

Novel Translation from the Perspective of Translational Rhetoric -- Taking Fortress Besieged as an Example

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Abstract

Translational Rhetoric is a paradigm for understanding, engaging in translation activities, and researching and solving translation problems from the perspective of contemporary rhetorical theory, represented by the "New Rhetoric." Its core lies in exploring the rhetorical nature of translation acts and translation practices that embody rhetorical awareness. This study takes the original text of Fortress Besieged (《围城》) by Qian Zhongshu and its English translation by Jeanne Kelly and Nathan K. Mao as its research object. It aims to delve into the application of rhetoric in Fortress Besieged and analyze how to effectively address the challenges of rhetorical translation arising from the differences between Chinese and English during the translation process. By applying the theoretical framework of Translational Rhetoric to conduct a detailed analysis of novel translation examples, this research not only enriches the guiding experience of Translational Rhetoric in translation practice but also opens up new research perspectives for rhetorical analysis in novel translation.

Keywords

Translational Rhetoric; Fortress Besieged; novel translation; translation methods

1. Introduction

Fortress Besieged is a classic novel by Mr. Qian Zhongshu, renowned as a "New Scholarly History." Set against the backdrop of intellectuals in the early stages of the War of Resistance against Japan, the work, through vivid descriptions and a unique perspective, reveals their living conditions and mental states, holding a significant position in the history of modern Chinese literature. Through delicate portrayals and lively depictions, the work presents a collective portrait of intellectuals in the early war period and their psychological journeys as they faced national crises and life's various dilemmas. In terms of rhetorical value, Fortress Besieged is exemplary.

Mr. Qian Zhongshu employs a rich variety of rhetorical devices in this novel, such as metaphor, parallelism, contrast, and hyperbole, making the language vibrant, the imagery sharp, and endowing the work with strong artistic appeal. The use of these rhetorical devices not only enhances the artistic expressiveness of the work but also profoundly reveals character traits and social realities, giving the work deep ideological connotation. *Fortress Besieged* is not only a literary masterpiece but also a model of rhetorical art. Its unique rhetorical techniques and profound ideological content give this work an irreplaceable status in the history of modern Chinese literature. It provides us not only with abundant rhetorical cases but also with unique artistic perspectives and profound intellectual insights. This study will combine the five research objects of Translational Rhetoric proposed by Yang Lili, focusing on the original rhetorical forms in *Fortress Besieged*, strategies for coping with rhetorical contradictions in translation, and the appropriate handling of rhetorical devices. It will analyze the Chinese-English translation transformations between the Chinese original *Fortress Besieged* and the English version *Fortress Besieged*, hoping to provide reference significance for novel translation research from the perspective of Translational Rhetoric.

2. The Development of Translational Rhetoric

In the development of translation studies, the research focus has expanded from a purely linguistic perspective to multiple dimensions such as the cultural turn, the sociological turn, and the communicative turn in translation studies. Some scholars have questioned the value of the linguistic perspective in translation studies, leading to the gradual marginalization of linguistic translation research, and consequently, the study of rhetoric in translation has also been neglected. Traditional rhetorical studies were often limited to the comparative translation of rhetorical devices and their effects, lacking systematic thinking. In view of this, Jingmin Fu & Xiaorong Sun(2023: 117) proposed that rhetoric, as the most distinctive means of linguistic expression, is manifested both in different language systems and in individual language styles. Translational rhetoric, which integrates the source language, target language, and the translating subject, exists as a relatively independent form and deserves holistic consideration and exploration. They further pointed out that Translational Rhetoric, as a branch of translation studies, focuses on the systematic study of rhetorical phenomena in translation.

