



A Study of Equivalent Translation from the Perspective of Narrative Stylistics: The Case of Tao's *The Color Purple*

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Abstract

The author's narrative strategy is the soul of the novel, and the words are the medium to express this soul. The issue of faithfulness in novel translation involves not only the faithfulness of the content, but also the form of expression - narrative strategy. This paper takes Tao Jie's translation of Alice Walker's *the Color Purple* as the research object, and probes into the formal equivalence of the translation from the perspective of narrative stylistics, that is, personal narrative voice, character discourse expression and the stylistic features of black American English. This paper explores the guiding role of narrative stylistics in literary translation practice, hoping to provide reverse translation experience for Chinese literary translation.

Key words: Narrative stylistics; *The Color Purple*; Equivalence

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The Color Purple is one of the representative works of Alice Walker. The protagonist of this novel, Celie, is a black, female and homosexual, that is, an object that has been triple marginalized. She is a woman who speaks for the times in the context of "post-modernism" (Wang, 2019). "*The Color Purple*" adopts the strategy of interleaving narration (i.e. narrating a new event, and at the same time leading to a possible event). It tells the story of how Celie and Nettie are oppressed. In the aspect

of narrative focus, the author deconstructs patriarchy, race and heterosexual monophony from the perspective and voice of Celie and Nettie. At the linguistic level, she uses a lot of grammatically incorrect Black English to expose the ideology behind the text, an artistic feature of the novel. To sum up, the stylistic features of Black English and the arrangement of the plot of the novel by the author have become a major feature of the novel, and the form of expression and stylistic features of the discourse have become an important part of the novel that cannot be ignored. Therefore, the study of the Chinese translation should also combine the stylistic features of the novel language with the narrative discourse skills. This paper analyzes the translation by means of close reading and discusses whether the Chinese version of *The Color Purple* is equivalent to the original in form and style.

1. CONTENT AND FORM IN NOVEL TRANSLATION

The unity or contradiction between content and form has always been a common phenomenon in any language. In the traditional translation theory, Xu Yuanchong believes that whether literal translation or free translation, faithfulness to the original content should be put in the first place and form the second. (Luo, 2008) Is the form merely subject to the needs of the content? When translating novels, can the translator put the form in the secondary position in order to reproduce the content of the original text? In the novel style, Leech and Short think that "meaning [content, fact] + [form of expression] stylistic value = (overall) meaning". (Leech and Short, 1981) The division of content and form is similar to the division of story and discourse in narratology (in narratology, the story is the content expressed, and discourse is the form of the content expressed). In the field of western narrative criticism, there has always been a dispute between monism and dualism between story and discourse, that

is, whether story and discourse should be divided. Due to the different stylistic features between poetry and novels, the translation of novels is less stressed by context than poetry, especially in rhythm, pronunciation and intonation. "Monism is more popular in poetic criticism; dualism is more popular in novel criticism." (Shen & Wang, 2007) When is the unity of form and content, there are different interpretations. However, in the translation of novels, the translator often only pays attention to the faithfulness of the content, that is, the story, but ignores its form, the rhetoric and the political culture behind the unique literary style of the original text, and ignores the manipulation of the original author at the narrative level, resulting in a kind of "pseudo equivalence" (Shen, 2002) of the translation.

2. RESEARCH STATUS OF CHINESE TRANSLATION OF *THE COLOR PURPLE*

At present, there are six Chinese versions of *The Color Purple* in China, namely Tao Jie (1986, 1998), Lu Shujiang (1986), Yang Renjing (1986, 1987) and Zhang Jianying (2001). Based on the data retrieved by CNKI, most domestic scholars choose the Tao Jie's version(1998) as the research object on the Chinese translation of *The Color Purple*. The main reason is the "gender influence" of the translator's identity (Li, 2008). Male translators often ignore the oppression of women in their translation, which is rooted in the fact that China has been internalized by patriarchy for a long time. Secondly, Tao Jie, a professor of English who has been studying African American literature for a long time, is the most suitable one to give an African American work to a translator who studies African American literature for translation. Therefore, this thesis still chooses Tao's translation as the research object.

