

Translation Exploration of the Rhetorical Devices from the Perspective of Cultural Translation Theory

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Abstract: Rhetorical devices are a common literary technique in literary works, and due to the differences in language and culture, the translation of rhetorical devices often faces various challenges. Firstly, the differences in expression and grammar structures between different languages make the translation of rhetorical devices difficult. This requires translators to flexibly use the expression of the target language in order to maintain the effect of the original rhetorical devices. Secondly, rhetorical devices in different cultural backgrounds often carry different cultural connotations and emotional nuances, so it is necessary to consider the cultural background and habits of the target language readers in order to better convey the meaning of the original rhetorical devices. In response to the problems of translating rhetorical devices, this paper is based on the guidance of cultural translation theory, and explores the translation strategies and methods of rhetorical devices from the perspectives of language differences and cultural differences. The translator uses different translation methods such as literal translation, free translation, combination, and annotation to handle the translation of rhetorical devices such as simile, personification, parallelism, and exaggeration commonly used in Chinese, in order to better convey the meaning of the original rhetorical devices. Through the discussion of translation strategies and methods for rhetorical devices, the aim is to improve the quality and efficiency of translation and to faithfully convey the beauty and emotion of the original rhetorical devices in the target text.

1. Introduction

With the acceleration of globalization, cultural exchange and dissemination have become an important part of China's foreign exchanges. In this process, translation plays a crucial role in cross-cultural communication. In cross-cultural exchange, rhetorical devices are an important means of language expression that can enhance the persuasive and expressiveness of the texts. However, the translation of rhetorical devices has always been one of the difficulties in the field of translation. Therefore, this article will start from the perspective of cultural translation theory, using the method of case analysis, to explore the translation issues of rhetorical devices, in order to provide new ideas and methods for translation research.

2. Definition and Classification of Rhetorical Devices

Rhetorical devices are important concepts in rhetoric, referring to linguistic phenomena achieved by using specific language techniques and expressive methods to achieve rhetorical purposes. Rhetorical devices have diverse forms and characteristics and can be roughly classified into three types: phonetic rhetorical devices, semantic rhetorical devices, and syntactic rhetorical devices.^[5] These three categories include approximately twenty or more rhetorical devices, with commonly used ones numbering more than ten.

1) Phonetic rhetorical devices are rhetorical techniques created by utilizing the phonetic characteristics of words. They mainly include onomatopoeia, alliteration, and rhyme and so on.

2) Semantic rhetorical devices primarily rely on semantic associations and linguistic variations to create rhetorical effects. They include simile, metaphor, metonymy, synecdoche, personification, hyperbole, irony, euphemism, pun, oxymoron, antithesis, and contrast, etc.

3) Syntactic rhetorical devices are rhetorical techniques created through balanced sentence structures or emphasizing key points. These devices mainly include repetition, rhetorical question, parallel structure, and inversion, etc.

3. Overview of Cultural Translation Theory

In the early 1990s, with the rise and development of cultural studies in the humanities and social sciences, translation studies began to witness a “cultural turn”. Susan Bassnett, a renowned British translator and literary scholar, is one of the most representative figures of the cultural translation school. In her book “Translation, History and Culture,” she formally proposed the concept of the “cultural turn” (Bassnett, S.&Lefevere, 1990) in translation studies and systematically expounded on cultural translation theory. The introduction of this theory has had a significant impact on contemporary translation research. Bassnett believes that translators must engage in translation activities within specific cultural contexts and should not isolate themselves from the influence of their own cultural background.^{[2][6]}

4. The Influence of Language Differences and Cultural Differences on the Translation of Rhetorical Devices

Language differences and cultural differences have a significant impact on the translation of rhetorical devices. Language differences include differences in vocabulary, grammar, and language structure, while cultural differences involve differences in values, beliefs, and social customs. These differences can result in different meanings and effects of rhetorical devices in different languages and cultures.

4.1 Differences in Language Structure

Differences in language structure are common issues in the translation of rhetorical devices. The grammar rules and syntactic structures of different languages can lead to changes in the expression of rhetorical devices during the translation process. Translators need to pay attention to the linguistic characteristics of the target language and apply translation strategies flexibly to maintain the effect and meaning of the rhetorical devices.

In English, metaphors are usually expressed by using adjectives or nouns to modify a noun, conveying a metaphorical meaning. For example, “His heart is as cold as ice.” uses “as cold as ice” to describe a person’s heartlessness. However, in Chinese, metaphors are often expressed by using verbs or verb phrases.

