

Translator's Subjectivity in the Three-body Problems from the Perspective of Semiotics

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Abstract

The Three-Body Problems is a representative work of Liu Cixin, who is a Chinese science fiction writer. This novel tells that humans have triggered the signal of contacting with the three-body civilization outside the universe, so they start a desperate struggle to save the earth. The translation of this book won the 73rd Hugo Award for Best Novel after translated by Liu Yukun, who is a Chinese-American writer. The translator adopted different translation methods to represent the original text to improve the readability and appreciation of the book. The readers not only can obtain the content and but also can feel the writing style of the author while reading. At the same time, the popularity of its English version of also promotes the international process of Chinese science fiction. From the perspective of Morris' semiotic, this article analyzes some cases in English version of this book through semiotic trichotomy to discuss the role of the translator's subjectivity. Morris explained the concepts of syntactics, semantic and pragmatics, which refer to the relationship between the different signs, the signs and referent, signs and interpreter respectively in the Foundation of the Theory of Signs. Translator's Subjectivity refers to a kind of subjective initiative shown by the translator who is the main part in translation process and wants to achieve the translation aims. The author of this article finds some translation phenomena that the translator changes the original content appropriately, resolves the differences between different culture by exerting his creative role in the translation to make the translation closer to the culture and reading habits of target readers. Therefore, the author categorized these different translation phenomena according to the linguistic meaning, designative meaning and pragmatic meaning: Firstly, it is divided into recombination of science fiction elements and synesthesia of dynamic parts of speech according to the relationship of different language signs. The writer often creates some science fiction words that are beyond the real world. The translator uses the method of word-building and reorganizes the root and meaning while dealing with such words. Focusing on some words that the original author uses ABAB-type words to simulate the sound effect, the translator adopts the descriptive explanation to reach the semantic equivalence through the verb nominalization. Secondly, Referential meaning and literal meaning are not equivalent because of the difference between the language and culture according to the relationship of signs and referents. This article analyzes the translation method of idioms and a two-part allegorical saying in source text. The translator must possess bilingual language and cultural knowledge, analyzing the referential meaning of source text and giving the interpretant by considering context in different language culture, so that reach the equivalence of designative meaning and make up the language vacancy. Thirdly, it is divided into adjustment of chronological order and structure in text as well as annotation on diachronic words. The writer adopts the narrative method of interposition. The translator adjusts the time and space development order of the narrative and revises the frame structure of the original text narrative without changing the meaning. And the translator also divides the article into three parts which reflect the translator's understanding and recreating for source text. In recent years, most of

domestic researches focus on the theoretical interpretation and application of Saussure and Pierce's semiotics. There are relatively few literatures that combine Morris semiotics with translation. Moreover, there is no research that combines semiotics with translator's subjectivity. It is a new field to study the literary translation by using semiotics. It is helpful to study the literary translation due to the strong practice guidance and operability of Morris' semiotics. The research in this article expands the research scope of semiotics to a certain extent. It also enriches the research field of semiotics and provides a new theoretical perspective for translation research of science fiction literature.

Keywords

The Three-Body Problems; Translator's Subjectivity; Science Fiction Translation; Semiotics; Morris.

1. SEMIOTICS AND TRANSLATOR'S SUBJECTIVITY

1.1. The Overview of Morris Semiotics

Charles W. Morris put forward his own semiotic theory and promoted the development of semiotics on the basis of combining the semiotics research from Charles S. Peirce, William James, George H. Mead and John Dewey. (Morris,1971)

Morris promoted that syntactics, semantic and pragmatics, which refer to the relationship between the different signs, the signs and referent, signs and interpreter respectively in the Foundation of the Theory of Signs (Morris,1938). These three different relationships are linguistic meaning, designative meaning and pragmatic meaning in linguistic system of signs. He redefined the "semiosis" of Peirce as "sign process" and promoted the three components of it, including sign vehicle, designatum and interpretant. Moreover, Morris divided the discourse into 16 types according to the signification mode and usage of signs. These semiosis branches are the concentrated reflection of Morris semiosis thought, and the divide of discourse type are the specific utilization (Hu, 2017).

Under the influence of formalism, empiricism, and pragmatism, he inherited and developed semiotic theory of Pierce. Compared with Pierce's semiotics, Morris semiotic has more strong practical operation. It plays significant guidance meaning in the process of cross-cultural communication and the exporting of language and cultural signs. It explains a specific mode and translation judgement standard objectively in different levels to the translation of language signs; therefore, it has a certain guidance meaning to the understanding of readers.

1.2. Translator's Subjectivity

Translator's Subjectivity refers to a kind of subjective initiative shown by the translator who is the main part in translation process and wants to achieve the translation aims under respecting the translation object. its basic characteristics including the cultural consciousness, humanistic character and culture, aesthetic creativity (Cha, Tian,2003). Therefore, the translator must be loyal to the source text and plays it subjectivity and creativity to represent the source text according to the difference of language and historic culture.

