

Analysis of Translator's Subjectivity from the Perspective of Translation Semiotics

-- Comparative Analysis of the Translation of The Peony Pavilion as An Example

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Abstract

Translation is the conversion of one language symbol into another language symbol, and the translator plays an important role in the language symbol conversion. The relationship between the ternary relationship symbol-interpretation term-object in translation semiotics is equivalent to the relationship between the original text and the translator's interpretation of the text and the object language text in translation. From the perspective of translation semiotics, this paper takes the Baizhi translation and Wang Rongpei translation of Peony Pavilion as examples, and analyzes the subjectivity of the translator from the direct interpretation term and the final interpretation term. When faced with the same objective, different translators adopt different translation strategies to translate, showing different translation styles.

Keywords

Translation semiotics; Translator subjectivity; Peony Pavilion.

1. Introduction

The emergence of translation semiotics has provided a more logical structural framework for the translation process. According to Peirce's account of the symbolic 'trinity' and the symbolic process, it provides an operational framework for describing and interpreting the problem of symbolic transformation in the process of translation. In the semiotic perspective of translation, the original text is the symbol, the target text is the object, and the translator's interpretation of the relationship between the symbol and the object is the interpretative term. (Linlin Pan, 2018) In the process of translation, the translator needs to dissect the text and reveal the truest and most essential content of the original text before transforming it into the target text. From the analysis of the direct interpretation term and the final interpretation term in translation semiotics, the translator adopts different translation strategies (including direct translation, interpretation, annotation, dilution, transparency, etc.) when facing the same symbol, so that the translation is faithful to the original text and conforms to the language habits and cultural common sense of the target language readers.

2. Translation Semiotics

The semiotics of translation is a sub-discipline of semiotics, which studies the conversion of signs in the process of translation and its related problems with its own theory of semiotics, including both the conversion of verbal signs into verbal signs and the conversion of verbal signs into non-verbal signs, the conversion of non-verbal signs into verbal signs and the conversion of non-verbal signs into other kinds of non-verbal signs, aiming to build a semiotics theory with the object of sign conversion. (Jia Hongwei, 2016) The introduction of semiotics

into translation has given people an additional perspective on translation, which has made the study of translation more multi-faceted and three-dimensional. The intermingling of different disciplines collides with new ideas and allows both to shine. Translation is a kind of intercultural communication, which is essentially a transformation of two sign systems. Semiotics and translation studies have similarities, and both are related to the usage, interpretation and manipulation of information or texts, i.e. signs. (Li Li, Chen Haodong, 2001) Semiotic theory provides a workable logical framework for interpreting and analyzing the events at the heart of translation. Peirce's association of signs, objects and interpretive items, with a semiotic triadic view of the production, interpretation and transformation of meaning, can be deconstructed into different components, each of which can correspond to a point in the triadic relationship, and this certainly provides an opportunity to understand the nature of texts and to examine in depth the cognitive processes that generate and transform meaning in texts. (Linlin Pan, 2018) The symbolic process is the process of symbolic reference between the symbol, the object and the interpretive item, the process of symbolic interpretation, the process of meaning generation, the process by which the symbol becomes a symbol. Of these, the explanatory term acts as a regulator of meaning between the symbol and the object, and the relationship between the three is illustrated in Figure 1. At the same time we can structure the translation process in terms of symbols - the original text, interpretive items - the translator's interpretation of the original text, and objects - the target language text. According to Peirce's theoretical framework of retrospective cause - induction - deduction, the same process is followed by the translator's interpretation term of the translated original. For the translation of a thing A, the translator has three processes, namely the direct interpretative term, the dynamic interpretative term and the final interpretative term. The direct interpretation term is the translator's own instinctive reaction to the most essential and original expression of thing A. The dynamic interpretation term is based on the translator's own experience and research, and the final interpretation term is based on the direct and dynamic interpretation terms, which the translator deduces to present the final interpretation term, i.e. the translated text. The translator plays a subjective role in the different interpretative items, and according to the translator's different translation styles, the translation presents different objects, but the object always corresponds to the symbol.

