

A Comparative Study of Chinese Versions of the Little Prince from the Perspective of Paratext Theory

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Abstract: Gérard Genette, a famous French narrative theorist, put forward the concept of "paratext" in the 1970s, which attracted the attention of academics, and this theory also provides new perspectives and research tools for translation research. 2018, Catherine Batchelor, associate professor at the University of Nottingham in the United Kingdom, constructed a paratext theory from the concept of paratext-paratext theory of translation research. From the perspective of paratext theory, this paper selects two Chinese translations of *The Little Prince* by French writer Antoine de Saint-Exupéry, Li Jihong, and Jenny Lin, for comparison and explores how paratextual factors play a role in influencing the dissemination and acceptance of the translations. It is found that there are significant differences in the strategies and effects of the two translations in terms of the treatment of paratexts, so the role of paratextual factors in the dissemination and acceptance of translations is multifaceted. These factors may affect the readers' understanding and acceptance of the original text, including emotional, cultural, and social factors, which significantly impact the dissemination and acceptance of the translations.

1. Introduction

1.1. About the theory of paratext

The term "paratext" was first coined by the French narratologist Gérard Genette to refer to the (usually textual) material around the body of a literary work and regulates the relationship with the reader. Genette wrote a series of essays on paratexts and published a French edition of his treatise *Seuils* in 1987, with an English translation, *Paratexts: Thresholds of Interpretation*, appearing in print in 1997. Since then, the theory of paratext has attracted the attention of the academic circle. Some researchers have deepened and expanded the theory. At the same time, some have applied the paratext theory to literary research and translation research, which has provided new perspectives and tools for translation research. Paratext translation theory provides a theoretical framework for exploring and studying the relationship between translation and paratext. In the translation process, paratext text becomes an important consideration, impacting the translated text's dissemination and acceptance. Kathryn Batchelor starts from the origin, connotation, function and application of the concept of paratext in different disciplines, combines the examples of paratext translation research in different contexts in the East and West, and then constructs the paratext theory of translation research. Furthermore, in September 2018, he published *Translation and Paratexts*, a theoretical monograph

exploring the relationship between paratext and translation studies.

According to Genette(1991), paratext is to make the text become a book and hand it over to the reader as a book. Thirteen types of paratexts are mainly mentioned and studied in the book, including publisher's internal text, author's name, title, colophon, dedication and inscription, colophon, preface, communicative context, original preface, other preface, internal title, hint, public external text, and private internal text^[3]. According to Genette's point of view(1991), paratext is divided into peritext paratext, including materials such as front cover, back cover, title, preface, sub-title, notes, index, author's name, author's or translator's profile, publication information, appendices, acknowledgments, dedication, and illustrations, and so on, and epitext paratext, including materials other than the text, such as articles, journals, letters, publisher's advertisements and posters that are closely related to the translated work^[3]. Cai Zhiqian(2013), in his *Review of the Theory of Paratexts and its Current Status in Translation Studies*, suggests that Genette's systematic study of paratexts has not only shaken the traditional thinking of focusing only on the body of the translated text but also provided a new critical tool for analyzing and researching literary works/translations^[2].

Translation and Paratexts consists of eight chapters, which are divided into three parts according to the theme, and each part is organised around a different theme, namely "Paratexts and Their Development in Various Disciplines", "Case Studies on Paratexts and Translation Studies" and "Translation and Paratexts in Translation Studies". In the book, Batchelor first defines paratexts as "deliberately crafted textual 'entrances' capable of influencing textual reception", and then defines and explains some key terms and concepts in her framework of paratextual studies, including fielding, fielding, metatexts and paratexts, additional text, metatext, and paratext. The author argues that paratext encompasses any element that provides commentary on a text, presents the text to the reader, and influences the reception of the text. Textual elements can be presented in both material and immaterial forms. The presentation can either be attached to the text (internal paratext) or separate from it (external paratext). Through the retrospection, development and interpretation of Genette's concept of paratext, Batchelor(2018) identified the point of entry between translation studies and paratext theory and transferred it to a new discipline, proposing a very dynamic and relevant concept of paratext, and at the same time combining with existing scholars' research, taking advantage of their strengths and complementing their shortcomings, and then to construct the most comprehensive, open and inclusive theory of paratext in translation studies so far^[1].

