

An Analysis of Translations of the Little Prince from the Perspective of Reception Aesthetics

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Keywords: *The Little Prince*; Reception Aesthetics; children's literature; appreciation and criticism

Abstract: This paper adopts the Reception Aesthetics Theory as its framework and focuses on the characteristics of children's literature. It conducts a comprehensive analysis of the English and Chinese translations of *The Little Prince*, paying particular attention to the aspects of colloquial language and imagery in the translation. The primary objective of this paper is to provide a critical evaluation and appreciation of the translations, while also identifying existing issues and offering suggestions for improvement. By examining how colloquial language and imagery are handled in the translations, the paper aims to shed light on the effectiveness of the translation strategies employed and their impact on the reception of the text by young readers. By offering new perspectives and methods for analyzing and evaluating translations, it aims to enhance the quality and cultural adaptability of translated children's books. By examining the specific challenges and considerations involved in translating children's books, this research aims to contribute to the broader understanding of translation theory and practice.

1. Introduction

The Little Prince, written by Antoine de Saint-Exupéry, is a literary work that the author once stated was intended for adults who were once children. The book consists of 27 short chapters, narrated from the perspective of the pilot, the king, the snake, the rose, and the fox. The language throughout the novel is concise, vivid, and filled with poetic melancholy and a subtle sense of sorrow.

Yang Xiaorong (2005) [1] defines translation criticism as comments on specific translations or translation phenomena related to specific works. The objects of such criticism include translators, the translation process, the quality and value of the translation, and their impact [2]. The purpose of translation criticism is to improve translation quality, provide examples for translation teaching, clarify translation concepts within specific periods and fields, aid in understanding masterpieces, and compare the semantic and grammatical differences between the source language and the target language [3]. Translation criticism is an integral part of translation studies, playing a crucial role in the development of translatology and translation quality. Additionally, translation criticism is an important branch of translation studies, focusing on the quality evaluation and value assessment of

translated works, including language expression and translation techniques. This paper conducts an analysis of the translations of *The Little Prince*, aiming to provide new theoretical perspectives for the translation and study of children's literature.

2. Literature Review

With the deepening of globalization, literary translation plays an increasingly important role in promoting cross-cultural communication and fostering mutual respect and appreciation among different cultures. Literary translation is not merely a simple language conversion; it is a means of cultural inheritance and exchange. Through literary translation, people can understand and appreciate literary works from different cultural backgrounds, broaden their horizons, and gain knowledge. Additionally, literary translation facilitates communication and integration among diverse cultures, promoting cultural diversity and coexistence. Translation criticism is an essential component of translation research, and reception aesthetics, as a unique research perspective, provide new insights for translation studies. This paper reviews domestic and international research on translation criticism, as well as the application of reception aesthetics in translation studies, in order to provide theoretical support for the study of English translations of *The Little Prince*.

Translation criticism focuses on the quality evaluation and aesthetics of translated works. Lawrence Venuti (1998) [4], in his book *The Scandals of Translation: Towards an Ethics of Difference*, presented a new perspective on translation criticism. He criticized the traditional notion of focusing solely on the accuracy of expression in translation and advocated for a greater emphasis on the translator's subjectivity and the cultural influence on translation works. Nida (2004) [5], in *The Theory and Practice of Translation*, discussed the importance of translation criticism, emphasizing their significance in evaluating and interpreting the quality of translations and their relationship with the original works. Mona Baker (2011) [6], explored the role of translation criticism and appreciation in translation research methodology. She argued that translation criticism and can help understand the practice and impact of translation by providing frameworks for cultural, social, and textual analysis. Suzanne Bassnett (2014) [7], provided a comprehensive overview of translation criticism theories, explaining various translation theories and analytical methods, and discussing different approaches to appreciation and evaluation of translation works.

Hans Robert Jauss (1982) [8] and Wolfgang Iser (1978) [9] proposed the concept of reception aesthetics. It breaks the traditional pattern of literary research and emphasizes the centrality of readers, expecting a broader vision and aesthetic view. Reception aesthetics highlights the subjectivity of readers in the process of accepting literary works, considering readers' responses as an important criterion for evaluating the value of literary works. It argues that literary works require readers' engagement and understanding to truly realize their meaning and value. Therefore, readers' responses become one of the essential criteria for evaluating literary works. This evaluation method emphasizes the interactive relationship between literary works and readers, as well as the subjectivity of readers in literary works, providing possibilities for multiple interpretations of literary works. In the process of translation, translators need to fully consider the cultural backgrounds, aesthetic habits, and psychological expectations of the target language readers in order to better convey the meaning and aesthetics of the original text.

