

A Comparative Study of the Two Chinese Versions of The Magician's Nephew from the Perspective of Gestalt Psychology

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Abstract

Written by the British writer Clive Staples Lewis, the *Chronicals of Narnia* is an attractive fantasy novel which contains seven independent stories. As the sixth part of this great work, the *Magician's Nephew* is full of mystical adventure stories which reveal sincerity and kindness. Four principles of gestalt psychology will be chosen as theoretical foundations in this paper: wholeness, closure, similarity and heterogeneous isomorphism. With the guidance of these four laws, the author will compare two Chinese versions of the *Magician's Nephew*, analyzing the translation effects.

Keywords

Gestalt; Isomorphism; The Magician's Nephew.

1. Introduction

Increasingly frequent cross-discipline analysis can stimulate thinking and expand our horizons, which will enrich scientific achievements. Stressing integrity, gestalt psychology plays a crucial role in the domains of arts, science and technology. Essential and practical, it has also been introduced into translation studies. The *magician's Nephew* contains a wealth of characters and psychological details, reflecting religion beliefs and magic. Some scholars tended to analyze the *Chronicals of Narnia* as a whole. Comparative studies of the *Magician's Nephew* with the Bible can also be found. Some researches focus on the metaphors of the sixth story of Narnia. In this paper, the author attempts to analyze the translation effect and influence according to relevant principles of gestalt psychology, further exploring the enlightening value of *The Magician's Nephew*.

2. Gestalt Psychology and Literary Translation

Proposed by Wertheimer in 1912, gestalt psychology was developed later by Kohler and Koffka. The word "gestalt" refers to an entity, which can be regarded as a "shape". Gestalt psychology manifests the entirety cannot be equal to simple sum of its separated parts. The intrinsic essence of the whole transcends and determines the function of each individual. When perceiving an object, our brains first gain a whole conception. When we see a biscuit, an overall concept of "a biscuit" rather than its materials such as water and flour will immediately flash across our mind. Gestalt psychology has played a crucial role in numerous fields, including literary translation. Combined with translation, the main laws of gestalt psychology contain integrity, closure, heterogeneous isomorphism and similarity. A single sentence, a paragraph even a word in a literary work can be treated as an individual gestalt image. Various and abundant words constitute elaborate and rich sentences. Complicated sentences form intricate paragraphs which compose a complete literary work, presenting an overall gestalt image. Each scattered fragment shows individual gestalt image. Under control of the overall gestalt image, individual gestalt image interconnects with each other, coexisting harmoniously.

3. Studies on the Magician's Nephew and its two Chinese Versions

3.1. The Magician's Nephew and Its Enlightenment

The Magician's Nephew is the sixth part of The Chronicles of Narnia, driving the holistic plot and containing thrilling details. It describes a magical and exciting adventure. Curiosity and naughty, Digory and Polly intruded into uncle Andrew's mysterious lab and took the magic rings. They traveled to a completely spiritless city Charn because of the magic power. Digory yielded to the temptation and struck a golden bell, breaking the spell and bringing sleeping evil witch back to life. They witnessed the destruction of Charn in amazement, which made them extremely regret awakening the witch. The wicked witch was later taken to another unknown world, in which all of them was shocked by the birth of Narnia. With dulcet and wonderful melody, powerful lion Aslan gave hope and vitality to Narnia. Digory accomplished Aslan's mission, bringing the mysterious fruit that protect Narnia. What's more, brave Digory saved his mother's life thanks to the charm of the mysterious fruit. Children's world is full of pure kindness and innocence. In order to save Polly, kind-hearted Digory broke through a host of difficulties and rushed into a strange world without hesitation. Against all the odds, all cute creatures pulled together and ultimately managed to protect burgeoning Narnia.

Enticing and changeable, our life is filled with inevitable hesitations and struggles. We are unavoidably faced with complicated situation and various attractions, which will somehow make us confused and puzzled. What we should do is to remain true to our original aspiration, pursuing our shining dreams unremittingly and going forward without limits. The Magician's Nephew makes me realize the precious beauty and invaluable goodness.

