

A Review of Research on Translation of Children's Literature

Chen Zixuan

Jilin Normal University, Changchun, Jilin, 130000, China

Abstract: *In the past decades of translation studies, the research results of foreign children's literature translation have been remarkable, but the domestic children's literature translation research is less. By outlining and summarizing the research on children's literature translation, this article analyzes the development status and shortcomings of domestic research on children's literature translation in China, hoping to promote the progress of children's literature translation in China.*

Keywords: *children's literature; translation; review*

1. Introduction

As society continues to progress, there is a growing concern for the education of children and their development. The emergence of children's literature is to enable children to appreciate and accept the literary value of literary works and cultivate their all-round development. Children's literature is different from ordinary literature because of its special language characteristics and special target readers, so children's literature translation has distinctive features different from ordinary literature translation: it should not only follow the characteristics and laws of ordinary literature translation, but also reflect its special characteristics in style and text at all times.

2. Overview of children's literature translation

2.1. Definition of children's literature translation

The concept of children's literature contains two elements: first of all, children's literature must be literature and secondly, literature for children. Children's literature must first be literature with aesthetic value. Therefore, children's literature can be defined as: various forms of literature that suit the age characteristics of children, suitable for children to read and enjoy, and conducive to the healthy development of children's body and mind. [3] In reality, there are some literary works with children or animals as the main characters and bizarre plots, but not specifically written for children, such as *Gulliver's Travels*. In addition, children can also read some popular and accessible adult literature, such as *Aesop's Fables* and *Robinson Crusoe*. Therefore, there is a narrow concept of children's literature, i.e. "literature specifically created for children". The main part of children's literature translation is the translation of children's literature works in the narrow sense, but in practice, adult works may be translated into simple texts suitable for children according to the needs of children readers. In this way, the term "children's literature in translation" actually refers to "literature translated specifically for children".

2.2. Characteristics of children's literature

Childhood is the most important and the most rapid stage of human growth. Children at all stages have different distinctive characteristics in three aspects: mental level, language development and aesthetic needs. Children between the ages of 3 and 17 can be roughly divided into three stages according to their age. The mental characteristics and linguistic abilities of children at each stage differ greatly, and the corresponding children's literature also shows different characteristics.

Early childhood literature is aimed at children aged 3-6, whose image thinking is dominant, whose intelligence is in a state of obscurity, whose attention cannot be focused for a long time, whose imagination is rich. They can only express simple thoughts and their vocabulary is small. They do not have the ability to read. Therefore, the genre of literature is mostly nursery rhymes, children's songs,

stories and poems. The works are characterized by anthropomorphism, colloquialism, concise words and beautiful rhymes.

Children's literature is aimed at children aged 6-12. During this period, children have received primary education, abstract thinking begins to develop, but figurative thinking still dominates, curiosity about things is strong. They begin to learn reading and writing, oral and written expression skills develop rapidly, and the vocabulary increases. The works are mostly in the genre of fairy tales, fables, myths, fantasy novels, fairy tale plays, etc. The works are simple in plot, clear in theme, short in length, moderately difficult in language, rich in imagination, distinctive in character, and strong in rhythm.

Juvenile literature is aimed at adolescents aged 13-17, they have the abstract thinking ability, reasoning, reflection ability, self-consciousness enhancement, but still have important influence on the image thinking, adolescent sexual awareness, strong curiosity to society, to increase vocabulary, expression ability improved remarkably, subtle differences can distinguish between words, frequent use of abstract words, can understand complex grammar structure, rhetoric came into use. The genres of works in this period, such as detective novels, magic novels, historical novels, biographies, and school romance novels, are widely loved by adolescents. The narrative techniques, scene descriptions, inner activities of characters, themes and language of works are becoming more complex and longer, but still tend to be figurative, with bizarre plots and rich imagination.

2.3. The language of children's literature

A deep understanding of the linguistic features of children's literature is the key to successful translation of children's literature. Improving sensitivity to these linguistic features and accurately reproducing them in translation practice is the central task of translators. However, original works suitable for children readers of different ages also have different linguistic characteristics. Therefore, in addition to the commonalities of most children's literature, translators must be aware of the differences in the linguistic characteristics of children's literature at different stages. ^[1]

Vivid images, lively and interesting. Children's literature readers are children and adolescents who mainly have image-based thinking, in order to adapt to this thinking characteristics, to attract children readers, in addition to the plot is fresh and interesting, to stimulate the curiosity of children readers, children's literature works' language often use words with distinctive images, such as sound, color and shape. Through the sound, anthropomorphism and exaggeration, using repetition, playful imitation, puns and other forms to make the language of children's literature more vivid and interesting. Sometimes, the writers of children's literature even experiment with creative language in their works, thus arousing the interest of children readers. The language of children's literature is much concerned with the imaginative and interesting nature of words and phrases, therefore, translators must have a keen insight into the imaginative and interesting nature of the original language, and at the same time, the translators should have the excellent linguistic ability to reproduce these interesting qualities in Chinese. In addition, children of different ages have different requirements for the image and fun of language. Generally speaking, the younger the child, the stronger the reliance on figurative language, while older adolescents are more inclined to the fun nature of language. Translating literature for young children may require more attention to the images, sounds, colors, etc. of language, while translating literature for teenagers requires a higher degree of linguistic creativity.

