

Three Chinese Versions of *Charlotte's Web*: A Skopos' Theory Perspective

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Abstract

This thesis makes comparisons with three Chinese translated version of “Charlotte’s Web” and analyzes different reactions from readers of translation based on the view of Skopos’ theory. It also aims at exploring the influence and restriction of children’s literature, which is caused by children’s characteristics, expecting to bring new enlightenment in the research of translation theory. First of all, the thesis presents the outline of Skopos’ theory and its guiding significance for translation through literature review. And then, the thesis studies translators’ strategies and purposes for the three common Chinese translated versions of “Charlotte’s Web” through the guidance of Skopos’ theory, making comparisons concretely with both advantages and disadvantages of the three translated versions, and also their main features. At last, the thesis concludes: Skopos’ theory is a kind of theory that aims at illustrating “the most important factor in process of translation is the purpose of translational action”.

Keywords: Skopos’ theory, Chinese translation, comparisons

1. Introduction

Skopos’ theory is one of the important western translation theories, which develops rapidly in contemporary western countries. As the base of functional theories of translation, it provides a new perspective for translation. It mainly focuses on choices of a variety of purposes and makes up for the deficiency of the traditional translation theories.

In China, many relevant books have been published since Skopos’ theory was introduced into mainland in 1987. Related researches have covered many aspects, such as the exact definition of translation, translation criteria, translation strategies and literary translation. In the aspect of literary translation, those published papers can be divided into three categories: evaluative papers (mainly about the main evaluation of relevant theories), practical papers (mainly about how to put the theories of Skopos’ theory to practice) and researches papers (mainly about the theoretical researches of Skopos’ theory). The thesis can be classified into the second category.

The word ‘Skopos’ means goal and purpose in Greek. The core of Skopos theory is that the translator should translate according to the purpose of translation action in the progress of translation (Christiane, 1997, p.35). Translation is not merely a linguistic transformation activity due to different customs and values in different cultures. Translation is a kind of purposeful activity, and translation theories are designed to respond to the profound plurality of contemporary translation studies. There are many problems to be solved, many possible approaches that can be drawn from neighboring disciplines, and several strong language-bound traditions plagued by the paradoxical fact that some of the key theoretical texts have yet to be translated.

From the theory of Hans J. Vermeer’s translation (1984), Skopos’ theory is an essential one, which embodied in some early works. Hans J. Vermeer also defined the main concept of Skopos’ theory (Vermeer, 1978,1983,1986a), making it more individual in aspect of translation. That is: the main principle concluding any translation process is the purpose of the whole translation action. The three rules of Skopos’s theory show the judging criterion of translation.

First, also the most important, is called Skopos’ Rule. The Skopos’ Rule focuses on “purpose”, which includes the communicative purpose of the translation. Actually, translators should definite their purpose in their translated copies. The Skopos’ Rule will also be used as the main theory to analyze texts, which are chosen from translated versions of “Charlotte’s Web”.

Second is Coherence Rule, which points out that translated versions should be readable and easily acceptable, both in

language and in logic.

The last one is Loyalty Principle, founded by Nord, which could be divided into two parts: one is that translators must be responsible for their translated works, the other one is a translator ought to show respect to the original author. In a word, Loyalty Principle mainly focuses on the relationship between translators and the source language author.

There is no doubt that translation should and need to be related with practice, and Skopos' theory has been the bridge across them. In the description, Vermeer cited Hubbell's translation of Cicero's *De Inventione*: according to the aims or statements of goals, real reasons for actions could always be formulated (Vermeer, 1989, pp. 176).

According to content of Skopos' theory, the target culture is more important than the source culture. The outline relies on the circumstances of the former. And a text is becoming meaningful in the process of recreation of its readers, and also for its readers. Diverse readers (or receivers) could find various meanings in the same linguistic material from text (Nord, 1992, pp. 91).

Most of time, a good translator, or a practiced one can infer the Skopos (purpose) from the translational situation itself, dealing well with the relation between the source culture and the target culture, they are able to find a proper way to let receivers in target culture feel and understand what the sender (the writer) wanted to express as much as possible with their translation skill.

To sum up, Skopos' theory in translation is the necessary bridge across the source culture and target culture. Translators should try to figure out the intention and purpose and reflect them in the translated versions, by which readers could feel and comprehend the essence of the original works to some extent.