In recent years, the application of reception aesthetics in translation research has gained increasing attention. Zhang Yimin (2010) [10] highlighted the importance of the aesthetic perspective in literary translation. He believed that the aesthetic perspective can help translators better understand the aesthetic features of the original work and convey its aesthetic value through translation strategies and techniques. Chen Yixin (2012) [11] emphasized the significance of the aesthetic perspective in achieving aesthetic effects and reader acceptance in literary translation,

proposing aesthetic principles to be followed in the translation process. Zhang Fengling (2018) summarized the insights of reception aesthetics in literary translation. She argued that the perspective can enhance the quality of literary translation and provided concrete cases to illustrate how to apply reception aesthetics principles in translation practice.

The translation of *The Little Prince* in China began in the 1970s and 1980s. Zhou Kexi's translation adheres to a precise language style and standard sentence structure, emphasizing the overall style of the work. He translates the book in a childlike tone, without excessive embellishments, aiming for simplicity, accessibility, and ease of understanding. Currently, research on the translation of *The Little Prince* mainly focuses on translation strategies, cultural differences, and aesthetic view. However, further research is needed on the translation of *The Little Prince* from the perspective of reception aesthetics. The study of the English translation of *The Little Prince* from the point of reception aesthetics is complex and challenging, requiring researchers to fully consider the cultural differences and aesthetic views between the original work and the target readers in the translation process, in order to achieve the best translation effect.

Through the review of domestic research on translation criticism, as well as the application of reception aesthetics in translation studies, it can be observed that translation research has achieved fruitful results. Translation criticism studies provide theoretical support for evaluating translation quality and aesthetic value, while the application of reception aesthetics provides new perspectives for translation studies.

3. Exploring the Impact of Reception Aesthetics on the Translation of The Little Prince

Analyzing Translations of The Little Prince from the Perspective of Reception Aesthetics, this study aims to examine the impact of translation choices on the reception of the beloved literary work. Specifically, the main section will delve into two key aspects: Simplified Childlike Language and Imagery and Childlike Representation. By employing translation criticism methods and combining them with the principles of reception aesthetics, this research will explore how these elements are handled in English and Chinese versions of *The Little Prince*. Through a comprehensive analysis, this study seeks to shed light on the effectiveness of different translation approaches in capturing the essence of the original work and resonating with the intended audience.

3.1 Simplified Childlike Language

From an aesthetic perspective, we can explore whether translated works can evoke readers' aesthetic emotions and resonance. The purpose of translation is to help readers better understand and appreciate the aesthetic value of the original work. For the translation of children's literature, it is important to pay attention to the use of simplified childlike language in order to effectively convey the emotions and meanings of the original work. Zhou Kexi's translation is very concise and clear in language, using a lot of childlike expressions, which helps readers better understand and appreciate the emotions and meanings of the original work. Furthermore, while using childlike language, Zhou Kexi's translation also preserves the aesthetic value of the original work. In translation criticism, we need to consider the fidelity, fluency, and language style of the translated works. The use of simplified childlike language is an important aspect in the translation of children's literature as it allows the translated works to be closer to the language habits and thinking patterns of children, making it easier for them to be interested in and understand the work. In the translation process, attention should be paid to the use of simplified childlike language to make the translated works more appealing to readers' aesthetic emotions and reading needs.

As the example 1 in Table 1 shows, Zhou's translation reflects the characteristics of children's literature by using simple and understandable language to express the emotions and thoughts of

children. Children often give names to their creations that they like, such as “drawing Number one” and “drawing Number two”, which is a way for them to express their emotions and recognition of their work. The phrase “xiè le qì” is commonly used in children’s literature to express the feeling of disappointment after a failure. Zhou’s translation reflects the reader-centered approach, capturing the language characteristics and reading expectations of children. The target language has a sense of innocence and simplicity, as if in everyday conversation, creating a warm and vivid tone. The translator successfully reflects the language characteristics of children’s literature, allowing readers to better understand and appreciate the emotions and thoughts of children.

