

A Feminist Approach to the Reconstruction of ‘Fidelity Paradigm’

- A Case Study of ‘Jane Eyre’

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Abstract: From a feminist perspective and using feminist translation theory as its theoretical framework, this article, subverts the traditional notion of ‘fidelity’ in translation through Sherry Simon’s feminist translation theory. It employs strategies of supplementation and hijacking to conduct a comparative study of male and female translations of Charlotte Bronte’s ‘*Jane Eyre*’. This research demonstrates differences in translation strategies and ideological perspectives between male and female translators, indicating that female translators, when using the supplementation strategy, pay more attention to shaping female characters and qualities. They also incorporate their own understanding and sympathy for female characters into the translation process to highlight the translator’s subjective position. However, male translators may deliberately or inadvertently stigmatize, belittle, or mock female images in their translations. Therefore, female translators employ the hijacking strategy to intervene in the text with feminism and embed female thinking. The goal is to eliminate discrimination against women and strive for gender equality. And it highlights the identity and subjectivity of female translators and advocating for gender equality. At the same time, the strategies and significance of feminist translation theory provide rich intellectual resources for the criticism and development of translation theory.

Keywords: feminist translation theory, feminism, Jane Eyre

1. Introduction

Since its inception, Charlotte Bronte’s famous work ‘*Jane Eyre*’ has been regarded as a feminist representation of resistance against the patriarchal discourse system by feminists. The translated versions of this work also reflect the demand for resisting male dominance. In both Eastern and Western cultures, the image of women has always been distorted. Through comparing different translations of ‘*Jane Eyre*’, it can see that the female image has been distorted.

In the practice of traditional translation theories in both China and the West, the image of women has been associated with inferiority and meekness. In history, translators, like women, have been seen as weaker figures in their respective hierarchical orders: translators were considered serving as maids to the authors, while women were seen as inferior to men [1]. Traditional translation theories regard the source text as masculine, assuming that the source text is dominant and holds absolute

leadership, while the translated text is considered feminine, subordinate to the source text. However, feminist translation theory, arising from the feminist movement, has challenged this traditional notion. It emphasizes the subjectivity and creativity of the translated text and translator, and connects translation with women's rights and status [2]. Therefore, the development of feminist thought and movements has influenced the development of feminist translation theory.

Although there are various translations of '*Jane Eyre*' by both male and female translators, few studies have compared the translations from the perspective of fidelity. Gender has a certain influence on translation, and female translators possess a stronger and more implicit awareness of their gender than male translators [3]. From a feminist perspective, emphasizing the subjectivity of translation implies an emphasis on the creativity of the translated text and establishes a subversive translation ethics, embodying the characteristics of feminist translation, such as "highlighting the subjectivity of women as much as possible in the process of meaning production" [4]. Therefore, this article chooses to address this issue through the translation perspective of feminist fidelity, analyzing '*Jane Eyre*' from a feminist viewpoint to better understand the important position and role of female translators in the translation process.

Traditional fidelity in translation holds the view that the source text is the only faithful object for translation. However, Shirley Simon believes that in feminist translation, the pursuit is not linguistic equivalence but performative equivalence, which refers to the equivalent pragmatic meaning. Therefore, feminist translators engage in full cooperation with the feminist author of the source text to be faithful to the feminist "writing agenda" [5]. Feminist translation theory aims to reveal the distorted construction process of using fidelity and infidelity to perceive women and translation, as well as the discriminatory portrayal of women [6]. Thus, this article highlights the reconstruction of the "fidelity paradigm" in the male and female translations of '*Jane Eyre*' reflecting Sherry Simon's feminist translation theory, emphasizing the subject position and role of female translators in their creative process.

Against the background where both the translators and women are considered disadvantaged, this article explores Sherry Simon's feminist translation theory born out of the feminist movement that challenges the traditional fidelity view. Through the comparison and analysis of male and female translations of '*Jane Eyre*' using supplementary (Female translators, through their understanding of culture, aim to compensate readers for any linguistic gaps caused by differences in geography, culture, ethnicity, and other factors.) and hijacking (Translators, through their own judgment, praise the female population, while also modifying or even deleting any language in the work that discriminates against or shows bias towards women.) strategies, the aim is to illustrate the exploration of the translation process from a feminist perspective, emphasize the important role of women in the creative process, and highlight the identity and status of female translators.

2. Feminist Translation Theory

According to the feminist movements that emerged during the late 19th century through the 1960s, the first wave of feminism sought to fight for women's rights and political consciousness, aiming for gender equality. The second wave occurred from the 1960s through the 1980s, focusing on respecting individual differences among women and rejecting any fixed definition of femininity. Critics such as Cixous argued that "writing the body" was an important means of emancipating women and challenging the oppressive patriarchal rule. Spivak, on the other hand, analyzed the power dynamics and discursive exploitation experienced by Eastern women using feminist theory. The third wave of feminism emphasized integration, coexistence, and diversity. It highlighted the notion that translated works and their originals should have equal complementarity, while aiming to rewrite the original texts from a feminist perspective, reflecting the status of women and eliminating discrimination against women in translation practice.