In the modern translation history, many translation principles required that the translator must obey the source text strictly and represent it information faithfully, such as the basic translation rules "loyalty and coherence", the "faithfulness, expressiveness and elegance" promoted by Yan Fu who was a great translator in Qing Dynasty. The position of translator is always a "Third person" without initiative and right of speech. Venuti promoted that "a perfect translation should be so transparent like a glass that the readers can't feel that he is reading a

translation work " in The Translator's Invisibility. Even many translation critics in domestic often regard the translator as "servant, invisible manand megaphone, parrot and so on". (Hu,2004). All these thoughts reflect the inequality between the writer and translator, source text and translation. Moreover, the traditional translation concept require that the translator must be faithful to the source text unconditionally, which constrains the translator's creativity severely, resulting in translators' rigid translation in the translation and making the original text lose its original cultural characteristics.

The traditional translation concept has constraint the translators which decided they must get rid of it and tried to "creative rebellion" in translating. Translator can find their subjectivity between the loyalty and rebellion of translation or come up with their own understanding towards to the translation and translator subjectivity (Xu,2003). Moreover, the translator's subjectivity in philosophical significance means that the translation process of translator is also a self-development process. The translator need to improve his own translation literacy and bilingual expression skills. Afterall, the bilingual expression skills are actually related to the translator's ability about translating source text to what extent, which can also be regarded as the transcultural awareness of the translator (Zhong, Zhou,2006). Firstly, the translator should break through the limitation and constraints on thought. Secondly, the translator should play his own dominant control over the word and sentence, even paragraph of source text, then considers the culture of source language and target language, all these are aim to reach a balance between source language and target language. Lastly, the translator should maintain the characteristic of source text while being close to the target readers.

1.3. The Relationship between Semiotics and Translator's Subjectivity

The semiosis process in pragmatism refers to a cognitive process that express the signs and propose the interpretant constantly. It's impossible to reach absolute equivalence in different signs focusing on the difference of signs and infiniteness of interpretation (Lu, Lu,2005). However, the translation is an intercultural and interlingual communicative activity among signs, its nature is to transfer the language signs. As a communicative bridge between the authors and readers, it is necessary for translator to understand the symbol content of source text and close to the symbol word created by the author, then play his personal subjectivity to decode the signs and give the signs interpretant so that the translation text can be represented with another signs form to improve the deep understanding for original work(Chen, 2003) .

2. THE REFLECTION OF TRANSLATOR'S SUBJECTIVITY IN THE THREE-BODY PROBLEMS BASED ON THE MORRIS' TRICHOTOMY OF SIGNS

2.1. Translator's Transmission on Linguistic Meaning

Linguistic meaning is a reflection of syntactics in language system, which refers to the combination relationship between the different signs (Morris,1938). Any language signs in words are related to each other. However, the linguistic meaning sometimes has a specific meaning in a special language culture of signs or cannot be find a natural equivalence in other language culture. Therefore, the linguistic meaning cannot be equivalent in translation process. But the impossibility to achieve equivalence does not mean that this special meaning cannot be conveyed.

2.1.1. Recombination of Science Fiction Elements

The author always creates some fictional materials with sci-fi colors while creative process. However, these claims of fictitious matter do not exist in real life. New languages with special meanings continue to emerge with the development of science and technology. There are many new compound structural forms such as "micro-organism, macro-economic". Morris once divided into five significance mode in mode of signifying, including identification method,

reference method, evaluation method, prescribed method and configuration method. The configuration means that the means include variable items, suffixes, grammatical structures, and punctuation marks. In the means of forming signs, these signs are also the symbols in other combinations before they appear, but they add a certain stimulus to the stimulus in a new and decisive way (Morris,1955).

The author also creates many fictional words in *The Three-Body Problem* such as: “宏原子”. This word is a kind of fiction matter to explain the ball lighting in his fiction work of *Ball Lightning*. This word does not exist in the real physics concepts. It is a linguistic sign to describe a new kind of substance. As a new cognitive thing, it will generate new stimuli, affect the interpreter's behavior, and form new interpretation items. Liu translate the “宏原子” into “macro-atom” which is composed of “macro” and “atom”. “Macro” is an abstract text pattern in computer science. The translator combines these two words to form a compound word. The literal meaning is simple and easy to understand for readers. Such words in the novel also include “trisolaris”, “sophon”, “adventist” and “redemptionist”. “tri” is the affix that means “three”, and “ris” is a postfix that means “rise”. Translator use this compound word exquisitely conveyed the scene that three solar appear in the sky at the same time.

The translator reorganized the roots and meaning of words to translate these fiction words so that reach the equivalent of linguistic meaning. All these translation methods require that the translator must deeply grasp the content and word meaning of source text and they also reflect the translator's subjectivity and creativity in translation process.

