

# Study on the Chinese Translation of *Charlie and the Great Glass Elevator* from the Perspective of Reception Aesthetics

Yizhuo Qiao

Inner Mongolia University, Hohhot, 010010, China

**Abstract:** This paper explores the translation of children's literature *Charlie and the Great Glass Elevator* from the perspective of Reception Aesthetics. Taking Ren Rongrong's translation as the analysis object, it adopts close reading method, selecting instances with typical characteristics. Firstly, according to translation methods, it is divided into literal translation and free translation; furthermore, taking Reception Aesthetics as the interpretation perspective, the study is conducted from the respect of word, syntax and rhetoric. The lexical level refers to adjustment of word order, four-character word use, etc.; for syntax, it involves changing complex sentence to simple sentence, reduplicated words use, adjustment of comparative structure etc.; rhetoric concerns using addition, omission and other translation techniques to deal with simile, parallelism and other rhetorical device. From the analysis, it is concluded that the appropriate way to translate children's literature is to take children readers as the center. Translators should bear in mind the child-centered idea and flexibly adopt translation methods such as literal translation and free translation, so as to meet the expectations of readers and improve the acceptability of translation among children readers.

**Keywords:** Reception Aesthetics, translation, children's literature, *Charlie and the Great Glass Elevator*

## 1. Introduction

Generally speaking, during the upbringing of children, children's literature plays an important role in shaping their views on the world, life and values. However, in the academic world, children's literature has always not gotten the due attention, additionally, there is little analysis and research on children's literature in the field of translation studies. Therefore, this paper, based on the theory of Reception Aesthetics, has a certain theoretical and practical value in the translation of children's literature *Charlie and the Great Glass Elevator*.

When it comes to children's literature, we have to mention Roald Dahl. As the winner of Edgar Allan Poe Literature Prize and the White Bread Children's Book Award, he enjoys high reputation both at home and abroad. Among his huge number of literary works, there are many famous works such as *Charlie and the Chocolate Factory*, *Matilda* and the academic circles have also fully studied such works. However, his other works like *Charlie and the Great Glass Elevator*, being also very popular at home and abroad, there is very little research on it. Actually, *Charlie and the Great Glass Elevator* has won many international awards such as Surrey School Award, Hawaii Nene Award. The translator of *Charlie and the Great Glass Elevator* is Ren Rongrong, a famous Chinese translator of children's literature. His translation is faithful to the original text, vivid, interesting, and highly readable.

According to the author's expectation, in terms of theoretical value, through this thesis, it may reflect the high degree of conformity and practicality of Reception Aesthetics to the translation of children's literature, and awaken the academic circles' attention to this theory, so as to guide translators to improve the status of readers when translating children's literature, and to meet readers' expectations. In terms of practical value, firstly, through translation research, it may improve and perfect translation and present better translation works, so that readers can read the original works and experience similar or even the same experience as western children when they read the original works. Furthermore, it can satisfy children's imagination and creativity, stimulate children's interest in reading and guide children to develop the habit of reading from an early age. It even attracts children to read original English books, sowing the seeds for future English study. Secondly, it may let children better understand and learn western culture and cultivate cross-cultural communication awareness, understand English

idiomatic expressions, realize the difference between Chinese and Western thinking, etc., to clear some obstacles for future language study.

## 2. Previous studies on translation of children's literature

Having a better understanding of the previous studies on translation of children's literature can help readers have an overall view on this research. The following part will introduce the studies abroad and studies at home respectively. The author searched and reviewed a large body of studies and found very limited research on *Charlie and the Great Glass Elevator*. Because Dahl is still new in China and not as well known as mainstream children's literature authors such as Cao Wenxuan and Shen Shixi, there are only a few studies on *Charlie and the Great Glass Elevator*, and most of them are purely literary and do not yet involve translation. Therefore, the author cites some previous studies on children's literature in translation here as a review of the literature.

### 2.1 Foreign studies

Since the beginning of the new century, children's literature translation research has benefited from the theoretical development of literary research and translation research, showing a diversified development trend. O'Sullivan<sup>[1]</sup> studied the translator's presence in the translation of children's literature. He moved from general narrative theory to the specifics of translation, looking at translation in terms of narrative communication. He proposed that translators are especially tangible in the target text when they became visible as narrators of the translation work. Moreover, as examples illustrate, according to the asymmetrical communication in and around children's literature, the more audible the implied translator becomes as the narrator of the translation, the more tangible he is in the corresponding translation. Drawing on a corpus of eight translations of *Alice in Wonderland* into five languages, Nord<sup>[2]</sup> discussed the forms and functions of proper names in children's books and some aspects of their translation. He studied the method of annotation in translation, holding that the principle of addressee-orientation determined whether annotations should be used or not in translation. Moreover, the important function of proper names in fiction is to indicate in which culture the plot is set and to entail different communicative effects for the respective audiences.