The translation activity is defined as an activity that recreates the original text in another language based on the translator's understanding of the original. Translation is neither a direct copy of the source language model nor does it completely follow the target language model; instead, it incorporates the translator's unique language expression style. Therefore, translation activity is seen as a complex integrating the source language model, the target language model, and the translator's language expression model. It exists as an independent form, forming the so-called

“third code.” The concept of the “third code” was proposed by Frawley in 1984 to emphasize that translated language is categorized separately due to its unique linguistic features, which differ from both the source and target languages. This concept originates from Homi K. Bhabha’s theory of the “Third Space.” Bhabha (1996: 28) believes the “Third Space” possesses “hybridity,” transcending the boundaries of “self” and “other,” forming a unique existence. Based on this theory, domestic scholars further proposed the concept of the “third code” to describe the unique linguistic features of translated language that distinguish it from both the source and target languages, giving it a unique status.

Translational Rhetoric, as an important branch of modern humanities research, focuses on the social value and function of language. It is dedicated to in-depth study of various discourse phenomena emerging in real life and text forms that affect social interaction, analyzing the structure of arguments and their potential persuasive power. It also meticulously explores the complete process of text creation to reception and its internal logical connections for specific audiences. This discipline has a deep and broad academic foundation, maintains traditional and modern close connections with multiple disciplines, and plays an active and vibrant role in promoting the development of related disciplines. Simultaneously, Translational Rhetoric is also regarded as a key practical activity. It emphasizes the targeted exploration and application of holistic symbolic resources centered on language, aiming to achieve a positive and effective impact of discourse on the audience. Given the profound historical connection and close correlation between translation and rhetoric, the integrated study of these two not only has sufficient necessity but can also generate positive energy to advance the discipline and enhance the quality of a country’s international discourse dissemination.

Xiaowei Chen(2019: 45) further explained “Translational Rhetoric”: it is a paradigm for understanding, engaging in translation activities, and researching and solving translation problems from the perspective of contemporary rhetorical theory, represented by the “New Rhetoric.” Its core lies in exploring the rhetorical nature of translation acts and translation practices that embody rhetorical awareness. It is not only about the translation of “rhetorical devices” or rhetorical metaphors generated around “translation” issues, nor is it limited to literary translation. Instead, it extends the research object to all cross-linguistic and cross-cultural social interactions conducted through oral and written translation, hoping to more clearly understand, explain, and solve some theoretical and practical problems concerning disciplinary development and national concerns.

3. Related Research on Translational Rhetoric

In 2001, Lili Yang(2001: 71) proposed a preliminary conception for establishing Translational Rhetoric, outlining the main research scope, objects, and methods of the theory, and pointing out several issues urgently needing resolution in its devel-

opment. In this study, she pointed out that “the theoretical core of Translational Rhetoric is to explore the methods and principles of selecting linguistic means in translation, and is no longer confined merely to the handling of rhetorical devices in translation.” She believed the main research objects of Translational Rhetoric are the following five: 1) Analysis of the original work’s rhetorical form and content, i.e., parsing the author’s intention and their choice of linguistic art in a specific context; 2) Standards for translational rhetoric, establishing benchmarks and principles for word choice and sentence making in translation; 3) Systematic summarization of translational rhetorical resources, meticulously organizing synonymous expressions in the target language; 4) Strategies for coping with translational rhetorical contradictions, involving handling conflicts between author and translator intentions, original and translated contexts, reader demographics, and rhetorical resources; 5) Appropriate handling of rhetorical devices. Translational Rhetoric, as an important branch of translation studies, can be used to directly guide translation practice. Its research scope is broad, including understanding the rhetorical features of the original work, selecting words and sentences for the translation, adjusting text structure, reproducing stylistic features, and handling rhetorical devices.

Xiaowei Chen (2022: 9) pointed out: “Translational rhetoric exists within the overall context composed of purpose, audience, and various constraining relational elements.” In the consideration of translational rhetoric, multiple factors intertwine and influence each other. We should not focus solely on the rhetorical qualities of language or the rhetorical techniques of the text. More importantly, the rhetorical nature of translation is a comprehensive system constituted by the agents of the translation act, involving key elements such as the translator and the audience. The rhetorical nature demonstrated by the agents of the translation act is neither entirely determined unilaterally by the translator nor entirely dictated by the audience; therefore, the influencing factors in the translation process are highly complex.

