

A Study on English-Chinese Translation of *The Bluest Eye* from the Perspective of the Three-dimensional Transformation of Eco-translatology

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Abstract. *The Bluest Eye* is the first and also the representative work of American female black writer Toni Morrison. Published in 1970, *The Bluest Eye* is an innovative novel exploring themes of race, class, and beauty standards. Eco-translatology, the translatology theory devised by Chinese professor Hu Gengshen, gains insights from the tenets of natural selection and provides its description and interpretation of translation activities. Based on the three-dimensional transformation of Eco-translatology, this paper analyzes Yang Xiangrong's Chinese translation of *The Bluest Eye*. In recent years, the three-dimensional transformation of Eco-translatology has been analyzed in many fields of translation, but it has never been applied to Toni Morrison's works. Therefore, this paper explores the feasibility of the three-dimensional transformation of Eco-translatology to guide the translation of *The Bluest Eye*, and finally comes to the conclusion that Yang maintains the ecological balance and harmony between the source language and the target language.

Keywords: *The Bluest Eye*; Toni Morrison; Eco-translatology; Three-dimensional Transformation.

1. Introduction

1.1 Research Background

Toni Morrison, the first black female writer to win the Nobel Prize in Literature in the history of literature, has received extensive attention for her debut novel *The Bluest Eye*. *The Bluest Eye* sets the story background in the United States in the 1940s. At that time, the mainstream culture regards white people as the embodiment of nobility, and black skin, thick lips, curly hair and wide and flat nose is regarded as the symbol of ugliness and meanness.

As a systematic and mature theoretical system, Eco-translatology serves as a solution to the problem of "how to translate", and the three-dimensional transformation theory, which involves the discussion of translation methods is very suitable for guiding and assessing the translation practice of *The Bluest Eye*.

1.2 Research Content

This paper is based on the Chinese translation of *The Bluest Eye* by Yang Xiangrong, and the aim of this paper is to analyze the translator's adaptability and selectivity in such an eco-environment from the perspective of the three-dimensional transformation principle in Eco-translatology proposed by Hu Gengshen. By analyzing the gains and losses of the Chinese translation of *The Bluest Eye* by Yang Xiangrong, this paper mainly talks about the translation strategies or methods he used that can guide the translation of literary work with the three-dimensional transformation principle. On this basis, it is hoped that the findings of this study will provide useful references for the practice of English literature translation in the future and help deepen the understanding of Eco-translatology.

1.3 Research Methods

Two research methods are used in this paper: descriptive approach and case study method. First of all, I adopt the descriptive approach to introduce Eco-translatology, three-dimensional transformation, and their studies at home and abroad. Besides, case study method is used to analyze

examples from the Chinese translation of *The Bluest Eye* by Yang Xiangrong.

1.4 Research Significance

The Bluest Eye is one of Toni Morrison's most renowned novels. Most of the scholars and students study it from the perspective of literature, such as the mother's love, narration methods or structure, the novel's themes and main characters, but few studies have been made to analyze its Chinese translation, let alone doing a translatology research based on Eco-translatology.

Eco-translatology sets a new phase for the translatology studies in China. Still, few scholars have paid attention to the translation in *The Bluest Eye*. Concentrating on the assessment of three-dimensional transformation methods deployed by Yang Xiangrong when translating *The Bluest Eye*, this paper aims to explore a plausible way to analyze the translation studies on *The Bluest Eye* and hopefully it will be of help to promote the culture exchange spread by *The Bluest Eye* in China.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Previous Studies on Eco-translatology

2.1.1 Studies at Home

The theoretical system of Eco-translatology has been developing and improving since its first presentation in 2001, and the number of studies on it has also been increasing on a daily basis. As the first native translation theory in China, Eco-translatology has received extensive attention from domestic scholars and researchers. In addition to Professor Hu, many scholars and researchers have also joined the research and exploration of Eco-translatology, which has promoted its continuous development and improvement. Up to now, more than 1,000 academic papers regarding Eco-translatology could be retrieved from Wanfang Database and many scholars have published papers in major linguistic journals.