### 2.2 Domestic studies

Compared with the scale and progress of foreign research, domestic children's literature translation research has not received due attention, and the research depth and breadth are limited. In the new century, domestic research mostly focuses on the overall description of children's literature translation, the chronology. Xu Derong<sup>[3]</sup> lists three important elements needed to be accounted while translating children's literature, which are style, psycho-emotional state and the cultural difference. At the same time, he addresses that the discussion of culture in children's literature translation can help us deepen our understanding of the nature of translation. No matter from the aspect of language or children's psychology, translator should always be invisible, to facilitate the pleasure of reading. Zhang Luyan<sup>[4]</sup> briefly describes the status of the translation of children's literature in China from the late Qing Dynasty to the new period after 1976, and holds that although children's literature is not taken seriously in the field of literature and translation, the difficulty of translation is non less than that of adult literature. She holds that the theory of Reception Aesthetics provides a new perspective for the translation of children's literature, and that translators should take into account children's development, life experience and language habits, so as to produce better translation. Yuan Xiao<sup>[5]</sup> proposes that the birth and development of Chinese children's literature is closely related to the translation of foreign children's literature in China. She believes that the Reception Aesthetics offers an ideational basis for the translation of children's literature. Translators should fully consider the reading expectation and the requirements of children readers to reproduce the style in the original works.

## 3. Reception Aesthetics

Having an overall understanding of the Reception Aesthetics can help readers have an clear view on the theoretical framework. The following part will introduce the development of Reception Aesthetics and its main concepts.

### 3.1 The development of Reception Aesthetics

By absorbing the essence of several other theories like Russian Formalism, Prague structuralism, Roman Witold Ingarden's Phenomenology Aesthetics and H.G. Gadamer's Hermeneutics Aesthetics, reception theory came into being during the late 1960s and 70s [6]. In 1967, Hans Robert Jauss published an article named *Literary History as a Provocation to Literary Scholarship*, was acknowledged as the declaration of the birth of reception theory [7]. In 1969, Wolfgang Iser delivered a lecture named *The Appealing Structure in Literature*, established him as another leading figure of reception theory [7].

### 3.2 Main concepts of Reception Aesthetics

There are three important concepts in Reception Aesthetics: the history of literature, the horizon of expectations, and the evolution of literature. The history of literature lies in reader's prior experience of literary works. The horizon of expectations includes three levels: the system of expectation, the fusion of horizons and the reconstruction of horizons. The evolution of literature means to move from a single literary work into a literary series, in which successive works solve the formal and moral questions left by previous works and raise new questions [8].

The theory introduced by Jauss is grand and broad in implications; to be specific, in this thesis the author mainly adopted three concepts proposed by him. They are, namely: the horizon of expectations, fusion of horizons and indeterminacy. The horizon of expectations is the main concept of Reception Aesthetics and the author utilized this as one of the analysis perspective. It is formed through the reader's life experience, customs and understanding of the world, which influences the reader's social behavior and his understanding of the text [9]. On a further step, the fusion of horizons happens in reading. During reading, readers' present horizon is moved to a fresh horizon; therefore, the process of understanding is a process of fusion of horizons [9]. Besides this, there are still some minor concepts mentioned by Jauss in his book *Toward an Aesthetics of Reception*, which are important and applied by the author. Indeterminacy refers to the absence of an exact correlation between phenomena described in literary texts and the objects in the world of real life; it is a combination of the text and the reader [9]. Readers would encounter many unknown things, i.e., the spots of indeterminacy in the process of reading, which provides them a good chance to use their imagination to fill the meaning of the text.

## 4. Brief introduction to Charlie and the Great Glass Elevator

In China, Roald Dahl's works are recommended as extracurricular books that must be read in primary school, and his works have been widely circulated among adults and children. Abroad, In 2000, in the "My Favorite Author" poll conducted in the United Kingdom during World Book Day, Dahl's name topped the list, even JK Rowling, the author of *Harry Potter*, could only be ranked after him [10]. The translator of *The Witches* is Ren Rongrong, a famous translator of children's literature. The purpose of Ren Rongrong's translation of foreign children's literature works is to provide spiritual fortune for Chinese children on the one hand, and to provide reference for domestic children's literature workers on the other hand, so as to inject fresh blood into the creation of Chinese children's literature [11].