Concise, clear, and approachable. The vocabulary of children at the time of language development is limited, and the words used in children's literature should not usually exceed the comprehension of children. Therefore, the language of children's literature needs to be simple and clear, with simple vocabulary and sentence structure, using more common words, modal particles, simple sentences, etc. On the other hand, most of the creators and translators of children's literature are adults. In addition to making the plot interesting and the language vivid, the authors or translators need to keep their words approachable and put themselves in the readers' shoes from the children's point of view.

Beautiful and imaginative. Children are in the period of language acquisition, they have a keen intuition of the rhythm of language, rhythmical and rhythmic language sounds more pleasant and easier to remember. In order to attract children readers, the language of children's literature pays more attention to the rhyme, rhythm and readability of the language itself, making the work suitable for reading aloud and easy to remember.

2.4. Principles of children's literature translation

As a special group, children and adolescents have distinctive characteristics and differences in cognition, language and aesthetics. Translators must consider the readers of children's literature at first and then determine the translation strategy according to the characteristics of the work and the target readers of the translation, which is the core issue of children's literature translation. Taking children's readers as the center means that the language of the translation should be light, interesting and beautiful, in line with the psychological characteristics and language level of the readers. Specifically, in terms of wording, we should use colloquial words, physical words and color words often used in children's language and avoid abstract, remote and archaic words; in terms of sentence structure, we should use simple sentences as far as possible and avoid complex nested sentence patterns; in terms of rhetoric, we should use more metaphors, personifications and exaggerations to make the translation vivid and interesting.

Removing language barriers and overcoming cultural differences. Language is the carrier of culture, and translation is never a simple conversion between words, but a highly creative cross-cultural communication activity; the key point of translation is to help readers remove the language barrier and overcome the gap brought by language and cultural differences. Children's literature translation is certainly no exception. Foreign children's literature is deeply influenced by the social environment, cultural atmosphere, traditional concepts and educational philosophy in which children live. These cultural factors are very different from the cultural background of children in the translated language, and children readers are more dependent on translators than adult readers to help them clear the language barrier and overcome cultural differences due to their intellectual level and knowledge and experience. However, this does not mean that the linguistic characteristics and cultural traits of the original work itself are completely erased. Accurately reproducing the characteristics of the original work and appropriately preserving the cultural differences of the original is also one of the basic requirements of translation. In fact, under the premise that children readers can understand, appropriately preserving such differences can objectively serve to provide fresh literature for children readers of the translated language and arouse their interest.

Reproducing children's interests accurately and stimulating their creative imagination. The simplicity of the language does not mean that the artistic value of the language is lost. The rich creativity and imagination of children's literature is not only expressed in the richness and variety of its plots and characters, but also in the vividness, innocence, humor and beauty of its language. Many children's literature works are interesting and vibrant even when read by adults. While emphasizing the simplicity and clarity of children's literature translations, it must not be at the expense of losing the fun of the translation. The most challenging aspect of translating children's works is how to reproduce or even surpass the "childishness" of the original work in the translation of children's literature. This is also the most meaningful aspect of translating children's literature.

3. A Brief History of Chinese Translation of Children's Literature

The translation of children's literature in China began in the late 19th and early 20th centuries, developed and matured during the May Fourth period, lasted from the 1950s to the 1970s, and flourished in contemporary times. The earliest children's literature translated into Chinese was *Aesop's Fables*, which was translated by the Englishman Robertson and an anonymous Chinese translator in 1840. Subsequently, famous works such as *Arabian Nights*, *Hans Christian Andersen's Fairy Tales* and *Robinson Crusoe* were translated into Chinese one after another.

The May Fourth period was a period of development and maturity for the translation of Chinese children's literature. During this period, Chinese writers realized the value of children's literature and began to translate works from the perspective and needs of children, using plain vernacular language. The major translators of children's literature during the May Fourth period included Lu Xun, Zhou Zuoren, Zhao Yuanren, Mao Dun, and others. Among them, Zhao Yuanren's translation of *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* is still widely praised today.