2.1.2. Synesthesia of Dynamic Parts of Speech

In the source text, the author uses many words like ABAB-type words :“咕噜咕噜” to simulate the sound effect and make the article more vivid. It describes the sound of soup boiling in a pot and liquid flowing in the throat. These words are a kind of sound produced by different organisms in the nature, and human try to imitate this sound to form the written language symbols. In the translation version, the translator use “boiling and bubbling” to show the original scene of boiling soup through his own understanding and expressive ability to explain this sound word. The translator translates the sound of boiling water from transit auditory sense to visual sense with the cultural color of the target language, forming an interpretant and representing the article by vivid artistic effects, as if it appeared in front of the eyes. These kinds of words in the source text also include “咔嚓咔嚓” to express the sound of camera and “噼啪噼啪” to express the sound of firecracker. And the translator chooses to descriptive explanation and transit the auditory sense to visual sense to translate these words into “Keep on pressing the shutters”, and “struck it against a blade” respectively. He achieves equivalence in the sense of the word successfully.

2.2. Translator's Transmission on Designative Meaning

The designative meaning is the reflection of semantics in language system and study the relationship between the signs and referent (Morris,1938). The referential meaning is not equal to even absolutely different in the literal meaning due to the difference of special local culture. The translator should seek the equivalent in the language content form and semantic structure, and then reorganize the sentence to communicate when he thinks about these differences from designative meaning.

There is police role in the source text named “Shi Qiang” who is very vulgar. The character language description of this man in source text involves many Chinese local slangs and two-part allegorical sayings, such as “硬充六个脚趾头”、“一眼能从嘴巴看到屁眼的直肠子” and so on. Influenced by the local specific culture, Chinese local slangs and two-part allegorical sayings include special cultural information. Moreover, these kinds of translation are very difficult because the transition from source language system to target language system not only involves

words signs, but also the culture. Therefore, the translator must consider the sign context of different language and culture to achieve the combination of translation and source text with corresponding bilingual knowledge while translating.

The true meaning of this slang refers to “A man who don’t understand, but he pretends to do.” The policeman Da Shi uses this slang to describe Wang Miao who is the protagonist in the fiction. It is implied that Wang Miao shouldn’t act as a tough guy, but should be realistic. The signs in the sign process are regarded as sign vehicle, and the sign involves to the signification. And the something is a sign for an interpreter, and the effect on this interpreter is interpretation. (Morris, 1938). Therefore, the words of slang are regarded as sign vehicle in the translation, and its significance is “pretend to tough guy”. The effect on the translator is that he should give the interpretation through understanding this Chinese slang on the view of target readers according to the slang expression of target readers. Therefore, the translator gives up the referential meaning in source text and translates it into “playing the tough guy”. And the translator also gives the interpretant to translate other Chinese slangs by contacting the context and finding its referential meaning. All these methods can help the target readers to experience the uniqueness of foreign languages and culture in a subtle way. And it also can void literal translation causing difficulties in understanding the target language readers by explaining to make up for language gaps caused by cultural differences.

2.3. Translator’S Transmission on Pragmatic Meaning

Pragmatic meaning is a reflection of the pragmatics in language system, which focuses on the origin, usage and effect of semiotics. It pays attention to the relationship of signs and interpreter, dealing with the phenomena of psychology, biology and society that exist in the role of signs (Morris, 1938). The signs obtain the meaning during the process of language usage. Therefore, the translator needs to find the content with special meaning given to the original text as well as writing purpose of the author in a special cultural environment.

2.3.1 Adjustment of chronological order and structure in text

Many authors may adopt to use different narrative structure in literary works. The translator can adjust the time and space order of the narrative without changing the meaning of the original work in the translation, making the complex narrative structure easier to understand for the target readers. Because the author did not divide the content of the novel, the translator modified the frame structure of the original text according to the reading habits of the target language readers and divided the this book into three parts, and selected three titles “ Silent Spring”, “Three Body” and “Sunset for Humanity” to lead each part of the content. The translator changed the chronological order of the original narrative, and explained the background of Ye Wenjie’s entry into the Red Bank base in advance. All this translation methods can help the readers to distinguish the narrative time sequence of articles during reading.

