

Original Paper

A Study of Literary Translation from the Perspective of Discourse Translation: Taking *Transient Days* as an Example

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Abstract

For translators, understanding the original text is the basis of translation activities, and analyzing it in terms of the discourse helps translators better understand the original text. In translation activities, the translation approach from the perspective of the discourse is favored by more and more translators. Taking Transient Days as an example, this paper analyzes this translation version with its varied and beautiful translation style from the perspective of discourse translation, and explores the aesthetic value of literary translation in terms of discourse.

Keywords

Discourse Translation, Transient Days, Translation Style

1. Introduction

The essay “匆匆” is a classic work by Mr. Zhu Ziqing, a renowned modern Chinese writer and essayist. This text is imbued with poetic sentiments, conveying the melancholy and bitterness of intellectuals following the May Fourth Movement. It paints a picture of twilight in spring, illustrating the author’s contemplation on the passage of time like a fleeting arrow. This paper takes *Transient Days*, the English version included in the book *Selected Modern Chinese Essays I*, as the subject of analysis. It aims to examine and discuss the stylistic features of essays in English translation from the standpoint of discourse translation. The translator strived to achieve an aesthetic effect equivalent to that of the original text in his translations. He carefully selected words for accuracy while also aiming to create a sense of musicality in sound. He employed flexible and varied sentence patterns and organized discourse in a way that aligns with the aesthetic norms of the English language. It can be concluded that he has made significant efforts to convey the style of the original text.

2. Discourse Translation

The so-called discourse translation is the translation of a text using the discourse as the unit of translation. The unit of translation refers to “the smallest unit that has a counterpart in the translated language”, which means that if you choose to take the discourse as the unit for translation practice, you will pay more attention to the overall nature of the text as well as its context, and you can better take into account the speaker’s, or translator’s intention, or even the psychological activities of the characters, which will help you translate the text more accurately. Discourse translation is an important concept in the field of translation, which emphasizes that translation is not only the conversion of sentences or paragraphs, but also involves the treatment of the whole discourse. (Zhang & Liu, 2003) Discourse translation considers not only the conversion at the linguistic level, but also pays attention to context, context, pragmatics and other factors.

According to the Systemic Functional Linguistics School (SFL), the use of language is influenced by the context in which it is used. Because there is a purposefulness in the use of language, its specific purpose can only be realized if it has meaning in the cultural and situational contexts in which it is used. At the same time, language use is also influenced by different cultural and situational contexts. The Systemic Functional Linguistics school believes that the actual unit of language use is the discourse unit such as the discourse, not the grammatical unit such as words and sentences. (Wang, 2004) According to Han Lide and others, translation activities do not deal with separate words or sentences, but are interrelated and constrained each other. These words and sentences are combined into a discourse in a certain format for a specific communicative purpose. That is to say, the direct object of translation activity is the original discourse, and its final product is the translated discourse. This requires translators to learn how to practice translation from the perspective of the discourse and to focus on the theme of the original text.

3. Translator’s Style

In the field of translation, translator’s style refers to the individual and unique linguistic expression and translation preference presented by the translator in the translation process. Each translator has his or her own unique way to understand the original text and present it in the target language. This unique way is the translator’s style.

Many scholars in the field of translation have their own views on what is translator’s style. According to Liu Shuangshan, “Style is the natural expression of a writer’s personality through certain language means after being cultivated by certain ideology and culture”. Translator Zhang Jin proposes that the concept of translator’s style should be divided into two major aspects: spiritual and material. Although there are different opinions on the definition, in general, the specific manifestation of translator’s style can be roughly divided into the following three aspects.

Firstly, different translators tend to adopt different ways of translating words and phrases with emotional coloring, which leads to the fact that the emotional and psychological activities between the

words felt by the reader are often different.

Secondly, the choice of translation methods and techniques is also a reflection of the translator's style. When translating, the translator will choose the appropriate translation methods or techniques according to his own habits and understanding of the translated text, which can reflect the different personal styles of the translator.

Finally, different translator's style can also be reflected in the selection of translation materials. When selecting translation materials, especially literary translation texts, translators usually combine their personal interests, translation purposes and their own fields of specialization to select materials. This actually reflects the existence of translator's style.

4. The Embodiment of Translator's Style in the Perspective of Discourse Translation from the Translation of Transient Days

ST1: 燕子去了, 有再来的时候; 杨柳枯了, 有再青的时候; 桃花谢了, 有再开的时候。

TT1: If swallows go away, they will come back again. If willows wither, they will turn green again. If peach blossoms fade, they will flower again.

Analysis: As the first sentence in the beginning of the essay, Zhu Ziqing employed the rhetorical techniques of parallel and repetition at the same time. This sentence is separated by a semicolon with three clauses, which are similar in structure and meaning. The author utilized the coming and going and withering of the three images of "swallows, willows and peach blossoms" to describe the change of seasons and the cycle of life. The reason why the author described in the beginning of the article that swallows will come back again, willows will turn green again, and peach blossoms will flower again is to contrast with the following part: "But, tell me, you the wise, why should our days go by never to return?", which serves to emphasize the role of the first and the last in the overall discourse perspective. In the translation, the translator, also used the rhetorical technique of parallel, because English pays attention to hypotaxis and emphasizes the logical relationship between sentences. So here, the translator used three conditional clauses in succession to form a parallel sentence, which made the translation similar to the original text in form and at the same time reproduced the logical relationship between sentences in the original text very well. In addition to the rhetorical device of parallel, the original text repeatedly used the sentence structure of "when there is" three times in a row, and the translator also took this repeated structure into consideration when he translated it, so he turned the repetition of the sentence structure into the repetition of a specific word, i.e. the English word "again". This not only highlights the author's emotion, but also makes the format of the article neat and orderly, yet loops back and forth, full of formal beauty, and at the same time, also well from the perspective of the discourse to grasp the essence of the original text, and their own style is shown in the text between, giving the reader a good reading experience.