Table 1: Simplified Childlike Language Examples

Example 1	SL: I had been discouraged by the failure of my drawing Number one and of my drawing Number two.
	TL: Zuò pǐn yī hào hé zuò pǐn èr hào dōu méi chéng gōng, wǒ xiè le qì.
Example 2	SL: The thorns are of no use at all. Flowers have thorns just for spite.
	TL: Cì ya, shen me yòng dōu méi yǒu, chún cuì shì huā ér xiǎng shǐ huài bei.
Example 3	SL: I shall look at you out of the corner of my eyes, and you will say nothing.
	TL: Wǒ cóng yǎn jiǎo lǐ chǒu nǐ, ér nǐ shen me yě bié shuō.

In example 2, due to the limited vocabulary of child readers compared to adult readers, it is important to use simple vocabulary within their cognitive range in translation to ensure better understanding and acceptance. Zhou Kexi’s translation is very close to the thinking pattern of children, using a tone of childlike language with words like “ya” and “bei”, making the translation more lively and suitable for child readers. It not only makes it easier for child readers to understand the content of the original work but also carefully shapes the characters in the original work. For example, translating “spite” as “shǐ huài” effectively conveys the meaning of “just for spite” in the original text, which means “It’s a thorn for sheer mischief”. Through Zhou Kexi’s translation, the characters become more vivid and distinctive, making it easier for readers to resonate and emotionally identify with them. In conclusion, his translation method makes the source language more suitable for childlike language, making it easier for child readers to understand and appreciate the original work, and enhancing their reading expectations to better understand and enjoy the original work.

In example 3, the phrase “chǒu nǐ” in source language indeed reflect childlike language, and the word “chǒu” has a strong colloquial feeling (northeast Chinese dialect) when read. However, this kind of childlike language does not align with the overall style and tone of *The Little Prince*. It is a philosophical and poetic fairy tale, and its language should be concise, fresh, and elegant, rather than overly childlike. Furthermore, the purpose of translation is to help readers understand the meaning of the original text, rather than sacrificing the artistic conception and tone of the source language in pursuit of childlike language. Therefore, I believe that translating “tōu miāo” is more in line with the overall style and tone of *The Little Prince*, while accurately conveying the meaning of the source text.

3.2 Imagery and Childlike Representation

From an aesthetic perspective, translation should focus on the imagery of the translated text, allowing readers to experience the beauty and emotions conveyed in the source language through the translation. Imagery refers to the creation of literary images with sensory characteristics, such as form, color, sound, and smell, through language expression, enabling readers to have a strong sensory experience of the things depicted in the literary work. In translation criticism, imagery is also an important aspect. Translators need to understand the source language and grasp the target

language, as much as possible, to retain the imagery expressions, so that the translation can convey a similar sensory experience as the original one. Zhou Kexi focused on the metaphors and symbolism in the original text, transforming them into concrete imagery in his translation, making it easier for readers to understand and appreciate. From the aesthetic perspective, he emphasizes the imagery and linguistic beauty of the translation, allowing readers to have a deeper understanding and experience of the beauty and emotions conveyed in the source language. For example, in the original work, the various peculiar planets and creatures encountered by the Little Prince have distinct imagery, such as “the fox”, “the rose”, and “the lighthouse”. In the translation process, Zhou Kexi describes these images in detail and uses the Chinese language skillfully to successfully convey similar sensory experiences as the original work to readers. However, there are still some words that pursue beauty excessively, which may reduce conceptual clarity and cause ambiguity for readers. Imagery is a very important aspect in the translation of children’s literature. Translators need to understand the source language and grasp the target language to retain the imagery expressions as much as possible.

Table 2: Imagery and Childlike Representation Examples

Example 4	SL: There, coiled in front of the little prince, was one of those yellow snakes that can kill you in thirty seconds.
	TL: Zhǐ jiàn yì tiáo bàn fēn zhōng jiù néng jiào rén zhì mìng de huáng shé, áng rán shù qǐ shēn zi duì zhe xiǎo wáng zǐ.
Example 5	SL: The idea of the herd of elephants made the little prince laugh. “We’d have to pile them on top of one another.”
	TL: Lǐng yì qún dà xiàng lái de xiǎng fǎ, rě de xiǎo wáng zǐ xiào le qǐ lái: “ nà děi ràng tā men dié luó hàn le...”
Example 6	SL: I raised the bucket to his lips. He drunk, his eyes closed. It was as sweet as some special festival treat.
	TL: Wǒ bǎ shuǐ tǒng jǔ dào tā zuǐ biān. Tā hé zhe shuǐ, yǎn jīng méi zhāng kāi. Shuǐ xiàng jié rì yì bān měi hǎo.
Example 7	SL: She did not wish to go out into the world all rumples, like the field poppies.
	TL: Tā bú yuàn xiàng yú měi rén nà yàng yī liàng xiàng jiù shì mǎn liǎn zhòu wén.

