

Original Paper

A Study on Translator's Subjectivity in Novel Translation Based on Skopos Theory: Take *Mrs. Dalloway* Translated by Wang Jiaxiang as an Example

Fan Luo¹

¹ College of Liberal Arts, Nanjing University of Information Science & Technology, Nanjing, China

Received: April 3, 2024

Accepted: April 28, 2024

Online Published: April 30, 2024

doi:10.22158/jetss.v6n2p80

URL: <http://dx.doi.org/10.22158/jetss.v6n2p80>

Abstract

The translator, as the subjectivity of translation, will have a certain influence on the effect of translation. Therefore, the role that the translator plays in translation has always been a hot topic in translation studies. Mrs. Dalloway is a classic novel of the British writer Virginia Woolf, and Wang Jiaxiang's translation can fully reflect the characteristics of Woolf's stream-of-consciousness novel. Taking Skopos Theory as the theoretical guide, this paper explores the manifestation of translator's subjectivity in Wang Jiaxiang's translation of Mrs. Dalloway from the aspects of translation techniques and language style, and analyses the subjective initiative played by the translator from the translation purpose, so as to further study the significance of translator's subjectivity in translation practice.

Keywords

Skopos Theory, Translator's subjectivity, Mrs. Dalloway, Translation Studies

1. Introduction

Mrs. Dalloway is one of the representative works of Virginia Woolf, a writer of stream of consciousness. In Professor Wang Jiaxiang's translation, she writes: "The charm of Woolf's works is that they leave a huge space for readers to appreciate." There are many literary reviews on stream-of-consciousness novels, but few studies on the translation of this special literary type. In addition, when studying the translation of *Mrs. Dalloway* by Wang Jiaxiang, the previous researches mostly focused on the translation from the perspective of feminist translation and poetics, but few researches studied the manifestation of the translator's subjectivity based on Skopos Theory. Therefore, in light of Skopos Theory, this paper aims to understand the translator's specific purpose, study the translator's subjectivity in translation purpose, translation techniques and language style, and explore

how translation purpose and translator's subjective initiative are unified, so as to enrich the appreciation and research of Woolf's stream-of-consciousness translation works.

2. Overview of Skopos Theory and Translator's Subjectivity

2.1 Skopos Theory

Skopos Theory was proposed by Hans J. Vermeer and Christiane Nord, representatives of the German Functionalist School, in the 1970s. According to Skopos Theory, all translations should follow three rules: Skopos Rule, Coherence Rule, and Fidelity Rule.

Skopos Rule means that translation activities are determined by the purpose. "Skopos" usually refers to the communicative purpose of the translation, which is determined by the initiator of the translation activities. This rule states that the translator should translate in a way that enables the target text "to function in the situation in which it is used and with the people who want to use it" (Vermeer, 1989b, p. 20; Nord, 1997, p. 29). Coherence Rule requires the translation to ensure intralingual coherence, which means that the translation should consider the reading needs and culture background of the target language readers. Therefore, this rule refers that "the target text should be acceptable and meaningful in a sense that it is coherent with the situation in which it is received" (Nord, 1997, p. 140). In view of this, translators need to enhance the readability of the translation as much as possible to achieve the purpose of communication. Fidelity Rule refers to "the coherence between the source and the target texts" (Reiss & Vermeer, 2013, p. 102). Meanwhile, the target text must be comprehensible as a text at first and then it could be analyzed with regard to the circumstances in which it is produced (Reiss & Vermeer, 2013, pp. 102-103).

In short, the purpose of translation is the inner power of the translator to exert his/her subjective initiative.

2.2 Translator's Subjectivity

As for the definition of the subjectivity of translation, Xu Jun (2003, p. 11) holds that "we can regard the translator as the subjectivity of translation in a narrow sense, and the author, translator and reader as the subjectivity of translation in a broad sense." He points out that in defining the subjectivity of translation, the translator should be put in a central position (Xu, 2003). The scholars Zha Mingjian and Tian Yu (2003, p. 22) believed that "translator's subjectivity refers that the translator, as the subjectivity of translation, shows his/her subjective initiative in translation activities for the purpose of translation under the premise of respecting the translation object. Its basic characteristics are the translation subjectivity's conscious cultural awareness, humanistic character and cultural and aesthetic creativity." There are three obvious characteristics of the translator's subjectivity, namely "initiative", "egoism" and "receptiveness" (Zha & Tian, 2003), which can run through the whole translation activity.