3.2. Language Style of Two Selected Chinese Versions

A comparative analysis of the versions of Yang Xiaobo and Deng Jiayuan will be discussed in this paper. After comparing, the author found that catchy Chinese four-character idioms and phrases were frequently adopted in both versions. In Yang's version we can find “弥留之际”，“秉烛夜谈”，“光天化日”，“鞭长莫及”，“重蹈覆辙” and so on. In Deng's narrations we can find “毋庸置疑”，“自言自语”，“万籁俱寂”，“咆哮奔腾”，“心心念念” and “黯然失色”. Retroflex suffixation in Beijing mandarin were showed in Yang's version, including “那会儿”，“一块儿”，“女孩儿”，“带劲儿”，“破事儿” and so on. Both translators prefer to take advantage of the dialect “啥”. Yang also used “甬” and “压根儿”. Modal particles added in Yang's version such as “呀”，“呢”，“喽” and “啊” show genial atmosphere. Reduplicated words in both versions help to make the narrations vivid and charming: “绿油油” “红通通”，“硬邦邦”，“直勾勾”，“凉飕飕” and “湿漉漉”. Yang tended to translate the word “said” following the utterances into various verbs according to the context——“道歉”，“回敬” and “反驳”. Rich adverbs expressing attitudes were chosen to polish up the descriptions as well. When dealing with lengthy and difficult sentences, both translators chose to simplify them. Whereupon, concise statements make it easier for readers to understand. Parallelism was applied to make the tones in the context convincing and language elaborate.

3.3. Different Perspectives of Readers

Kids are generally regarded as the primary readers of children's literature. With superficial social cognition and scarce life experience, they would probably much more willing to accept concise statements. What's more, reduplicated words which are supposed to encourage interest in reading will create cordial discourse atmosphere for kids. Furthermore, these words can be close to their inward world. Rhotic accents and dialects are so true to life, creating jocular and light-hearted atmosphere. Whereupon, the plot turns out to be like a roller coaster of twists and turns. Adult readers, who are supposed to be taken into consideration, put a high value on violent language beauty and inspiration of the literature. Exquisitely detailed portrayals and

four-character structure in the selected Chinese versions can meet adult readers' aesthetic needs.

4. A comparative Study of the Two Chinese Versions of The Magician's Nephew Based on Gestalt Psychology

4.1. Law of Wholeness

The law of wholeness functions as the core point of gestalt theory, highlighting that the significance of the whole surpasses the function of its parts. Besides, individuals are under control of the entirety. The overall literary work reflects a complete gestalt image, which restricts different individual gestalt images distributing in the context. Only when the whole gestalt image is taken into account can all the individual gestalt images be perfectly expounded. Only focusing on the meaning of words in a single sentence may distort the holistic conception. Ignoring the significance of the whole will definitely lead to partial and unilateral understanding. Translators should pay more attention to the general idea of the literature, comprehensively experiencing the source text. Deal with fragmentary information after accurately grasping the holistic gestalt image. Select suitable words and expressions according to the cultural background and discourse atmosphere of the source text.

Example 1

ST: "And so wound you," he went on, "if you'd lived all your life in the country and had a pony, and a river at the bottom of the garden, and then been brought to live in a beastly hole like this."

TT1: "换成你，也会哭的，"他继续说，"如果你以前一直住在乡下，拥有一匹小马，花园的尽头还有一条小河，结果却被带来住在这样一个野兽住的洞穴里。"(Deng)

TT2: "换了你也要哭呢"，他继续说，"要是你从小住在乡下，有一匹小马，花园的尽头有条小河，然后却被带到这么个鬼地方来住的话。"(Yang)

Analysis: Judging from Digory's dusty face and unusual look, Polly felt that he had just cried. Reluctant and disappointed, Digory confessed and explained the reason. "Beastly" means something unpleasant. "Beastly hole" literally means a terrible cave. Ponies, graceful gardens and rivers imply that Digory lived a carefree life before. However, the following details mentioned that his mother was dying. Moving to live with uncle Andrew who is selfish and eccentric made Digory agonized. Deng translated "beastly hole" into "野兽住的洞穴" while Yang stressed Digory's sadness and chose the phrase "鬼地方" which was closer to the wholeness principle and expressed resistance and dissatisfaction.

Example 2

ST: Polly had disliked the Queen from the first; and even Digory, now that he had heard the story, felt that he had seen quite as much of her as he wanted. Certainly, she was not at all the sort of person one would like to take home.

TT1: 波莉一开始就讨厌这个女王；即使是狄哥里，在他听完这个故事后，也感觉自己看她已经看够了。她肯定不是你会想要带回家去的那种人。(Deng)

TT2: 波莉一开始就对女王没啥好感；而迪格雷呢，在听完那段故事后，觉得已经看透她了，也不想再了解她什么。显然，没有谁愿意把她这种人带回家。(Yang)

Analysis: The wicked witch cast a spell and destroyed Charn City, making thousands of people become innocent victims. Digory was disgusted with the rough and villainous witch after hearing about this, seeing through her ruthless nature. Deng used "看够了" to convey the surface meaning only, which may baffle readers. They may wonder if the witch is ugly or not.

Yang used “看透” to expose Digory’s antipathy to the witch, sublimating emotion. Yang made the contents more substantial, revealing vivid inner processes and exposing the witch’s cruelty.