There are eighteen Chinese translation studies on *The Color Purple* in China, which are divided into two categories: from the perspective of gender and politics, and the other one from the perspective of stylistic features. The former occupies the majority, mainly based on the gender and cultural perspective to explore the translator's translation strategies under gender identity or national political ideology, such as: from the perspective of Feminism (sixteen articles), homosexuality (one article) to analyze its translation. If only the external study of the translation is carried out, mainly from the political level and neglecting the ideological significance of the discourse structure, the study will go to the extreme, and the field of vision will be rigid and one-sided. Another graduate's thesis, an analysis of the two Chinese versions of "purple" from the perspective of stylistic translation, is a study of translation from the perspective of stylistics, but mainly deals with the handling of words and texts by translators. The analysis of translation only stays

at the linguistic level of the article and separates the relationship between language and culture. To analyze the translation from the perspective of narrative stylistics, we can consider the dialectical relationship between the language and culture of the translation. In the western post classical narratology, there are interdisciplinary studies such as female narratology, rhetoric narratology and narrative stylistics, which give consideration to the comprehensive analysis of language level and cultural politics. The narrative technique and stylistic features of language used by Walker in the novel reveal the ideology of the text from the form, so that the readers can find the double oppressions of black women in race and gender more directly. Therefore, from the perspective of narrative stylistics, this paper will analyze the equivalence of the translation from three aspects: the narrative voice of the text, the expression of characters' discourse and the stylistic features of black American English, hoping to provide a reverse translation experience for the translation of Chinese literature.

3. ON THE EQUIVALENT TRANSLATION OF *THE COLOR PURPLE* FROM THE PERSPECTIVE OF NARRATIVE STYLISTICS

3.1 Personal Narrative Voice

Narrative voice has always been considered as the narrator's own voice. In narratology and novel stylistics, Shen Dan compares Genette's perspective classification and thinks that "narrative voice has become the voice of focusing on the characters to a certain extent." (Lancer, 2002) For *The Color Purple*, narrative voice is the synthesis of Celie, the narrator and her own voice in the story. When Walker portrays the fictional female, she constructs her identity through the stylistic features of letter style. As the plot advances, Celie attempts to break her oppressive situation and becomes a symbol of female consciousness awakening. Therefore, in the characterization of Walker's novel, Celie's narrative voice is an artistic feature that cannot be ignored.

In this novel, Celie is a double identity character. She is the narrator and the protagonist of the story, so she "shifts the private voice into a semipublic narrative form". *The Color Purple* is a novel composed of ninety-two letters, fifty-six of which are Celie's confession to God, and the other twenty-six are the correspondence between Celie and Nettie. In this novel, Celie acts as the first person of the story, and the first person is a kind of narrative strategy to draw readers closer. Its main purpose is to make readers feel the same. As the first person, Celie is expressing her inner thoughts to the readers and making them feel the same.

SL: "You better not never told nobody but God. It 'd kill your mommy." (Walker, 1982)

TL: "你最好什么人都不告诉, 只告诉上帝。否则会害了你妈妈。" (Walker, 1998)

In this society dominated by the masculine logos, the patriarchal cultural thought suppresses the voice of women (in the novel, it is the narrator Celie). In her 56 letters, she is asking God for help to relieve her frustration and depression of aphasia. The narrator's double negation is an absolute meaning in style. Celie, the subject, was threatened with a warning, only telling God, which means that you can't say it even if you die, and this warning was strengthened. This sentence is a contradiction and conflict in Celie's heart. The narrator presents Celie's inner thoughts to the readers from an omniscient perspective. It can be seen from the original text that as the narrator, in addition to receiving the information that Celie, the narrator, was raped by her stepfather, she was also forbidden to tell anyone the information, which resulted in a political narration and oppressed the voice of women. The translator needs to transmit the original focusing strategy and the modality to the target readers equally, imitate the context of the original narrator, and adopt the narrative technique of omniscient perspective, so that the target readers can see Celie's inner helplessness as a spectator: if she told her mother, her mother will die. "The best" and "neither" form an indirect opposition and form a tension of language and emotion in the style of formal means, which can highlight Celie's inner fear and helplessness.

ST: "I am I have always been a good girl." (Walker, 1982)

TL: "我是我向来是个好姑娘。" (Walker, 1998)

The grammatical feature of the sentence is first the general present tense, but Celie crossed it out and changed it to the present perfect tense. A foregrounding of tense emphasizes that she used to be a good girl. However, thinking of my 14-year-old, I had been raped by my stepfather before I wrote, and the good girl was in the past. The past tense part of Celie is a kind of self-retrospective narration, while the present tense emphasizes the action of Celie writing a letter. The author uses the perspective of retrospective narration to allow readers follow Celie's description to uncover the mystery layer by layer, while Celie in the past cannot predict what will happen in the future. Because the change of Chinese tense is not directly reflected in sentence pattern, it can only be judged according to context. At the same time, another characteristic of Chinese is the uniqueness of the reporting language. Zhao Yiheng pointed out the current situation of the research on the reporting language in *the novel narration in China*, "this may be because there is no tense correspondence between the subject sentence and the clause in Chinese." (Zhao, 1987) in terms of the rhetorical effect of the reporting language, its technology is not complicated. But this is only a one-sided view.