From the 1950s to 1970s, a large number of Soviet children's literature was translated into Chinese. The main translators of children's literature include Ren Rongrong, Chen Bochui, Li Liangmin and so on. Among them, the most prolific translator of children's literature is Ren Rongrong, who can translate in Russian, English, Italian and Japanese, and has translated many foreign children's literature works, such as Pushkin's fairy tale poems, Italian fairy tale *The Adventure of Pinocchio*, British fairy tale *Peter*

Pan, and so on. Most of these works have become classics in contemporary children's literature translation

Since the 1980s, translations of contemporary children's literature, like other types of literature translations, have entered a period of vigorous development. Almost all contemporary children's literature in all genres, for all ages and in all languages can be found in Chinese translation. Among these, the more notable works are J.K. Rowling's series of novels *Harry Potter*, J.R. Tolkien's *The Lord of the Rings* series, and others.

4. The current situation of domestic children's literature translation theory research

Inspired by the research on the translation of foreign children's literature, Chinese scholars have proposed principles that should be followed in accordance with the translation of domestic children's literature, and have studied the methods of children's literature translation by deeply analyzing functional equivalence, aesthetics of reception, and the skopos theory. The similarities of these theories all emphasize the child-centered approach, taking into account the special characteristics of children when translating, and translating literature suitable for children to read and enjoy, so as to promote children's physical, mental and intellectual development.^[2]

For example, from the perspective of functional equivalence, Xu Derong suggests that translators need to be familiar with the language of children's literature and have a keen insight into children's psychology in order to create "functional equivalence" translations that are popular among children's readers, starting from the characteristics of the genre, children's taste and cross-cultural communication. From the perspective of reception aesthetics, Yuan Xiao believes that translators should consider children's psychological and physical development, knowledge and experience, cultural literacy, life experience, thoughts and feelings, and aesthetic interests, take into account the inconsistency of the target readers, create a style and form suitable for children's readers, and pay attention to children's child interests. Men Dongmei believes that translators should accurately grasp the children's expectation horizon when translating. Secondly, translators should be good at standing in the perspective and position of children's thinking, pay attention to the characteristics of teenage readers, use translation strategies flexibly, and try to translate using intelligible words and simple and interesting sentences that children can understand. In terms of skopos theory, Wang Miao suggests that for the purpose of children's literature translation, translators should grasp both intralinguistic and interlinguistic aspects, master the main features of the original language and the translated language, and try to maximize the purpose (function) of the translated text, and he believes that the target readers should be put in the first place, so that the readers of the target language culture can accept and approve the translation. Song Songyan and Huang Juan, through their analysis of the Chinese translation of *Charlotte's Web*, argue that for translators of children's literature, it is very necessary to clarify the purpose of translation before translation, and that translators should focus on the translated language, focus on the readers of the translated text, grasp the psychological characteristics, comprehension and aesthetic ability of children, and that the style, expression and beauty of the original can be expressed by adopting a language that is consistent with the characteristics of children's language. This is the only way to translate literature that is loved by children readers.

5. Shortcomings of domestic research on children's literature translation

Through the search of children's literature translation on CNKI, only a few studies on children's literature translation are from core Chinese journals, and only a few articles from core foreign language journals, and there are still relatively few studies on children's literature translation by domestic scholars. In response to the above review of domestic translations of children's literature, I think that Chinese scholars can also conduct in-depth research in the following areas:

In the study of the history of children's literature translation, at present, Chinese scholars mainly study the dynastic history of Chinese translation literature such as the late Qing Dynasty and the early Ming Dynasty, the May Fourth Period, the War of Anti-Japanese, and the 1990s, but few scholars have written a general history of children's literature translation, and in addition, some time periods of children's literature translation have not been paid attention to.

In the study of translators of children's literature, Chinese scholars mainly focus on such foundational figures as Lu Xun, Zhou Zuoren, and Mao Dun, and there are still fewer studies of contemporary writers of children's literature.

In the method of children's literature translation, we can pay attention to the cross-application of multiple disciplines, for example, children's literature as a part of literature, we can apply literary theory to children's literature translation, and research methods such as corpus in linguistic research can also be tried to innovate the methodology and translation theory of children's literature translation research.

6. Conclusion

Xu Derong has pointed out that there is a gap between the development of translation theory and practice in children's literature translation, and although there are numerous children's literature translations, the research on children's literature translation needs to be deepened. At present, the international research results on children's literature translation are remarkable, but the domestic research in this field is still in its early stage, and the practice of children's literature translation is still in the development stage. It is hoped that domestic researchers and translators can discover the shortcomings of children's literature translation in China, draw the attention and interest of translation researchers, and thus contribute to the development of children's literature translation research.

References

- [1] House J. *Linguistic aspects of the translation of children's books* [J]. *Teilband*, 2004, 1(1): 683-697.
- [2] Hunt P. *Literature for Children: Contemporary Criticism*[C]. London: Routledge, 1992.
- [3] Oittinen R. *Translating for Children* [M]. New York: Garland Publishing, inc., 2000.