2.1.2 Studies abroad

Eco-translatology gives a comprehensive view and description of the whole translation ecology and the theoretical ontology of translation from an ecological perspective (Hu Gengshen, 2013: 17). With the upsurge of ecological theory in the late 1980s, there are also many scholars from other countries that have studied the translation activities from isomorphic metaphor of translation ecology and natural ecology. International scholars have also made great efforts in the development of ecological translation studies (Hu Gengshen, 2013: 48). In recent years, some well-known international scholars and Chinese scholars deeply discuss the research and development of ecological translation and communication. Several International Symposiums on Eco-translatology were held after the establishment of International Association for Eco-translatology Research, providing a good platform for scholars from all over the world to discuss the development and researches of Eco-translatology. It promotes the maturity of Eco-translatology as well as displays China's confidence in developing its theories.

2.2 Previous Studies on the Translation of *The Bluest Eye*

At present, there are many translation studies of Morrison's other works from different perspectives. In 2003, Yu Jinhong studied the Chinese translation of *Song of Solomon*. Zhang Ruwen studied the Chinese translation of *Beloved* by Pan Yue and Lei Ge from the perspective of foreignizing translation. Over the last ten years, more than 80 academic articles analyzed the Chinese translation of *Beloved* can be retrieved from Wanfang Database, including articles from the perspectives of relevance theory, skopos theory and equivalence principle.

Meanwhile, the domestic research on Morrison's debut *The Bluest Eye* has gone through a process from simple to profound. Domestic researches on Morrison's works have become active since her winning of the Nobel Prize in Literature. And the researches show a diversified and

innovated trend. However, there are still two perspectives worth considering: (1) in comparison, domestic scholars pay much less attention to *The Bluest Eye* than Morrison's other works; (2) although the research perspectives have gradually diversified and modern western theories were constantly adopted, there is a lack of evaluation and analysis of the Chinese translation of novels and research on translatology studies.

3. Theoretical Framework

3.1 Introduction to Eco-translatology

Eco-translatology regards the translation as a circle of constant adaption and choice-making. It is the result of interdisciplinary and multidisciplinary intersection as well as an extension of modern translatology theory research. Eco-translatology is constructed with the feature of "translator-centredness" (Hu Gengshen, 2004: 136). It mainly discusses the interrelation, related mechanism, essential features and rules between the translator's behaviors as adaptation and selection, and makes new description and interpretation in terms of the nature, process, criteria, principle and mechanism of translation under the guidance of the doctrine of adaptation and selection in Darwin's Theory of Evolution.

The theoretical system of Eco-translatology has been gradually improving over the last two decades, its practical application is enriching, and its international influence is also expanding.

3.2 The Three-dimensional Transformation of Eco-translatology

The three-dimensional transformation, namely linguistic dimension, cultural dimension, and communicative dimension, is the main translation method proposed in Eco-translatology to guide translation (Hu Gengshen, 2011: 8).

The linguistic dimension transformation refers to the adaptation, and selection of both SL and TL while translating. The cultural dimension transformation means that the translator focuses on bilingual cultural meanings and contents. It stresses the whole culture system of the original language, and adjustments while performing language. The communicative dimension transformation concentrates on the transmission of communicative intention between languages while translating. The three-dimension transformation method is a useful tool to direct translation practice.

4. Analysis of the translation of *The Bluest Eye* Based on The Three-dimensional Transformation

4.1 Linguistic Dimension

English and Chinese feature different characters, words, sentences and texts (Hu Gengshen, 2008: 11-15). Therefore, proper language must be selected and transformed to adapt to the source language. In the translation of *The Bluest Eye*, the linguistic dimension is mainly transformed in lexical level. On the lexical level it mainly adopts the conversion of static expression.

