

The Effects of Focalization on Translations in the English Translation of the Chinese Poetry

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ABSTRACT: *In the English translation of the Chinese poetry, the choice of different focalizations would bring out different effects on the translations. This paper attempts to explore the effects of focalization on translations by analyzing Du Fu's poem- Alone in Her Beauty, the other poem- Song of Mulan and their translations.*

KEYWORDS: *Chinese poetry, English translation, focalization, effect*

1. Introduction

Gerard Genette in *Narrative Discourse: An Essay in Method* distinguishes “who sees” and “who says”. He says: “To avoid the too specifically visual connotations of the terms vision, field, and point of view, I will take up here the slightly more abstract term focalization which corresponds, besides, to Brooks and Warren's expression, ‘focus of narration’”^[2]. Genette classifies focalization into three categories: zero-/non- focalization, internal focalization and external focalization. Zero focalization corresponds to what English-language criticism calls narrative with omniscient narrator, meaning that the narrator knows more than the character, or more exactly, says more than any of the characters knows. Internal focalization means that the narrator says only what a given character knows. External focalization means that the narrator says less than the character knows.^[2]

In the English translation of Chinese poetry, the choice of different focalizations would bring out different effects on the translations. This paper attempts to explore the effects of focalization on translations by analyzing Du Fu's poem- *Alone in Her Beauty*, the other poem- *Song of Mulan* and their translations.

2. The Effect of Different Focalizations on the Depiction of Character in Translation

Different kinds of focalizations could exert different influences on the depiction of the character. In this part, Du Fu's poem- *Alone in Her Beauty* and its two

translations are chosen to analyse that influence. In the original poem, the first and the last two sentences are narrated in the external focalization, expressing the narrator's praise towards the beauty, and the rest part that begins with words "白云"(I say) is narrated in the internal focalization, telling her misfortunes.

《佳人》

杜甫

- (1)绝代有佳人，幽居在空谷。
- (2)白云良家女，零落依草木。
- (3)关中昔丧乱，兄弟遭杀戮。
- (4)官高何足论，不得收骨肉。
- (5)世情恶衰歇，万事随转烛。
- (6)夫婿轻薄儿，新人美如玉。
- (7)合昏尚知时，鸳鸯不独宿。
- (8)但见新人笑，那闻旧人哭。
- (9)在山泉水清，出山泉水浊。
- (10)侍婢卖珠回，牵萝补茅屋。
- (11)摘花不插发，采柏动盈掬。
- (12)天寒翠袖薄，日暮倚修竹。

Alone in Her Beauty

Who is lovelier than she? Yet she lives alone in an empty valley.
She tells me she came from a good family, which is humbled now into the dust.
When trouble arose in the Kuan district, her brothers and close kin were killed.
What use were their high offices, not even shielding their own lives?
The world has but scorn for adversity; Hope goes out, like the light of a candle.
Her husband, with a vagrant heart, seeks a new face like a new piece of jade;
And when morning-glories furl at night, and mandarin-ducks lie side by side,
All he can see is the smile of the new love, while the old love weeps unheard.
The brook was pure in its mountain source, but away from the mountain its waters darken.
Waiting for her maid to come from selling pearls, for straw to cover the roof again,
She picks a few flowers, no longer for her hair, and lets pine-needles fall through her

fingers.

And, forgetting her thin silk sleeve and the cold, she leans in the sunset by a tall bamboo.

(Witter Bynner)

I, WHO was the flower of my day among the beauties, now dwell alone in a deserted valley;

I, who was well born, live desolate in a country retreat.

In past times there was ruin and turmoil in the frontier passes; My brothers met with destruction;

What availed such high officials their lofty rank, when they could not protect their own flesh and blood?

It is the way of the world to turn in loathing from adversity and decay. The affairs of men flicker like a guttering candle.

My husband holds me in light esteem, but his new mistress seems as beautiful as jade.

Even the morning glory has its passing hour. The Mandarin duck and drake do not roost apart.

But wrapt in his new favourite's smiles, how can he hear his old love's sighs?

In the hills the spring water runs clear, but on leaving the hills it becomes muddy.

My servant girl sells my pearls and returns, to pull the creepers to patch my thatched roof.

Her mistress plucks flowers, but not to stick in her hair; The cypress needles slide through her listless fingers.

The weather is cold and my kingfisher-blue sleeves are thin; As day draws to dusk I lean against the tall bamboos.

(Soame Jenyns)

In Witter Bynner's translation, the poem is narrated in the external focalization from the beginning to the end. The sentence “白云良家女” is translated to “She tells me she came from a good family” and the internal focalization is substituted by the external focalization, which diminishes the infectious effect. In the original poem, the beauty herself relates her life experience directly to the audience as if she is having conversation with them, making them identified with her.

In Soame Jenyns' translation, the poem employs the internal focalization except the last but one verse which uses the external focalization. But it is improper that the translation of the first verse is dealt with the internal focalization in that it not only rebels the principle of the dynamic equivalence proposed by E. A. Nida who argues that “a dynamic-equivalence (or D-E) translation may be describe as one concerning

which a bilingual and bicultural person can justifiably say, ‘That is just the way we would say it’^[4]. Besides, it damages the quality of the protagonist and spoils the aesthetic of the poem.

The poem tells about a beauty who survives from adversaries and sticks to her noble character. She is born well but at the chaotic time. Her brothers who are ranked high in the office are killed and her husband abandons her for her parents’ family’s decline. But she does not succumb and instead she dwells in an empty valley and resolves to keep her fine quality. Therefore, the internal focalization used in Jenyns’ translation of the first verse makes the protagonist boastful and the praise for her unreal and exaggerated, and finally brings harm to her fine quality.