4.2 Differences in Semantics

Semantics is another important aspect of the translation of rhetorical devices. Different languages may have different understandings and expressions of the same rhetorical devices, which can affect translation. Some rhetorical devices may not have direct lexical equivalents in the target language, and translators need to convey the rhetorical effects in the source language through paraphrasing or adjusting the expression.^[1] In addition, the lexical semantic scope and cultural connotations may also differ in different languages, and translators need to consider the cultural background of the target readers and choose appropriate expressions.^[3]

In Chinese, the idiom “eat like a wolf and a tiger” is used to describe someone eating quickly, vividly expressing the urgency and fierceness of eating. There is no direct equivalent idiom in English, so translators need to convey this rhetorical effect through paraphrasing or adjusting the expression. It can be translated as “eat like a horse” or “devour food,” but such expressions may not fully convey the rhetorical effect of the original text. In Chinese, the phrase “green hat” is used to describe a wife’s infidelity, symbolizing that the husband is being cuckolded. There is no direct equivalent term in English, so translators need to paraphrase it as “cheat on one’s husband” or “be unfaithful to one’s spouse.” However, such expressions have some semantic differences from the original text and may result in the target readers not fully understanding the rhetorical effect of the original text.

4.3 Cultural Background Differences

Rhetorical devices are often closely related to specific cultural backgrounds and traditions. Readers from different cultural backgrounds may have different understandings and levels of acceptance of rhetorical devices. Translators need to consider the cultural background of the target readers and adjust the expression of rhetorical devices appropriately to ensure that the rhetorical effects are conveyed and understood in different cultures.^[4]

In Chinese, the phrase “Two dogs bite each other” metaphorically describes two bad people fighting each other, indicating that both sides are not good. There is no direct equivalent idiom in English, so translators need to consider the cultural background of the target readers. It can be translated as “a dog-eat-dog fight,” which can convey the rhetorical effect of the original text and help the target readers understand the cultural connotations involved.

In Chinese poetry, poets often use “moon” as a symbol of “longing.” In English, “moon” does not have a specific symbolic meaning. Translators need to consider the cultural background of the target readers and choose appropriate vocabularies.

4.4 Differences in Cultural Values

Cultural values refer to the beliefs and concepts held by a society, group, or individual regarding worldviews, life views, and values. Cultural values are diverse, and different cultural backgrounds can result in different values. In the translation of rhetorical devices, differences in cultural values can affect translation strategies and effects. Differences in cultural values are reflected in different beliefs and religions. For example, in China, the main religions are Buddhism, Taoism, and Islam, while in Western countries, Christianity is the dominant religion. In the translation of rhetorical devices, it is essential to consider beliefs and religious factors to avoid misleading or offending translations.

Different cultural backgrounds have different social customs and habits, such as wedding customs, funerals, and holiday celebrations. In the translation of rhetorical devices, it is important to respect and reflect these differences and avoid cultural conflicts. Different cultures have different

understandings and levels of practice regarding moral concepts. Therefore, in the translation of rhetorical devices, it is necessary to fully consider the differences in moral concepts to ensure that the translation conforms to the moral norms of the target culture. Different cultures also have different aesthetic concepts, such as preferences and evaluations of colors, shapes, music, and art. In the translation of rhetorical devices, attention should be paid to the transformation of aesthetic concepts to make the translation attractive and artistically valuable in the target culture.

In conclusion, cultural values play a vital role in the translation of rhetorical devices. When translating, it is crucial to choose appropriate strategies, such as foreignization or domestication, based on the cultural differences. Additionally, conveying the cultural connotations fully is essential to ensure readability and relatability in the target culture. Translators must possess strong cross-cultural communication skills to accurately grasp the nuances of the source text and effectively convey them in the translation, in order to achieve the objectives of intercultural communication, translators must accomplish equivalence at both linguistic and cultural levels throughout the translation process.^[7]

5. Analysis of Translation Strategies for Chinese Rhetorical Devices

In both English and Chinese languages, various rhetorical phenomena are very common. More excellent literary works can be widely known by the artistic deconstruction and construction of rhetorical effects. As a learner of translation and promoters of cultural exchange, translator has selected the local chronicle text of Jilin Province —The Good Earth and the River of Heaven - Historical and Cultural Narratives of the Songhua River as the source text for translation.(The following is abbreviated as The Good Earth and the River of Heaven.)This work is based on the historical and cultural significance of the Songhua River in the Jilin province of China. It systematically narrates the history and culture of the Songhua River from various aspects, including its origins, historical significance, artistic expressions, folklore, and emotional connections. The translator has selected representative rhetorical devices used in the work to explore the translation. Cultural translation theory advocates that translators respect and understand the culture of the source language during the translation process, appropriately convey the cultural information contained in the source text, and highlight the cultural characteristics of the source language. This allows for true communication and exchange between the source culture and the target culture. Guided by cultural translation theory, translator further explores the translation strategies and techniques for several commonly used rhetorical devices from the perspective of language and cultural differences.