Jianwei Wu (2021: 40) viewed translational rhetoric as an autonomous and independent system, not excluding case studies. The results of case studies all demonstrate corresponding professionalism and effective insights to varying degrees. However, Translational Rhetoric currently faces the dilemma of lacking systematic theory, thus urgently requiring the establishment of a clear and definite research methodology and tools. Whether in constructing the disciplinary system or analyzing specific translation problems, a systemic view plays a crucial role and is the necessary path to revealing universal patterns and forming theoretical generalizations. Therefore, in the field of translational rhetoric research within translation studies, we should base ourselves on the basic framework of translation studies, be guided by the problem consciousness of translation studies, regard translational rhetoric and its research as activities influenced by multiple relationships involving factors internal and external to the specific system and its environment, and then conduct in-depth, systematic translation studies explanations for them.

4. Analysis of Translation Examples

Fortress Besieged, with its unique artistic charm and rich rhetorical devices, has become an important object of study in the field of literary research. Among these, rhetorical devices not only add profound connotation to the work but also reflect the author's ingenuity. In further research, from the perspective of Translational Rhetoric, we delve into how different translation methods affect the conveyance of the original text's rhetorical forms. In the following section, we select specific translation examples to analyze how to handle the original text's rhetorical forms, potential contradictions encountered in translational rhetoric, and how to appropriately deal with different rhetorical devices during the translation process. This process requires the translator not only to possess profound language skills but also to have a precise grasp of the original text's rhetorical intentions to ensure the translated text can both faithfully retain the rhetorical characteristics of the original and conform to the reading habits and aesthetic standards of the target language readers.

4.1. Literal Translation

E.g.1: 他仿美国人读音，维妙维肖，也许鼻音学得太过火了，不像美国人，而像伤风塞鼻子的中国人。(Qian Zhongshu, 1991: 145)

He imitated the American accent down to the slightest inflection, though maybe the nasal sound was a little overdone, sounding more like a Chinese with a cold and a stuffy nose, rather than an American speaking.(Jeanne Kelly & Nathan K.Mao, 2003: 54)

The original Chinese sentence forms a humorous and meaningful expression through clever language organization. Comparing "Mr. Zhang, who over-imitates the American nasal sound" to "a Chinese with a cold and a stuffy nose," the sentence vividly depicts the characteristics of the protagonist's pronunciation by comparing the imitated nasal sound to the symptoms of having a "stuffy nose from a cold," while also adding amusement and imagery to the expression. The sentence implies sarcasm. The protagonist's original purpose was to imitate the American accent, but the excessive nasal sound makes the imitation effect comical, resembling a "Chinese with a cold and a stuffy nose." This sarcasm not only teasingly comments on the protagonist's imitation ability but also implies criticism of over-imitation or pursuing superficial similarity while neglecting internal authenticity. Through the use of rhetorical devices such as sarcasm and metaphor, this sentence reveals the dual nature of the protagonist's imitation ability, expresses criticism of over-imitation or pursuing superficial similarity, and adds humor and imagery to the expression, filling the sentence with tension and depth, prompting readers to ponder deeper issues in a lighthearted atmosphere.

In this example, the translational rhetorical contradiction is not significant. The tenor and vehicle of the Chinese original are translated literally into English, having the same effect in both linguistic contexts. Therefore, the translator adopted a literal

translation method. Using literal translation, English readers should also understand the tenor and vehicle translated into English, thereby comprehending the rhetorical effect of the simile in this specific context. The humor of the original is transmitted to the translation, and the rhetorical device of “simile” in the original is preserved in the translation.

