Fiction Translation on the View of Labyrinth Narrative Theory

-- A Case Study of Lolita

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Abstract

Labyrinth Narrative is a common creation method in postmodern novels. Its multiple narrative contexts imply abstract analogical thinking. The paper adopts the labyrinth narrative theory, combined with the characteristics of fiction, and analyzes how translators can find a way out in the labyrinth constructed by the author of the source text, coexist peacefully with the labyrinth, and see through its mysteries while preserving the original form. A comparative study of two Chinese versions of Vladimir Vladimirovich Nabokov's *Lolita* is carried out to explore the feasibility and necessity of the theory in guiding and evaluating fiction translation.

Keywords

Labyrinth; Labyrinth narrative; Fiction translation; Lolita.

1. Introduction

As a representative literary genre, fiction is rooted in the historical context and cultural form of a specific time and space. The literary act constructs a discourse-induced intersubjective connection with transform function among strangers, which requires translators to have the sense of conversion, context and difference. The most superficial change in fiction translation is the conversion from the source language to the target language, but the fundamental change is the multiple dislocations such as novel writing and translation purpose, authors and translators, the context of the source language and target language readers, etc. This misalignment will inevitably lead to the difference in language choice [1]. The internal linguistic structure of "labyrinth text" is significantly expanded, and the narrative techniques are both uncertain and fluid. This requires translators to pay more attention to two levels while grasping the textual design and structure: one is "the creation level of authors to construct the language labyrinth", and the other is "the reading experience level of readers to become self-propelled in the labyrinth" [2], in order to better decipher with immersion, resonate with the author or the narrator, and show readers the unique narrative function and affective effect.

The paper takes labyrinth narrative theory as the theoretical framework, Vladimir Vladimirovich Nabokov's novel Lolita as a case study, and Yu Xiaodan's translation (hereinafter referred to as translation one) and Zhu Wan's translation (hereinafter referred to as translation two) as a comparative study.

2. The Connotation of Labyrinth Narrative Theory

The abstract analogical thinking between space and language structure is intrinsic to the labyrinth narrative strategy. The labyrinth contains special spatial architectural roots, and its construction and "self-propelled experience" need a diversified imitation of the textual structure. The specific forms of labyrinth narrative vary greatly, manifesting as forking paths, dead end, backtracking and circles, etc [2]. Although the narrative is endowed with characteristics such as "curves, complexities, swirls, spirals, pluralities, ambiguities,

redundancies, etc." [3], in terms of fundamental commonality, it all has the basic configuration mode and major methodological path. Moreover, the labyrinth narrative has the salient feature of deconstruction: focusing on dissolving the same with difference. It often uses abundant convergent elements to create the deja vu for readers, placing them in a dilemma of choice. In this sense, the reading behavior in which labyrinth authors invite readers to participate constitutes a resistance to the homogeneous appearance. Furthermore, with the passage of narrative time and the deepening of the reading experience, the recurrence of the same narrative elements in the reading has an effect that is not a mechanical repetition of the previous narration, and the seemingly undifferentiated narrative can refer to the absence of the only meaning [2]. Labyrinth narrative originates from the authors' ingenious design, presenting an artistic consciousness that expresses the procrastination of language meaning through the chaotic disorder of linguistic relations, a kind of "orderly disorder" [4]. The transformation of the literary labyrinth from a topographical literary phenomenon to a structural textual form projects the encircling artistic techniques of the original authors borrowing from the chaotic enlightenment order.

3. The Reappearance Strategy of Labyrinth Narrative

In translation practice, one of the important tasks of translators is to accurately locate the circuitous and ambiguous labyrinth forms in the text, to clarify and understand the interpretive path therein, and to use appropriate and precise labyrinth narrative strategies and methods to produce the same strong resonance and aesthetic enjoyment as the original authors, to fit and bridge with it, so that the translation can better reveal the interactive relationship between itself and the original text, with a strong labyrinth connotation. Translators try to establish clear coordinates in the labyrinth to satisfy the readers' reading needs, make a deep connection among original authors, translators and readers, and reflect and internally echo the original text, the translation and the "readers' texts" interpreted by different readers from diverse perspectives. Translators are intended to convey the "roundabout artistic strategy of order inspired by chaos" [2] that the original authors want to express. Among them, forking and repetition are common reappearance strategies used by translators in labyrinth narrative.