Eco-translatology conceptualizes translation as the adaptation to the translational eco-environment. In this sense, Eco-translatology is to investigate the rules and mechanisms of the source language ecology and the target language ecology in the process of transplantation and transformation, to explore the solutions for the survival and long survival of the translation (Hu Gengshen, 2020, 7).

Example:

SL: But knowing full well she was cut out for better things, and could make the right man happy.

(Morrison, 2019: 56)

TL: 这样的女孩十分清楚自己完全可以另觅高枝，能让适合自己的男人幸福。

(杨, 2013: 44)

This sentence appears in Chapter 3. This paragraph mainly introduces the view of values and love of prostitutes like Poland, China and Maire. As discussed above, English sentences show the tendency of using few verbs while Chinese displays the characteristics of dynamic. Therefore, it is often necessary to convert the static expression in English into the dynamic one in Chinese, and consideration and coordination of the context is required in doing so. In the original text, “cut out for better things” means “naturally able or suited to do or be something better”. The emphasis here is “qualification”, while the translator adopts linguistic dimension transformation with the emphasis on “something better”. Yang translated the phrase into the verb “另觅高枝”, which on the one hand reflects the dynamic characteristic of Chinese over English, on the other hand displays the identity of the three women as prostitutes and depicts their sober and free-spirited characteristics. Rather than the literal translation of “值得更好的”, Yang’s translation of “另觅高枝” adopts the linguistic dimension transformation and better serve to achieve the artistic aesthetics of *The Bluest Eye*.

4.2 Cultural Dimension

Different cultures have their own unique language expression. The differences between the original cultural ecology and the target cultural ecology require the translator to pay attention to the transmission of cultural connotations of both sides in the translation process. Besides, the translator should also make sure the balance and harmony of the cultural ecology of the two languages. The adaptive selection and transformation from the cultural dimension remind the translator not only to grasp the differences between two cultures but also to figure out the similarities. Therefore, the translator usually adopts using semantic translation as the translation method.

Example:

SL: Three merry gargoyles. Three merry harridans.

(Morrison, 2019:55)

TL: 三个快乐的碎嘴婆。三个快乐的老巫婆。

(杨, 2013:44)

Semantic translation Yang Xiangrong applied here is the reproduction of the English cultural-loaded expression within the semantic constraints of Chinese. In English architecture, “gargoyle” is a stone-carved guardian mounted on the sides of building. With a spout design to convey water from a roof and away from the side of the building to prevent water from running down masonry walls. Gargoyles usually shaped as a human or animal face and have hideous appearance. Considering the water-draining application of gargoyles, the author here uses gargoyles to characterize the three gossipy prostitutes: Poland, China and Maire. The image of words running from their mouths matches the image of water draining from the gargoyles. Giving full consideration of the cultural connotations, the translator adopts “碎嘴婆” to demonstrate the chatty characteristic of the three prostitutes. Also, “harridans” refer to strict, bossy or belligerent old woman. It is established early in this chapter that Poland, China and Maire didn’t age well, their thick make ups clung to their loose skin, and they are a bunch of unfeeling and judgmental whores. In order to convey the connotation of this word, Yang chooses the word “老巫婆”, which symbolizes ugly and evil woman, to reproduce the contextual meaning of the English culture-loaded expression. Meanwhile, it is in line with the cultural eco-environment of Chinese.

4.3 Communicative Dimension

Language deviation is first identified as one of varieties poetic language. Deviation of poetic language occur when a poet has a poetic license. Poetic license is the freedom to change the normal rules of language. Then, Leech (1969) stated that poetic license is the poet's right to ignore rules and conventions generally observed by users of the language. Although deviation of language usually occurs in a poem, it's application gradually expands to other forms of literature. Therefore, generally, language deviation itself, means the use of language that does not follow the ordinary rules of the language use. According to Leech (1969), there are five types of language deviation: lexical deviation, grammatical deviation, graphological deviation, semantic deviation and historical deviation.

