

An Analysis of the Translation Strategy of Pound's "The Jade Stairs" from Bakhtin's Dialogism

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Abstract: The poet Pound's Cathay is a translation and interpretation of ancient Chinese poetry that has not only contributed to the development of modern Western poetry but has also served as a bridge between Eastern and Western cultures. Although the translation of Pound's Cathay has received mixed reviews, the translation strategy used by Pound, as a successful example of intercultural communication, is worthy of our consideration and study. Therefore, based on Bakhtin's theory of dialogism, this paper analyses and compares Pound's translation of Li Bai's "The Jade Stairs" in the Cathay to analyze the context and impact of the use of the first and third person used in the translation on the reader's reading. In this way, we explore Pound's translation strategies and the reasons for the success of the Cathay and provide more experiences and references for promoting the dissemination of classical Chinese culture and increasing the intercultural communications between East and West.

Keywords: Ezra Pound, translation, different personalities

1. Introduction

Ezra Pound (1885-1972), the famous American poet, literary scholar, and representative of Imagist poetry, is regarded as the leader of British and American modernist poetry and as the founder of postmodernism [1]. In 1915, Pound's translation of Cathay, based on notes on ancient Chinese poetry in Fenollosa's posthumous manuscript without knowing Chinese, set off a wave of British and American translations of ancient Chinese poetry that shook the poetry world and spread Chinese culture to the Western world.

The Cathay has a reputation on a poetic level, but suffers from criticism in terms of translation, as for the Cathay, we must point out that Pound is the inventor of Chinese poetry in our time [2]. Qian Zhongshu [3] has also noted that Pound confused translation with composition, using Chinese poetry as a blueprint for his own collection of poems, Cathay.

Whether it is praise or criticism, it is undeniable that Cathay has a place in the poetry world and that the translator's mission as a messenger of intercultural exchange is to bring one culture into dialogue with another in conflict, harmony, and compromise [4]. Therefore, it is necessary for us to stand in the perspective of intercultural results, the perspective of dialogics and analyze the translation strategy chosen by Pound in his translation of Cathay, taking The Jade Stairs' Grievance as an example and the reasons for it, to provide a new basis for the rationality of the existence of the

translation of Cathay.

2. The Dialogism

The study of Bakhtin's dialogism theory began with the French structuralist Kristeva's *Word, Dialogue and Novel*, which introduced Bakhtin's dialogism narratives and polyphony in detail, making Bakhtin's name known to Western scholars. In contrast, research by Chinese scholars on Bakhtin's theory of dialogue began in the 1980s, first introduced by Xia Zhongyi in 1982, applying Bakhtin's theory of the polyphonic novel, which drew the attention of the research community in China to this theory [5].

Scholars in China and abroad have also studied Bakhtin's theory of dialogics in a more systematic and organized way, Bakhtin's theory of dialogics has gradually expanded from the field of linguistics to the field of cultural analysis since the 1980s and has become an important part of linguistics in the study of social disciplines [6]. Based on dialogue theory, in intercultural communication, people as subjects play an essential role, language and ideas are social in nature, intercultural communication is essentially dependent on social culture, and by examining the interaction between authors, translators and readers, the path of dialogue in social culture and its causes can be grasped. "The dialogue is characterized by a "chorus of voices" due to the differences between the subjects, and this is where the "polyphony" of dialogue comes into being, while the goal of dialogue should be the co-creation of meaning based on respect for differences [7]. Based on Bakhtin's dialogue theory about dialogue, it can help us understand the translation strategy in Pound's Cathay. In the translation process, it is necessary to emphasize the importance of the subject and its differences but also to establish connections and platforms between the subjects of cross-cultural communication based on respecting cultural differences.

2.1. The Use of Personification in 'The Jade Stairs' Grievance'

Li Bai's 'The Jade Stairs' Grievance' is traditionally regarded as a representative of ancient Chinese poetry on palace grievances, but the poem focuses on expressing palace grievances without mentioning words related to sorrow and grievance, which is a unique reading experience brought about by the connotations of imagery poetry and the emotions that flow between the lines. The translation of imagery poetry requires consideration of the interpretation of different contexts and the transformation of cultural connotations. The original text and Pound's English translation are as follows.

Original text [8]

《玉阶怨》
玉阶生白露，夜久浸罗袜。
却下水晶帘，玲珑望秋月。

Pound [9]

The Jade Stairs' Grievance
The Jeweled steps are already quite white with dew,
It is so late that the dew soaks my gauze stoking,
And I let down the crystal curtain,
And watch the moon through the clear autumn.

In the original text of "The Jade Stairs' Grievance" the subject is unclear but does not cause misunderstanding among Chinese readers, but when translating into English, to avoid ambiguity, Pound adds the subject to the translation and translates from the first-person perspective, which is different from the English translation by Xu Yuanchong: she comes in, lowers crystal screen [10]. Pound uses I let down the crystal curtains, bringing the reader's identity from that of a spectator to

that of the main character as if he were there. Pound uses translation as a platform to construct equality in the relationship between the original author, the translator, and the reader.