Forking

Forking is one of the most typical strategies of labyrinth narrative, which is analogous to the multiple choices of interpretation that readers face in the reading. At the lexical level, narrative forking mainly corresponds to the reading process in which readers continue to make meaning choices due to unfamiliar forms or ambiguous semantics of vocabulary [2].

Case one: There, on the soft sand, a few feet away from our elders, we would sprawl all morning, in a petrified paroxysm of desire, and take advantage of every blessed quirk in space and time to touch each other: her hand, half-hidden in the sand, would creep toward me, its slender brown fingers sleep-walking nearer and nearer; then, her opalescent knee would start on a long cautious journey; sometimes a chance rampart built by younger children granted us sufficient concealment to graze each other's salty lips; these incomplete contacts drove our healthy and inexperienced young bodies to such a state of exasperation that not even the cold blue water, under which we still clawed at each other, could bring relief. (Nabokov, 2000)

Translation one: 在软绵绵的沙地上，距离大人们几英尺远，整个早晨我们都仰卧在那儿，带着欲望的勃发，利用时间和空间任何一个天赐的良机互相触摸：她的手，半埋在沙里，也会慢慢地移向我，修长的褐色手指梦游般越来越近；然后，她乳白色发光的膝盖会开始一次小心翼翼的旅行；有时，别的小孩们建筑的堡垒，能完全掩蔽我们摩挲彼此咸腥的嘴唇；这种不完整的接触把我们健康、却毫无经验的稚嫩身体驱向兴奋的状态，即使在冰凉的海水中，我们仍然互相紧拉着手，不能解脱。(Yu Xiaodan, 2001)

Translation two: 在松软的沙滩上，离开我们的长辈几英尺远，整个上午我们总摊开手脚躺在那儿，在欲望的勃发下浑身发僵，利用空间和时间的任何一个天赐良机互相抚摸：她的一只手半埋在沙里，总悄悄伸向我，纤细的褐色手指梦游般地越移越近，接着，她乳白色的膝盖便开始小心翼翼地长途跋涉。有时候，别的年岁更小的孩子偶然堆起的壁垒为我们提供了充分的遮蔽，使我们可以轻轻吻一下彼此咸津津的嘴唇。这种不彻底的接触弄得我们那健康却缺乏经验的幼小身体烦躁到了极点，就连清凉碧蓝的海水——我们在水下仍然彼此紧紧揪着——也无法缓解。(Zhu Wan, 2005)

Translation one is the scene where Humbert recalls the time with his first love Annabelle on the beach, and it is the narrator's focus on the point of view from which Humbert observes and experiences the event, though this view is more subjective and unreliable. On the surface, both translations vividly portray the dramatic image of two young boys and girls with heart-stirring. However, translation two creates some labyrinthine situations that enhance the readers' affective experience and also interfere with their reading progress. Different from translation one, translation two supplements the meaning of "petrified" in the original text, and "stiffen all over" is not only a physiological response, but reflects Humbert's inner tension, uneasiness and weakness. In addition, translation two makes good use of dashes, flexible syntax and implicit poetic expressions to revitalize the plot and highlight the aesthetics of "defamiliarization" and fragmented narrative effect, breaking away from the natural flow of narrative. Although translation one translates "exasperation" as "excitement", which is completely opposed to the affective attitude of the original meaning, this expression does not show the characters' complex inner state, and the narrative perspective does not shift from external to internal. On the contrary, translation one is not faithful to the original and shows only a monotonous and unified sentiment. Generally, translation two here embodies two contradictory emotions. The excitement caused by a little kiss is in sharp contrast with the irritability brought by incomplete contacts, requiring readers to turn back to the above in the reading to make a reselection of meaning and fall into the vortex of the labyrinth, which makes the plot of linear development changed and highlights the destabilization in the labyrinth narrative strategy. Therefore, translation two is slightly better than translation one and better reflects the tension of the original.

Repetition

The reentry and amendment of reading is often associated with the reference object of the labyrinth route. Faris calls it the node or the point of mondulation. The node is used as an analogy to repetitive or similar words, sentence groups or paragraphs designed by authors in the labyrinth narrative and prompt readers the recurrence of the same or similar narrative with the "deja vu" in the reading. It is essentially a repetition narrative strategy. When the recurring narrative nodes never lead to a new narrative fork, the whole narrative process forms a circular structure of the labyrinth path [2].