2. Comparison of the three Chinese versions

For the works analyzes and studied by different researches, *Charlotte's Web* is special and unique in fairytales. It is one of the most famous fairytales in western countries, being welcomed by almost all children and even their parents. It could be regarded as one of the representatives of fairytales. It tells about the friendship between a pig and a spider. The pig Wilbur wanted to escape from his original fate, and the spider, Charlotte, found an interesting way to save him by keeping him in lifelong safety finally. What's more, some minor characters, like the girl called Fern, Mr. Homer L. Zuckerman and the mouse named Templeton, which appears later in the book, are also very important in the novel. Three different Chinese versions of it will be analyzed from the Skopos' theory. And this thesis will focus on how children's characteristics, personalities and their reading habits will pose their influence on the translated versions.

"Charlotte's Web" has several Chinese translated versions, among which the versions by Xiao Mao, Kang Xin and Ren Rongrong are the most famous ones in China. In fact, most of readers who are new to "Charlotte's Web" may have heard of one of the three translated versions. Three versions have their own features and readership because the three translators have quite different identities and experiences. The Skopos' theory could be considered when the different versions of translation are evaluated. For example:

"我从不愿意在这些事儿上浪费时间。"耗子冷冷地回答。(Xiao, 2000/1952, pp. 33)

"这种事我从来能不干就不干"老鼠尖刻地回答说。(Ren, 2009/1952, pp. 33)

The main readers of *Charlotte's Web* are children, therefore from the point of view of the Skopos Rule, children prefer the version "这种事我从来能不干就不干" (Ren, 2009/1952, pp. 33) to the version "我从不愿意在这些事儿上浪费时间" (Xiao, 2000/1952, pp. 33). The former is quite formal as written words, and will not be said by young adult people usually in daily life. And for the latter, readers could feel and imagine the expression of the mouse. To some extent, the translated sentence should better reflect the personality of the figure in the novel. Additionally, the mood of the latter shows children's pettish mentality, which could easily draw the children closer. For aspects of the Coherence Rule and Loyalty Principle, both the translated versions are equally matched. Sentences are fluent and general meanings are faithful to the original. As a child, it should be considered that he/she might not accept or totally understand the former one easily, so in this way, Mr. Ren's version is more proper for children to read.

"我宁愿把我的时间用在吃，咬，偷，藏上面。我是一个贪吃的老鼠，不是游戏主义者。"(Xiao, 2000/1952, pp. 33)

"我情愿把时间花在吃啊，啃啊，窥探啊，躲藏啊这些上头。我是个大食鬼而不是个寻欢作乐者。"(Ren, 2009/1952, pp. 33)

It is more likely to find a child who was saying“吃啊，啃啊，窥探啊，躲藏啊”than“吃，咬，偷，藏”. Besides, words like“大食鬼”are capable to arouse children’s interest and their natural instincts. The original expression for“大食鬼”is“glutton”, which means someone eats too much and is greedy. (1990, pp. 556)“大食鬼”covers both the meaning (eat too much and be greedy), so according to the Loyalty Principle, it’s a better version to convey the spirit of the original. From the view of the Skopos Rule, the second is more welcomed by children. Like the samples selected above, more examples could be found in the texts.

“你不用老呆在那个肮脏的-小 肮脏的-小 肮脏的-小院子里，”母鹅说得相当的快。“这儿有一块木板松了。推开它，推-推-推开它，就能够出去！”(Xiao, 2000/1952, pp. 22)

“你用不着待在那脏兮兮小兮兮脏兮兮小兮兮脏兮兮小兮兮的猪栏里，”那母鹅飞快地说，“有一块烂板松了。顶顶它，顶顶-顶顶-顶顶它……出来吧！”(Ren, 2009/1952, pp. 22)

“你说我去哪儿比较好？”

“你喜欢的任何地方，你喜欢的任何地方，”母鹅说。“到果园那边去，把路上的草皮翻出来！……在你年轻时世界是多么美妙。”(Xiao, 2000/1952, pp. 23)

“依你看，我最好上哪儿去呢？”

“你爱上哪儿就上哪儿，爱上哪儿就上哪儿，”母鹅说，“穿过果园，拱草皮！……你年纪小，会觉得世界真奇妙。”(Ren, 2009/1952, pp. 23) (Note 1)

