Study on Translator's Subjectivity from the Perspective of Feminist Translation Theory

-- Taking the Three Chinese Versions of Gone with the Wind as Examples

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Abstract

The combination of feminist and translation studies provides a new perspective for translation theory. This paper chose three translation versions of Gone with the Wind as the research object, hoping to discover the differences between the male and female translators in translation under the feminist translation theory, and to further explore other manifestations of female translators' subjectivity. This paper carried out a comparative study of the Chinese versions from the perspective of feminist translation theory, aiming to investigate how the translators rewrite the target text, and to find out how the female translators highlight their subjectivity in the target text in detail. In the end, it is found that female translators tend to emphasize feminist thoughts and speak for women.

Keywords

1. Introduction

1.1. The Context and Development of Feminist Translation Theory

Western feminism emerged in the context of the women's liberation movement. Prior to the sixteenth century, literary creation was the exclusive field of men in Europe, and there was little room for women in this field. Although a few women had the chance to engage in this field, it was limited to the translation of books written by men. Therefore, translation became the only means for women to express themselves. At that time, religion was perceived as a symbol of supremacy and transcendence, and all the books translated by women were related to religion. Whereas the religion constrained women, it also enabled women to have access to translation. It is fair to say that feminist translation had its beginning in the translation of religious books. In the mid-nineteenth century, some women translators engaged in religious translation discovered that there was a great deal of misogynistic language in a certain religious doctrine. As a result, women translators had to adopt the translation strategy of "hijacking" to convey female aspirations for gender equality and women's liberation [1]. The concept of the social gender reinforced Western women's awareness that language not only serves as a way to communicate, but also enables women to recreate their image. They highlighted that men and women deserved equal rights and approached the issue of translation from the feminist perspective. In comparison with the source text, the target text had always been subordinate to the woman. Subsequently, feminism and translation were merged, and the translation served as means to rebel against discrimination and strive for women's status. They put forward that "women must attain linguistic emancipation, and women's emancipation must proceed from language beforehand" [2]. In the 1970s, people started to analyze translation from a more sophisticated perspective than the study of language itself. After the 1980s, the discrepancy of

gender consciousness between men and women was applied to translation theory and practice, forming a new translation theory---feminist translation theory.

1.2. The Study of Feminist Translation Theory in the West

Feminist translation theory emerged in Canada in 1984. From then on, feminist translation theorists devoted themselves to propagating feminist translation theory, making it a worldwide phenomenon. The integration of feminism and translation was a novel theory in the field of translation, which posed a tremendous challenge to traditional translation theory and shattered the status of traditional translation theory. The study of feminist translation theory in the West predates that in China. At the beginning of the twentieth century, Canadian feminists assembled at the University of York in Toronto and had a conference on the theme of "Dialogue". Two years later, they held a conference called "Women and Dialogue" in Vancouver. In 1984, a periodical called Tessera came to be the forerunner magazine of feminist translation theory in Canada, which raised the banner of feminism and translation. Afterwards, a significant number of outstanding women translators emerged who conveyed feminist ideology by writing books. The subsequent publications of several translation monographs confirmed the predominant status of feminist translation studies in Canada, which contributed immensely to the development of feminist translation theories and the dissemination of feminist translation theories throughout the world. Luise von Flotow, Sussanne de Lotbiniere Harwood and Sherry Simon are the representatives of feminist translation theories who presented their viewpoints in their monographs. Against the backdrop, countless Western feminist translation theorists carried out a massive amount of translation research as well as translation practice. With the advancement of the times, the study of feminist translation theory has also evolved. Feminist translators called for a translation regime that defied patriarchal society and underlined women's consciousness. They also put forward some new insights regarding the translation standards and the subjectivity and creativity of translators, and the feminist translation theory was a form of liberation for women and translators.

1.3. The Study of Feminist Translation Theory in China

Practically speaking, feminist translation theories had little impact on Chinese female translators initially, which was due to the fact that Western women were courageous in expressing their opinions. As Chinese women influenced by the feudal system for a long time, they followed conventional values in translation. Western feminists argued that women's liberation should begin with the emancipation of language, yet it did not work in China. Chinese female writers conveyed feminist consciousness by portraying female characters, rather than language itself. Nevertheless, some Chinese female translators adopted the translation strategies used by Western feminist translators in the course of translation, rendering their own translations with a pronounced feminist tone. Currently, major progress has been made in the exploration of feminist translation theory, the analysis of domestic translations, and the research on feminist translation theory. Most of the Chinese translation theorists did not show any significant resistance to this theory. On the contrary, they believed that the feminist translation theory has brought fresh ideas and vision to Chinese translation theory. Translators analyzed the effects of feminist translation theory on translation practice critically and put forward their own perspectives. At the same time, they also conducted reflections and criticisms on the limitations of feminist translation theory.