4.2. Free Translation

E.g.2: 不过我不是饭桶，你也是了解的，所以我照顾不了你。(Qian Zhongshu, 1991: 180)

But I am not good-for-nothing, you yet understand, so I can not look after you.(Jeanne Kelly & Nathan K.Mao, 2003: 178)

“饭桶” is a derogatory metaphor, usually used to describe someone who only eats but does not or will not work, or to describe someone’s low ability in some aspect, being incompetent for a certain task or job. Here, the speaker uses “饭桶” for self-deprecation, but actually expresses their inability to take care of someone in a humorous or self-mocking way. Additionally, this sentence employs a technique of “first suppress then elevate”. First, self-deprecation is made through “But I am not a good-for-nothing,” creating an expected reversal; then, “you yet understand” confirms the other party’s recognition of this point, strengthening the effect of this reversal; finally, “so I can not look after you” clearly states their position, while also refusing the other party’s request or expectation in a relaxed, humorous manner. If “饭桶” were translated literally as “But I am not a rice bucket” or “But I am not a meal bucket,” it might confuse English readers. Therefore, the translator rendered “饭桶” as “good-for-nothing,” adopting a free translation method. Although the rhetorical effect is not as strong as the original, it is easier for readers to understand.

E.g.3: 这些办教育的人专会挂着幌子唬人。(Qian Zhongshu, 1991: 68)

All those people in charge of education can ever do is try to impress everyone with fancy names.(Jeanne Kelly & Nathan K.Mao, 2003: 65)

When discussing cultural differences between Chinese and foreigners, it is not difficult to find significant differences in life experiences. These differences mean that things commonly known in Chinese life may be unfamiliar to foreigners, posing challenges for translating related metaphors. Taking the word “幌子” as an example, it has deep roots in Chinese culture, originally referring to a sign hung by shops to attract customers, but now often used metaphorically for the name borrowed for an activity or matter. However, in foreign cultures, there is no direct equivalent for “幌子.” Therefore, during translation, the translator needs to find appropriate substitute words to convey its original and extended meanings. In this example, the translator chose “fancy names” as a substitute, preserving both the original meaning and conveying its extended sense.

4.3. Transferred Translation

Transferred translation includes conversion of parts of speech, direct and indirect conversion, affirmative expressed as negative or vice versa, de-metaphorization, conversion between different Chinese and English metaphors, etc. (Dajin Lin, 2019: 187).

E.g.4: 鸿渐一字没听出来，因为人哼诗跟临死呓语二者都用乡音。(Qian Zhongshu, 1991: 260)

Hung-chien couldn't make out a word, for the chanting of a poem, like a dying man talking in his sleep, was in the native dialect.(Jeanne Kelly & Nathan K.Mao, 2003: 256)

In the sentence, the sound of “人哼诗” is compared to “临死呓语”, forming a vivid metaphor. This metaphor not only vividly depicts the indistinct and blurred nature of the “humming” sound but also enhances the expressive power of the language. In the English translation, the tenor “哼诗” is literally translated as “chanting of a poem,” and the vehicle “呓语” is freely translated as “talking in his sleep.” The translation uses the comparative word “like” to connect the tenor and the vehicle, converting the metaphorical rhetorical device obtained in the original text into a simile in the translation. Since both metaphor and simile are rhetorical devices common to Chinese and English, even using a transferred translation method does not affect the transmission of the original rhetorical effect.

5. Conclusion

Translational Rhetoric is a paradigm for understanding, engaging in translation activities, and researching and solving translation problems from the perspective of contemporary rhetorical theory, represented by the “New Rhetoric.” Its core lies in exploring the rhetorical nature of translation acts and translation practices that embody rhetorical awareness. The language of *Fortress Besieged* is exquisite, vivid, and witty, not only providing readers with great reading pleasure but also showcasing the essence of linguistic art to the fullest. The various rhetorical devices used fill the text with wisdom and humor, while also profoundly revealing the complexities of human nature and social contradictions. From the perspective of Translational Rhetoric, this paper conducted a detailed discussion to analyze the impact of different translation methods on the conveyance of the original text's rhetorical forms. Addressing the handling of the original rhetorical forms, potential rhetorical contradictions encountered during translation, and strategies for dealing with different rhetorical devices, the translator cautiously employed various translation techniques such as literal translation, free translation, and transferred translation to ensure that the rhetorical effects in the Chinese original were appropriately preserved and reproduced in the English translation.

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