In the above-mentioned examples,“肮脏的-小 肮脏的-小 肮脏的-小院子里”(Xiao, 2000/1952, pp. 22), which reads more intentional and seems to be said from an adult or an actor in a play. In a contrast,“脏兮兮小兮兮脏兮兮小兮兮脏兮兮小兮兮”(Ren, 2009/1952, pp. 22)could make readers feel a flowing rhythm, which is much preferable to young readers than the former one, and also the most important point, the latter sounds like words from a child—like the readers of the book, which could give the readers a vivid image of the scene. The original text is“‘You don’t have to stay in that dirty-little dirty-little dirty-little yard,’ said the goose.” Xiao Mao’s translation is rigid than the latter. From the view of the Skopos’ Rule, the readers are always to be considered. The sentence“你喜欢的任何地方，你喜欢的任何地方”(Xiao, 2000/1952, pp. 23) shows the habit of literal translation of writer, but that should be avoided in translation of fairytales. The original text is“Anywhere you like, anywhere you like.”(White, 1952, pp. 23)“你爱上哪儿就上哪儿，爱上哪儿就上哪儿”(Ren, 2009/1952, pp. 23) is much more proper and convenient for readers to accept and understand, especially for readers in the mainland of China, according to the daily usage of language.

According to the Coherence Rule in Skopos’ theory, words and lines which could quite easily be accepted and understood are capable of bringing readers into the scene personally as not merely an outsider but truly a watcher. Moving to the Loyalty Principle, for translation of“‘The world is a wonderful place when you’re young’”(White, 1952, pp. 23), for the version of Xiao Mao, she just took“在你年轻时世界是多么美妙”(Xiao, 2000/1952, pp. 23) as the line. And for Ren Rongrong, he used“你年纪小，会觉得世界真奇妙”(Ren, 2009/1952, pp. 23).“美妙”just shows the beauty of the world and does not have other inner emotion;“奇妙”demonstrates the exclamation for seeing a brand-new part of the world, reflecting the strong emotion that the role in the book has been shocked. The latter transfers the original meaning more accurately.

"Children's literature should suit the characteristic of child's age, allowing children to appreciate, promoting the development of children's physical and mental health of the various forms of literary works' and same as other literary works, the creator of children's literature and translators are adults, and its target audience is children, so children's literature creators and the translator should fully consider the specificity of the target readers. The uniqueness of children's literature is embodied in its style, there is a specific reader object that children's decision. Children's literature was written for children, the writer and the translator should first consider the needs and characteristics of the target readers." (Hu, 2011, pp. 24)

Hans J. Vermeer proposed that “main and basic principle determining any translation process is the purpose (Skopos) of the overall translational action, this fits in with intentionality being part of the very definition of any action. To say that an action is intentional is to presuppose the existence of free will and a choice between at least two possible forms of behavior. One form of behavior is nevertheless held to be more appropriate than the other in order to attain the intended goal or purpose (Skopos).” (Nord, 2001, pp. 30) So under the perspective of Skopos’ theory and the three rules, Ren Rongrong’s version is better than one of Xiao Mao, although it may be better in other aspects.

Skopos’ theory mainly focuses on the purpose and idea of the translator. Besides the versions of Ren Rongrong and Xiao Mao, in the paper, version of Kang Xin is also taken to make comparisons with others.

“大家看好了！”威尔伯大叫一声，用尽全身力气，头向前腾空跳下去。绳子拖在它身后。可是它忘了把绳子另一头拴在什么东西上面，绳子一点不起作用，威尔伯扑通一声落在地上，跌疼了。眼泪从它眼睛里涌出来。坦普尔顿呲着大牙笑。

.....

“你少了一个吐丝器，你也少了这门技术。不过高兴起来吧，你用不上网。朱克曼先生一天供你三顿大餐。你干吗要费心捉东西吃呢？”(Ren, 2009/1952, pp. 62)

“大家看着！”他叫道。他一鼓作气跳向空中.....他眼里充满了泪水。谈波顿咧着嘴笑着。夏洛只静静地坐着。过了一会，她说话了。

.....

“你没有丝囊，你也没有织网的常识。可是别伤心，你用不着网。查克曼先生每天喂你三大餐，你何必费心织网捕食呢？”(Kang, 1979/1952, pp.61) (Note 2)

Differences between the two versions of translation might not be obvious enough, but usages of personal pronoun should be observed. Apparently, in Ren Rongrong's version, roles in the fairytales are seen as animals, original animals. He used “它”(it) to describe all the roles which appeared in the story.

