

Aesthetic Elements in Prose Translation

Jin Li

Zhongyuan University of Technology, Zhengzhou, Henan, 450007, China

ABSTRACT. *Translation has long been connected to aesthetics both in theory and practice. The author introduces some elements of aesthetics, including aesthetic subjects and aesthetic objects. The translator is the aesthetic subject of the original text and the translator should reproduce the aesthetic value of the original in another language through exploring the aesthetic features in the original text. The reader is the aesthetic subject of the translated text. The aesthetic value of the translated text can only be concretized in the reading of target language readers. The aesthetic reception theory will help us understand the role of readers in the translation activity.*

KEYWORDS: *Aesthetic subject, Aesthetic objects*

1. Introduction

The aesthetic subject, according to aestheticians, refers to those who have possessed the aesthetic competence that is derived from aesthetic practice. (Gu Jianhua, 1999: 14). In other words, aesthetic subjects refer to those who carry out aesthetic activities on aesthetic objects. Therefore, the process of translation is defined as an aesthetic experience in the translation aesthetics in which the translator and the reader are deemed as the aesthetic subjects. The translator, obviously, is the dominant factor that matters in the course of translation, and he is the aesthetic subject of the original work; the reader, on the other hand, is the aesthetic subject of the translated work, and his reception brings the whole process of literary translation to an end.

The translator and the target language reader are two inseparable constituents and they all share an important position in the aesthetic appreciation process. On the one hand, the aesthetic perspective of a translator determines in which aspects he will bring out the aesthetic beauty of the original and his aesthetic competence determines to what extent he can blend the artistic properties on different levels into a well-organized unity; on the other hand, the aesthetic value of translated texts can only be concretized in the reading of target language readers.

1.1 Translator

The translator plays a leading role in the process of translation. He has to first of all appreciate the beauty in the source language text and then reproduce it in the target text. He acts as a reader of the source language text and a writer of the target language text. Obviously, the realization of beauty in the SL text depends largely on two factors: the aesthetic constituents of the SL text and the aesthetic competence of the translator. Only when the two are in a unified and interactive aesthetic state can the translated version possess aesthetic effects. The aesthetic competence of the translator, without which the aesthetic processes can't become a reality, is essential. Therefore, the qualification of the translator directly decides the quality of the translation. The more a translator can perceive the aesthetic properties of the original text as a unified whole, the better he may translate; the more the translator understands and grasps the aesthetic properties of the original text, the higher his translation quality is.

Unlike a writer who can portray anything unrestrictedly or even in an exaggerating way, the aesthetic subject-translator ought to get across the aesthetic messages faithfully and completely in the process of prose translation so that they may touch the readers of the TL in the same way. A translator should try every way possible to reproduce the aesthetic values of a literary text while translating. In a word, the translator is the center of the complicated activity of translation. He not only acts as a reader but also a writer and even an editor of his translation.

The aesthetic evaluation is the perception of beauty and sensitivity to beauty. This kind of perception and sensibility usually starts from intuition. Hence, the transfer of the original beauty requires the translator to have similar feelings to those of the original author. Therefore, his/her evaluation of the aesthetic properties of the

original text plays a significant role in prose translation.

A translator can develop aesthetic perceptions in a series of repeated aesthetic activities. Just like the saying goes, “practice makes perfect”, an experienced aesthetic subject can perform his/her aesthetic functions comparatively well and tap his/her potential to its full. An aesthetic subject shall achieve harmonious cadences, and compose the TL text in a sweet and even style so as to ravish the reader’s ear and intellect. Also a competent aesthetic subject shall seek to attain plenitude, purity and propriety, but above all he/she seeks aptitude. Aesthetic aptitude determines to what extent a translator can fashion his /her aesthetic perspective and perception into an artistic unity. Generally speaking, the aesthetic aptitude of the aesthetic subject covers two aspects: the cultural accomplishments and the aesthetic experience. Firstly, a translator must have a good command of the foreign culture. If a translator’s mother tongue is the SL, he/she may have a better understanding of the original since he/she shares the same linguistic and cultural backgrounds with the author, which aids him/her with a penetrating insight into the original beauty. Secondly, a translator’s aesthetic aptitude lies in the aesthetic experience. An aesthetic subject with little aesthetic experience may have no strong aesthetic awareness even though he/she is translating a well-written beautiful prose work, and can’t perform his/her aesthetic functions effectively. The processes of perception, feature assignment, pattern recognition, coding and storage of the aesthetic constituents all depend on the aesthetic subject’s ability, acquired through his/her aesthetic experience to analyze images and to do it in a progressively abstract manner.