Silent Spring is created by Rachel Carson, which describes the relationship of human and environment is getting worse and calls on humans to rethink the problems of social development with the rapid development of industry. This book is only introduced in original book briefly. But it has significant influence on the life of Ye Wenjie, who is one of the protagonists in the book. And it is a blasting fuse that led Ye Wenjie to connect with the three-body world and cause the outbreak of wars between the three-body world and human. It also reflects that Ye Wenjie’s desire to let human to rethink these human development issues. Therefore, the Silent Spring is not only the foundation of the whole book, but also the beginning of its content which plays an indelible role in the story plot. Due to the readers are also involved in the target text, the meaning of many same signs will be changed because of the context change. But the true meaning of the sign is its use meaning. Therefore, the translator must obtain its true meaning during using it (Zhao,2012). The translator used the “Silent Spring” as the title of the first part, showing that the translator tries to find the hidden meaning and role of this book

in the whole text. This method revealed the purpose and significance of the original work for target readers to some extent. The innovative establishment of the three titles in the translation shows the development sequence: from the outbreak beginning of war between humans and three-body world to the plot climax of the intersection of three-body culture and human culture, and the process of human culture is about to decline finally. These three titles run through the development of the novel's plot, and show the translator's grasp and creation to the framework and content of the whole text. The translator shouldn't be constrained by the content structure and context of original text during translating literary works. He can rearrange the chapters sequence without changing the meaning of the original work according to the context and the entire article.

2.3.2 Annotation on diachronic words

The pragmatic meaning emphasizes the influence of language signs on people in the article. It refers to the macro-structure of language in non-language context, including the meaning of society, culture, emotion and use domains and so on. The cultural heterogeneity of pragmatic meaning is distinctive, and the pragmatic meaning contained in different language symbols reflects different national psychological and cultural characteristics (Heng,2003).

The original background of this *The Three-Body Problems* is the period of the Cultural Revolution. Therefore, there are many descriptions with characteristics and significance of the times in the process of interpolating the historical background of the Cultural Revolution such as "the reactionary academic authority". The original author did not mention specific characters involved in reactionary academic people in the resistant spirit description of reactionary academic authority during the Cultural Revolution. The translator uses the word of "them" to replace the "reactionary academic authority". But some foreign readers who don't learn the historical events after the founding of New China, it is difficult for them to understand the role and influence of these reactionary people with a specific historical background in the entire book. If the translator only translates use one word like "they" to describe these people according to the original text. The readers may not know the referent of "they" in the translation. And it will cause the reading barrier for target readers. Therefore, the translator creatively used addition to increase some content and adopted the method of adding annotations to give interpretant in the translation. The addition and annotation help the pragmatic meaning relate to the language signs and its users in the specific historical context. It can be seen that the translator had sufficient historical and cultural knowledge of the source language and fully considered the historical and cultural differences between the source language and the target language, so that so that the original information can be better transmitted and the pragmatic equivalence can be achieved (Lu, Lu,2005).

The relevant historical background information described in this article by adding annotations also includes: "Monster and Demons", "August editorial" and "Red Guards" and so on. The language signs with diachronic character will produce a specific psychological influence and reaction tendency on interpreters. It can form the referent and transmit it to target readers through interpreters and let the readers can produce the same psychological and behavioral response. It can be said that the translator realizes the correspondence between language sign and pragmatic meaning. The translator adds annotations to the content involving historical information characters. It not only increases the cognition of events in a special historical period for target readers, but also deepens the cognition of readers for creative purpose of author so that struck a responsive chord to readers.

3. CONCLUSION

The creation of science fiction is still moving forward, but the translation about science fiction is still in the marginal area. The translation of *The Three-Body Problems* has brought a new

demonstration to the export of Chinese excellent culture. The biggest problem in the development of Chinese science fiction is how to create excellent works and how to push them go international. In order to continuously promote excellent Chinese literary works to the world, on the one hand, we need excellent translator to translate original text into an excellent translation. On the other hand, we need to make the film and television works through the media. And whether it is science fiction translation or the creation of science fiction movies, we still need the support of national technology and talents. Moreover, the creation genius and translator of science fiction novels are too scarce. Belonging to two different philosophical categories, semiotics and translator's subjectivity provide a strong foundation for translation study.

Morris's semiotics has strong practical guidance and operability. It pays attention to analyze text under specific time and space conditions. So its semiotic significance has more practical guidance for the study of cross-cultural communication. But people had divided different language for objective thing in life because of cultural difference. And the internal source and semantic meaning are also not corresponded due to the different between language signs. The language system is a special symbol system and the semantic system embodies the language function, both of them are inseparable. Moreover, Morris's semiotics objectively and comprehensively explained the specific mode and judgment criteria of translation to signs translation at different levels. It also has certain guidance meaning for translator to learn and understand about symbol equivalence in translation.

Therefore, this article explores the internal relationship of symbol text and the translator's subjectivity through semiotics. The author tries to put the translation in the environment of abstract concepts and philosophical speculation, and combine them with translation practice text, then explore the translator's self-construction in translation process from a new perspective. This article explores the translation strategy of science fiction by analyzing the English translation of *The Three-Body Problems*. The combination of semiotics, translation, and translator's subjectivity has certain reference significance for studying translation of science fiction works and pushing the domestic science fiction novels to break through the bottleneck to go to the word.

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