Building upon the third wave of feminism, feminist translation theory has witnessed significant developments. It emphasizes making women “visible in language, making the world see and hear women.” From a feminist perspective, translators consciously apply their female consciousness, experiences, and aesthetic preferences to the works they translate. They exercise agency by injecting feminist thought into the translation process, intervening in the text.

Since the 1980s, Western scholars have conducted extensive research on the relationship between feminism and translation. Notable figures include Barbara Goddard, Shirley Simon, Laurie Chamberlain, Louis von Flotow, and Gayatri Spivak, among others. Barbara Goddard, for example, emphasizes the visibility of women and translators in the translation process. Laurie Chamberlain not only highlights the binary opposition within gender metaphors but also advocates for “collaboration” between authors and translators. Shirley Simon argues that in feminist translation, equivalence is not about linguistic equivalence but rather about performative equivalence, i.e., equivalence in pragmatic meaning. Therefore, feminist translators engage in full collaboration with feminist authors of the original texts, remaining faithful to the feminist “writing agenda” [5]. Faithfulness here does not refer to the author or reader, rather it pertains to staying true to the feminist writing agenda, highlighting the subjectivity of female translators. This challenges the traditional idea of fidelity in female translation.

Western feminism has evolved towards theorization and systematization, but the feminist movement itself has tended to prioritize practice over theory since its inception. To this day, the guiding principles and practices of feminism largely revolve around the idea that women’s disadvantaged position in the labor market is the root cause of gender inequality. However, feminist translation activities not only lay the foundation for literary creation but also provide a platform for intervention in literary creation, challenging male cultural hegemony. They also offer foundational theoretical and practical resources for contemporary feminist translation [7]. Despite the existence of multiple schools of feminist thought, with differing and even opposing views, they all share a common goal: “to eliminate gender inequality.” Therefore, contemporary feminists continue to strive for a true form of feminism, and feminist translation theory offers rich intellectual resources for the criticism and development of translation theory. It hopes to uncover unique aesthetic values through feminist translation, ultimately achieving the goal of gender equality. In order to achieve this goal, this paper employs the methods of supplementation and hijacking, and from the perspective of Shirley Simon’s feminist translation and her reconstruction of the concept of faithfulness, it compares the male and female translations of ‘*Jane Eyre*’ and delves into the feminist translation theories and their unique aesthetic values reflected in them.

3. Sherry Simon’s Feminist Translation Strategies in the Reconstruction of Fidelity in ‘*Jane Eyre*’

Sherry Simon argues that feminist translators challenge traditional translation methods by using various strategies to translate texts to give voice to women, while highlighting female language and the status of women as subject, thus uncovering unique aesthetic values. Therefore, this paper will employ the translation strategies of supplementation and hijacking to compare and analyze the translation strategies between male and female versions of ‘*Jane Eyre*’. This will demonstrate how Sherry Simon’s feminist translation perspective reconstructs the concept of fidelity and intervenes in the translated texts by infusing feminism throughout. In the following examples, the original text will quote Charlotte Brontë’s ‘*Jane Eyre*’ [8], Yuanshen Huang’s translation will quote his Chinese version ‘*Jane Eyre*’ [9], Qingying Zhu’s translation will quote her Chinese version ‘*Jane Eyre*’ [10] and Junxie Wu’s translation will quote his Chinese version ‘*Jane Eyre*’ [11].

3.1. Supplementation Strategy

Supplementation refers to feminist translators actively engaging in the target text, compensating for the omissions in the linguistic meaning caused by cultural, regional, ethnic, and other differences, in order to highlight female roles and pursue gender equality.

(1) Original text :Diana had a voice toned, to my ear, like the cooing of a dove.

Yuanshen Huang's translation: Diana's voice sounded to me like the cooing of a dove.

Qingying Zhu's translation: Diana's voice, to my ear, was as melodious as the cooing of a dove.

Through the comparison of male and female translations, it can be observed that Zhu's translation uses the positive term "yue'er(melodious)" to describe Diana's voice, vividly expressing Jane Eyre's fondness for Diana. Compared with Huang's translation, Zhu's use of the supplementation strategy fully embodies Sherry Simon's faithful feminist stance, highlights female language, and elevates the status of women.

(2) Original text : Had he been a handsome, heroic-looking young gentleman, I should not have dared to stand thus questioning him against his will, and offering my services unasked.

Junxie Wu's translation: If he were a handsome and heroic-looking young gentleman, I wouldn't dare to stand here and question him against his refusal, and offer help without being asked.

Qingying Zhu's translation: If he were a handsome and heroic-looking young gentleman, I wouldn't dare to stand here questioning him against his will, and insist on helping without being requested.