4.2. Law of Closure

The law of closure deems that people’s psychological mechanism tends to automatically complete the outline of a fragmentary object. When seeing an imperfect shape or structure, people will unconsciously perceive it as a whole because of a kind of “pressure” created by their brains. In literature translation, proper “white space” can be deliberately applied, stimulating readers to deal with information gap. In this skillful way, readers gain inner satisfaction and pleasure.

Example 1

ST: And now you could hardly hear the song of the lion; there was so much cawing, cooing, crowing, braying, neighing, baying, barking, lowing, bleating, and trumpeting.

TT1: 这会儿你几乎已经听不见狮子的歌声了，四周充满了乌鸦的嘎嘎叫、鸽子的咕咕声、鸡啼、驴叫、马嘶、狗吠、狼嚎、牛哞、羊咩，以及大如喇叭似的高亢的象鸣。(Deng)

TT2: 这会儿，你几乎听不见狮子的歌唱了，到处传来动物的叫唤，啊啊、嗷嗷、咕咕、嘶嘶、汪汪、咩咩、呜呜……(Yang)

Analysis: Aslan’s wonderful songs are filled with magic power, lingering around and making Nania full of vigor. A variety of animals appeared when the melody gradually vanished. “Cawing”, “cooing”, “crowing”, “braying”, “neighing”, “baying”, “barking”, “lowing”, “bleating” and “trumpeting” respectively indicate sounds generated by crows, doves, cocks, donkeys, horses, dogs, wolves, cows, sheep and elephants. Instead of listing specific animals like Deng, Yang flexibly used onomatopoeic words in a fuzzy way. “Blank left” was thus adopted to inspire readers’ imaginations, which is in conformity with the law of closure.

Example 2

ST: “Oh, don’t be silly,” said Polly, stamping her foot. “Of course humans can’t eat grass, any more than you could eat a mutton chop.” “For goodness’ sake don’t talk about chops and things,” said Digory. “It only makes it worse.”

TT1: “噢，别犯傻了。”波莉跺着脚说，“人类当然没法吃草，就像你没法子吃羊排一样。”“看在老天的份上，别提任何羊排之类的东西。”狄哥里说，“这只会让我更饿。”(Deng)

TT2: “哎，别说傻话了，”波莉跺着脚嚷道，“人当然没法儿吃草，就像你也不吃羊排。”“看在上帝的份上，别提什么羊排了，”迪格雷说道，“越提事情越糟。”(Yang)

Analysis: With the help of the flying horse Fledge, Digory and Polly strived to find the fruit to keep Nania safe from harm. Fledge advised Digory and Polly to enjoy the delicious grass. Polly refused and mentioned mutton chops, upsetting Digory. The author of the source text didn’t explain in details what had become worse, using “it” and leaving a “vacancy”. Yang translated “it” into “事情” instead of explaining concretely as Deng did. In this way, Yang set the suspense, motivating readers’ imagination and giving them gratification of completing the “vacancy”. By contrast, Yang followed the closure principle and added interest to the text.

4.3. Law of Similarity

The law of similarity emphasizes that elements owing similar features tend to be grouped together. In other words, objects with same characteristics such as shape, size and color are more likely to be combined as a whole. In the process of translation, similar linguistic elements can be arranged into a whole. Rich four-character idioms or phrases used in literary translation can be regarded as a whole, which will skillfully enhance visual effects and promote readers’ understandings. Besides, it will be easier for readers to remember.

Example 1

ST: It was a lion. Huge, shaggy, and bright, it stood facing the risen sun...

TT1: 那是一只狮子，体型巨大，毛发浓密蓬松又闪亮。它挺立着面对太阳... (Deng)

TT2: 唱歌的是一头狮子。它体型庞大，毛发浓密，生气勃勃，面朝升起的太阳站着... (Yang)

Analysis: Deng translated “bright” into “闪亮” while Yang us “生机勃勃” to express spiritual connotation of the lion. Three four-character phrases “体型庞大”，“毛发浓密”and “生气勃勃” employed by Yang can be grouped together as an entirety. As similar elements, they are tidy and catchy. Thus, Aslan’s vitality can be showed and momentum can be enhanced.

Example 2

ST: Next moment (how those dwarfs loved their works!) the fire was blazing, the bellows were roaring, the gold was melting, the hammers were clinking.