1.2 Reader

Aesthetics of reception, as an approach to literary criticism first presented in the 1960s by Hans Robert Jauss, points out a problem which is overlooked by literary critics for a long time: the reception of the literary texts. Jauss asserts that: “In the triangle of author, works and the public, the last is no passive part, no chain of mere reactions, but rather itself an energy formative of history.” (Jauss, 1982:19) The theory of aesthetics of reception distinguishes itself from the former theories not only for the shift it brings about, but also for its acceptance of the great diversities of understandings held by readers. Whether one thinks of the appearance of the theory of aesthetics of reception as a change in paradigm or, more modestly, as a shift in emphasis, no one today can seriously question the enormous impact that the theory has had on the interpretation of literature and art.

Generally speaking, as a common reader, every translator makes the completion of a whole process of translation possible: original text-translator-translated version-target language reader. Nevertheless, when the reception process of the target language reader is taken into account, it is really impractical and impossible to study each of the readers respectively because of the enormousness in number and greatness in individual diversities. Studies of each individual target language reader would never be convincing unless they are taken collectively as an integrated community.

As a matter of fact, apart from translations for special usage, nearly all translators expect a wide acceptance for their works. So, in their translations, translators would always make all efforts to meet the needs of the largest number of target language readers possible. They have no intention to cater to one or two of the target language readers.

The core of the study of the target language readers’ reception process is by no means any individual target language reader. Reception at the second stage in translation would no longer refer to the normal simplified process of reading or interpretation by an average reader. Along the process of reception within the source language, readers would, through their reading, create an aesthetic image and then through the image enter a specialized situation provided by the text, to experience and value the content expressed and art revealed. Reception process of target language readers resembles in some ways that of source language readers, but they two still differ a lot owing to the cultural differences. Reception of a translated version consists of at least two interactive layers: aesthetic layer and cultural layer. Of the two, the latter is peculiar to the target language readers as they are from a quite different cultural community and demands the translator’s special attention.

As knowledge about a certain source language community at a given period of time is relatively stable, and in addition, we cannot expect the majority of the community to voluntarily make efforts in expanding their knowledge about the source language community, reception of translated versions is a progressive process and we should not expect an adequate reception to be accomplished in one period of time. As a result, on one hand, translators, required by their responsibility, are always eager to expand their knowledge in both source language and target language so as to produce versions of high quality while the target language readers are much more passive and tend to rely on their translators for understanding. On the other hand, the target language readers’ strong demands for acquainting themselves with foreign information urge translators to make more efforts to speed up the reconstruction of target language readers’ horizon of expectations and facilitate cross-cultural

communications.

2. Aesthetic Objects

Judgments of aesthetic value clearly rely on our ability to discriminate at a sensory level. Aesthetics examines what makes something beautiful, sublime, disgusting, fun, cute, silly, entertaining, pretentious, discordant, harmonious, boring, humorous, or tragic. We can call a person, a house, a symphony, a fragrance, and a mathematical proof beautiful. What characteristics do they share which give them that status? What possible feature could a proof and a fragrance both share in virtue of which they both count as beautiful? What makes a painting beautiful is quite different from what makes music beautiful, which suggests that each art form has its own system for the judgment of aesthetics. In the external world, not all the objects are the aesthetic objects. Only those that are relative to the aesthetic subject and have relationship with the aesthetic subject can be called aesthetic objects. For example, a book on shelf is not an aesthetic object until you bring it back home and get down to study it, to experience the beauty in sound, sense and form, etc. The beauty in various forms in the book is then the aesthetic object.

Translation must involve two different languages. Thus there are two aesthetic objects in translation: the source language text and the target language text. As mentioned above, this thesis will confine its discussion mainly to the English translations of Zhu Ziqing's prose works.

The ancients said that emotions touch human beings the most. The way of expressing the bottom of the heart is the reason why Zhu Ziqing's prose could always strike a chord in everyone's heart. He never attracts the readers by magnificent structures and euphuistical writing but expresses himself in plain words. If you read between the lines, you can feel the unique affections flowing over the scenery, around the object and in the story. The beauty of his prose lies in his admirable lyric means of artistic expression.

In his prose, Zhu Ziqing often applies "realism" to expressing his true feelings. With simplicity the innermost emotions from the heart appear especially in the prose describing family love, for example, *My Father's Back*. In this work, he expresses the inmost feeling at parting with deep affection. The author recalls the sight when his father and he were parting at the station. The real feelings in his prose deeply moved everyone.

And another characteristic of his prose is that he successfully combines expressing the emotion with the portrayal. He is an expert in syncretizing the feelings and the scene to create a romantic and artistic conception, attracting every reader.