The main reason is the differences in the expression of predicate tenses between English and Chinese. Therefore, it can be seen that there is a kind of uncertainty in Chinese. In dealing with this sentence, the translator has fully considered the stylistic features of the original text, especially the literary artistry of tense. At the same time, it also changes from omniscient perspective to character perspective, which shortens the distance between the reader and the narrator, so that the reader can feel the oppression experience of Celie's multiple other identity. Let's look at another sentence:

ST: "You a lowdown dog is what's wrong, I say. It's time to leave you and enter into the Creation. And your dead body just the welcome mat I need." (Walker, 1982)

TL: "怎么啦! 就是你这个卑鄙的混蛋,我说。我现在该离开你去创造新世界了。你死了我最高兴。我可以拿你的尸体当蹭鞋的垫子。" (Walker, 1998)

Walker uses epistolary form to give Celie a place to vent, and also reveals a stylistic feature of black discourse privacy. When dealing with this sentence, the translator also uses the perspective to change to Celie, so that Chinese readers can feel Celie's anger.

3.2 The Way of Characters' Speech Expression

In this epistolary novel, the author uses free indirect speech and free direct speech. The whole novel has never used any direct quotation, which avoids the readers' fluency in reading. According to Gerald Prince, "free indirect speech is a kind of way to present people's words or thoughts. It has the grammatical characteristics of indirect speech without guiding sentence." (Prince, 1988) Shen Dan believes that "compared with" indirect speech "the" free indirect speech "can retain the elements reflecting the subject consciousness of the characters, so that the characters can enjoy more autonomy." (Shen & Wang, 2005). From the perspective of stylistic features, sentences get rid of the shackles of clauses, so that they have greater freedom and the semantic density of the text is strengthened. As for Walker's narrative technique, the third person narration opens the distance between readers, but because of the free indirect quotation, it allows readers to feel the consciousness of Celie, and at the same time, it avoids the incessant switch between the narrative language and tense, which leads to the fluency of narration. Look at the following sentences:

ST: "Well that's no excuse, say the first one, Her name Carrie, other one name Kate. When a woman marry she spose to keep a decent house and a clean family. Why, wasn't nothing to come here in the winter time and all these children have colds, they have flue, they have direar, they have new monya, they have worms, they have the chill and fever. They hungry. They hair ain't comb. They too nasty to touch." (Walker, 1982)

TL: "哼,这不是理由,头一个妹妹又说。她的名字叫嘉莉,另一个叫凯特。女人结了婚就得把家里收拾得像个样子,把一家大小打扮得干干净净的。唉,以前

冬天要是上这儿来的话, 这些个孩子, 不是伤风就是得了流感, 再不然就是肺炎, 他们肚子里长虫子, 他们受寒、发烧, 经常如此。他们饿肚子。他们的头发从来没人给梳。他们脏得都没法叫人碰。” (Walker, 1998)

The translator considers that Celie is a round character in the original text. The narrator indirectly gives Celie a right to control her own words by recounting what she has seen and heard. In dealing with the expression of characters, the translator also adopts the method of free indirect quotation: a large number of inner monologues without quotation marks, which increases the reading fluency, but not alienating the relationship between the readers and the characters, so that the readers can directly hear the inner voice of Celie without any interruption. Thus we can indirectly see the germination of female consciousness awakening. “Well, if I had come here in winter They are too dirty to be touched. “ Readers can see that Celie has begun to complain from her heart; “ too nasty to touch”, and readers can even feel the disgust in Celie’s heart in the translation. Look at the next sentence:

ST: “It’s hot, here, Celie, she write. Hotter than July. Hotter than August and July. Hot like cooking dinner on a big stove in a little kitchen in August and July.” (Walker, 1982)

TL: “这儿真热, 西丽, 她来信说。比七月还热。比八月加七月还要热。就像七八月间在小厨房里守着大火炉做饭那么热。” (Walker, 1998)

This is a letter from Nettie to Celie. The translation method adopted by the translator here is free direct quotation, which can reveal the control of the narrator Celie over the text. Let’s look at the following sentence:

