The Appeal of Foregrounding in the Translation of Children's Literature

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Abstract

There is a huge market demand for children's literature, but the quality of its translation is far from satisfactory. Many of the translated works blindly pursue content equivalence, while the un=ique language form of the original is ignored. In children's literature, foregrounding, as a major literary stylistic feature, plays an important role in reproducing linguistic appeal. Based on the concept of foregrounding, this paper discusses the appeal of foregrounding in children's literature translation from three aspects: auditory sense, visual sense and emotional sense.

Key words: Children's literature translation; Foregrounding; Appeal

INTRODUCTION

Children's literature, which serves as spiritual food for children, provides them with essential knowledge about life, culture and morality. However, as a branch of general literature, children's literature is not often considered as important as we might assume. Li Li (2010) points out children's literature is often on the edge in the multisystem of literature, and children's literature translation is the same. The study of children's literature translation in China has just started, and it has not been paid much attention by the mainstream translation scholars in China (Li Hongshun, 2014). Considering that the translation of children's literature emerges in an endless stream, the study about it is pitifully small in number. Nevertheless, throughout Chinese market, the real situation is that most children's literature translations are far from satisfactory, which is really worrying since there are hundreds of millions of children's literature readers in China.

Children's literature, because of its readers' particularity and specificity, requires a higher understanding of the language. However, foregrounding, as an obvious stylistic feature in children's literature, has attracted the attention of a few scholars. Only Xu Derong (2018) addressed the relationship between foregrounding and the aesthetic recreation in the translation of literary fairy tales. Starting from the concept of foregrounding, this paper analyses how the translator reproduces the appeal of foregrounding from the three aspects: auditory sense, visual sense and emotional sense by dealing with foregrounded language in children's literary works. The author hopes that the translation of foregrounding in children's literature can bring some reference for the future practice of children's literature translation.

1. FOREGROUNDING IN CHILDREN'S LITERATURE

Foregrounding is particularly common in children's literature. As an internal operating mechanism, foregrounding is adopted to create an artist appeal of children's language by meeting children's unique aesthetic and cognitive characteristics.

1.1 Foregrounding Theory

Foregrounding is one of the important concepts in literary stylistics. It is the result of the author consciously

choosing unconventional language forms to achieve specific purposes. Originally as a technique in painting art, foregrounding is commonly used by artists who deliberately highlight particular elements to draw attention.

In the 1930s, Shikarovsky, the representative of Russian formalism, put forward the theory of "defamiliarization", which opened up the study of the phenomenon of "linguistic deviation". That is, the study of the concept and method of foregrounding. Then, Havranek from Prague School introduced the concepts of automatization and foregrounding, mainly to analyze the foregrounding of standard language. Mukarovsky holds that foregrounding is "deautomatization", the opposite of "automatization". The standard language, which is automatized, is "the background against which is reflected…the intentional violation of the norm of the standard" (Mukarovsky, 1964). Jakobson raised the principle of equivalence and projection theory, aiming at the other important aspect of foregrounding--parallelism (Deng Renhua, 1999).

According to Linch (1969), there are two types of foregrounding, paradigmatic and syntagmatic. The former means deviation from a norm by breaking up rules or expectations so as to attract the readers' attention. The latter refers to parallelism, including repetitive and contrasted structures. The repetitive structure does not mean absolute duplication. Instead, it requires some variable features of the pattern--some contrasting elements which are parallel with respect to their position in the pattern.

Foregrounding brings readers' attention back to the form of language, especially the effects behind the specific language form. Both content and form are important factors in literary works, and the ignorance of either one will be a loss hard to bear. Traditionally, content, referring to what is said, is much more emphasized in literary interpretation; however, form, referring to the way how it is said and also conveying the thematic meaning but in a more subtle way, is often sacrificed for content, thus calls for more attention and more efforts. Shendan (2001) put forward the concept of "deceptive equivalence" when discussing the application of literary stylistics in translation research. In her opinion, translators always attach importance to the faithful transmission of text information and ignore the foregrounding language beyond the meaning, which will lead to the situation that the translation and the original refer to the same, but the literary value or literary meaning are far from each other.

1.2 The Application of Foregrounding to Children's Literature

In children's literature, the author is an adult while the reader is a child. In this mode of communication, there is inevitably an unequal communication structure. In order to maximize peer-to-peer communication and satisfy children's "horizon of expectation" in reading, the author must stand in the perspective of children's thinking and speculate on children's psychology. According to the psychological development of children, children's thinking in childhood has gradually changed from concrete image thinking to abstract logic thinking, but this abstract logic thinking is still influenced by specific image to a large extent. It's still much easier for them to pay attention to intuitive and concrete things, such as shape, color, sound and form. Therefore, the language of children's literature is more specific and vivid than that of adult literature, to create a strong sense of the scene.