Moonlight over the Lotus Pond is a good example. All kinds of scenery create a silent night view, by which the author expresses his strong desire of pursuing the best solitude under the panic environment during White Terror so that he can achieve an instant tranquility breaking away from the bothering of the reality. The similar vivid portrayal can be found everywhere in his prose--- bright color, dynamic figure and mild emotion fuse into a perfect organic whole.

Prose's styles vary a lot, but mostly appear refined and natural. Zhu Ziqing's works are apparently in the nature of normal prose. What's more, he applies a lot of simple oral language, showing his master hand of handling the rhetoric and wording. Firstly, the beauty lies in simplicity. According to Zhu Ziqing, prose is supposed to describe the reality. The language style in his prose is simple, presenting an aesthetic feeling of "purified simplicity after luxury have gone", which precisely symbolizes his own character of never pretending, no vanity and no ostentation and extravagance. The characteristic of simplicity clearly embodies in the prose *To My Dead Wife*, *Children*, *Memorizing Mr. Wei Woqing*, *My Father's Back* and *The Winter* and so on.

Secondly, Zhu Ziqing employs a lot of oral language in his prose accurately, naturally and skillfully. He draws upon a great number of colloquial languages in his prose and makes artistic forging and foundry, creating a unique language style. Between the lines, every reader feels the beautiful scene in spring from vision, hearing as well as the bottom of the heart.

Thirdly, the beauty is embodied in diversified rhetoric and skillful wording and phrasing. In *Moonlight over Lotus Pond*, he describes the moonlight which looks like the moving wate. Meanwhile, the author is an expert to apply metaphor, personification and Synaesthesia, such as vivid and romantic description. To sum up, the language in Zhu Ziqing's prose is refined with the beauty of simplicity but never contrived. They convey the mood of the author most appropriately with visual recapitulation in simplicity.

A beautiful work must have a good image, and a perfect artistic image must have an "eye" which makes the main idea elastic and the structure dense. Zhu Ziqing's works give prominence to the arrangement of the "eye" with an inventive mind despite they are comparatively short. Zhu Ziqing successfully combines the "eye" with

the expressive keynote to create a wonderful mixture of self emotion and image with a catching in artistic convey.

The “eye” in Moonlight over the Lotus Pond is mixed together with the expressive keynote of the author’s gloomy. The arrangements of the “eye” in Zhu Ziqing’s prose reach the designated position, highlighting the magic ability with natural beauty. In the famous prose Spring, he firstly expresses the hope for spring, then builds the profiles of spring, followed by the feature of the grass, the flower, the wind and rain of elaborate style from every aspects to portray the great vitality and creativity of the spring. And at last he aims his camera shot at the activities of dynamic people in the hopeful spring, presenting a beautiful picture of spring-heralding. At first blush, the “eye” of Spring is not easily found, but readers all single out the “eye” of this prose after focusing on it. The author aims at putting up the hope for spring and people’s creativity via portraying the vitality of the scenery.

The arrangements of the “eye” make the image of the prose meticulous, and at the same time, Zhu Ziqing is a skillful craftsman who could lay out the makeup with ingenuity, which creates an artistic image. And he is good at putting the clues through the pictures of the scenery to make the prose compact and complete. His works are shining necklaces stringed by artistic threads and pearls.

In brief, the charming points in Zhu Ziqing’s prose works consist of the following: creating a natural, harmonious, beautiful and romantic image by meticulous artistic idea, expressing the true feelings via the combination of narrating, describing and commenting, developing fresh, amiable and tasteful “talking” style through the processing of the oral language, achieving delicate but various structures by the perfect unification of the completion and change. It shows his unique artistic style and aesthetic sentiment in all his prose works---comeliness and meaningfulness in his early years, simplicity and richness in his middle age as well as the radicalism and profundity in the last period.

References

- [1] Bassnett, Susan, Andre Lefevere(2001). *Constructing Cultures: Essays on Literary Translation*, Shanghai: Shanghai Foreign Language Education Press.
- [2] Benjamin, A(1989). *Translation and the Nature of Philosophy*. London and New York: Routlege.
- [3] Edwin Gentzler(2004). *Contemporary Translation Theories*. 2nd ed [M]. Shanghai: Shanghai Foreign Language Education Press.
- [4] Hatim, Basil. & 1. Mason(2001). *Discourse and the Translation*. Shanghai: Shanghai Foreign Language Education Press
- [5] Halilday, M . & R. H arsan(1976). *Cohesionin English*. London: Longman. Iser, W .1987. University of Chicago Press.