In the pre-translation, the translator needs to determine the translation purpose, clarify the creation background of the original text and bring in his/her own aesthetic interest and emotion as well as fully understand the connotation and emotion that the original text wants to express. In the process of

translation, the translator needs to flexibly choose translation strategies according to the purpose of translation. Under the guidance of Skopos Theory, according to Skopos Rule and Coherence Rule, translators should satisfy readers' reading and aesthetic needs as much as possible in order to achieve the purpose of cross-cultural communication. In the post-translation stage, the translator needs to reflect and evaluate the translation to see whether he/she has fulfilled the purpose of translation.

2.3 Connection between Skopos Theory and Translator's Subjectivity

There are three rules in Skopos Theory, namely, Skopos Rule, Coherence Rule, and Fidelity Rule. The translator's subjectivity has three characteristics, namely "initiative", "egoism" and "receptiveness". These are integrated with and closely related to each other.

After determining the expected effect of the translation, the translator can complete the translation work according to his/her subjective initiative. Before choosing translation strategies and methods, translators will consider the purpose of translation. It may include conveying information, expressing emotions, cultural adaptation, etc. Based on different purposes, translators will choose different translation strategies and methods, such as literal translation, free translation and so on. According to the translator's subjective initiative, he/she understands and analyzes the source text, and uses his/her own knowledge, experience and judgment to make translation decisions. They can choose the appropriate vocabulary, syntax, and structure to ensure that the translation achieves the desired effect in the target text. At the same time, the translator also needs to consider the needs and understanding of the target readers. They are supposed to adjust the translation according to the target readers' cultural background, language level and habits, so as to ensure that the translation can be accurately understood and accepted by the readers.

Therefore, the purpose of translation is closely related to the translator's subjectivity. Only by combining the purpose of translation with the translator's subjectivity can translation better convey information and emotions and satisfy the target readers' reading needs and aesthetic tastes.

3. Introduction to Mrs. Dalloway

Virginia Woolf's *Mrs. Dalloway* is a classic of modernist literature. The biggest feature of this novel is that it uses stream-of-consciousness and introspective narration to present the inner thoughts and feelings of the characters. Readers can follow the thoughts of the characters and enter their spiritual world. At the same time, Woolf tends to use long English sentences, as well as complex and fluid sentence structures that enhance the novel's introspection and stream-of-consciousness presentation. The book also involves deeper themes and meanings through metaphors and symbolism, enriching the language of the novel with visual and sensory descriptions. In addition, Woolf's writing style is unique, and she is good at using repetition, sound effects and rhythm to create a unique atmosphere.

All in all, Woolf's *Mrs. Dalloway* has such linguistic features as stream of consciousness, inner monologue, multi-dimensional narration, concise and precise expression, rhyme and rhythm, metaphor and symbolism. These characteristics make the language of the novel more vivid.

Professor Wang Jiexiang's translation is very much in line with Chinese readers' expectations in terms of word, syntax, rhythm and other details. We can see many flexible and wonderful translations in this Chinese version.

4. Manifestation of the Translator's Subjectivity in *Mrs. Dalloway*

4.1 Application of Translation Techniques

4.1.1 Information Supplement

It is an important translation technique for translators to supplement hidden details of the original text, such as the dialogue of characters and the description of characters' emotions. It fully reflects the translator's "initiative" and "egoism". The means of description of the source text and the translated work are different, and the cultural context of readers is also different. This translation technique may include the interpretation of cultural background and the localization of idioms and metaphors to make the story more closely related to the cultural understanding of the target readers, and to meet the aesthetic and cultural demands of the readers.

Example 1:

ST: But Peter—however beautiful the day might be, and the trees and the grass, and the little girl in pink—Peter never saw a thing of all that.

TT: 但是彼得——无论天气多好，无论树木、草地和穿粉红色衣服的小女孩多可爱——彼得一概视而不见。

Analysis: In example (1), the heroine is recalling a story of her ex-boyfriend Peter. Peter was only interested in the changes of the world, and he did not understand the beautiful scenery and good mood that Clarissa felt. Therefore, the translator adds the word “无论” to emphasize the tone, which indicates that the different attitude towards life between the two people is irreconcilable, and ultimately the two did not get married. Supplementing hidden information can show that the translator is ready to grasp the emotion of the characters and actively exert her subjective initiative in translation. It is definitely guided by Skopos Theory.