Dialogue, in a broad sense, is not only a verbal one-to-one exchange between two parties, but any form of communication can also be seen as dialogue if there is an exchange of meaning between the two or more. In Bakhtin's eyes, literature is not only an object of study but also a platform for people to communicate. A dialogical relationship exists both between the lines and in the grand chapters. The author can dialogue with the protagonist and the director with the reader.

2.2. The Distinction between Personality

The rhetorical narrative theory emphasizes the interaction between the author, the textual phenomenon, and the reader's response [11]. Of these three, the text acts as a mediator, the author influences the reader's response through textual strategies, and different readers respond differently to the author's textual strategies, a response that will not always coincide with the author's strategic aims. In the case of intercultural communication, the translator's strategy for translating the original text influences the reader's response to a certain extent.

First-person and third-person narratives are the two most basic types of narrative in literature. The difference between them lies in the persona used by the narrator, that is, the different use of 'I' and 'he/she' in the story. This choice of persona has a profound impact on the narrative, not just as a technique or rhetorical device, but as a way of expressing and conveying the story, directly affecting the reader's reading experience and perception.

In this article, we will illustrate the differences between first and third-person narratives and their impact on the readers. When the reader reads fiction, and poetry, they can transcend the limited horizons to experience various scenes. For lack of a better term, will call perspective-taking: the impression on the part of the reader to actually "be in the story" and to take part in the situation described in the narrative from the perspective of one of the protagonists [12]. So, the reader's choice of persona affects his experience and immersion in the book.

2.2.1. First-person Narrative

First-person narrative refers to the narrator's use of "I" to tell the story. This narrative is more personal and directly reflects the narrator's thoughts and feelings, making it easy for readers to immerse themselves in the narrator's experiences and emotions. First-person narrative helps the reader to understand better and experience the feelings and inner world of the characters in the story, increasing the reader's sense of empathy and involvement.

However, the first-person narrative also has its drawbacks. As the narrator is the protagonist of the story, the experiences, and feelings he describes are very subjective, which tends to make the story limited and one-sided. In addition, first-person narratives are also prone to the problem of self-absorption, making the story seem too self-centered and emotional.

Booth in *The Rhetoric of Fiction* provides an in-depth discussion of the characteristics and effects of first-person narrative. He points out that first-person narrative can help readers gain a deeper understanding of the characters and emotions in a story, as the narrator tends to describe his or her feelings and reactions, which can help readers gain a better understanding of the internal world of the story [13]. At the same time, he also points out the limitations of first-person narratives, especially in that the truthfulness and objectivity of the story is easily affected by the narrator's emotions and position.

In addition, Fludernik provides an in-depth discussion of the effects and rhetorical techniques of first-person narrative in her book *Natural Narratology* [14]. She points out that first-person narratives can help readers better to understand the emotions and experiences of the narrator, but

that attention also needs to be paid to the consciousness and characterization of the narrator to avoid the story becoming too egocentric and emotional.

2.2.2. Third-person Narrative

Third-person narrative refers to the narrator's use of 'he/she' to tell the story. This narrative is more objective and neutral, not influenced by the narrator's subjective feelings and position, and the story is more comprehensive and objective. Third-person narrative helps the reader to gain a deeper understanding of the characters and the plot, as the narrator can describe the experiences and actions of the characters from different perspectives, allowing the reader to gain a fuller understanding of the inner world of the story.

However, third-person narrative also has its drawbacks. As the narrator's position and perspective is different from that of the characters, this tends to make it difficult for the reader to gain a deeper understanding of the characters' emotions and inner worlds, reducing the reader's sense of empathy and involvement.

Nünning explores the characteristics and effects of third-person narrative in *The Rhetoric of Fiction*. He points out that third-person narrative can help readers understand the characters and plot of a story more objectively because the narrator is not influenced by personal feelings and positions and is able to describe the experiences and actions of the characters more objectively [15]. At the same time, he also points out the limitations of third-person narrative, especially in depicting the emotions and inner world of the characters, which may appear less in-depth and detailed.

Fludernik also discusses the characteristics and rhetorical techniques of third-person narrative in her book *Natural Narratology* [14]. She points out that a third-person narrative can help the reader understand the characters and plot of a story more objectively, but that attention also needs to be paid to the narrator's characterizations and awareness so that the story does not become too dispassionate and objective.