Case two: And then the remorse, the poignant sweetness of sobbing atonement, groveling love, the hopelessness of sensual reconciliation. In the velvet night, at Mirana Motel (Mirana!) I kissed the yellowish soles of her long-toed feet, I immolated myself...But it was all of no avail. Both doomed were we. And soon I was to enter a new cycle of persecution. (Nabokov, 2000)

Translation one: 而后是懊悔，是哭着赎罪时刺心的温存，是卑躬屈膝的爱，是感情修好的绝望。在天鹅绒般的天幕里，在米拉娜汽车旅店（米拉娜！），我吻了她长趾头双脚的黄色脚掌，我牺牲了我自己......但这一切全是枉然。我们两个人命运都已注定。我很快又进入了一轮新的迫害。(Yu Xiaodan, 2001)

Translation two: 接着便是悔恨自责，抽抽搭搭地表示赎罪和卑躬屈膝地求爱所有的深切甜美的感觉，以及肉体接触的那种毫无希望的和解。那个黑幽幽的夜晚，在米兰纳汽车旅馆（米兰纳！）里，我吻了她那脚趾很长的双脚的发黄的脚底，我惩罚了自己......可是这一切

都无济于事。我们两个人的命运都已注定。不久，我就要开始一个新的遭受迫害的周期。(Zhu Wan, 2005)

Case two is Humbert's inner monologue after slapping Lolita's cheekbone. J. Hillis Miller has said, "Any novel is a compound organization of repetitive phenomena, a repetition in repetition or a complex tissue that forms a chain link with other repetitions. [5]" Translation one begins with the same syntax—"... is ... of ...", and uses the component parallelism. The repetition of sentences here reflects the translator's intention, incarnating the mutual echo of syntactic and semantic features. The labyrinth text is characterized by semantic nihilism. Translation two gives a specific explanation of "the hopelessness of sensual reconciliation" in the original text, which loses its ambiguity. Although "sensual" has the meaning of carnality, the word here is too absolute to encourage readers' imagination. Nevertheless, "affect" in translation two is general and infinite, which is conductive to readers' open understanding and imagination. Translation one literally translates "velvet night" without excessive interpretation. On the one hand, the translator maintains a more objective stance and adjusts the narrative distance, making the characters stand on the stage far away from readers, on the other hand, describing them truthfully to readers [6], which reflects the translator's "absence", while "dark and gloomy" in translation two refers to a dismal picture, bringing a sense of depression of environment and affect. Translation one translates "immolate" as "sacrifice", a neutral word, which embodies the translator's "zero writing" and the "straightforward literary creation mode that pursues almost 'white' traceless" [7], while translation two translates it as "punishment", which is derogatory and negative, dominating readers' cognition and destroying the uncertainty of the labyrinth text, so translation one has more reference value than translation two.

4. Conclusion

Through the above comparative study, the application of labyrinth narrative in translation is feasible and necessary. The translators' use of different labyrinth narrative strategies fits the original authors' intentional motives and caters to the readers' seeking reading taste—not relying on external forces to get out of the reading labyrinth and mental predicament, which is the hidden manipulative power possessed by translators. In the process of translation, the translators carefully plan, design and represent the labyrinth horizon outlined by the original authors. On the surface, the two are engaged in a tug-of-war between the interpretive forces, but in fact, they work together to form the relational network and energy field of the labyrinth narrative. In addition, the translators have become the only and active interpretive force, revealing the complex and agglutinate narrative secrets for the readers, forming a literary consensus.

In the empirical study of translation, the translators are faithful to the original by constantly trying to figure out the rich semantics of the labyrinth text and the reappearance of some typical labyrinth narrative strategies, so that the expressions of the source language and the target language collide in a more splendid way. To a certain extent, the translators' re-creation is also constantly explored and upgraded in the labyrinth game of fiction translation. The translation practice itself is to unlock the mysteries of the labyrinth, and the translators are constantly searching for the organ of narrative discourse strategies from the text. More importantly, translators are omniscient narrators without identity, just retellers of the original rather than dictators who can directly witness the world of the fiction. This belongs to the translators' artistic self-consciousness.

The crossover study of labyrinth narrative theory and translation practice provide more research perspectives for translation studies, hoping that the paper can bring some inspiration to the multi-dimension and in-depth interdisciplinary study of labyrinth narrative theory and future fiction translation.

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