5.1 Translation Strategies for Simile

Simile refers to “a word or phrase that compares something to something else, using the words like or as. Simile is composed of three elements which are the tenor, the vehicle and the connective word. The tenor is the thing described; the vehicle is the thing compared to and the connective word is the word connecting the tenor and the vehicle, such as “like”, “as”, “as if” “as though” and so on.^[8]Based on Bassnett’s theory of cultural translation, when translating, the translator adopts the strategy of foreignization. Guided by this strategy, the translator uses literal translation to maintain the style and characteristics of the original text.

Example 1

Source Text: This sentence can be found on the seventh line of page 50 in the book *The Good Earth and the River of Heaven* (published by Jilin People’s Press in 2020, Bao shenghua)

Target Text: The rain outside is pouring heavily, the sound of rushing rain is getting more and more urgent, as if millions of leaves are running.

Analysis: Literal translation is a method of translation where the source sentences are translated directly into the target language without any changes to their structure or expression. When translating Example 1, the translator prioritized the use of literal translation, aiming to preserve the rhetorical charm of the original text through this translation method. The tenor of the original sentence is “the sound of rain,” and the vehicle is “running leaves.” The author compares the sound produced by heavy rain to millions of running leaves. Both the sound of rain and leaves are common elements in both Chinese and English languages and cultures. By using literal translation, it does not create any reading obstacles for target language readers and avoids cultural misunderstandings. Therefore, the translator translated it as “the sound of rushing rain is getting more and more urgent, as if millions of leaves are running.” Through this translation method, the intended meaning of the source text is accurately conveyed, while preserving the source text’s imagery and emotions as much as possible.

Example 2

Source Text: This sentence can be found on the fifth line of page 86 in the book *The Good Earth and the River of Heaven*

Target Text: The surging waves, like pieces of silk, continuously fold and unfold.

Analysis: This simile compares “the surging waves” to “rolls of silk,” using the phrase “continuously fold and unfold” to describe the rolling and fluctuation of the spray. Through vivid and imaginative description, this simile allows readers to feel the softness, elegance, and dynamic beauty of the spray. At the same time, the use of the word “folding” implies the movement and undulation of the spray, creating a visual impact and sensation. This simile uses vivid description to express the beauty and dynamism of the spray, enabling readers to have a deeper appreciation of the wonders and marvels of nature. When translating the source text, the translator used a literal translation method and did not change the rhetoric and imagery of the source text. This approach preserves the style and expression, allowing readers to experience the source text’s artistic conception.

5.2 Translation of Personification

Personification is the attribution of human characteristics and behavior to non-human things, enhancing vividness and emotional color in expression. When translating personification rhetoric, the translator adopts the method of free translation to accurately convey the cultural connotation.

Example 3

Source Text: This sentence can be found on the twenty-first line of page 91 in the book *The Good Earth and the River of Heaven*—Qing ·Wu Zhaoqian—Depart from Ni Shi Ha in the Morning

Target Text: The sound of the flute encircles the camp, urging the people to prepare, while the fading stars blend into the misty darkness, heralding the approaching dawn.

Analysis: *Depart from Ni Shi Ha in the Morning* is a seven-character ancient poem written by Zhaoqian Wu, a poet of the early Qing Dynasty. It was composed by the poet during his exile, passing through Ni Shi Ha. (Note: In the Qing Dynasty, Longtan Mountain in Jilin was called Ni Shi Ha Mountain). The meaning of these two lines of poetry is: the sound of the flute echoes around the camp, as if urging the travelers to set off quickly. In the night mist, the stars gradually fade away, indicating that daybreak is approaching. In terms of rhetorical techniques, the personification technique is used to describe the sound of the flute. “Urging” attributes human behavior to the flute, giving the flute the meaning of urging and prompting, vividly depicting a tense and urgent atmosphere. It reflects the poet’s helplessness and sorrow during his exile. In order to accurately convey the cultural connotation of the poem, the translator uses the method of free translation. The translator translated the imagery of “stars” and the “ethereal white mist” depicted in the source text

as “while the fading stars blend into the misty darkness, heralding the approaching dawn”. This translation allows the target language readers to better experience the poet’s hardships during his exile and his melancholic state of mind at that time.

