

Research on Educated: A Memoir from the Perspective of Narrative Stylistics

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Abstract: Educated: A Memoir, the debut novel composed by American author Tara Westover, ranks on the New York Times bestseller list for weeks and still holds a high top-one sales volume, selling more than one million copies in the United States. Owing to its overwhelming popularity, the book has been translated into Chinese by the famous translator Reng Aihong and it became a best seller when it was introduced into China. This paper takes the Chinese translation of Educated: A Memoir as the object of study, and examines the successful embodiment of the thematic meaning of the original work from narrative techniques and stylistic feature. By comparing the original text and the translated text from the perspective of narrative stylistics, the author finds that the translation techniques used by the translator have showed some stylistic changes in narrative time, narrative perspective and narrative distance in the Chinese translation of Educated: A Memoir.

Keywords: Narrative stylistics; Stylistic feature; Narrative effect; Educated: A Memoir; Translation techniques

1. Introduction

Educated: A Memoir (Tara Westover, 2018), an autobiographical novel composed by American author Tara, is classified into the category of growing up novel. It fully and explicitly tells the story of Tara, a country girl living in Idaho, was distorted and shaped by her family environment, and upon entering the college environment, began to awaken, rebel, reorient and refresh herself, completing the transformation and elevation from her stale self to rebirth. Until the age of seventeen, she worked for her father in a scapyard called Barker's Frontier without any education, but later, with strong-willed courage and motivation, she tried every means to escape her family and was admitted to the top Cambridge University by her relentless endeavor and effort. She achieved her self-worth self-redemption through schooling and got liberation from the bonds and bandage of her original family and climbed up to the highest peak mountain in her heart. It's the mountain that orients the clear and correct direction of her life-long path. It's the mountain that generates the ceaseless power and belief for her success. It's the mountain that will never collapse and crumble in confrontation with disasters and difficulties.

2. The Overview of Narrative Stylistics

Narrative Stylistics is a kind of stylistic study that uses narration as a framework to analyze texts, integrating the focus of narrative and stylistic studies. In general, narrative time, narrative perspective, and narrative distance are three main elements. Gennett pointed out that narrative time is the time relationship between narration and story, including narrative order, frequency, time distance, etc.(Genette, 1983). "Chronology" is a phenomenon in narrative works in which there is a serious misalignment between the time of the discourse and the time of the story.

In a first-person narration, the narrator naturally, is a part of a story. It is usually narrated in the past tense, and the narrator also acts as a recollector and add imponderables to what is unknown at the time. The fact that the narrator is usually an unidentified bystander results in a narration that is stereotyped by a lack of perspective. Like an omniscient God, the narrator can be in different places at the same time, can know about the past, foretell the future, and enter the mind of any character at will to uncover the privacy of his or her mind.

Narrative distance is the distance between the subjects of a novel's narration (the implied author, the subject of the narrative and the characters) and is carefully created by the author through using various narrative skills in the novel creation. The necessary prerequisite for the formation of aesthetic distance for the reader is its effective control.

Strictly speaking, stylistics is the microscopic study of style in literature. But generally speaking, most scholars explore the stylistic features of texts at four levels: style, vocabulary, syntax, and semantics. It "concentrates on specific linguistic expressions that are of motivated prominence to the effect of foregrounding for the thematic and aesthetic purpose" (Dai Fan, 2005). The study of stylistics focuses on the characteristics of discourse, along with the role of discourse and stylistic effects. Stylistic research includes research on language form, speech and thought expression, and prospect.

3. Narrative Features and Stylistic Features of Educated: A Memoir

The narrative characteristics of the novel are analyzed from six parts: narrative angle, narrative order, speed and rhythm, narrative tone, narrative form and narrative person. The narrative angle is the foothold of the novel narrative, that is, who tells the story. The age, gender, identity, occupation, status determine the tone, language, etc. The order encompasses chronological order, logical order and so forth. The narrative tone is the personalized characteristic of the emotional color, age, gender, and identity, which is more or less manifested with the shadow and imprint of the author, and is closely relevant to the novel or the author's style.

As an autobiographical novel, *Educated: A Memoir* adopts a traditional linear narrative structure, using chronology as a clue to show an in-depth, interlocking account of Tara's upbringing. As a child, she is a naive girl controlled by her father's bigotry and has no position to fight against being shaped by others. As an adolescent, she is cursed by her brother for being a "whore" when she wears pretty clothes, and is pulled by her violent brother Shawn by her hair into the toilet, while she witnesses another brother Tyler leaving the family and pursuing education to regain his life. This is a true phase of awakening and struggle of her self-awareness and a complete reversal of her past life.

