

Excessive Intertextuality in Literary Translation -- Take Harry Potter and the Philosopher's Stone as an Example

Gao Yi

College of Arts & Information Engineering, Dalian Polytechnic University Zip code: 116400

Key words: Intertextuality, Literary translation, Excessive intertextuality.

Abstract: Intertextuality theory is widely used in literary translation. Based on the theory of intertextuality, this paper analyzes the phenomenon of excessive intertextuality in Harry Potter and the Philosopher's Stone. By comparing the excessive intertextuality in literature with the original text on literary expression, literary effect and meaning transfer, this paper points out that the negative impacts of excessive intertextuality on the original text, demonstrates the importance and applicability of moderate intertextuality in literary translation, and advocates the translation on accuracy, smoothness and elegance. With literal translation as the main and intertextuality as the supplement, the translator should respect the original author's writing intention, restore the original literature effect, reduce the subjective involvement of the translator, and optimize the reader's reading receipts.

1. Introduction

The essence of translation is the act of transforming one linguistic information into another on the basis of accuracy, smoothness and elegance. And smoothness is the premise of elegance, accuracy is the premise of smoothness. The literary translation refers to the act of translating literary works in one language into another language, conveying the artistic conception of the original work, making the target readers inspired, moved and feel the beauty just like reading the original works. It can be seen from this that the process of literary translation and the recipient of literature are mutually influencing. The translator's view of literary translation and the level of literary translation have a direct impact on the recipients' understanding and the appreciation of literary works. Therefore, this paper takes the theory of intertextuality as the foundation, analyzing the excessive intertextuality phenomena made by translators in literary works. By studying the cases from readers and translators, this paper will propose the corresponding suggestions for getting better translations.

1.1 Intertextuality

Julia Kristeva, who was specialized in symbology and literary criticism, "Her first published work in France is on Mikhail Bakhtin's literary writings, Roland Barthes's seminar is the place where this first substantial part of the Kristevan oeuvre would be presented." [1] Bakhtin considered that the meaning did not merely in the word, the speaker or the listener, but in the interaction between speakers and listeners. That was "Language for the individual consciousness lies on the borderline between oneself and the other". [2] On the basis of Bakhtin's theory, Kristeva developed the intersubjectivity into intertextuality. She pointed out that "every text is constructed as a mosaic of citations, every text is an absorption and transformation of other texts". [3] In brief, any text is more or less related to other texts. It was Kristeva who initiated the intertextuality theory, but it was Roland Barthes who provided the definition of intertextuality. He considered every text was a new tissue of recycled citations.

After Roland Barthes's theory on intertext, Gerald Prince, an American academic and literary theoretician, gave a clear and pellucid definition of intertextuality in his *A Dictionary of Narratology* in 1987, "The relation(s) obtaining between a given text and the other texts which it cites, rewrites, absorbs, prolongs, or generally transforms and in terms of which it is intelligible". [3] He pointed out that there was an "interrelationship between texts", and related understanding in separate works. Gerald's thoughts focused more on the relations between different texts, and

pushed the application of intertextuality in literary translation.

It was Hatim and Mason who combined the intertextuality with the research of translation. They deemed that a text could not be completely original or original for one author, and classified the theory of intertextuality into two parts: active intertextuality and passive intertextuality. “The passive intertextuality aims at meeting the basic need of coherence within a text while the active intertextuality activates knowledge and belief systems well beyond the text itself”.^[4] Based on the research above, many scholars from all over the world begin putting more and more focus on the translation field.

And this paper believes that moderate intertextuality is the action of active intertextuality, but the excessive intertextuality belongs to the action of the passive one.

1.2 Literary translation

The translation itself is a kind of interlingual transformation, adopting the target language to re-express the source language. This transformation process is an activity of intertextuality. The literary translation is a branch of translation, referring to the act of translating literary works in one language into another language. And the difficulty of this kind of translation process is that the translators need to use an another language to re-express the meaning of the source text with its original contents, style, culture, and literature effects.

Because of the nature of literary translation, the application of intertextuality in translation process may be misused, more or less than usual, by the translators. And the quality of literary works will also be affected by different possible factors from the difference of cultures and the ability of translator.

This paper aims to suggest the translators to make moderate translations in active intertextuality theory, and advocate moderate intertextuality in literary translation for getting better literary translations.