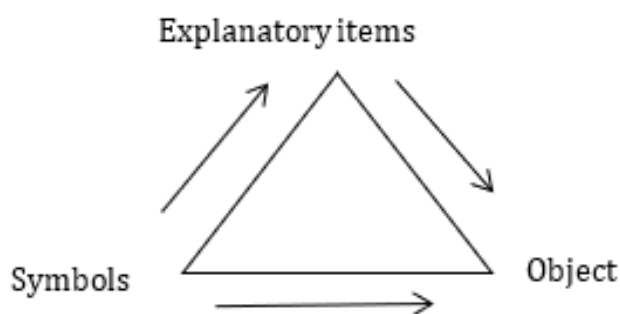


Figure 1. Symbolic triadic relationship, Eco; 1990

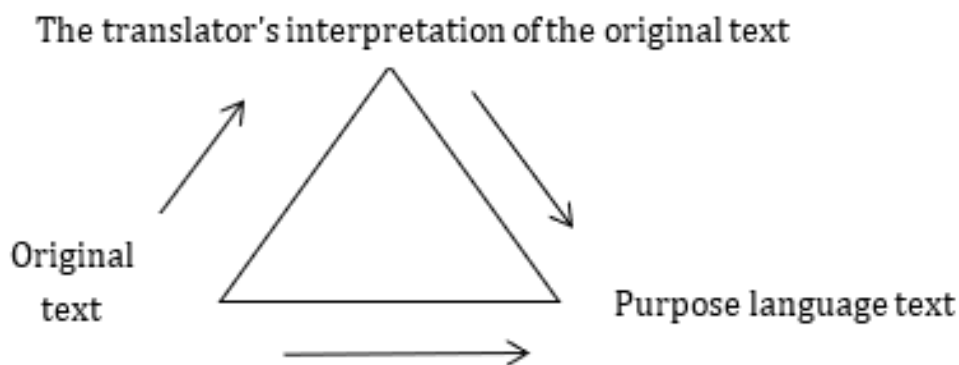


Figure 2. Relationship of the original text to the translator and the translation

3. The Peony Pavilion

The Peony Pavilion, known as The Return of the Peony Pavilion, is a play by Tang Xianzu of the Ming Dynasty. Tang Xianzu was a brilliant man by nature, but after failing four imperial examinations because he had offended the powerful, he gradually shifted his focus to writing. The Peony Pavilion is the story of Du Liniang, the daughter of a dowager, who is physically and emotionally repressed and who meets the elegant scholar Liu Mengmei in a dream during a visit to the garden. After waking up from her dream, Du Liniang is distraught and “unaware of her feelings” and becomes ill with longing, which leads to her death. Three years later, the man in her dream, Liu Mengmei, gets a self-painted portrait of her, and she reenters the world as a wandering soul in search of her dream marriage. With the help of others, Du Liniang and Liu Mengmei finally break through the barriers of love and come back to life, eventually becoming a couple. (Wang Donglin, 2016) It was Tang Xianzu’s humanistic sentiments that created the image of Du Liniang, who sought liberation, longed for freedom of love and broke the shackles of feudal rituals. The work is full of idealism and this realization in the social context of the time was also a breakthrough from the ideological shackles of the time, as well as the author’s desire for a more idealized real life, turning real life regrets into an idealization in the play. Both in the past and in the present The Peony Pavilion is highly ideological and creative, and a milestone in Chinese dramatic literature. As such, the translation of The Peony Pavilion is extremely informative for foreign researchers of theatre and provides a bridge to other readers who love comedy and Chinese culture.

4. A Study of Translator Subjectivity from the Perspective of Translation Semiotics

The Peony Pavilion play is very Chinese in character and uses the art of exaggeration. In the process of translation, the translator must fully understand the context in which the original text takes place and know the author of the original work in order to be able to integrate with the author’s work to the greatest extent possible. As individual translators receive the same object, different translations of the same thing are presented based on the translator’s instincts, experiences and habits. The translation strategies used by different translators for the same thing are studied from the perspective of translation semiotics in terms of direct and dynamic interpretative terms.