In example 4 of the Table 2, in Western culture, snakes are often seen as cunning and treacherous symbols. In the original text, the moment the pilot saw the snake, he pulled out his gun to scare it away, indicating his deep understanding and strong aversion to the symbolism of snakes. The translator translates the phrase "kill you" as “zhì mìng”, which enhances the perspective of child readers. “shā rén” is a highly negative word, and the translator’s use of “zhì mìng” avoids direct use of negative vocabulary, appropriately reducing the negative impact and making the translation more suitable for child readers. Additionally, the translator uses “áng rán shù qǐ shēn zi” to describe the posture of the yellow snake, which can attract the attention of child readers. Therefore, this translation reflects the characteristics of children’s literature at the lexical level, retaining the meaning of the source language while making the translation more suitable for child readers.

In example 5, compared to adult literature, children’s literature language is more vivid and three-dimensional. Zhou translated it as “dié luó hàn”. It refers to two or more people stacking on top of each other. In *The Little Prince*, Antoine de Saint-Exupéry presents a world full of imagination and whimsy through the eyes of the Little Prince. In this world, the image of elephants stacking like acrobats reflects children’s imaginative thinking and creativity. Zhou’s translation is very vivid and expressive, with a sense of artistic appeal that is more attractive to child readers and

leaves a deep impression on them. “dié luó hàn” is a term in Chinese culture, and cultural terms are effective carriers of cultural transmission and can also expand readers’ knowledge. Translating some words into Chinese cultural terms not only attracts children’s attention but also stimulates their imagination and creativity, allowing them to gain more enjoyment and inspiration from reading. At the same time, this expressive way also reflects aesthetics, allowing readers to have more feelings and experiences in reading, thus achieving aesthetic effects.

In example 6, Zhou’s translation “Tā hé zhe shuǐ, yǎn jīng méi zhāng kāi.” in this translation is somewhat verbose. Furthermore, the comparison between water and a festival in the latter part of the translation does not align with Chinese expression. Additionally, the use of “Shuǐ xiàng jié rì yì bān měi hǎo.” as a metaphor may make child readers feel difficult to understand. Child readers may feel confused while reading because water and a festival do not have a direct comparison, and there is no such expression habit in Chinese. The original meaning of the sentence is that the Little Prince felt happy after drinking the water, so it should be a comparison between the feeling of drinking water and the feeling of celebrating a festival. Therefore, when translating children’s literature, it is important to use simple and understandable language while focusing on the characteristics of children’s literature. In this case, it is believed that translating the sentence as “Wǒ bǎ shuǐ tǒng jǔ dào tā zuǐ biān. Tā bì zhe shuāng yǎn hē le qǐ lái. Měi zī zī de jiù xiàng shì guò jié yī yàng.” and the addition of “delightful” represents the Little Prince’s sense of happiness and satisfaction.

In example 7, in aesthetic criticism, translation is not just about language conversion, but also about the transmission of culture and the expression. The translator chose the term “yú měi rén” to replace “poppies” in the original text because “yú měi rén” has profound cultural connotations and aesthetic significance in Chinese culture, which aligns with the image of roses. At the same time, the translator added the description “yī liàng xiàng jiù shì mǎn liǎn zhòu wén” in the translation, which vividly portrays the image and characteristics of roses. However, this translation may lack the characteristics of children’s literature. The use of “yú měi rén” may be unfamiliar and difficult for child readers to understand. Therefore, when translating children’s literature, it is important to focus on using simple and understandable language while retaining the characteristics of children’s cognition and language habits. In this case, I believe that translating it directly as “yīng sù huā” is better. Although children may not have as much knowledge as adults and have limited understanding, at least they will know that “poppies” are a type of flower, which is more conducive to their understanding and expands their perspective of expectation.

4. Conclusion

Through a brief analysis of the translation of *The Little Prince* from English to Chinese, it can be observed that childlike language and imagery are important factors that influence the quality of translation in children’s literature. From the perspective of aesthetics and children’s literature, scholars can better understand the connotations and meanings of the original text, and provide more accurate appreciation and criticism of the translation. Furthermore, translation is an art that requires continuous exploration and practice, requiring translators to have a deep language foundation, cultural literacy, and a profound understanding and insight into the source language. And translators should continuously improve their translation skills, in order to make greater contributions to cross-cultural communication and literary dissemination.

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