5.3 Translation of Parallelism

Parallelism is the use of a series of similar or related words or phrases in parallel to enhance the rhythm and emphasis of expression. For the translation of the following parallel sentences, the translator adopts the method of Combination.^[5] Combination refers to expressing two or more simple sentences or a complex sentence in the source text with a single sentence in the target text. By using conjunctions, prepositions, participles, infinitives, etc. to connect Chinese phrases into longer sentences, the logical structure of the English sentence is clear and more in line with the characteristics of English writing.

Example 4

Source Text: This sentence can be found on the last line of page 189 in the book *The Good Earth and the River of Heaven*

Target Text: She remains calm and composed. Whether it comes or goes, exists or not.

Analysis: The translator uses the Combination method to translate the text while maintaining the meaning and expression of the source text and taking into account the language habits and cultural background of the target language. The source sentence is separated by five commas, consisting of six short phrases, with phrases ③④⑤⑥ forming a parallel structure. The use of parallel structure enhances the strength and rhythm of the expression, allowing readers to deeply feel the character’s calm and detached attitude. The translator merged phrases ② to ⑥ into a single long English sentence, translated as “Whether it comes or goes, exists or not.” In terms of the overall translation effect, it accurately conveys the meaning of the original text and is consistent with the language habits and cultural background of the target language, consistent with the content advocated by cultural translation theory.

5.4 Translation of Exaggeration

Exaggeration is a rhetorical technique that amplifies or diminishes the image, qualities, impact, or extent of things in order to create a specific effect in expression. By utilizing rich imagination, exaggeration can heighten the expressive impact by intentionally magnifying or diminishing the inherent qualities of objects within the boundaries of objective reality.

Example 5

Source Text: This sentence can be found on the twentieth line of page 39 in the book *The Good Earth and the River of Heaven*

Target Text: This smile has blossomed for thousands of years. (Note: smile here refers to the joyous mood of fishermen at fishing.)

Analysis: The source text employs the rhetorical device of exaggeration to express the fishermen’s joy when fishing. The author uses the phrase “thousands of years” to describe the time when the “smile” blossoms, clearly exaggerating the actual length of time. This exaggerated expression conveys that the smile has existed for a long time, allowing readers to feel the accumulation of history and the traces of time. It is also a symbol and inheritance of traditional culture, enabling readers to deeply understand the emotions and significance represented by this smile. Therefore, the translator uses the method of annotation to translate the meaning of “smile” in this sentence, by adding a note: smile here refers to the joyous mood of fishermen who are fishing. This further explains the cultural connotation behind the smile, enhancing the vividness and

imagery of the language, making it easier for target language readers to understand and remember, and achieve the purpose of cross-cultural communication.

6. Conclusion

This article delves into the translation issues of rhetorical devices from the perspective of cultural translation theory. By analyzing the impact of language and cultural differences on the translation of rhetorical devices, as well as the strategies commonly used in Chinese rhetorical devices, the article argues that translators need to consider the influence of language and cultural differences on translation and adopt appropriate translation strategies to effectively convey rhetorical devices. Additionally, the article emphasizes the importance and necessity of translating rhetorical devices, as it plays a crucial role in promoting cross-cultural communication and understanding.

The translator conducted research and analysis on the translation of commonly used rhetorical devices in Chinese. For metaphors, personification, parallelism, exaggeration, and other rhetorical devices, different translation methods such as literal translation, free translation, combination translation, and annotation translation were employed. The translation methods and strategies for rhetorical devices are not fixed, and their adoption should be based on cultural transmission and communication. Therefore, when dealing with the translation of rhetorical devices, translators need to fully consider the cultural background and language habits of the target language while striving to preserve the rhetorical effects of the source text.

To translate an excellent work, it is necessary to deeply understand the cultural background and rhetorical techniques of the source text, make appropriate adjustments based on the characteristics and habits of the target language, and pay attention to the overall effect and contextual representation. Translators need to focus on the overall style and context of the source text during the translation process, so that the translation presents a similar style and artistic conception as the original text. At the same time, it is important to consider the acceptability and comprehensibility of the target readers, making the translation easier to understand and accept by the target audience.

In conclusion, the exploration of translating rhetorical devices from the perspective of cultural translation theory is of great significance. Due to the differences between cultures, certain specific rhetorical devices may be difficult to accurately convey their meaning in the translation process. This requires translators to have profound cultural literacy and language skills. In-depth exploration of the translation of rhetorical devices in different cultural backgrounds will help promote communication and dialogue between different languages and cultures, allowing more outstanding literary works to be appreciated and passed on by a wide range of readers.

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