4.1.2 Explication of Word Meaning

Due to the differences between English and Chinese, translators need to pay attention to the choice of words so as to accurately express the original meaning. Explication can express the implied meaning of the original text more accurately and logically.

Example 2:

ST: A being so differently constituted from herself, with such a command of language; able to put things as editors liked them put; had passions which one could not call simply greed.

TT: 一个和自己的素质完全不同的人，对语言是如此精通，能按编辑之所好来措辞写文章；具有你无法简单称之为贪婪的热情。

Analysis: In example (2), the original phrase “so differently constituted from herself” is translated as “和自己素质完全不同的人”. Actually, the main meaning of “constitute” in Chinese is “构成,” which

can refer to a certain part of a person. In the context, the term “differently” is used to describe well-educated Hugh, who writes letters well, so the translation can be interpreted as “个人素质”, because one’s literary accomplishment is indeed part of one’s personal quality. When explaining the exact meaning of the phrase “put things”, the translator chooses the common Chinese writing term “措辞” to express it, which is very consistent with the reading habits of Chinese readers. In view of this, the translator can actively exert her subjective initiative in rendering the meaning of the source text, convey the connotation of the original text, and enhance the readability of the translated text. Though this technique, readers of the original text and readers of the target text can get the same reading experience, which reflects the Coherence Rule in Skopos Theory.

4.1.3 Inversion of Word Order

Adjusting word order can reorganize the sentence structure, so as to conform to the readers’ phrasing habits. The use of this translation technique reflects the Coherence Rule in Skopos Theory and translator’s subjectivity, because when adjusting the word order of a sentence, the translator needs to divide sense groups according to his/her own understanding of the text and grasp the author’s writing intention, so as to faithfully convey the information and emotions expressed in the original text.

Example 3:

ST: It rasped her, though, to have stirring about in her this brutal monster! to hear twigs cracking and feel hooves planted down in the depths of that leaf-encumbered forest, the soul...

TT: 但是她觉得很焦躁不安, 让这样一个残忍的魔鬼在她心中搅动! 她在她的灵魂、这片枝繁叶茂的森林的深处听到了树枝断裂的噼啪声, 感到魔蹄的践踏.....

Analysis: In example (3), the translator obviously switches the positions of “the soul” and “in the depths of that leaf-encumbered forest”. According to the above statement “残忍的魔鬼在她心中搅动”, therefore, the translator makes it clear that the key word in the context is “her soul”. In translation, the translator puts “he soul” and its appositive words in advance, reorganizes the sentence structure to better reflect the psychological activities of the characters, and highlights the key point in the language expression habits of Chinese, so that the translation can be read fluently.

4.2 Embodiment of Language Style

4.2.1 Poetic Style in Translation

In discussing the constraints of poetics, Lefevere (2010, p. 86) explains it as follows: “Poetics consists of two parts: one is literary technique, genre, rhetoric, archetypal characters, situations, and symbols; The other is a poetical idea of what role literature is or should play in a social system.” The poetic effect of *Mrs. Dalloway* is mainly embodied in the stream-of-consciousness writing style and the rhythmic language rhythm. Poetic translation is one of the main purposes of Wang’s translation. The poetic style also shows the translator’s subjective initiative in this work.

Example 4:

ST: It was not to them (not to Hugh, or Richard, or even to devoted Miss Brush) the liberator of the pent egotism, which a strong martial woman, well nourished, well descended, of direct impulses,

downright feelings, and little introspective power (broad and simple—why could not everyone be broad and simple? she asked), feels rise within her, once youth is past, and must eject upon some object—it may be Emigration, it may be Emancipation.