### 4.1 Content of Charlie and the Great Glass Elevator

As for the content, *Charlie and the Great Glass Elevator* is a sequel to *Charlie and the Chocolate Factory*: Charlie Bucket has won Willy Wonka's chocolate factory and is on his way to take possession of it, in a great glass elevator! But when the elevator makes a fearful whooshing noise, Charlie and his family find themselves in splendid orbit around the Earth. A daring adventure has begun, with the one and only Mr. Willy Wonka leading the way. It is worth noting that the elders, always amiable in fairy tale books, are portrayed as greedy and lazy in this book, except for Grandpa Josephine. Dahl's children's literature is often written from a child's point of view, and often includes adult villains—those who hate and abuse children, with at least one righteous adult to mitigate the villain's impact [12]. For example: the crude witch and the gracious grandmother in *The Witches*; the kind giant and the bloody ogre in *The BFG*; the vicious headmaster and the virtuous Mrs. Henny in *Matilda*... The most groundbreaking thing of the book is that the space adventure part. Most of the chapters have science fiction properties, following the adventures of Charlie, Wonka, and Charlie's other loved ones in a party of eight as they rampage through a large glass lift and fly in orbit around the earth. At the

same time, the author introduces many other elements such as the worm Knid and the Negative Man to add more mystery to the book. In the second half of the book the crowd returns to the chocolate factory that children know and love to meet the magical potion Wonka Vita and Vita Wonka in the factory.

#### **4.2 Language of *Charlie and the Great Glass Elevator***

As for the language, it can be divided into two parts: lexical level and syntactical level. Firstly, in terms of vocabulary, the words used in this book are flexible, colloquial and interesting, with many onomatopoeia, reduplicated words and interjections, without many pedantic and academic words. The use of these words can make readers feel immersive and enthralled while reading. In addition, the biggest feature is that there are many coinages. These made-up words are often related to magic, as if they were a set of cryptogram that belongs only to readers and the writer. These words narrow the distance between the reader and the author, attract children's interest in reading, and add mystery to the article. Secondly, regarding the syntax, on the one hand, since it is a novel for children, most of the texts are simple sentences, with obvious colloquialism, and even some sentences do not conform to grammatical norms to a certain extent. On the other hand, because the audience for this book was originally English-speaking children who already have some reading ability in English, there were also long sentences in the text to illustrate the storyline and so on. The combined long and short sentences make the article reasonable and smooth in structure.

It is safe to draw a conclusion that Dahl's works have won many awards because of his vivid imagination, interesting stories, thrilling plots, approachable text, and a large number of magical coinages. And what makes Dahl's works widely spread and famous at home and abroad is the translator Ren Rongrong's wonderful and brilliant translation. In the process of translation, Ren puts readers first from the beginning to the end, adopts the way of Reception Aesthetics, and considers children's reading ability. It was Ren's flexible use of literal translation, free translation and other translation techniques combined with addition and omission that made the translation smooth and elegant.

### **5. Reception Aesthetics applied in translation**

Based on the classification of translation methods in the book *A Textbook on Chinese-English Translation*, written by Si Xianzhu and Zeng Jianpin<sup>[13]</sup>, this article analyzes from two translation methods: literal translation and free translation.

#### **5.1 Literal translation**

Literal translation strives to reproduce both the ideological content and the style of the original works and retains as much as possible the figures of speech<sup>[14]</sup>.

##### **5.1.1 Lexical level**

In terms of vocabulary, taking into account the cognitive level of children, translation should be interesting and vivid to attract their attention. For a long time, literary criticism has been primarily concerned with the author and the text, with the reader being viewed as an afterthought. For the first time in history, reception theory recommends that when writing and illustrating literary works, we should pay attention to the function of the reader. The horizon of expectations is the foundation of reception theory and it is originated from Heidegger's "fore-knowledge" and Gadamer's "pre-understanding"<sup>[15]</sup>. Normally, the author, the translator, and the reader are all involved in the process of translating literature. In order to use the most effective translation procedures, the translator should pay attention to the reader's horizon of expectation. Here are some cases to illustrate my point:

Example 1:

ST: Skyhook<sup>[16]</sup>

"Skyhook" is the device keeps the great glass elevator up in the air said by Mr. Wonka in the novel. According to common sense, there is no such thing as "skyhook". According to the current level of technological development of people, the power to keep the spacecraft flying in the universe is the booster rocket. However, if it is translated as "booster rocket", it would be too formal, and children may not be familiar with such thing nor meet their expectations. Moreover, "booster rocket" is a complex, sophisticated scientific and technological equipment, containing advanced physical technology and mathematical principles, which has a strong sense of reality. If it is translated as this, it

will greatly destroy the fairy tale atmosphere that the novel aims to create. Therefore, it is most appropriate to use literal translation and do not conduct any change for the word.