TT1: 下一刻（那些矮人是多么热爱他们的工作！），火焰熊熊，风箱怒吼，黄金融化，铁锤叮叮当当敲打起来。(Deng)

TT2: 不一会儿（那群小矮人喜欢自己的工作啦！），火生起来了，风箱呼呼地拉起来了，金子熔化了，铁锤叮叮当地敲起来了。(Yang)

Analysis: Diligent and enthusiastic dwarfs were busy making an exquisite crown. Deng used reduplicated word “熊熊”，demonstrating the fiercely burning fire.“怒吼” in Deng’s version was supposed to describe the humming bellows and busy scene. This personification made the bellows come alive on the paper. “黄金融化” was chosen to be harmonious with “火焰熊熊” and “风箱怒吼”，forming continuous four-character structures and strengthening atmosphere of the context. In contrast to Deng’s version, “生起来”，“拉起来” and “融化了” are platitude and monotonous. Conforming to the law of similarity, Deng’s detailed-filled version possesses a very strong sense of picture.

4.4. The Law of Heterogeneous Isomorphism

As the name suggests, “heterogeneous isomorphism” signifies the same structure with different properties. According to gestalt psychology, there exists a close relationship between the mental field and physical field. When perceiving an object, our brains will be stimulated by its shape, arousing related emotions. Once the “force” structure of the objects is identical with that of people’s inner feelings and emotions, aesthetic sense can be obtained by readers. Emotional resonance can be evoked in this way. We can take willows as an example. Low-hanging branches, which conveys a mood of melancholy, has the same “force” structure with that of sorrowful emotions. Sometimes simple words may be a hindrance to express emotions. This principle can naturally surmount this barrier.

Example 1

ST: Its spreading branches seemed to cast a light rather than a shade, and silver apples peeped out like stars from under every leaf.

TT1: 它向四面八方伸展开来的枝丫，投落在地面的似乎不是阴影，而是光亮，银闪闪的苹果从每片叶子下露出来，犹如一树繁星。(Deng)

TT2: 它伸展的枝丫投下的是一片亮光，而不是一片阴影；银灿灿的苹果像星星一般在每一片叶子底下眨着眼睛。(Yang)

Analysis: Digory brought back a powerful apple to guard Nania. Treated as a seed, this apple was buried in the soil and turned out to thrive. Fruits were all ripe, sending out fragrant flavor to the air. Everyone was amazed by the miraculous powers. They were delighted and intoxicated by the harvest of joy. Both Yang and Deng translated “silver” into “银闪闪”. This lifelike reduplicated word can be close to kids’ hearts. “peer out”， which originally means “向外望”. Yang adopted “眨着眼睛” to echo “银闪闪”， personifying the apples and giving vitality

to them. “眨着眼睛” exudes extraordinary vigor of the apples, symbolizing glimmers of hope in Nania. The “force” mode hidden in the movement (blinking) is identical to that of joy which was revealed in the context. Compared with “露出来” in Deng’s version, Yang’s translation conforms to the law of heterogeneous isomorphism, encouraging emotional growth.

Example 2

ST : “How exactly like a man!” said Polly in a very grown-up voice; but she added hastily, in her real voice, “And don’t say I’m just like a woman, or you’ll be a beastly copy-cat.”

TT1 : “完全像个大男人！” 茉莉用成年人的语气说，但她很快又用自己的语气补充说，“别说我是大女人，要不你就是个讨人厌的模仿者。”(Deng)

TT2 : “多像个男子汉啊！” 茉莉装出大人的口吻说道。接着，她又变回自己的语调匆匆补了一句：“不要说我像个女人，不然，你就是一只讨厌的学舌鹦鹉。”(Yang)

Analysis: Polly was unpleasant with Digory because of his complaints, feeling he came over as quite bossy and arrogant. His male chauvinist attitude got Polly down, sparking a quarrel. “copy-cat”, with negative connotation, refers to someone who loses his or her own opinion and becomes others’ echo. In Chinese culture “鹦鹉学舌” implies who is repeating what they heard, bringing the character to life. “鹦鹉学舌” can be semantically equivalent to “copy-cat”. It is more emotionally satisfied than “模仿者” which was used in Yang’s version. By contrast, “模仿者” was completely eclipsed. “鹦鹉学舌” is conducive to create a vivid image, enhancing the atmosphere of the text. The “force” mode of this action is similar to that of Polly’s antipathy to Digory.

5. Conclusion

By comparison, we can find that both selected Chinese versions of *The Magician's Nephew* have their unique features. According to gestalt psychology, the principle of wholeness is conducive to words choice and sentences formation. Therefore, the implications in the source text can be profoundly elaborated. The law of closure guides translators to stimulate the reader’s imagination through “blank left”. The similarity principle is beneficial to enhance the visual effect, highlighting the special features of the characters in the literature. The principle of heterogeneity isomorphism helps to make the translations correspond to the aesthetic feelings and emotions hidden in the source texts. Practical and necessary, gestalt psychology plays an enormous role in translation. With the help of its relevant principles, divergent thinking and creativity which are vital can be cultivated to perfect translations.

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