Conversely, in Kang Xin's version, the translator used “他”(he) to address the pig and “她”(she) to address the spider (Charlotte). The translator has endowed the role specific genders, which have a strong relation with appearance, behavior and “personality” of the roles.

The pig, Wilbur, has shown his temper and characters like a little boy. Sometimes he does not have his own idea or opinions, and sometimes he shows his naughty features. And for the spider, Charlotte, every time she helps Wilbur. Readers could be impressed and feel her selfless love to him. In people's traditional impression, selfless love is almost equal to like being a mother, showing the greatness of motherhood over and over again. Thus, the latter one is better in expression of “personality” of roles.

With the Skopos Rule and theory of Skopos' theory, whether the text makes readers have sense of identification between roles and themselves is one of the standards to judge whether it is a good translated version. Making readers have the sense of identification allows the readers to understand the deeper meaning between the lines of the text. The book needs to provide readers with some figures of flesh and blood.

On the other hand, in the aspect of description of behaviors, both the two versions show the details, which are depicted in place. Translators reveal their attainments, making each action more specific and strengthen the coherence.

夏洛对她这工作的兴趣越来越浓了，她一边干一边自语起来，好像这样能令她更兴奋。如果那天夜里你正静坐在谷仓地窖里，你就会听到下面的话：

“现在开始织字母 R！我们往上去！系住！下降！抽丝！停！.....现在往右往下转个圈儿转圈转圈儿！现在往左边来！系住！爬！再来！OK！小意思，把那些线连起来！现在，往下织 R 的一条腿儿！放线！停！系住！下降！再来！好姑娘！”(Xiao, 2000/1952, pp. 94)

夏洛爬到网的左上角。她给丝囊安好方位，把丝头系住，然后徐徐向右角移动。她移动时，产丝管开始工作，放出丝来。.....她重复这笔，变为双线，八条腿不住地忙碌着。

“现在写木字！”

“现在写‘出’：爬上去！系住！下来！.....往下去！系住！重复一遍！现在写另一笔！系住！往下！放线！系住！哗！重复一遍！好孩子！”(Kang, 1979/1952, pp. 93) (Note 3)

The two long parts show the whole process of the spider's weaving net. For the details, the sentence “夏洛对她这工作的兴趣越来越浓了，她一边干一边自语起来，好像这样能令她更兴奋” (Xiao, 2000/1952, pp. 94) makes readers feel sense of translationese (translationese: some translated texts neglect the core principle of translation, the accuracy of information, which brings about the occurrence of “translationese” and produces many under-qualified translated texts. (Nida & Taber, 1969). In Chinese, people rarely used adjective words like “excited” to describe a kind of feeling when they do their work. That's for the particularity of Xiao Mao's version, which is released from the Internet. That is to say, Xiao Mao's version is mainly for adults, or for people who at least could find the translated version on the Internet to read. As the result, the version has reflected the desire of the translator himself that hopes readers could enter the inner world of the fairytale and let them join the journey with the characters. It could also be the purpose of the translator if it's seen under the Skopos Rule. Another example, in Xiao Mao's version, the letter which appears in original works, “T”, “E”, “R” and colloquial word “OK” have been put into the

translated version directly, which allows the readers to taste the “beauty” of the book by themselves, though it may be a little hard for some readers to form a picture of the content they are reading in their mind.

As Kang Xin’s version, sentences like “夏洛爬到网的左上角。她给丝囊安好方位，把丝头系住，然后徐徐向右上角移动。她移动时，产丝管开始工作，放出丝来。” (Kang, 1979/1952, pp. 93) show literary appreciation of the translator, making the words she used be neither too childish nor too serious. No matter how old the readers are, nearly all of them could feel the splendidness of language. Being different from Ren rongrong’s motivated version (more proper for little kids and being oral and lucid), Kang Xin’s version emphasizes the characters of Chinese. Although “Charlotte’s Web” is a fairytale from the United States, readers in China should feel the inner word of the works via charm of Chinese language. Kang Xin tent to make her translated version of “Charlotte’s Web” become a work of art. And she turned the letter appears in the original works into the Chinese characters, such as “十”、“木” and “出”, making the content more understandable.