### 5.1.2 Syntactic level

At the syntactic level, children generally have not studied grammar systematically, and only grasp intuitively the structure of sentences. They are not familiar with complex grammars such as inversions, negative transitions, the passive voice, etc. Therefore, simple sentences should be used as far as possible when translating. It is not necessary to use two sentences to make it clear for one sentence, and it cannot be translated more and more difficult to understand.

Example 2:

ST: Soon these dirty beasts will start popping like popcorn <sup>[16]</sup>!

Here, Dahl rewrote some words in an interesting way by repeating the consonant letters. E.g. “popping”, “popcorn”. This will make the text more vivid and reproduce the situation of the speaker, his mood, emotion etc. In this sentence, the large glass lift was plummeting towards the planet, meanwhile Knid was still wrapped around the exterior of the lift. Mr Wonka hates the cannibalistic worms Knid with a passion, and when asked about the results of Knid’s entry into the atmosphere, he bluntly stated that these disgusting things burn into a long red light like a meteor. In this translation, Ren still used the method of literal translation. Regarding the structure, he preserved the sentence structure of the original text, the original words order and the future tense. As for meaning, Ren translated “popping” into reduplicated words which is quite a well-done. Children are usually attracted by sound rather than meaning of words firstly; hence phonology is an important component in translating children’s literature. The combination of sound, form and meaning endows language the characteristics of beauty. Reading the reduplicated words and leading them to further reading in a pleasant and light attitude would be highly amusing for the target children readers.

### 5.1.3 Rhetorical level

As the most common rhetorical device, simile has its unique charm. It uses the comparative word to connect the tenor and the vehicle, illustrating the similarity between two different things. In this book, there are many similes. To deal with it, the translator employs the literal translation approach.

Example 3:

ST: Until at last the creature, which had originally looked like a huge egg, now looked like a long curvy serpent standing up on its tail <sup>[16]</sup>.

Knid after Knid appeared in the lobby in the hotel lift, and one of the Knids began to morph. Its soft body began to twist and gradually assumed an alphabetical style. The other Knids followed suit and turn into other letters, and the words they formed would provide important warnings to Charlie and the others. Therefore, the author uses a simile to compare Knid’s body first to an egg and then to a serpent, which vividly conveys Knid’s body flexibility and versatility. The translation retains the sentence structure of the original text to the greatest extent, and basically restores the original text in terms of content. Ren reproduced the comparative word “as” in the target text, thus making the translation descriptive, illuminative and illustrative. At the end of the sentence, Ren made an amplification, adding an adjectival group. He illustrated the subject, show it to the understanding in a clearer view and display it to the fancy with great dignity. Kind does not exist in a real world yet Dahl invented it in his imagination. Therefore the indeterminacy appeared between readers and the text. What Ren could do is to help readers fill the indeterminacy by his loyal translation as much as possible.

## 5.2 Free translation

Free translation is an alternative approach which is used mainly to convey the meaning and spirit of the original without trying to reproduce its sentence patterns or figures of speech. In terms of words and phrases, it tries to use various translation techniques to make the target text concise and easy to understand <sup>[14]</sup>.

### 5.2.1 Lexical level

Example 4:

Original: footles around <sup>[16]</sup>

In terms of swearing, it also reflects the horizon of expectations that cater to children. The swearing

words must first look like curse, and it cannot be changed thoroughly in order to protect children, which will tamper with the original meaning and affect the development of the context. However, it cannot be too explicit or too direct in translation, which will have a bad influence on the ignorant children and be detrimental to their physical and mental development. Here “footle” is a verb and in Collins Dictionary, it means “to loiter aimlessly; potter”. The original meaning of the word is to hang around, but the context reveals that the phrase was spoken by Grandma Georgina. Both Grandma Josephine and Grandma Georgina are clearly distrustful of this answer when they learn that the great glass lift is kept in outer space by a mere skyhook. As a result, Grandma Georgina states that Wonka is not to be trusted and is an insane person. Therefore, a literal translation would not convey the condemnation of the word. Instead, Ren used free translation method and use four words to express that “hu” in Chinese has the meaning of run amok, and heaven and earth are two polarities in the Chinese language. To commit outrages in these two holy and supreme place is undoubtedly a great dishonour so that it can fully express the critical meaning of the original text.