4.1. Direct Explanation Items

4.1.1. Direct Explanatory Items for Religious Terms

The direct explanatory item for religious terms is filled with knowledge of religious terms (mainly Taoist) in The Peony Pavilion, which are interpreted in terms of their connotative meaning according to their retro-activity. As illustrated below,

Original text	Direct explanation items
1、三清	The Taoist temple is dedicated to Yuan Shi Tian Zun, Tai Shang Dao Jun and Tai Shang Lao Jun.
2、羽衣青鸟	Feathered Cloth, referring to the Taoist priest; Green Bird, mythical messenger of the Queen Mother of the West, originally referring to the Taoist nun and disciple of Shi.
3、九还丹	It is the Nine Turning Pill, a type of the so-called Golden Pill made by Taoists.
4、真武	The Taoist venerated Admiral Zhen Wu, a Xuantian God.
5、真妃	The name of the female immortal worshiped by the Taoists.
6、善财天女	Good Fortune, the name of a disciple of the Buddha, is born with all kinds of treasures springing up naturally.
7、十地	In Buddhist terms, this refers to the tenth king of the Ten Halls of the Underworld, who is in charge of the reincarnation of ghosts.
8、补陀	Putuo, also known as "Mantou Lujia", is in the Zhoushan Islands, Zhejiang Province, and is said to be a sacred Buddhist site.
9、无生	A realm of no birth and no death, no birth and no death, achieved by Buddhist practice.
10、天雨花	Buddhist legend: Venerable Yunguang, a senior monk of the Liang Dynasty, gave a sermon at the Yuhua Terrace in Nanjing and was inspired by the heavens and the rain.

4.1.2. Explanatory Item for Semantic Homographic pun

Original text	Direct explanation items
1、欲尽出游那可得？秋风还不及春风	The view is not as good in autumn as it is in spring. (Alluding to the fact that Liu Mengmei was admitted to the imperial examinations and not through other unorthodox means)
2、他趁这春三月 红绽雨肥天，叶儿青，偏迸着苦仁儿里撒圆。	The plums, fattened by the spring rains, have turned red, so full that they seem to be on the verge of bursting, and are rounded in the presence of her fated one.

4.2. Dynamic Interpretation Terms for Translators

Different translators have different dynamic interpretation terms for the same original text. This is due to the different cultural backgrounds and influences of the translators, as well as their linguistic styles and habits, all of which affect the dynamic interpretation terms.

4.2.1. Dynamic Explanatory Items for Religious Terms

Original text	White's Translation	Wang Rongpei's translation
1、三清	Shrine of Three Pure Ones	Gods in Heaven and Hell
2、羽衣青鸟	Bluebird Messengers of Sainted Queen Mother of the West	A Nun and A Novice
3、九还丹	Alchemist's Pill Nine Times	Pills
4、真武	Guardian Gods	Taoist Immortal King
5、真妃	Nine-Splendored Lady	Goddness
6、善财天女	Treasure Boy, and Heavenly Maid	Treasure Boy and Virgin Maid
7、十地	The Tenth hell	Tenth Tribunal of Hell
8、补陀	Potlaka	Putuo
9、无生	Birthless Realm (buddhist concept of a realm beyond birth and death.)	Mortal Life
10、天雨花	The Sky to Rain Flower Petals (these Phenomena, in early Buddhist legends, were the effects of sermons by abbots of great sanctity)	A rain of blooms would spread

The three in "Three Pure Ones" are Yuan Shi Tian Zun, Ling Bao Tian Zun, and Dao De Tian Zun, and the three Pure Ones refer to the places where these three heavenly beings reside, namely the realms of Yu Qing, Shang Qing, and Tai Qing, so the abbreviation "Three Pure Ones" is used to represent these three figures. In Bai Zhi's translation, it is directly translated as "Shrine of Three Pure Ones", without any explanation, retaining the original textual style, but it may be difficult for the target language readers to understand. Wang Rongpei translates "Three Pure Ones" as "Gods in Heaven and Hell", where "GOD" means foreign gods and is consistent with what is meant in the Three Pure Ones. The meaning of "GOD" is consistent with what is meant in the San Ching. In contrast to Bai's translation, the concept of religion has been diluted, and Chinese religious culture has been exported in an easy-to-understand way. "The Sky to Rain Flower Petals (these Phenomena, in early Buddhist legends, were the effects of sermons by abbots) are translated with a commentary by Bai Zhizhi as The Sky to Rain Flower Petals. (these Phenomena, in early Buddhist legends, were the effects of sermons by abbots of great sanctity) is explained by context and commentary, which, although longer in expression than the three words in Chinese, preserves the imagery of the original and enables the reader to understand Chinese Buddhist thought. Wang Rongpei, on the other hand, highly summarizes and concisely expresses the concept of the heavenly rain flower, internalizing and absorbing the direct explanatory item, and translating it concisely, but losing this Buddhist concept.