The earliest article that mentions Genette's paratext theory in domestic translation research is Huang Dexian's "*The Function of Title and Translation*". The article analyses the measures that should be taken when translating headings according to Genette's discussion on the function of headings. Xiu Wenqiao's article "*Fu Lei's View of Translation and Readership from the paratexts of Fu's Translations*" takes the paratexts as a starting point. Through sorting, summarising and analyzing Fu's paratexts, such as the preface and dedication of Fu's translations, he sums up Fu Lei's view of translation and readership, as well as his aim to pay attention to the readers, to guide the readers and to be responsible for the readers. Cui Can and Li Yingying's article "*The Patriotic Motive of Lin Fen's Translation from the paratexts of Lin's Translations*" considers that the large number of paratexts in Lin Fen's translations reflects Lin Fen's patriotic and nationalistic mind and considers that awakening the nation and saving the country's life are the main motive of Lin Fen's translations of foreign works. The famous scholar Zhang Meifang's thesis "*Hypertext Component in Translation: News Translation as an Example*" broadens the focus of paratext from literary works to politics, culture, ideology and so on. The history of the domestic application of the theory of paratext in the study of translation is still relatively short, with a small number of articles focusing on the study of English language and English-Chinese translation, which means that the content and scope of the study still need to be narrower.

1.2. About The Little Prince

The Little Prince, written by French writer Antoine de Saint-Exupéry, first came to the eyes of Chinese readers in 1979 when Xiao Man's translation was published in the March issue of *World Literature*. The story is about a little boy, the Little Prince, who comes from a distant planet and meets many strange people and things after he leaves his home. He travels to six planets, each of which is inhabited by a peculiar inhabitant. These inhabitants all have their quirks and unique personalities, and from them are conveyed deep thoughts about human nature and social issues. During the Little Prince's journey, he eventually lands on Earth and becomes friends with a pilot. Through their dialogue and time spent together, the Little Prince expresses his thoughts on friendship, loneliness, love, responsibility, and growing up. Through his interactions with flowers, foxes, and other creatures, he teaches readers how to cherish the emotional bonds between people and how to discover what is truly important in everyday life. *The Little Prince* is a philosophical children's novel depicting deep-seated human emotion and humanity issues in a straightforward, refreshing narrative. Despite being a children's book, its themes and ideological connotations also resonate widely among adults. The book has been translated into dozens of languages and has consistently sold well. With its unique charm and far-reaching influence, it has become a classic in world literature.

Over the past many years, this legendary work has been retranslated and reprinted repeatedly in China. Its wide dissemination and deep acceptance have stimulated the curiosity of most translation researchers. Taking *The Little Prince* as an example, the paratext in *The Little Prince* mainly includes elements such as quotations, illustrations, cover, foreword and so on. There may be differences in the translation and treatment of paratexts in different Chinese translations. These include illustration processing. There are many beautiful illustrations in the original book, and therefore the translator needs to decide whether to keep the illustrations or add corresponding illustrations in the translated book; title and cover translation, the translator needs to choose a suitable Chinese title for *The Little Prince* in the translated book and design the cover accordingly. In addition, the translator may explain and illustrate the original book's background, author and story in the form of foreword and afterword to help Chinese readers understand and read it better. Each Chinese translation may be handled differently in terms of paratext translation. Translators usually consider factors such as the needs of the target readers, translation accuracy and literary effect when making decisions. In this paper, we have chosen the Chinese translation of Li Jihong's edition, which was first published by Tianjin People's Publishing House in 2013, and Jenny Lin's edition, which was published by Translation Publishing House in 2010, as the objects of our study, to compare what are the differences between the two in terms of their strategies for paratexts, as well as their functions.