2. Excessive Intertextuality in Literary Translation

This part, based on the theory of intertextuality and the study of text of Su Nong’ s translation of *Harry Potter and the Sorcerer’s Stone*, studies the excessive intertextuality in literary translation and analyzes the translation from the perspective of the translator and readers. The excessive intertextuality’ s causes and its influence on the quality of the original text and the readersz’ reading effect will be discussed in the following.

2.1 Excessive intertextuality between text and externality

2.1.1 Mistranslation and ambiguity in translation

Compared with the ordinary text translation, the literary translation pays more attention to the influence of culture, background, literary effect and other factors involved in the text on the actual content of the original text. Take a passage from *Harry Potter and the Sorcerer’ s Stone* as an example, “He had a large pink face, not much neck, small, watery blue eyes, and thick blond hair that lay smoothly on his thick, fat head.”^[5] This is a description of Harry’ s cousin, Dudley. In this sentence, the writer uses “a large pink face” to describe the colour of Dudley’ s skin as pink, uses “large” to express size. But in the translation of Su Nong’ s, it is translated as “一张粉红色的银盆大脸，脖子很短，一对水汪汪的蓝眼睛，浓密的金发平整地贴在他那厚实的胖乎乎的脑袋上。”^[6] Su Nong translates “a large pink face” as “一张粉红色的银盆大脸”. This is obviously an overinterpretation of the original. On the one hand, the translator makes a dimensional analogy to “large” (as big as a basin), restricting the reader’s imagination of the characters in the novel; on the other hand, she uses the Chinese idioms incorrectly, changing positive words into negative words, leading the reader to make wrong judges of the character image in the original text. Such a practice

of intertextual translation that wrongly borrows things from the cultural level will not only fail to faithfully convey the idea of the original text, resulting in the readers receiving the wrong information, and even lead to the ambiguity of the translated text due to the translator's over-expression, which will reduce the effect of the readers' reading and thus affect the quality of literary works. Two aspects in the sentence should be studied carefully.

The first aspect is Dudley's skin colour. In the original, "a large pink face" clearly described that Dudley's skin colour is pink. But in Su Nong's translation, she added another two words "银盆" to modify his big face. And the problem lies in these two words. These two words "银盆" in Chinese have two meanings. First, it refers that the basin is silvery on colour or silver on material. But no matter it is silvery or silver, both of them are silvery on color. The original text has clearly stated that Dudley's skin color is pink, there is a conflict with the modifier of "银盆". Therefore, from the perspective of skin color, "银盆" is redundant and inconsistent. Second, in the classical Chinese culture, Cao Xueqin once used the word "脸若银盆" to describe Xue Baochai's looking in *A Dream in Red Mansions*. The original intention is to show that Baochai is round, plump, fair and beautiful. Ancient people often compare the moon to a silver basin, "银盆大脸" refers to the face like the full moon, shining. Therefore, the term "银盆大脸" is often used to praise a woman for her roundness and beauty, rather than referring to a face as large as a silver basin. Excessive intertextuality will bring the translation mistranslation and ambiguity.

2.1.2 suggestions

Actually, "He has a large pink face." , is a very clear and straightforward sentence. Just the translator, in order to improve the literariness of literary translation, enhance the effect of text reading, lead the target language readers into reading, forces the cultural environment which the readers are familiar with into the original text in the process of translation, leading to the excessive or improper intertextuality between text and outer, so as to make the readers create ambiguity or misunderstanding about the original. Therefore, appropriate intertextuality is particularly important for literary translation. Then, how do the translators avoid excessive intertextuality? The essence of translation is the act of transforming one linguistic information into another on the basis of accuracy, smoothness and elegance. And smoothness is the premise of elegance, accuracy is the premise of smoothness. Smoothness is the foundation of all translation. No smoothness, no accuracy; no accuracy, no elegance. The literature has thus lost its literary essence. As a result, in the process of translation, translators should strictly abide by the translation principles of accuracy, smoothness and elegance. It is a wrong action to force different texts together just for pursuing literature effect.