In order to highlight the language feature of children's literature, foregrounding provides reasonable and feasible methods. And the concrete linguistic effect is largely achieved through foregrounding. The author uses special language forms to attract children's attention and improve children readers' grasp of the image of things, giving children readers strong visual audible and touchable perception. In this way, the appeal of children's literary language is enhanced. It is the choice of specific foregrounding that shapes the unique artistic appeal of children's literature.

2. THE APPEAL OF FOREGROUNDING IN THE TRANSLATION OF CHILDREN'S LITERATURE

In view of the important role of foregrounding in creating linguistic appeal of children's literature, it is also necessary to use foregrounding effectively in the translation of children's literature in order to achieve the reproduction of linguistic appeal in the target language. As Wang Dongfeng (2004) said, whether the stylistic features of the original can be properly identified depends largely on whether the translator can realize the subtle differences and tensions between the foreground and background of the original, between the norm and the deviation. The translation of foregrounding should realize the inherent meaning of the original text by the most natural form. For foregrounding techniques in the original work, the translator should not only convey its original content, but also identify its distinctive language expressions and the effect that the original author wants to express through this technique, and then reproduce the effect through the target language in order to achieve equivalent translation.

2.1 Auditory Appeal

Children's literature has distinct phonetic characteristics, which not only conforms to the thinking characteristics of children readers, which are mainly based on concrete images, but also conforms to the practical needs of adults to read works to children. The phonetic features of children's literature are mainly embodied in readability, reflecting the unique aesthetic characteristics of children's literature.

Example 1

"Better go north," said Dr. Carey." Don't you think so, Mr. Clydesdale?"

"'ook in'entral'ark," said Mr. Clydesdale.

"What?" cried Stuart.

"I'ay, 'ook in'entral'ark," said Mr. Clydesdale.

"He says look in Central Park," explained Dr. Carey, tucking another big wad of gauze into Mr. Clydesdale's cheek.

Translation:

"朝北走比较好，"卡里医生说。"你不这样认为吗，克莱德斯代尔先生？"

"奥翁肮公肮奥奥，"克莱德斯代尔先生说。

"你说什么？"斯图尔特叫道。

"我饿奥翁肮公肮奥奥"克莱德斯代尔先生说。

"他说到中央公园找找，"卡里医生替克莱德斯代尔先生翻译，一边说着，一边在他的腮帮子里面又塞了一大团纱布。

This example is from *Stuart Little*, written by the American writer E. B. White. In this plot, Clydesdale originally wanted to say "look in Central Park", but because of cotton stuffed in his mouth, the soft palate / l/, fricative / s/ and blasting / P / could not be pronounced. The author intentionally uses phonological derivation to omit these three sounds to attract children's attention in the process of reading. Ren Rongrong's translation here is to the point. When children are reading the translation, they cant help reading out "奥翁肮公肮奥奥" out of curiosity. Then they will find that when pronouncing these sounds, they can't close their mouth, just as a large mass of cotton stuffed in mouth. What's more, the pronunciation of "奥翁肮公肮奥奥" is the reasonable change of "到中央公园看看" in pronunciation. But if this short sentence is translated to the standard Chinese, children will not be impressed. How can he fully pronounce all sounds with a large mass of cotton stuffed in mouth? By Ren Rongrong's translation, the voice of Clydesdale, when he was mumbling, seemed to linger in readers' ears. The foregrounding translation here conveys the auditory effect to children through the text, and more satisfies the children's strong desire for intuitive feelings when they read.

Besides, Children are generally interested in rhythmic writing, like children's songs, which sounds lilting and catchy. There are many examples in *Alice in Wonderland*:

Example 2

"How doth the little crocodile
improve his shining tail,
and pour the waters of the Nile
on every golden scale!
How cheerfully he seems to grin,
how neatly spread his claws,
and welcome little fishes in
with gently smiling jaws!"

Translation:

"那条小小的鳄鱼怎么样
使它发亮的尾巴更发亮，
还把尼罗河的水浇身上，
洗的每块鳞片都金光闪！
喜滋滋地样子看来多动人，
张牙舞爪的动作多轻灵，
那辆颌一开大口笑迎宾，
小小的鱼儿请进，都请进！"

Phonological parallelism is also an important means to realize the sense of rhythm in children's literature. The pronunciation of the last part of the word at the end of every other line in the original text is the same. It creates the harmony in rhythm and belongs to the phonological parallelism. The form of the translated text creates unique characteristics of poetry. More importantly, the translator fully recognizes and applies the foregrounding method of phonological parallelism in the translated text, making the whole poem cadenced. Translators of children's literature should fully realize the importance of phonology to children's literature, and try their best to create the same rhythmic effect as the original text in translation so as to give the children readers aural appeal.