1.3. Thesis statement and structure

The paratext of translation often plays two roles because the translation itself can be regarded as the paratext of the original text. The paratext of the translation also becomes the paratext. At the same time, the main text of the translation also has its paratext, so it has good research value. The theory of paratext translation emphasizes the importance of paratext to the dissemination and acceptance of the translated text. It reminds translators not only to pay attention to the translation of the main text but also to consider how to deal with and convey the content and function of the paratext. By studying paratext translation, we can better understand and explain the complexity of translation practice in different linguistic and cultural contexts. Translators must be careful when translating paratexts to consider the visible lines of paratextual elements, such as footnotes, quotations, etc. They also need to consider the form in which they are presented, how to re-establish the relationship between the paratext and the main text, and how to ensure the accuracy and literary effect of the translation. According to Genette, the paratext is like an artificial "threshold" for the text, which serves as a guide

to persuade the reader, share his/her views and educate him/her. paratext factors may also include the translator's understanding of the paratext in the original text, translation strategies and the needs of the target readers. Therefore, analyzing the works of the two translators is conducive to a more prosperous and fuller exploration of the role of paratextual factors in translation. The Little Prince touches readers' hearts deeply with its poetic text and concise storyline. This paper chooses two Chinese translations by two translators, Li Jihong and Jenny Lin, to compare and analyze how the paratexts of the translations play a role in the process of accepting and disseminating the original works from two paratext perspectives, namely, the publisher's and the translator's, in the perspective of the theory of paratext translation.

2. Publisher's paratext

The cover plays an essential role as a paratext in a translated book; it is the first impression that readers are exposed to, and it arouses their interest and stimulates their curiosity about the work. However, the cover is usually the responsibility of the publisher or designer rather than the translator. Nevertheless, the translator can provide information about the work and the target audience in communication with the publisher or designer to ensure consistency and accuracy of the cover design with the translated book as a whole.

First of all, covers usually use various elements, such as images, color schemes and text, to attract readers' eyes. A good cover design attracts readers' attention and creates a strong visual impact, stimulating their interest in the work. Cover design helps to convey the theme and emotion of the work. Through artistic design and layout, the cover can create an atmosphere and emotion in line with the content of the work so that readers can get a basic feeling about the work at first glance. Incorporating appropriate cultural elements in the cover design can make the target readers more easily accept and understand the work. The covers of Li Jihong's version and Jenny Lin's version use blue as the base colour with an image of the Little Prince standing on a planet, which overall reveals the depth of the universe and the beauty of a fairy tale, conveying the theme and emotion. By communicating with flowers, foxes, and other creatures, the Little Prince teaches readers how to cherish the emotional bonds between people and discover the things that matter in everyday life. Li Jihong's version of *The Little Prince* adopts a sketchy approach, using white lines to outline the Little Prince and his planet, with active and dead volcanoes, flowers and plants. Against the dark blue cosmic background, it has a simple beauty without losing its vibrancy, giving readers room for reverie. Jenny Lin's version, on the other hand, is painted in colour, with yellow hair, green clothes, red flowers and a blue planet, visually portraying the image of the Little Prince for the readers, making the image fuller and stimulating the readers' interest in the work. Secondly, when choosing the title for the cover, both Li Jihong and Jenny Lin chose to keep the French text of *The Little Prince*. This information can let the readers understand the basic situation of the work, which is conducive to disseminating the target language, and let the readers understand the target language's culture.

3. Translator's paratext

3.1. Translator

The process of translation is often called "dancing with shackles", which requires the translator to create the natural beauty of the literary work under the custom of the target language based on faithfulness to the original text. In this process, the translator plays an important role, and different translators have different opinions and thoughts of the same work. The role of the translator as a paratextual factor in the translation process is to ensure that the translation accurately conveys the original text's meaning and makes it flow naturally in the target language. It is also needed to combine

the above factors in their judgment and decision-making in order to produce high-quality translations.

Li Jihong is a famous Chinese translator. He has served as Director of the Translation Research Institute of the Foreign Languages Bureau of China, Vice President of the China Translators Association, and has been active in the translation field for many years. He specializes in translations from English, French and German, which cover various fields such as literature, philosophy, social sciences, history, etc. Moreover he is particularly accomplished in cultural and social science translations. In French-related cultural and academic circles, Li Jihong is known as "China's most important French translator". This title highlights his outstanding achievements in translating French literary and philosophical works. Li Jihong also specializes in conveying the ideas of French writers and philosophers in French translations and has presented Chinese readers with excellent Chinese translations of many classic works. The French literary community has recognized his translations and has played an important role in bridging cultural exchanges between China and France. He has published multi-million best-selling translations of *The Kite Runner* and *The Little Prince*. "The loneliness of the author's words" was his first impression of the book, and he felt different every time he read it. Li Jihong found that the literal meaning of *The Little Prince* is easy to understand, but the deeper meaning requires a lot of effort to explore. Li Jihong's translation, published on 1 January 2013, is full of poetry and sadness, using simple and clean language to produce a thought-provoking philosophical and childlike version of the novel.