The study of feminist translation theory in China is quite late. Liao Qiyi, a professor at Sichuan International Studies University addressed the impact of Western feminism on translation theory for the first time in his book "Exploration of Contemporary Western Translation Theory". Over the past decades since the Western feminist translation theory was introduced to China, Chinese academics limited their discussions to the theory itself and failed to conduct case studies on feminist translation. Most of the relevant studies were about the appreciation of

Chinese versions of Western masterpieces, and the objects of text type were confined. With regard to the research method, domestic scholars adopted the comparative translation approach and conducted a study on different methods of translation from gender perspective by analyzing various Chinese versions of classics. In comparison with Western feminist translators, Chinese feminist translators were more moderate, but sometimes they would also break the traditional translation strategies for voicing their perspectives. The combination of feminism and translation ultimately formed the feminist translation theory, which turned out to be another crucial translation theory followed by post-structuralism, deconstructionism and postmodernism [3].

2. Feminist Translation Strategy

During the course of translation, feminist translators tend to use a variety of translation strategies to get a version that is different from the source text, or sometimes even to modify it. These translation strategies cover the following three categories: hijacking, supplementing, and footnoting and prefacing [4].

2.1. Hijacking

Hijacking is one of the most radical approaches in feminist translation theory. In order to convey their discontent with the patriarchal society, feminist translators often impose some feminist views in the translation, or adopt some feminist colored words to express their aspiration for gender equality, or endow the translation with stronger feminine meanings. For the purpose of showing respect for women, feminist translators often eliminate words that are belittling to women in the source text or make a reversed translation of them, hence changing the purpose of the source text completely. It is fair to say that the use of the strategy of hijacking is highly controversial in translation studies.

2.2. Supplementing

Supplementing is a vital strategy in feminist translation theory. According to the semantic coherence and expression habits, the translator will include contents in the target text so as to illustrate the information that the translator intends to convey or emphasize. The most notable feature of supplementing used in feminist translation theory is that the added content indicates feminist values. To enable the target readers to acquire a better understanding of feminist values, translators adopt supplementing to modify the content of the source text so as to create a feminist tone in the translation.

2.3. Footnoting and Prefacing

Footnoting and prefacing are also commonly adopted in translations. Footnote is placed at the bottom of each page of the target text, which illustrates the content of the source text and allows the target reader to have a thorough understanding of the source text. While the preface is attached to the introduction of the target text, it is typically a brief description of the translation. Feminist translators elaborate on the source text by adding prefaces and footnotes, which may cover the background of the source text, the author's intention, and the overall translation process. In this way, the target readers can relate to the feminist ideology as presented in the target text. Indeed, the preface and footnote are common translation strategies, but feminist translators regard them as a general strategy for translation.

3. Translator's Subjectivity from the Perspective of Feminist Translation Theory

Translator's subjectivity refers to the initiative of translators in translation practice. In the traditional translation theory, translator's subjectivity means that the subjective initiative

exhibited by the translator to realize the translation purpose based on the premise of respecting the translation object. Translator's subjectivity is characterized basically by cultural awareness, humanistic integrity and cultural and aesthetic creativity of the translation subject [5]. Yan Fu's translation criteria of "faithfulness, expressiveness and elegance" and Nida's "Functional Equivalence" are the ideal standards that translators strive for in their translation practice. In the conventional translation theory, the source text and its author enjoy a paramount and unassailable status. On the contrary, feminists believe that the meaning of the source text should be diverse and negate its singularity, which reveals that the translator can give full play to subjectivity. Feminist translators proclaim that translation is rewriting, and it is carried out in various ways to emphasize the status of women in the target text. Feminist translators challenge the traditional translation theory, arguing that it puts the translator and the target text in the subordinated category. They stress the subjectivity of the translator and unveil a new path for the study of translator's subjectivity. The emphasis on translator's subjectivity from the perspective of feminist translation theory is manifested as follows: firstly, it subverts traditional theories, so that translators are no longer stuck in the traditional framework and are stimulated to rewrite; secondly, it affirms the efforts of translators and boosts their status.