2.2 Visual Appeal

Children's world is imaginary, and pictures constitute the basis of their imagination, so the visual sense is an indispensable factor and a solid foundation of children's literature. According to Lei Qian and Zhang Lude (2014), in complex multimodal discourse, visual modality and text modality are completely complementary to strengthen each other in the creation of textual meaning.

Example 3

"Um…what? I said 'help me', and tidal-waving my boat? NOT HELPING!" she shouted, kicking her foot toward the ocean. The water retreated, causing her to fall on her rear.

Translation:

"哼，你干什么呢？我求你'帮帮我'，你就让浪潮卷翻我的船？这根本不是帮忙！"她咆哮道，对着大海就是一顿拳打脚踢。海水连连后退，吓得莫阿娜也一屁股坐在了地上。

Here, "not helping" is capitalized in the original text, which belongs to the graphological derivation, to make a marked visual effect. And the translator uses an emphatic pattern in Chinese "这根本不是帮忙！" to reproduce the effect of graphological derivation to the greatest extent. When children read here, they can imagine that Mona is burning with a frenzy of rage. Then a vivid picture is emerging in their minds, in which the leading character Mona, because of her anger at the ocean for not helping her, uses the child's mace to kick toward the ocean at random. Her appearance is the epitome of the innocent and lovely children. This series of actions are full of sense of image, fully expressing the anger and loveliness of Moana, so that the little readers can't help laughing.

The foregrounded features of capital words can attract the attention of children's readers, conform to their cognitive characteristics, and make the words have an irresistible power and strong appeal. Besides, the special layout, color and image can also achieve special stylistic effect in children's literature works. The "tail poem" in *Alice in Wonderland* arranges the stories told by mice in the shape of their tails, which conforms to children's thinking habits of visualization and greatly enhances the interest of the works. It is a landmark stylistic creation of this classic works. However, the foregrounded phenomenon in many translations has been ignored. Neither normal typesetting nor vertical typesetting in translation has lost the importance of the stylistic effect in original text.

2.3 Emotional Appeal

Zhu Ziqiang (2009) once pointed out that children's pure and full perceptual aesthetic is different from adults. In children's literature, if the author wants to realize the spiritual communication with children, the emotional factors should not be ignored. Excellent children's literature works can make children readers have emotional resonance with the contents of the book, stimulate their childlike mind and cause thinking. Through the integration of emotional connotation in the story content and wonderful plot, the educational function of the children' literature can also be realized. The collocation of various foregrounding languages can create an emotional atmosphere and affect the attitude of children's readers.

Example 4

"她一个人去上学，一个人回家。仿佛那路是她一个人的路，那学校是她一个人的学校。像其他孩子喜欢玩耍一样，她也喜欢玩耍，但她都是独自一个人玩耍。虽然是一个人的世界…"

Translation:

"She went to school by herself, and went home by herself. It was as though the road was hers, as though the school was hers. Her and hers alone. Like other children, she loved to play, but she always played by herself."

As a representative of leading Chinese children's literature to the world, Cao Wenxuan paid special attention to the use of foregrounding in his works. The example is taken from *The Cassia Tree*. In a few words, Wanling's loneliness is vividly expressed, as a result of being ignored and excluded. In order to emphasize the effect of loneliness, Cao Wenxuan used quantitative foregrounding to repeat "一个人" six times, which belongs to lexical parallelism. This foregrounding is also adopted in the translation. The reflexive pronoun "by herself" is repeated three times and "hers" three times, which has reached quantitative equivalence in form. The successful translation of foregrounding has brought about emotional appeal to the children readers. In the process of reading, it is easy for children to imagine that how helpless Wanling is. Her desolate figure emerges before children's eyes, arousing sympathy and compassion for Wanling and generating emotional resonance.

CONCLUSION

The translation of children's literature tends to be considered as simple and easy, so that it should consequently require less theoretical attention as long as the language can be understood by children. On the contrary, it demands highly on the translators, if high quality is to be achieved. How to reproduce the appeal of foregrounding in children's literature translation is a very delicate problem, which requires the translator to have sensitive stylistic awareness, keen language sensitivity and rich imagination to achieve the "functional equivalence" between the translation and the original. The translator of children's literature should also have a childish heart, be familiar with children's language, have insight into children's psychology, bear in mind the translator's conscience and sense of responsibility, and strive to create a translation that is popular with children's reader

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