Stylistic feature means the writing system and pattern of language. It contains the choice of diction, way of expression, discourses and rhetoric features. In the novel, the written and spoken language is interspersed used such as colloquial expression and technical terms, the interchangeable use of long and short sentences and the choice of loose sentences greatly highlight the direct and coherent narrative style. In terms of syntactic features, the author is good at using alternating written and oral terms based on dialogue scenes and specific contexts to portray the main characters, emphasize their images, and indirectly add background information to them.

4. Application of Translating Techniques in the Translation of Educated: A Memoir

4.1 Adaptation

Adaptation means translators can make negotiable linguistic choices from a variable range of possibilities in such a way as to approach points of satisfaction for communicative needs and harmony of cultural differences.

Example 1: *Educated: A Memoir*

Translation: 《你当像鸟飞往你的山》

The title of the Chinese version, 《你当像鸟飞往你的山》, is said to have been decided by the author herself. Prior to the Chinese version, the original English version, *Educated: A Memoir*, had a certain popularity and had been translated in many ways: "Education Changes Life", "The Power of Education", "Knowledge Changes Destiny" and so on. These translations are straightforward, conventional and lead the story in one direction—success. However, if you immerse yourself in reading the book, you will realize that it is not merely an inspirational success story. Her halo is the part of her book that she tries to downplay the success. She wants to emphasize not her achievements, but the dilemma between gain and loss. So the editor approached Tara, who gave it another name: "Things gained and Things lost", but the Chinese translation still didn't have the flavour. Later the Chinese translator found a line from the Bible's Psalms, "Flee as a bird to your mountain", which means "to escape the cage" and "to find a new faith". In fact, it implies that the author, Tara, had fled the mountains of her homeland to seek for education like a bird of prey and find the mountains of her true faith. In China, mountains often represent difficulties and hardships. A bird flying over a mountain needs to overcome many difficulties, which also foreshadows Tara's process of growth, so it was directly naturalized in the translation. This translation method narrows the narrative distance between the reader and the author, allowing the reader to better appreciate the theme conveyed by the book.

4.2 Literal translation and additional translation

Example 2: “what’s going on?” Tyler repeated. He eyed Shawn, inching forward.

Translation: “发生什么事了？”泰勒又问。他眼睛盯住肖恩，慢慢走过来，像接近一条响尾蛇。

The example is a description of Tara’s brother Tyler’s reaction when she is abused by Shawn. In dealing with this detail, the translator uses the translation skill of additional translation to complement the phrase “像接近一条响尾蛇” in her translation. As we all know, rattlesnakes belong to the category of poisonous snakes, which are extremely fierce and cold-blooded. So if someone is described as a rattlesnake, then, the probability is that he or she is not a good person. In this way, Shawn’s fierce, cruel side of personality traits are shown in front of the readers completely. In the meanwhile, the narrator, Tara, distances herself from Shawn, enhancing the narrative effect of the text and setting the stage for Tara’s repeated abuse by Shawn later on.

4.3 Annotation

As there are several cultural variations between English and Chinese, bound cultural words in English merely do not have any equivalent in Chinese, making a niche in word sense. In such cases, English to Chinese translations are usually used to fill in the gaps by adding notes. Annotations will usually be used to add relevant data, for instance the background material, the origin of the word, etc., to facilitate the reader’s understanding.

Example 3: “How marvelous,” he said, smiling. “It’s as if I’ve stepped into Shaw’s Pygmalion.

Translation: “太不可思议了，”他微笑着说，“我好像走进了萧伯纳的《卖花女》^①”

① Pygmalion, 是爱尔兰剧作家萧伯纳的戏剧，描写了一名教授训练一名贫苦的卖花女，并最终成功让她被上流社会认可。后来好莱坞据此翻拍了电影《窈窕淑女》。

This is an exclamation made by Professor Steinberg of Cambridge University, who, after learning about Tara’s life in general, quips that he has stepped into the world of George Bernard Shaw’s Pygmalion. In terms of stylistic features, the example employs the rhetorical device of simile, with the professor comparing himself and his student Tara to Higgins, the professor of linguistics in Pygmalion, and Eliza, the flower seller on the streets of London, respectively. In addition, the use of the translation technique of annotation makes an instant connection between Steinberg’s nurturing of Tara, who is uneducated until the age of seventeen, and Higgins’ nurturing of the foul-mouthed Eliza, who comes from a lower-class background. This not only brings the narrator closer to the reader, but also makes the characters of both the professor and Tara immediately visible, while the humorous banter adds to Professor Steinberg’s characterization.

5. Conclusion

Narrative stylistics, a new theory combining narrative and stylistics, has been applied to translation studies relatively infrequently. It used to being chosen as the guidance of analyzing the narrative literary works. With its distinctive features, it combines macro-narrative and micro-genre studies, which can make up for the respective shortcomings of narration and stylistics and provide new ideas for the study of literary translations. Translators should focus on the stylistic and narrative features of the original texts when translating, and choose appropriate translation techniques and methods.

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