TT: 对于他们来说(对休、理查德、甚至对忠心耿耿的布拉什小姐来说都是如此)这也不能使被压制的自我中心思想得到释放, 而像布鲁顿夫人这样一个健壮勇武、营养充足、出身名门、直率冲动、感情外露、缺乏内省(明朗而单纯——为什么不能每个人都明朗而单纯呢?她问道)的女人, 却感到一旦青春逝去, 自我中心的思想就在她内心涌起, 必须朝某个目标发泄——可能是移民, 可能是解放。

Analysis: The flexible use of idioms and four-character words is a dimension of poetic language. In example (4), the translator renders all the modifiers in the original text into Chinese idioms and four-character words. The form of Chinese four-character expression can condense the connotation of the text and hide the meaning between the lines, which is conducive to enhancing the sense of rhythm of the text. In addition, the four-character style of writing reflects the unique Chinese culture, and this poetic language can improve the quality and acceptability of the translation in English-Chinese translation.

Example 5:

ST: Look, the unseen bade him, the voice which now communicated with him who was the greatest of mankind, Septimus, lately taken from life to death, the Lord who had come to renew society, who lay like a coverlet, a snow blanket smitten only by the sun, forever unwasted, suffering forever, the scapegoat, the eternal sufferer, but he did not want it, he moaned, putting from him with a wave of his hand that eternal suffering, that eternal loneliness.

TT: 冥冥中的幽灵命令他看, 这个声音在和他交流;他, 塞普蒂莫斯, 人类中最伟大的一员, 最近刚刚经历了生死考验, 是来此复兴社会的上帝, 他像床罩般躺在那里, 像条只有太阳才能毁灭的雪毯, 永不损耗、永受苦难, 是替罪的羔羊, 是永恒的受难者。但是他不愿如此, 他呻吟着, 摆摆手赶走那永恒的苦难, 那永恒的孤独。

Analysis: In example (5), the translator starts from the rhythm of writing and pays attention to the use of the number of Chinese characters, so as to make the translation rich in rhythm and achieve the artistic effect of poetry. The expressions “永不损耗、永受苦难”, “永恒的苦难” and “永恒的孤独” in the translation give people a strong sense of rhythm; “替罪的羔羊” and “永恒的受难者” highlight the rhythm through the contrast of stress and light tone. The poetic effect brought by the sense of rhythm can enrich readers' imagination of characters' inner world, and it is in line with the pursuit of rhythm and rhyme in traditional Chinese poetics. From the perspective of poetic translation, Wang's translation can not only convey the original information faithfully and smoothly, but also absolutely meet readers' expectations.

4.2.1 Use of Modal Particles

In the translation of stream-of-consciousness works, it is very significant to accurately capture and convey the tone of the original text. When the tone is properly translated, it not only ensures the

accurate expression of the translated content, but also perfectly reproduces the unique style and emotional color of the original English text. In *Mrs. Dalloway*, the translator, from the perspective of female translators, adds some modal words, such as “呢” and “吧”, or adopts repetition to reflect the monologue of the characters’ inner world. The flexible use of modal particles can make the image of characters more vivid. On the whole, this can make the translation more suitable for the portrayal of the characters.

Example 6:

ST: I have been dead, and yet am now alive, but let me rest still, he begged (he was talking to himself again—it was awful, awful!)

TT: 译文：我曾死去，而现在却活着，“但是让我再休息休息吧”；他乞求道（他又在自言自语了——“可怕，真可怕！”）

Analysis: Septimus is a retired soldier who participated in the war which caused him great mental trauma, and his life after retirement is often clouded by the shadow of death. In the context of this example, Septimus feels like a drowning sailor and being dying, but he is still alive, struggling with the wounds of war. The first addition of “吧” in the translation makes people feel that the protagonist is physically and mentally exhausted. His brain is still constantly active, but his spirit is on the verge of collapse. In addition, this “吧” can also reflect the inner struggle of the protagonist, which makes Septimus feel helpless. The latter “it was awful, awful!” in the translation, the translator adds “真”. Although this is a small detail, it can highlight the delicate expression of female translators in the translation of the character’s inner monologue. Adding soft modal words can enrich the character image, and it is also the embodiment of the translator’s subjective initiative.