ST: “Dear God. Dear stars, dear trees, dear sky, dear peoples. Dear Everything. Dear God.” (Walker, 1998)

TL: “亲爱的上帝。亲爱的星星, 亲爱的树木, 亲爱的天空, 亲爱的人们。亲爱的一切。亲爱的上帝。” (Walker, 1998)

At the novel’s conclusion, Nettie came to Celie with her children. Celie is grateful for all this. In the process of translation, the translator also uses free indirect speech, which increases the readers’ sympathy for Celie. From “God” to “people”, we can see her excitement brought by the final reunion. The translator didn’t use quotation marks to highlight this is Celie’s voice; when translating this sentence, let the perspective shift to Celie’s character, and achieve the real equivalent translation.

3.3 Stylistic Features of Black American English

Black English is a unique language in American area, and black language is a cultural portrayal of black people. For example, Tang, the educated black protagonist in the film *Green Book*, whose educated language caused a kind of deviation of black culture, such as Tang’s oral family letter to white people. Throughout the novel *The Color Purple*, readers can clearly find that the expressions used in Celie’s letters are all against the grammar rules of English. Her choice of words and sentences in the letter is

a reflection of history, which reflects her own education and social status. Walker uses black dialect to let Celie tell the story of her growth to the readers. The main purpose of Walker is to create her own character characteristics for Celie, which is the story that Celie tells in her own dialect. In her story, each character’s character features are relative to the stylistic features of the language; in narrative strategy, Walker also uses the first-person perspective to let the readers observe the inner thoughts of Celie. She is eager to eliminate this unequal difference and hope to turn her dialect into a real standard language.

ST: “ My momma dead. She die screaming and cussing. She scream at me. She cuss at me.” (Walker, 1982)

TL: “我妈妈死了。她呼喊着叫骂着死去了。她冲着我大声叫嚷。她诅咒我。” (Walker, 1998)

Readers can see the character characteristics of Celie from the linguistic features. Celie is a simple and free American rural girl. Readers can see that Celie’s writing is against the English grammar rules. Stylistically, readers further explain that this phenomenon is caused by the oppressed black American women. “It marks a turning point in the history of narrative voice: it creates a positive space for a black female narrator in literature, making her murder the orthodox English. “ When dealing with the translation, the translation must convey such stylistic reflection. Therefore, the translator fails to translate the stylistic meaning of the original text equivalently, resulting in the “pseudo equivalence” mentioned above. My mother died, she cried and scolded four times. She shouted at me. She cursed me. (black is bold for the author) indirect use of some typos can also open the target language readers’ understanding of the text and extend the readers’ understanding of the expression. At the same time, this kind of translation method also meets the requirements of the concept of “Defamiliarization” (Shklovski, 1989) put forward by Russian formalist scholar Skrovsky, which makes the stylistic function of the translation more artistic.

CONCLUSION

The narration of a novel is like notes to music, and writing is the expressive form of this skill. From the perspective of narrative strategy and stylistic features, this paper examines Tao Jie’s translation of *The Color Purple*, which can appreciate its artistry from two aspects: the part, the language level and the whole, the narrative skills. Through the letters of Celie and Nettie, Walker makes the readers see the oppression of the multiple status marginalization of African American women, and imparts the readers to feel the helplessness and resentment of the other. In terms of narrative techniques, the use of personalized narrative voice, different characters’ speech expressions and the stylistic features of Black English can indirectly deconstruct the situation of male subjectivity and female otherness; through these strategies, women can make voice, break the dual opposition situation, and actively

participate in the dialogue of gender equality. Tao Jie not only pays attention to the right relationship behind the article, but also pays attention to the literary significance of the original expression form in his translation. When dealing with the style of Black English, the translator has translated the incorrect English expression of the original into the correct Chinese, which has some deficiencies in the aspect of equivalence.¹ According to the stylistic features and narrative techniques of the original text, the translator recreates the content of the novel in Chinese in a suitable discourse form. While conveying the content of the story level of the original text, he also displays the discourse artistic techniques of the story presented. The success of Tao Jie's Chinese translation of *The Color Purple* enlightens us: if Chinese literature wants to go out, it must change the situation that the traditional translation pays too much attention to the original content of the novel and ignores the artistic form of the original. When translating the novel, we should not only pay attention to the expression of the original content of the novel, but also fully consider the narrative form that the translation presents in the content of the story.

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¹ In dealing with the style of Black English, the translator translated the wrong English expression of the original into the correct Chinese, which has some deficiencies in equivalence, but there are no hidden flaws.