2.2 Excessive intertextuality within the text

2.2.1 Loss of the literary effect of the original text

Smoothness is the premise of elegance, accuracy is the premise of smoothness. On the basis of accuracy, the difference between literary translation and translation lies in the presentation of literary effect. However, due to the pursuit of literariness, the translator injects too much relevant but not mentioned content into the translation, resulting in the loss of the literary conception, atmosphere and literary effect of the original text, which is called excessive intertextuality. Take the title of chapter 3 of *Harry Potter and the Sorcerer's Stone* as an example, "The letters from no one". In the translation of Su Nong's, this sentence is translated as "猫头鹰传书" (That means the letters in the chapter were delivered by owls). From the title alone, it is impossible to judge whether the word "owl" should be reflected in the title, but "from no one" has indeed lost its mystique. The quality of a translation cannot be judged simply by "literal translation" or "free translation", but by analyzing which translation method is more applicable to the original text and which translated text is more appropriate to the original text. Therefore, this paper synthesizes the whole content of

chapter 3 to analyze whether the intertextual application of this title is reasonable. As a matter of fact, there is no reference to the owl in the whole of chapter 3, and there is no mistake in the literal translation of the title. The key point of this paper is whether the information of “owl” obtained from intertextuality between chapters is suitable for the title.

In the text, Harry’s mind activity when he received the letter for the first time is “Harry picked it up and stared at it, his heart twanging like a giant elastic band. No one, ever, in his whole life, had written to him. Who would?”[7] At this time, he did not know who was writing to him, that is, the letters from no one. To Harry’s question, Uncle Vernon’s answer is “No one. It was addressed to you by mistake.”[8] It adds to the mystery of the sender. So far, the dialog points to the sender, and the title doesn’t need to include “owl” or other irrelevant information.

In the next few days, “No less than twelve letters arrived for Harry. As they couldn’t go through the mail slot they had been pushed under the door, slotted through the sides, and a few even forced through the small window in the downstairs bathroom”[9] From this point on, the article begins to add a mysterious atmosphere, because the normal number of letters will not be so many, and the normal postman will not put letters in the house from all the cracks. The title of “猫头鹰传书”, which is obtained through internal intertextuality, not only exposes the way of delivering letters, but also reduces the mystery of the sender, making the mystery atmosphere rendered by the original text greatly reduced. If translated as “神秘来信” according to the literal translation, it not only retains the mystery of the way of sending letters, but also enhances the mystery of the sender.

“On Saturday, things began to get out of hand. Twenty-four letters to Harry found their way into the house, rolled up and hidden inside each of the two dozen eggs that their very confused milkman had handed Aunt Petunia through the living room window. While Uncle Vernon made furious telephone calls to the post office and the dairy trying to find someone to complain to.” [10] At this point, the story answers exactly the question pointed out earlier in this paper about whether owls are suitable for the title. The original author borrows Uncle Vernon’s action to exaggerate atmosphere, pointing the finger at the post office and the dairy to contrast the mystery of the letter instead of telling the readers any information of owls directly. The author aims to arouse the reader’s imagination and strengthen literary effect. Especially the action of “the letters rolled up and hidden inside each of the two dozen eggs” can not be done by owls. Therefore, the translation of “猫头鹰传书” appears to be very one-sided, and against the original author’s creative intention, lost the original literary effect in the meantime.

2.2.2 Suggestions

From the story development of the whole chapter, it can’t make the translation get better literary effect if the word “owl” is intertextualized into the title of the translation. On the contrary, this excessive use of intertextuality causes the translation to reveal what the author wants to hide (The author reveals the truth of the mysterious letters in chapter 4), and causes the reader to focus on the “owls” and ignore the fact that the author wants to express the letters from no one, not only the way of delivery. In short, the excessive use of intertextuality not only violates the author’s intention of creation, reduces the literary effect of the original text, but also makes the expression of the translated text one-sided and the information of the original text missing. This further proves the importance of proper intertextuality.

3. Summary

This paper takes intertextuality as the theoretical basis and Harry Potter and the Sorcerer’s Stone as the research text to analyze the application of intertextuality in literary translation. Firstly, this paper studies the mistranslation and ambiguity of the translator in the process of translation from the perspective of the intertextuality between the text and the external text. Then, from the perspective of intertextuality within the text, this paper studies the influence of the translator’s subjectivity on the literary effect of the original text, and points out that literary translation should be based on the

fact of the original text, with literal translation as the main and intertextuality as the supplement, so as to jointly improve the quality of the translation.

The purpose of applying intertextuality theory in literary translation is, based on the original facts and centering on the target language, to restore the literary effect of the original text and to enhance readers' understanding of the content, style and culture of the original text through intertextuality. Moderate intertextuality is between excessive intertextuality and literal translation, which aims to fully restore the literary features of the original language with the target language. Translators should correctly treat the importance of literal translation in literary translation. On the basis of literal translation, the translator fully understands the purpose and intention of the original text, and strengthens readers' understanding and feeling of the text through appropriate intertextuality.

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