4. A Comparative Study on Chinese Version of Gone with the Wind

Gone with the Wind is a novel written by the renowned female writer Margaret Mitchell, which focuses on the protagonist Scarlett and is characterized by feminism. Since its publication in 1936, Gone with the Wind has caught the attention of readers and has become one of the best-selling novels in the United States. In 1940, the Zhejiang People's Publishing House released the first Chinese version of Gone with the Wind, which became one of the most popular literary works in China at the time. There are over ten Chinese versions of Gone with the Wind, and this paper chose the first Chinese version published by Zhejiang People's Publishing House in 1940 of the male translator Fu Donghua , the Chinese version of the male translators Jia Wenhao, Jia Wenyuan and Jia Lingyi under the same context, and the Chinese version of the female translator Li Meihua. This paper carried out a comparative study of the Chinese versions from the perspective of feminist translation theory, aiming to investigate how the translators rewrite the target text, and to find out how the female translators highlight their subjectivity in the target text in detail.

4.1. Highlighting the Social Gender of Translators

Example 1：

Source text: Between her nervous apprehension over the thought that Melanie's time was approaching and her unconscious straining to hear the sound of the cannon, she could hardly eat.

Fu's version：因为她一面担心着媚兰的时间马上要到，一面又不由得一直竖起耳朵去听那炮声，哪里还吃得下东西呢？

Jia's version: 但是，生平第一次，她没了胃口。玫兰妮临盆让她焦虑不安，同时她不由自主地竖起耳朵听大炮声，这种时候哪有心思吃饭呢？

Li's version: 想到媚兰即将临产，她又担心又不安。此外，她又总是情不自禁地竖起耳朵去听炮声，所以，她几乎什么东西也吃不下。

It depicts the scene of Melanie about to give birth. The phrase "Melanie's time" refers to the time when Melanie gives birth to her child. The male translator Fu Donghua translates it as "媚兰的时间", Jia translates it as "玫兰妮临盆", and the female translator Li Meihua translates it as "媚兰即将临产". Due to the gender discrepancy, the female translators can get to know the whole process of pregnancy and can reach the innermost part of woman's heart. In contrast,

the female translator, Li Meihua, applies the translation strategy of hijacking, and translates it as "临产" to portray the hardships suffered by women during pregnancy. It demonstrates the subjectivity of the female translator and enables the target readers to recognize the significant role of women in society.

4.2. Embellishing the Persona of Character

Example 2：

Source text: You're both going to get lickered up and jealous of each other about that two-faced, little, green-eyed baggage.

Fu's version: 你们两个都让那绿眼睛的小妖精迷住了。

Jia's version: 那个两面三刀的绿眼骚货就会搞得你俩互相嫉妒。

Li's version: 你们很快就会为了那个狡黠奸诈、双眼泛绿的小尤物而喝的烂醉如泥。

Example 2 depicts the twin brothers who have fallen in love with Scarlett, and this example is a warning from their mother. "Baggage" means a girl or a woman who is rude or bad-tempered. The male translator Fu Donghua translates it as "小妖精", Jia translates it as "骚货", and the female translator Li Meihua translates it as "小尤物". The comparison of the three versions reveals that the male translators take a dismissive tone when translating. However, the female translator Li Meihua applies the strategy of hijacking and uses a more neutral expression of "小尤物", which tactfully avoids the translation that is not conducive to the propagation of feminism. It diminishes the prejudice against women, gives full play to the subjectivity of the translator, and safeguards the image of women.

Example 3：

Source text: Men were omniscient and women none too bright.

Fu's version: 女人都是无知无识的。

Jia's version: 女人却没一个聪明伶俐的。

Li's version: 女人却不太聪明。

In the old days, people were constrained by conventional concepts. They often treated women with prejudice, and they assumed that women were dumb and stupid by nature. The phrase "none too bright" embodies that women are ignorant, and all the three Chinese versions also convey the obtuseness of women. In comparison, the female translator Li Meihua adopts the translation strategy of hijacking. She uses the adverb of degree "不太聪明" to soften the original meaning, exerting the translator's subjectivity and defending the image of women.

Example 4：

Source text: Oh, to have to sit here, a wallflower against her will.