5. Conclusion

Based on Skopos Theory, this paper takes Wang Jiexiang’s Chinese version of *Mrs. Dalloway* as a case study of the translator’s subjectivity in novel translation. It is found that the translator’s purpose in translation is to achieve cross-cultural communication and to translate Woolf’s novels to Chinese readers so that more readers can appreciate Woolf’s novels. In light of the characteristics of stream of consciousness novels, the translator exerts her subjective initiative by information supplement, explicitation of word meaning, inversion of word order, poetic translation and the use of modal particles. All in all, Wang Jiexiang’s translation faithfully and coherently conveys the original information and delivers the feelings of the original text. From the perspective of the translator’s subjectivity, the translator respects the translation object. The subjectivity in the translation is conducive to the realization of the translation purpose, thus making the translation more acceptable to Chinese readers. More importantly, the translator’s subjectivity can play a better role under the guidance of Skopos Theory and its three rules. Therefore, in translation activities, translators should be clear about the purpose of translation, fully understand the reading needs of readers, actively play the role of translators’ subjectivity, and seek to translate more excellent works to achieve cross-cultural communication.

References

- Chen, Y. Z. (2018). A Study on the Rewriting of Fu Lei's *The Road to Happiness* from the Perspective of Poetics. *Journal of Zhoukou Normal University*, 35(01), 80-84.
- Feng, L. J. (2016). The Author's Language Style from the Translation of *To the Lighthouse*. *Language Planning*, 2016(23), 93-94.
- Han, D. Y. (2018). A Study of Translator's Subjectivity under the Guidance of Skopos Theory: A Case Study of Lin Yutang's *Six Records of Floating Life*. *Journal of Jinzhong University*, 35(01), 103-105.
- Lefevere, A. (2010). *Translation, Rewriting and the Manipulation of Literary Fame*. Shanghai: SFLEP
- Lu, X. D. (2017). *Application of the Three Rules of Skopos Theory to Chinese-English Translation of Tourist Texts*. Beijing: Beijing Jiaotong University.
- Ma, W. (2016). *Translator's Subjectivity from the Perspective of Skopos Theory*. Nanjing: Nanjing University.
- Meng, D. Y. (2023). "Semi-Outsiders" and Imperial Politics: The Marginal Wanderers in *Mrs. Dalloway*. *Foreign Literature*, 2023(02), 130-140.
- Nord, C. (1997). *Translating as a Purposeful Activity: Functionalist Approaches Explained*. Manchester: St. Jerome Publishing.
- Reiss, K., & Vermeer, H. (2013). *Towards a General Theory of Translational Action: Skopos Theory Explained (C. Nord, Trans.)*. Manchester: St. Jerome Publishing. (Original work first published in 1984). <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315759715>
- Vermeer, H. (1989b). *Skopos und Tanslationsauftrag: Aufsätze*. Heidelberg: Universit ä.
- Wang, J., & Chen, S. Y. (2017). A Review of Skopos Theory in Translation. *Modern Communication*, 2017(18), 102-103.
- Wang, Y. H. (2003). Stylistic Characteristics and Translation Strategies of Stream-of-Consciousness Novels. *Journal of Xianning University*, 2003(05), 92-93.
- Woolf, V. (2000). *Mrs. Dalloway*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Woolf, V. (2021). *Mrs. Dalloway (Translated by Wang Jiaxiang)*. Beijing: October Literature and Art Publishing House.
- Xu, J. (2003). "Creative Treason" and the Establishment of Translation Subjectivity. *Chinese Translators Journal*, 2003(01), 8-13.
- Xue, H. Q. (2014). The Weakening of Syntactic Features of Stream-of-Consciousness Novels in the Process of Translation from Skopos Theory: A Case Study of *Mrs. Dalloway* by Sun Liang and Su Mei. *Journal of Lanzhou Institute of Education*, 30(02), 135-136.
- Yang, L. (2013). A Study on the Translation Strategies of Modal Particle in Literary Works Translation. *Journal of Language and Literature Studies*, 2013(09), 74-75.
- Yin, Y. (2014). *Female Poetics in the Translation of Mrs. Dalloway from the Perspective of Feminist Translation*. Beijing: Beijing Foreign Studies University.

- Zha, M. J., & Tian, Y. (2003). On Translator's Subjectivity—from the Marginalization of Translator's Cultural Status. *Chinese Translators Journal*, 2003(01), 21-26.
- Zhao, Q. R., & Guo, X. (2019). A Study on Translator's Explicitation Strategy—A Study on the Verb “Speak” Based on the Four Translated Versions of *The Border Town*. *Journal of PLA University of Foreign Languages*, 42(05), 109-119+160.