2.3. Effects of First-person Narrative and Third-person Narrative on the Reader

First-person narratives and third-person narratives have different effects on readers. First-person narratives can help readers understand the characters and emotions in the story more deeply and enhance their sense of empathy and involvement, but they also tend to make the story too emotional and one-sided. Third-person narratives can help readers understand the characters and plot more objectively, enabling them to gain a more comprehensive understanding of the internal world of the story, but they also tend to make it difficult for readers to understand the emotions and inner world of the characters, reducing their empathy and involvement.

In Bakhtin's theory of dialogics, the purpose of language is not only to convey information, but more importantly to establish interpersonal relationships and social interaction. In this process, the speaker uses speech acts to express his or her attitudes, emotions, and intentions, while the listener needs to understand the speaker's true intentions by interpreting the meaning beyond the words of the speech act. Speech acts therefore play a crucial role in the dialogue process.

First-person narrative allows the speaker to express his or her emotions and attitudes more directly, while at the same time making it easier for the listener to understand the speaker's true intentions. When using first-person narrative, the speaker can express his or her feelings and attitudes more directly, for example, by using the 'I' to indicate his or her position and thoughts. This way of expression allows the listener to better understand the speaker's position and ideas, and thus better build interpersonal and social interactions. At the same time, the first-person narrative enhances the reader's sense of immersion and emotional experience, allowing the reader to gain a deeper understanding of the emotions and thoughts of the story's protagonist.

For example, in Bakhtin's novel *On the Frontlines of War*, the main character Ivan Denisovich narrates his experiences in the war in the first person. Using the first-person narrative, the reader can better understand Ivan's emotions and thoughts and experience his pain and suffering during the war. This narrative style makes it easier for the reader to empathize with the protagonist emotionally, as well as to understand the plight and challenges he faces.

In Pound's translation, the shift from the third-person construction of setting and atmosphere to the first-person makes the reader feel more in the moment, as if they were there and stepping into the imagery constructed by Li Bai, with different readers experiencing different sorrows under the same imagery. The poem is also like an open-ended ending that does not come to an end. The reader is placed in the author's text through the platform constructed by the translator, and the exchange of consciousness between the three is a communication.

Compared to the first-person narrative, the third-person narrative is more objective and neutral, free from the author's personal subjective feelings and attitudes. This objectivity and neutrality make the third-person narrative more effective in conveying facts and plots.

In Bakhtin's novels, the third-person narrative is often used to describe characters and events other than the protagonist. This narrative style allows the reader to gain a fuller understanding of the background and setting of the story, while also making it easier to understand the relationships and conflicts between the different characters. In the process, the third-person narrative serves to integrate and connect the story elements, making the whole story more coherent and complete.

Xu Yuanchong's translation is more like the end of a television drama, with a woman looking at the autumn moon, which is easier for Chinese readers to imagine, but for most foreign readers, who have no knowledge of Chinese culture, history or architecture, there is no effective communication of awareness or content. A woman lowering a pearl curtain and gazing at the autumn moon is merely two gestures piled on top of each other. Like a television series watching the end, it is just the end, but without the sense of empathy that brings one into the plot. Thus, we can see that the translation's choice of persona makes a very different impact on the reader.

The impact of different narrative styles on the reader is therefore also closely related to the type and purpose of the text. In texts such as diaries, memoirs, and autobiographies, the first-person narrative can present the author's emotions and thoughts in a better way, giving the reader a deeper insight into the author's inner world. In the case of poetry, especially imagistic poetry, which has different opinions and connotations, the translation, as a platform to communicate with the reader and the author, should be more immersive and resonate emotionally with readers of different cultural backgrounds. In this regard, Pound's use of personification and translation strategies are certainly worthy of our reference.

3. Conclusion

In general, both first-person and third-person translation perspectives are commonly used in the translation process. The choice of translation perspective depends on the context, meaning and authorial intent of the original text, as well as the target language and cultural background.

The first-person translation perspective is often used to convey the narrator's or character's emotions, feelings, thoughts, and other subjective experiences, as well as to enhance the emotional resonance between the reader and the text. In translation, the use of first-person translation perspective can bring the translation closer to the emotions and subjective experiences of the original text and strengthen the emotional resonance between the translation and the reader.

In contrast, the third-person translation perspective is more objective and neutral and is used to describe objective realities such as the occurrence of events and the actions of characters.

According to Bakhtin's dialogism theory, dialogue is an important way for people to communicate, and in literary works, dialogue can reflect the relationships and ways of interaction

between characters, as well as the author's depiction of the character's thoughts and emotions. In translation, Bakhtin's dialogue theory can help translators to understand better and grasp the dialogue between characters in the original text, to ensure that the translation is closer to the emotions and meanings of the original text.

Therefore, in the translation process, translators need to be flexible in choosing which translation perspective to use, as well as Bakhtin's dialogue theory, according to the context and meaning of the original text, to achieve the best translation results. In addition, the reading habits and tastes of the target language and culture need to be considered, so that the translation matches the reading habits and tastes of the readers as far as possible.

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