In this sentence, the original meaning of "offering my services unasked" is voluntarily providing assistance without needing to be asked. However, Wu's translation "offer help without being asked" lowers the status of women by using the phrase "without being asked." On the other hand, Zhu's translation "insist on helping without being requested" indicates voluntary action and does not place women in a subordinate position. Additionally, it reflects Jane Eyre's spirit of resistance and feminist stance, further demonstrating Sherry Simon's faithful translation perspective, employing the supplementation strategy to eliminate gender discrimination, and promoting gender equality.

3.2. Appropriation Strategy

Appropriation, also known as "reappropriation", refers to the translator's judgment and modification or deletion of language that discriminates against or shows prejudice against women in the target text, while still respecting the author's intentions. This is done to elevate the status of women and pursue gender equality.

(3) Original text :She shall, however, be watched, Mrs. Reed. I will speak to Miss Temple and the teachers.

Junxie Wu's translation: However, she will be well-watched, Mrs. Reed. I will instruct Miss Temple and the other teachers.

Qingying Zhu's translation: However, Mrs. Reed, we will take good care of her. I will talk to Miss Temple and the other teachers.

Firstly, this sentence is spoken by a male character. In Wu's version, the passive expression "she will be well-watched" aligns with the author's original intention. However, Zhu's translation changes the passive voice to "we will take good care of her" subtly converting Jane's subordinate position and reflecting Zhu's feminist consciousness. Secondly, Wu translates "speak" as "jiao she(instruct)", which implies that women should follow men's orders and are lower in status. In contrast, Zhu uses "jiao tan(talk to)" employing the appropriation strategy to create a softer tone and place men and women on an equal level, thereby elevating the status of women through feminist intervention.

(4) Original text : “Yes”, responded Abbot, “If she were a nice, pretty child, one might compassionate her forlornness, but one really cannot care for such a little toad as that.”

Huang Yuanshen’s translation: “Yes,” Abbot responded, “If she were a nice, pretty child, one might compassionate her forlornness, but one really cannot care for such a little toad.”

Qingying Zhu’s translation: “Yes,” Abbot responded, “If she were a cute and beautiful child, one might feel sorry for her loneliness, but she happens to be such a little troublemaker, not very likeable.”

In Huang’s translation, the term “little toad” is used to describe Jane, which carries a sense of irony and denigration towards women. In Zhu’s translation, the term “xiao ma fan zhi zao zhe(little troublemaker)” is used to describe Jane, showcasing her playful and clever nature. It also reflects the caring nature of the nanny Abbot towards Jane and creates a warm atmosphere. With the use of the appropriation strategy, feminist intervention is employed to modify language that discriminates against or belittles women, demonstrating Simon’s emphasis on highlighting the position of female translators and being faithful to the feminist writing agenda.

(5) Original text :” You,” I said, “a favorite of Mr. Rochester? Are you naturally gifted with the ability to please him? Is there any aspect of you that he values?”

Junxie Wu’s translation:”You,” I said, “are Rochester’s favorite, aren’t you? Were you naturally gifted to win his affection? What qualities of yours earn his regard?”

Qingying Zhu’s translation: “You,” I said, “are the person Mr. Rochester likes, aren’t you? Do you have the innate ability to please him? What aspects of yours are important to him?”

In this example from ‘*Jane Eyre*’, Jane expresses her disbelief that Mr. Rochester could possibly love her after learning that he intends to marry a noble lady. The phrase “please him” is translated by the male translator as “ying de ta de qing lai(win her favor)” and by the female translator as “qing ta(please him)”. Clearly, the latter translation more easily reflects the independent and autonomous status of women, whereas “ying de hao gan(winning favor)” usually implies someone of lower status trying to please a higher-ranking figure, giving it a derogatory connotation. By employing the strategy of hijacking, highlighting the position of women, and modifying discriminatory language towards women, this translation reflects Simon’s faithful feminist perspective and pursuit of gender equality.

4. Conclusions

This paper explores feminist translation theory through the reconstruction of Shelley Simon’s fidelity view, employing strategies of supplementation and hijacking to compare male and female translations of ‘*Jane Eyre*’. It has highlighted the identity and position of female translators, eliminate discrimination against women, and challenge male-centered viewpoints, thus enriching the diversity in translation research. Indeed, this paper has analyzed the differences between male and female translations of ‘*Jane Eyre*’ from a feminist perspective. Therefore, future research can continue to analyze the feminist elements reflected in more works from a feminist viewpoint, thereby further enriching and elevating feminist theory. From these translation perspectives and strategies, it can be seen that female translators adopt the strategies of supplementation and hijacking for the purpose of shaping female images and qualities. They embed female thinking and language in text translation, intervening in the text with feminism, incorporate their own understanding and sympathy for female characters into the translation process to highlight the translator’s subjective position. And reflecting the demands for improving female status, eliminating gender discrimination, and advocating for gender equality.

In the future, as globalization progresses, feminist translation theory will play a greater role in cross-cultural communication, making significant contributions to promoting cultural diversity and gender equality.

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