ST2: 在逃去如飞的日子里, 在千门万户的世界里的我能做些什么呢? 只有徘徊罢了, 只有匆匆罢了; 在八千多日的匆匆里, 除徘徊外, 又剩些什么呢? 过去的日子如轻烟, 被微风吹散了, 如薄雾,

被初阳蒸融了;我留着些什么痕迹呢?我何曾留着像游丝样的痕迹呢?我赤裸裸来到这世界,转眼间也将赤裸裸的回去罢?但不能平的,为什么偏要白白走这一遭啊?

TT2: Living in this world with its fleeting days and teeming millions, what can I do but waver and wander and live a transient life? What have I been doing during the 8000 fleeting days except wavering and wandering? The bygone days, like wisps of smoke, have been dispersed by gentle winds, and, like thin mists, have been evaporated by the rising sun. What traces have I left behind? No, nothing, not even gossamer-like traces. I have come to this world stark naked, and in the twinkling of an eye, I am to go back as stark naked as ever. However, I am taking it very much to heart: why should I be made to pass through this world for nothing at all?

Analysis: At this level, the author used the rhetorical question “What can I do?” This rhetorical question further evokes the complex in the discourse, tracing the traces of his own life and reflecting on “the bygone days” with a series of questioning phrases. The translator repeated the words “waver” and “wander” to express haste and wandering, emphasizing that the overall atmosphere of the discourse was melancholic; the verbs “waver” and “wander” are very graphic and vivid, with “waver” meaning to hesitate and vacillate, and “wander” meaning to roam aimlessly. According to the translator’s own understanding and the aesthetic experience of English readers, the inner meaning of “wandering” is crystallized. Similarly, the word “hurry” vaguely expresses the feeling that time flies, and life is in a hurry, leaving plenty of white space and imagination for the readers. The translator used the reversed translation method, rendering the phrase “我何曾留着像游丝样的痕迹呢?” into “No, nothing, not even gossamer-like traces.” The same thing can often be said positively or negatively, and this is true of both English and Chinese. For some things, English is accustomed to speak from the positive side, while Chinese is accustomed to speak from the negative side; for other things, Chinese is accustomed to speak from the positive side, while English is accustomed to speak from the negative side. In translation, a sentence that is said positively in the original text may have to be said negatively in the translated texts, or it may be said positively or negatively, but it will be better if it is said negatively. Here, the translator followed the English language habit and put the English translated sentence in the positive sense, which made it more firmly express the author’s emotion of not wanting to waste his youth and time under the overall discourse. At the same time, such translation makes the translation maintain the form of short sentences in the overall discourse structure, so that it contains strong emotions in the concise and condensed words.

ST3: 但是, 聪明的, 你告诉我, 我们的日子为什么一去不复返呢?

TT3: But, tell me, you the wise, why should our days go by never to return?

Analysis: From the perspective of discourse, the last sentence of the original text echoes the beginning and the end of the beginning. In translation, the translator modified the tone of the question while keeping the same rhetorical question. In fact, in the original article, these two sentences are not identical. This sentence at the beginning of the article is due to the fact that the previous article lists that swallows will come back again, willows wither will turn green again, and peach blossoms will flower

again. Therefore, it is immediately followed by a twist “But, tell me, you the wise, why should our days go by never to return?” The translator used domestic translation in translating this sentence, again using “but” to indicate a turn. And in the sentence at the end, “you the wise”, is the author’s honorific to the reader. In order to express this emotion in the translation, the translator not only used an intonational exclamation, making the translation create a kind of ancient poetic flavor, but also changed “tell me” to “would you tell me please”. And the translator’s modification changes to these two places are very appropriate and natural to reflect the respect for the reader that the author of the original text wants to reflect in the last sentence at the end. Therefore, from the perspective of the overall discourse, the translator not only pursues the formal correspondence between the translated text and the original text, but also conveys the thoughts and feelings of the author of the original text as much as possible on the basis of maintaining the formal beauty of the original text, so that the readers of the translated text maximize the sharing of the deep meaning of the text and the feelings of the author with the readers of the original text. Besides, in this way, the beauty of the original text’s meaning is reproduced very well.

5. Conclusion

Translation from the perspective of discourse has a guiding effect on translation activities, which can help translators better analyze the original text from an overall perspective and grasp the main idea of the original text. Translator’s style is an element that cannot be ignored in translation activities, and this feature is especially prominent when translating from a discourse perspective. Readers are often attracted by the personal style of the translator revealed between the words when they read the translation from the hands of an excellent translator. By taking a peek at the artistic style of translation, we can see the translator’s remarkable achievements in the field of translation. His faithful, accurate and evocative translation characteristics enable him to convey the meaning of the original text as well as to present the spiritual connotation of the original text to the readers. His representative works let us appreciate his superior translation skills and profound cultural heritage. And his tone lets us feel his love for the translation career and his concern for the readers. The translator’s artistic style of translation provides us with a unique aesthetic experience and sets an example for the Chinese translation community.

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