For Ren Rongrong’s version, it is necessary to discuss his habits or styles of translation, which could reflect the temperament and disposition of the translator. The first aspect is about his thoughts and ideas for translation of children’s literature. He, and others who were born at that time, is the last generation who were educated in Chinese traditional way. That determines his structure of knowledge and translation —— the residues and basement of old knowledge and the infiltration of the new. And in 1938, he studied in a middle school established by British, which led to his lifelong habits of reading English works, especially children’s literatures. After his study and research of traditional Chinese literature during his learning in university, he had a more specific structure of Chinese language and literature, changing his focus in learning western knowledge and works.

And the second, also the most important one, is his connotation and guidelines in translation. He put “children’s reflection” as the most significant point, he thought it quite necessary to let children read his translation frequently and feel interested. On the other hand, he laid emphasis on oral expression and rewriting. Being different from other translators who often made their works “strict and serious”, Mr. Ren thought translation for children’s literature must be easy to understand, for writers of the original one tended to make their works face all children as readers, who may have no interests for “adultification” style of language. For rewriting, Mr. Ren supposed that many annotations should be forbidden, since that will lose the interest of children. When meeting something that is hard for children to understand, he often chose to change it as a “relevant Chinese paronomasia” to keep the “spirit” of the original works still. Under the perspective of Skopos’ theory, Mr. Ren’s translator seems to be a better one, if compared with one by Xiao Mao.

Actually, Mr. Xiao is not a formal educated writer, he becomes a writer/translator through self-study, and most of his translated works stem from his personal interest. His translated version of “Charlotte’s Web” is released on the Internet originally, which means the function of this translated version is mainly as an informative and entertaining piece of work.

As these translated versions of “Charlotte’s Web”, for Kang Xin’s version, it contains some creative work, which endows a fairytale more elegant expressions and more attractiveness to adults. One purpose of the translator is to recreate the translated version into a real classic works, being suitable for all ages to read. Even if little children could not understand some literary words for the time being, they are still capable of feeling the rhythmic beauty, which is contained into lines with typical traditional Chinese expressions. For Xiao Mao’s version, some has been mentioned in the last part, readers could not feel meanings that Mr. White wanted to express behind Mr. Xiao’s lines with strong emotion. Re-create work is not bad, but the purpose of the original author should always be fully considered. For the last one, version by Ren Rongrong is simpler and quite “regular”. Between the lines, readers could notice that he hoped to transfer the intentions of Mr. White correctly to the utmost extent. Although for this reason, Mr. Ren’s version lost some flashes and brilliant moments, his works is decent generally, especially for little children.

3. Conclusion

“Charlotte’s Web” is a fairytale, which decides its main readership: children and adults (children’s parents). For children, the translated versions need to be more attractive and directly perceived, making them feel it’s easy to understand and feel the spirit behind scenes. For adults, translators should not only help them understand the literary work but also emphasize the proper way in which they could educate their kids and enjoy with them. The writer provided his “source culture”, and he has offered a chance for translators to have a “communication” with the “target culture”. So each translator has their own way, considering their different background and experience, people could imagine they are readers and suppose what they could feel. All translators could not transfer all the meanings, opinions and ideas to readers, just making themselves as the regular bridge-builder. People who often choose to read

on the Internet are quite different from ones who are willing to read a paper book with patience.

From what has been discussed and mentioned above, the conclusion could be drawn. It is clear that the effort of each writer is worthy of recognition though three translated versions aiming at different audience. With Skopos' theory, for the aspect of conveying the intentions of the author, versions by Ren Rongrong and Kang Xin are better. However, version by Xiao Mao should still be given affirmation, for the translator's personal experience and background, his version is like an autobiography. Mr. Xiao has poured his own feelings too much between the lines. For different readers, all three translators have already well transfer their own expression or feelings in the text. Different from meaningful and thought-provoking words by Kang Xin and Ren Rongrong, in Xiao Mao's version, an internal feeling from the translator himself becomes the hidden protagonist. If the rest two versions are compared again, Kang Xin's version is the best when it is judged by all the three rules in Skopos' theory, since this version not only has fully considered the children's characteristics, personalities and their reading habits, but it is also elegant and fluent to read and enjoy.

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Notes

Note 1. Some words in sentences above are omitted.

Note 2. Some words in sentences above are omitted.

Note 3. Some words in sentences above are omitted.