4.2.2. Dynamic Interpretation of Semantic Homographic Pun

Original text	White's Translation	Wang Rongpei's translation
1、欲尽出游那可得？秋 风还不及春风	Spring breeze in examination halls beats the sponger's 'autumn wind'!	In spring you'd better pass the imperial test.
2、他趁这春三月 红绽雨 肥天，叶儿青，偏迸着苦 仁儿里撒圆。	"Thriving in this third month of spring 'when rich rain swells the red to bursting,' its leaves shine glossy green, its full round fruit hide bitter heart. "	"When plums are ripe and rain is clean. The vernal leaves are thriving green. How can the plum contain a bitter heart?"

Original text 2: He took advantage of the red blossoms in March and the green leaves of the day to sprinkle the bitter seeds with roundness. In the original text, Du Liniang, who is struggling to find her dream lover, complains that the plums are round and good-looking, but "ren'er" is bitter, forming an extreme contrast, as Du Liniang yearns for the sweetness of being with Liu Mengmei, but at this time she can only wait alone, similar to "ren'er". The bitterness is externalized, forming a homographic pun. Bai Zhizhi does not translate the double word by word in accordance with the original text, but looks for suitable words with a double meaning in English to achieve a semantic double meaning. Wang Rongpei, on the other hand, focuses more on expressing both the surface meaning and the deeper meaning at the same time. For the same pun translation, different translators have different understanding of the original author or different forms of expression to the readers, and the readers can receive different messages. For the same interpretative item, the content presented to the reader by the translator's translation will be different for various reasons. Therefore, multiple factors must be taken into account in evaluating the merits of a translation.

4.3. Reasons for Differences in Interpreters' Dynamic Explanatory Items

4.3.1. Religious Background

Born in Lancashire, England, Bai Zhi received his BA in Modern Chinese Literature in 1948. He stayed at the University of London to teach Chinese between 1948 and 1960 and received his PhD in Chinese Literature in 1954, and the 12 years he spent teaching Chinese Studies in England provided a good foundation for Bai Zhi's lifelong career in Chinese Studies. "After immigrating to the United States in 1960 Bai Zhi began to focus on the study and translation of legendary ancient Chinese operas, represented by The Peach Blossom Fan and The Peony Pavilion." (Wu Siyuan, 2020) Bai Zhi, who is primarily a Christian, uses direct translations or direct translations with commentaries for the expression of some religion-related information to fully express its direct explanatory items, but probably due to religious and cultural differences and inadequate understanding of Taoism and Buddhism in China, the religious expressions in the translations are somewhat less precise. Wang Rongpei (1942-2017) was a renowned Chinese translator of canonical texts and educator. He fully understood Tang Xianzu's life story, career experiences and works before translating The Peony Pavilion, and also visited Tang Xianzu's hometown in person. Wang Rongpei's translations of religious culture are mostly Italian translations, which recreate the religious culture scenario and make it easier for the reader to understand the connotations to be conveyed.

4.3.2. The Creativity of Translators

In the case of the same translation, the translator's mode of thinking, habits of life and cultural background are closely related to the author's creativity. For the same dynamic interpretative item, the translator's reasoning about the original text differs and therefore creates a different translation. For the author of the original text, a good translation is one in which the translator

can convey the essential ideas of the original text; for the reader, a good translation is one in which the translator can deduce from the translation what the author of the original text wants to express; for the translator, a good translation is one in which the author's intentions are conveyed to the reader in the most original style and the reader can understand it. Whether from Bai Zhi's translation or Wang Peirong's, we can understand what the author of the original text wanted to say, but the translator's creativity is different and the text is presented in a different style.

5. Conclusion

The subjectivity of the translator is analyzed through the triadic relationship of sign-interpretation term-object in translation semiotics. In the translation process, the translator has to carry out a series of translation processes, from instinctive reaction to final deduction based on experience to obtain the final text. The translator has to reason about the meaning of the original text and then form the customary expression of the target language by reasoning about the meaning of the original text. In the translation of dramatic texts the subjectivity of the translator is subject to differences in creativity and religious background, and the translation takes on a different style.

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