Jenny Lin is an associate professor at the School of Foreign Languages and Literature of South China Normal University, an expert in French, and a member of the Translators Association of Guangdong Province. She has translated and published more than 30 books from the world's best-known novels, such as *Old Man Gao*, *The Little Prince*, and *Notre Dame de Paris*, as well as 14 translations, and has been honored with the title of "Senior Translator". Her translations are often disputed in the academic world. Some people think that her translations are too complicated and lose the original text's meaning, while others think that her translations are easy to understand.

Translators are also one of the important paratextual factors in readers' choice of texts, and readers often trust translators who are well known; Li Jihong has been controversial for having criticized the translations of his predecessors but is still acknowledged by academics as having produced some of the best translations to date. This experience made Li Jihong well-known and entered the limelight. In a news article covering the opening, *China Daily* stated, "Li Jihong is one of the most authoritative interpreters of *The Little Prince* in China, and in his view, the work is not just a fairy tale for children, but a brilliant work of existentialism that reminds people to follow their hearts in the hustle and bustle of everyday life." This assessment has undoubtedly made Li Jihong's version of *The Little Prince* an even better seller.

In addition to the translator's popularity and translation experience, the translator's subjectivity in the process of translation also affects the presentation of the original text in the target language. In "A Comparative Analysis of Two Chinese Translations of *The Little Prince*", Li Tiantian (2021) said that the essence of the subject is embodied in the characteristics of its passivity, for-me and subjective activity. Based on the understanding of this subjectivity, the translator's subjectivity is what the translator, as the main body of the translation, shows in the process of translation to achieve the purpose of the translation under the premise of respecting the original work. As the most vivid factor in translation activities, the translator's subjectivity is undeniable and subject to various influencing factors. The translator's bilingual ability, translation style, translation purpose, understanding of the original work, the translator's cultural awareness, the receiver of the translation and so on, all these factors will constrain the translator's subjectivity, affect the translator's translation process and translation behavior, leading to different translations of the same work by different translators. Comparing the translations of the two versions, Li Jihong's version of *The Little Prince* is more concise and precise in language, mostly in written language, and Jenny Lin's version of *The Little*

Prince wants to convey the emotion of the original text as much as possible, so compared with the original text, it adds a lot of imagery to serve the emotion, and the language is more delicate and softer.

For example:

Table 1: Source text: I was more isolated than a shipwrecked sailor on a raft in the middle of the ocean.

| | |
|---------------|---|
| Li's version | wo jian zhi bi mang mang da hai zhong zao yu hai nan de shui shou geng jia gu li wu yuan. |
| Lin's version | bi qi na xie cheng zhe mu pai, zai mang mang da hai zhong zheng zha piao fu de yu xian zhe, wo geng xian de wu zhu. |

Just like the table 1, Li Jihong uses idioms, which are more conceptual and obviously more suitable for adults, and more concise. By contrast, Jenny Lin's version translates a short sentence into a picture, which is more suitable for children's readers as if the scene is immediately presented in the reader's mind.

3.2. Preface

The preface or introduction plays a vital paratext in a literary work. Firstly, as the beginning of the text, it can provide background information: about the author, the background of the work and the motivation for its creation, which never helps readers to understand better the historical, cultural and social background of the work and increase their overall understanding of the work. Secondly, a foreword or introduction can explain the work's theme, purpose and core ideas. It can provide readers with the author's intentions and ideas during the creative process and guide them to focus on essential elements and concepts while reading. At the same time, a foreword or introduction can guide the reader on how to read the work. It can introduce the work's structure, characteristics, and style and guide the reader to understand and appreciate it better. Finally, a preface can create an emotional connection and increase the reader's interest in the work by creating an emotional connection with the reader. By sharing the author's stories, reflections, and emotional experiences, a preface or introduction can allow readers to empathize with the work and establish an emotional connection between the reader and the work in advance.