The translation of the last two verses is supposed to be faithful to the original poem as well. However, in Jenyns’ translation, the last verse rebels the principle again by using the internal focalization. The last verse describes that “forgetting her thin silk sleeve and the cold, the beauty leans in the sunset by a tall bamboo”. Du Fu would like to use the image of bamboo as a symbol to compliment the protagonist on her tenacity, elegance and nobility. Thus, Jenyns’ translation reveals a sense of self-pity as if she is grieved at her poor condition.

Compared to Bynner’s translation, Jenyns’ translation uses the same narrative focalization as the original poem in the monologue of the protagonist. The internal focalization straightforwardly displays the character’s sufferings and interior activity which is helpful to make the audience sympathize with her so that it shortens the distance between the character and the audience.

Therefore, It is very necessary to distinguish the internal focalization from the external focalization and use them properly as well as conform to the principle of dynamic equivalence in translation, because the change of the focalization would probably influence the image of the character.

3. The Artistic Effect of the Employment of Multiple Focalizations in Translation

The judgement made by a translator about whether a poem uses the internal focalization or the external focalization would influence the artistic effect of the translation. Translators should conform to the principle of the dynamic equivalence which highlights “the closest natural equivalent to the source-language message”^[4] and choose proper focalizations in their translations rather than completely be faithful to the original text.

Take the *Song of Mulan* as an example. As a famous classic poem in China, *Song of Mulan* tells the story of Hua Mulan's taking the place of her father to join the army, fighting on the battlefield, and then triumphantly returning to her hometown. It depicts the image of a heroine with kindness, bravery, loyalty and integrity. This poem receives popularity and love of the Chinese people because of its rich thought and theme, concise and beautiful language, and legendary story. It has been translated into many languages and widely spread all over the world. In this part,

this paper attempts to explore the artistic effect brought out by more than one focalization by analyzing the translations of Arthur Waley and Xu Yuanchong.

《木兰辞》

- (1)唧唧复唧唧，木兰当户织。
- (2)不闻机杼声，惟闻女叹息。
- (3)问女何所思？ 问女何所忆？
- (4)女亦无所思，女亦无所忆。
- (5)昨夜见军帖，可汗大点兵，
- (6)军书十二卷，卷卷有爷名。
- (7)阿爷无大儿，木兰无长兄，
- (8)愿为市鞍马，从此替爷征。
- (9)东市买骏马，西市买鞍鞞，
- (10)南市买辔头，北市买长鞭。

The Ballad of Mulan

Click, click, forever click, click; Mulan sits at the door and weaves.

Listen, and you will not hear the shuttle's sound, but only hear a girl's sobs and sighs.

"Oh tell me, lady, are you thinking of your love; Oh tell me, lady, are you longing for your dear?"

"Oh no, oh no, I am not thinking of my love; Oh no, oh no, I am not longing for my dear.

But last night I read the battle-roll; The Khan has ordered a great levy of men.

The battle-roll was written in twelve books, and in each book stood my father's name.

My father's sons are not grown men, and of all my brothers, none is older than me.

Oh let me to the market to buy saddle and horse, and ride with the soldiers to take my father's place."

In the eastern market she's bought a gallant horse; In the western market she's bought saddle and cloth.

In the southern market she's bought snaffle and reins; In the northern market she's bought a tall whip.

(Arthur Waley)

Song of Mulan

Alack, alas! Alack, alas! She weaves and sees the shuttle pass.

You cannot hear the shuttle, why? Its whir is drowned in her deep sigh.

"Oh, what are you thinking about? Will you tell us? Will you speak out?"

"I have no worry on my mind; Nor have I grief of any kind.

I read the battle roll last night; The Khan has ordered men to fight.

The roll was written in twelve books; My father's name was in twelve nooks.

My father has no grown-up son; For elder brother I have none.

I'll get a horse of hardy race, and serve in my father's place."

She buys a steed at eastern fair, a whip and saddle here and there.

She buys a bridle at the south, and metal bit for the horse's mouth.

(Xu Yuanchong)

It is not certain that the internal focalization or the external focalization is used in the original poem. However, in the two translations, these two kinds of focalizations are both applied. The first verse uses the external focalization with the third-person narration. The second verse uses the external focalization with the second-person narration which directly addresses the audience, arousing their attention and shortening the distance between the narrator and the audience.

From the third verse to the eighth verse, the internal focalization is applied to present the protagonist- Mulan's interior monologue. Here, the narration in the original is transformed into the conversation in the translations with the third verse addressed as the question and the rest verses from the fourth to the eighth as the answer by Mulan who relates the reason of her joining the army and her sigh: "I have no worry on my mind; Nor have I grief of any kind. I read the battle roll last night; The Khan has ordered men to fight. The roll was written in twelve books; My father's name was in twelve nooks. My father has no grown-up son; For elder brother I have none. I'll get a horse of hardy race, and serve in my father's place". The two translators use the internal focalization and the direct speech and give the character voice, making her story credible and touching as well as her character tangible and vivid. After the eighth verse, the external focalization with the third-person narration is adopted again to describe Mulan's actions and experiences.

Three kinds of focalizations in all are applied in the translations: the external focalization with the third person, the external focalization with the second person and the internal focalization. The proper employment of multiple kinds of focalizations strengthens the artistic effect of the poem and makes it dramatic.

4. Conclusion

Focalization as a technique of narrative, influences such qualities of translations in the translation of the Chinese poetry as the depiction of the character and the artistic effect. In fact, there are more effects than these two. As focalization plays a significant role in translation, translators are supposed to address it carefully and properly.

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