Example:

SL: Here is the house. It is green and white. It has a red door. It is very pretty Here is the family. Mother Father Dick and Jane live in the green-and-white house. They are very happy.

Here is the house it is green and white it has a red door it is very pretty here is the family mother father dick and jane live in the green-and-white house they are very happy.

Hereisthehouseitisgreenandwhiteithasareddooritisveryprettyhereisthefamily
motherfatherdickandjaneliveinthegreen-and-whitehousetheyareveryhappy

(Morrison, 2019:3)

TL: 这就是那幢房子。绿色和白色相间。有一扇红色的门。漂亮极了。这就是那家人。妈妈、爸爸、迪克和简就住在这幢涂成绿色和白色的房子里。他们很幸福。

这就是那幢房子 绿色和白色相间 有一扇红色的门 漂亮极了 这就是那家人 妈妈 爸爸 迪克和简就住在这幢涂成绿色和白色的房子里 他们很幸福

这就是那幢房子绿色和白色相间有一扇红色的门漂亮极了这就是那家人妈妈爸爸迪克和简就住在这幢涂成绿色和白色的房子里他们很幸福

(杨, 2013:7)

In the introduction part of *The Bluest Eye* there appeared a primer called "Dick and Jane" that has been repeated three times in different chapters throughout the whole novel. The repeated story seems unrelated, while actually it is the core clue of the novel. As written above, the story of "Dick and Jane" depicts a happy family in a childlike and happy manner. The typical white middle-class American family image demonstrated in "Dick and Jane" is juxtaposed with Pecola's broken family that has no warmth nor joy. Even more interestingly, the "Dick and Jane" story is written in different form each time. At the first time, the story is written in standard English with punctuation between sense group and the first letter of the sentence is capitalized; at the second time punctuation and capitalization is omitted and the words are separated by spaces, pacing up the speed of the language; at the third time, all punctuation, spacing and capitalization were omitted and all words formed a string of indistinguishable letters. The graphological deviation revealed in "Dick and Jane" story is echoing Pecora's destiny, that is, from normal towards mental disorder.

Translation at its essence is a kind of communication that demands the translator to eliminate communication barriers in addition to convey the literal meaning. The translator's adaptive selection transformation of the bilingual communicative intention in the translation process is therefore regarded as adaptive selection transformation of the communicative dimension (Hu Gengshen 2011). Paying attention to whether the communicative intentions in the original text are achieved in the translation, Yang's translation uses the similar graphological techniques to convey Morrison's communicative intention. Readers could sense the mounting oddity and absurdity presented in Chinese text, thus relating to Pecola's increasing insanity.

5. Conclusion

This paper adopts professor Hu Gengshen's theoretical framework of three-dimensional transformation in Eco-translatology to study Yang Xiangrong's translation of *The Bluest Eye*. By analyzing several examples of the three dimensions the author concludes that Yang's selection in the translating process adapts well to the translational eco-environment of linguistic dimension, cultural dimension and communicative dimension. It is concluded that the adaptive transformation of the three dimensions is interdependent and integrated. A perfect translation cannot be achieved without the adaptive transformation of any dimension. Yang flexibly adopts the three-dimensional transformation in his translation process and constantly adapt to the ecological environment of the original text. His appropriate and versatile translation strategies make it easier for the target language readers to better understand the original text.

Inevitably, there are some shortcomings in this paper. Firstly, this paper did a relatively poor survey on the foreign studies of Eco-translatology in terms of its theoretical foundation. Secondly, in addition to the three dimensions analyzed above, there are other ecological elements in eco-translation worth studying such as publishers, investors and critics. Thirdly, due to the limited personal ability I only select several translation examples, which may not be comprehensive.

Finally, the author hopes that other researchers can carry out more related studies from the perspective of ecological translation after the study of the translation of *The Bluest Eye* and further promote the dissemination of Toni Morrison's works in China. It is hoped that more researchers can pay more attention to the study of western literature translation and make more contributions to the development of Chinese literature.

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