Li Jihong, when writing the introduction, is unusual in starting with the Pantheon in the Latin Quarter of Paris, France, where many of the most prominent figures in French history are enshrined, such as Voltaire, Rousseau, Victor Hugo, and Alexandre Dumas, to name a few. There, the author of *The Little Prince*, Antoine de Saint-Exupéry, is enshrined, which makes the reader admire the author of *The Little Prince*. The translator then introduces the author's life, family, marriage and studies, in addition to his other works, which were written at different moments in his life, and *The Little Prince* is one of the last three works of the author's life, which gives an objective and full image of the author. In the introduction, the translator also explains that many of the images in *The Little Prince* require more knowledge of the author's life experiences in order to be understood. For example, the asteroid B612, where the Little Prince resides, has three volcanoes, which suggests that the small Central American country of Consuelo, the hometown of his wife, is known as the "Land of Volcanoes", and that the Little Prince's life experiences are not the same as those of the author's other works. El Salvador a small country in Central America known as the "Land of Volcanoes". Many of Antoine's works are inextricably linked, and some very subtle sentiments can only be realized by familiarising oneself with the author's other works. Li Jihong seems to have included the annotations of *The Little Prince* in the introduction, through which the reader can learn more about the author and the book. At the end of the introduction, the translator analyses the narrative structure of *The Little Prince*, as well

as the existentialist point of view of the book, and analyses the attitudes and emotions that the author wants to convey to the readers and to the society, from which it can also be seen that Jihong Li's version of *The Little Prince* focuses more on being an adult's book and that he touches upon the society, the economy, the philosophy, and the life in the book, to provoke people to think more.

The introduction of Jenny Lin's edition is even shorter compared to Li Jihong's edition. The article begins with the author's life, the achievements of *The Little Prince*, as well as talking about the background of *The Little Prince*'s formation from three aspects: the author's life as an aviator, the background of the time, and the author's own life, which gives the readers a richer knowledge and understanding of *The Little Prince*. In the introduction, the translator tells the reader that *The Little Prince* is a fairy tale, but not a fairy tale in the ordinary sense. It is full of reflections on the state of human life. By quoting a few lines from the book, the translator powerfully highlights the text's theme, facilitates the reader's interpretation of the text, clarifies the scope of the work's audience and its function, and guides the reader in choosing a translation. Jenny Lin's version of the introduction is merely guiding the reader in the reading, stimulating the reader's interest, and she uses delicate intonation to guide the reader, so her audience is more focused on children. Fewer notes appear in the text, with an explanation of Arizona only on the last page.

4. Conclusion

Publishers and translators are two important translation paratext factors. Publishers and translators may have different interpretations and emotions for the same text. First, the publisher's paratext expresses different visual effects from the cover; Li Jihong's version is more profound and provokes readers to think, while Jenny Lin's version is more in line with children's colorful effects and attracts readers' interest in reading. And then, the translator's paratext factor includes many aspects, whose introduction and notes often show the translator's subjectivity. Through comparison, it is found that the language of Li Jihong's version is more concise, more written, and more oriented to adults, and the translator wants to provoke people to think about life, living, and emotions through this book. The language of Jenny Lin's edition is more delicate and gentle, oriented to children, and she tells people a fairy tale through her intonation so that people can experience the beauty of life in the fairy tale and guard the childish heart of adults. The theory of paratexts suggests that paratexts are not ancillary or secondary but are as important a component as the main text. They may affect the readers' understanding and acceptance of the translated text, including emotional, cultural and social factors. It can significantly impact the interpretation of the main text and even change the reader's understanding of the work. The paratext's content, style and form can be studied to reveal its relationship with the main text and further explore its influence on the process of dissemination and reception of the work. In addition, because the understanding of the theory of paratext is not thorough enough, this paper does not deal with all the factors of paratext, which is still defective in terms of practice. Future research will be devoted to the theory of paratextual translation, aiming at exploring more comprehensively the influence of paratextual factors on the dissemination of the original work and the readers' reading from all aspects.

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