,046
Trespasses	12	12,226
Tricks	15	10,636
Powers	22	21,794

Example 1: “Stranger than strange,” he said happily.

Li’s translation: “真是匪夷所思呀。”他快快活活地说道。

According to the online Xinhua Dictionary, “匪夷所思” means “unimaginable; no common person could think of it.” Instead of literally translating “Stranger than strange” as “怪上加怪” or “奇上加奇”, the translator adopts a Chinese idiom to express its meaning. That alteration not only enables the targeted readers to understand the text better but also makes the language more appealing and expressive, as it unconsciously makes the readers wonder about the strange things about the hotel, such as the unkempt clothes of the innkeeper, the dingy and weird dining room, and the out-of-season canned green beans.

Example 2: “The coffee in Greece was quite strong, a little stronger than I like.”

Li’s translation: “希腊的咖啡太浓了，比我喝惯的浓多了。”

Mrs. Jamieson is an independent mature woman and high-qualified life is her pursuit. During the conversation with Carla over coffee, a picky judgment is made by her. In her view, Creek’s coffee is too strong to enjoy pleasantly. To reproduce that delicate feminine emotion, Li Wenjun translated “stronger” into “浓多了” instead of “浓一点”, which perfectly represents Mrs. Jamieson’s personality.

5. Conclusion

The research result indicates that the translator Li Wenjun greatly reproduces the feminine consciousness of the original through the depiction of female characters’ speech, behavior, and psychology. By analyzing Li’s translation on the lexical level, Li catches the gist and big picture of this book and conducts his translation from the other gender’s perspective. As Li Wenjun once said in an interview, “If readers can see the unique Canadian scenery, experience the feelings of the ordinary men and women there and feel resonated, then my wish of paying back the good friendship with the Canadians is not failed.” (Wang, 2004, p. 159) The acceptance of the translated text by Chinese readers

and the related studies from the female perspective further confirm the feasibility of its translation strategy.

Due to the limited time and energy, the database of this self-built corpus is relatively small which maybe result that some statistics are not so convincing and precise. Moreover, gender language differences are not clear-cut, but simply differ in inclination and preference. However, by combining the quantitative and qualitative research methods, the degree of the translators' androgyny can be captured. Therefore, by unearthing the feminine awareness of *Run Away*, Li Wenjun consciously reproduce and enrich the original.

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