### 5.2.2 Syntactic level

Because Chinese sentences are featured by parataxis and English sentences are featured by hypotaxis; Chinese is a non-inflectional language, whereas English is a inflectional language; Chinese is lion-headed, but English is tail-headed... There are huge differences between Chinese and English. Therefore, sometimes literal translation can not be completely used in translation. When encountering some English sentences with complex structures, it is necessary to consider the characteristics of Chinese grammar and adopt free translation to cut sentences, change the subject or the voice and so on.

Example 5:

ST: the rushing whooshing sound of the wind outside grew louder and louder and shriller and shriller until it became a piercing shriek and you had to yell to make yourself heard <sup>[16]</sup>.

This sentence is a combined complex sentence. In translation, if the translator does not separate sentences, there will be many long sentences filling with continuous commas. Readers would be tired and cheated reading these sentences. Ren does the segmentation and writes a simple sentence here. This way of handling is undoubtedly necessary and more in line with Chinese writing habits. Segmentation facilitates readers move their previous horizons to a newer horizons while understanding the text content; hence they achieved the fusion of horizon.

Example 6:

ST: She's as plussy as plussy can be!

She's more plussy than you or than me!

The question is how

Just how old is she now?

Is she more than a hundred and three <sup>[16]</sup>?

In Reception Aesthetics, readers are no longer just passive readers, they are put in the first place, and the work does not really end until it is read by the reader, who also undertakes the mission of making the work complete. Therefore, in poetry translation, the translator should take the reader into account while reflecting the rhythm and beauty of the form, and reduce the difficulty of reading, so that the reader can better complete his or her mission. Ren adjusted the comparative structure in the second line, changing the comparative mode into comparison at the same level, which is more in line with Chinese reading habits. In the poem, “be” and “me” rhyme at the end, but Ren couldn't find the right word to rhyme in the Chinese translation, which is a pity.

### 5.2.3 Rhetorical level

The artistic and aesthetic value of a work is decided by the aesthetic distance, which is created by the inconsistency and discrepancy between the readers' horizon of expectation and the given work <sup>[9]</sup>. To understand a new work, a reader has to overcome the aesthetic distance and achieve the fusion of horizons.

Example 7:

ST: “What if they come after us?” said Mr. Bucket, speaking for the first time.

“What if they capture us?” said Mrs Bucket.

“What if they shoot us?” said Grandma Grorgina <sup>[16]</sup>.

Parallelism is an important figure of speech for making a sentence smoother, more rhythmical,

logical, and compelling. It is possible to boost the text's mood and make it more rhyming by grouping words or sentences that have the same or similar structure. In this sentence Dahl uses three similar adverbial of condition sentence structures to form parallelism, which enhances the momentum and is fascinating. Ren also adopted a parallel structure, which are concise, powerful, and catchy, conveying the nervousness of the crowd.

## 6. Conclusion

This paper reviews the translation of children's literature at home and abroad, introduces Reception Aesthetics, and evaluates the characteristics of *Charlie and the Great Glass Elevator*, Dahl's important position in literature, Ren Rongrong's translation experience, translation status, etc. Then focusing on Jauss's Reception Aesthetics, it discusses two aspects in detail: literal translation and free translation. Through the combination of text analysis and demonstration, it is concluded that the theory of Reception Aesthetics has high academic significance and practical value, and the theory is even more workable when facing the special group of children. Correct and proper use of Reception Aesthetics can greatly improve the quality of children's literature translations and promote the widespread dissemination of children's literature.

Overall, Ren Rongrong's translations can be said to be of extremely high quality, perfectly showing the translation standard of "Faithfulness, Expressiveness and Elegance". But the only regret is that there are many poems sung by Oompa-Loompas in the chocolate factory and their songs are main thrusts of the storyline development. These songs are rich in meaning, either stating reasons or telling truths, and most of them rhymed. However, because of the huge phonetic difference between English and Chinese, many of these songs translation only convey the meaning and leave out the metre.

Due to the limited time and the author's limited academic level, there are still some errors in the details of this article, and unfinished points in the theoretical explanation, which need to be improved.

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