Fu's version: 她却不得不坐在这里做壁花。

Jia's version: 现在只好待在这儿，无可奈何当墙花。

Li's version: 在舞池上做个受人冷落的小可怜。

The source text portrays a scene when Scarlett attends a ball after becoming a widow. In accordance with the social regulations of that time, widows are not allowed to attend all entertainment activities. Therefore, Scarlett turns out to be an outsider of the ball, and she is upset by it. "Wallflower" means a person who is left out of a party because he or she has no partner or is shy or clumsy. The male translator Fu Donghua translates it as "壁花" and Jia translates it as "墙花", which are straightforward and distinctly demeaning. While the female translator Li Meihua adopts the translation strategy of hijacking and translates it as "受人冷落的小可怜", instead of pejorative expressions. In this way, it promotes feminist ideology and beautifies Scarlett's female image.

Example 5：

Source text: And she knew that, loving Ashley as she did, her plan was doubly prostitution.

Fu's version: 这种行为便成了双料的卖淫性质了。

Jia's version: 她的计划便构成了双重堕落。

Li's version: 她的计划就更是在加倍地出卖贞洁。

This is a description of Scarlett's psychological activities when she decides to marry Rhett Butler. Scarlett makes the decision to marry Rhett in order to keep Tara. She knows that marrying Rhett is a breach of tradition and her love for Ashley, but she has to do it. The word "prostitution" in the example sentence demonstrates the struggle and guilt of Scarlett. A comparative study of the three Chinese versions reveals that the male translators' versions are full of pejorative tones, and they tend to negate and weaken the female image. While Li Meihua adopts neutral words instead of pejorative expressions, which is exactly the translation strategy of hijacking she applies. Li Meihua gives full play to the translator's subjectivity, and her version is more in line with Scarlett's character.

4.3. Demonstration of the Translator's Feminist Consciousness

Example 6：

Source text: Men were rough of speech and often drunk.

Fu's version: 男人可以粗声粗气地说话，可以喝得大醉酩酊。

Jia's version: 男人粗言秽语，经常喝醉。

Li's version: 男人说话粗鲁，肆无忌惮，还经常喝的烂醉如泥。

The source text conveys the author's dissatisfaction with the unfair treatment of women and also depicts the vulgarity of men's behavior. The three versions are basically the same in meaning, but the male translator does not try to beautify the image of men. The female translator adds the word "肆无忌惮" to describe men, with the aim of degrading the image of men and highlighting the elegance of women. The use of the supplementing gives full play to the translator's initiative, embodies the translator's feminist consciousness, and facilitates the realization of gender equality.

Example 7：

Source text: Out there on the floor in an apple-green dress with dark-green velvet ribbons dangling from her bosom and tuberoses in her black hair.

Fu's version: 穿着那件淡绿的衣服，飘着那深绿天鹅绒的飘带子，鬓边插着月下香。

Jia's version: 穿上苹果绿裙袍，让墨绿色丝绒带在胸脯上飘荡，乌黑的秀发上簪上晚香玉花，往场地中央一站。

Li's version: 穿着苹果绿的裙子胸前垂挂着深绿色的天鹅绒缎带，乌黑的头发上别着晚香玉，亭亭玉立地站在舞池里。

It describes the scene of Scarlett attending the ball after she became a widow. At that time, widows were not allowed to dress up and participate in any entertainment activities, which was undoubtedly a severe shock to Scarlett. By analyzing the three Chinese versions, Li Meihua emphasizes Scarlett's charm by adding the word "亭亭玉立" to underline the feminist identity of the character. The supplementing from a female perspective highlights the subjectivity of the translator and brings out the persona of character, which is something that never comes to the attention of male translators.

5. Conclusion

Western feminist translation theory overthrows traditional translation theory, arguing that the status of the target text and the source text is equivalent, advocating creative rebellion by the translator, affirming the creativity and subjectivity of the translator, and opening up a new perspective for translation studies. Through a comparative study of the three Chinese versions of Gone with the Wind, this paper reveals that there are significant differences between female and male translators in terms of the translator subjectivity. Female translators tend to adopt positive words when translating female figures, while male translators always use discriminatory language. Although it is said that translation theory should not ignore the subjectivity of the translator, it should also be pointed out that the subjectivity of the translator has distinct limits. It is not acceptable to overstate the translator's subjectivity in both translation theory and practice. The female translator in the Chinese version of Gone with the Wind expresses female consciousness in her own rational and gentle way, and demonstrates the subjectivity of female translators adequately.

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