

The Application of Foregrounding in Literary Translation

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Abstract: In the 21st century, people's cognitive level continues to improve, and a lot of excellent literary works gradually come into view. Literary works are the art created by language, and literary translation is the use of another language tool to convey the artistic conception of the original work, so that readers can be enlightened, inspired and immersed in translation. Translation should not be a simple technical language change, but rather requires translators to deeply understand the artistic creation process of the original author by reproducing the language of the original work, thus finding content that is more in line with the original work in their own thoughts, emotions, and life experiences. The foregrounding concept is a key for translators to do well in literary translation. It means that the foreground (the most prominent and important part in the text) is reflected in the translation process, so as to achieve a better translation effect. In literary translation, foregrounding can make the translation more vivid, accurate, and faithful to the original, while also enhancing the reader's reading experience and improving the readability and comprehensibility of translation. Therefore, this paper explores the specific application of foregrounding in literary translation, aiming to provide better theoretical guidance for translators.

1. The Concept of Foregrounding

Foregrounding refers to a phenomenon that draws people's attention to the expression of content in literary research and stylistics, shifting readers' attention from what is said to how it is expressed. Foregrounding can help translators convey information more effectively and enhance the readability and understandability of translation. Zhang Tongtong noted that foregrounding is originally an artistic concept, which refers to the method that painters highlight the artistic image to be represented as the foreground from the background as foil [1]. However, in translation, foregrounding can be achieved through various methods, such as using industry terminology, utilizing synonyms or near-synonyms, adopting culturally equivalent expressions, and implementing creative translation techniques. In practice, translators need to choose the most appropriate methods based on the characteristics of the translation object and target culture to achieve the best translation effect. To sum up, foregrounding is a crucial concept in translation, which can improve translation quality and communication effect.

Linguist M.A.K. Halliday defined foregrounding as motivated prominence: a phenomenon in which certain linguistic features of the text are highlighted in some way [2]. In the process of

artistic creation, writers deviate from the norms of language use to highlight certain things, thereby achieving the purpose of artistic creation. Inspired by “defamiliarization”, Jan Mukarovsky, representative of Prague School, proposed two opposite concepts of “automatization” and “foregrounding” [3]. Automatization refers to the use of natural language flow, the recipient of information can easily understand without effort, and the language expression method does not attract people’s attention by “moving to the foreground”. Foregrounding means that the expression method of foregrounding deviates from the norm and is not widely accepted in this situation. The language itself “moves to the foreground” and attracts people’s attention.

2. Foregrounding in Literary Works

As a symbolic feature of the language forms of literature, Li Yuying and Gao Yaping believed that foregrounding is closely connected with the theme and aesthetic value of literary works [4]. Zhang Delu pointed out that foregrounding language exists most obviously in poetry and novel, because poetic and fictional language must violate the language convention and make it non-automatic and unfamiliar, that is, foregrounding, otherwise it will be difficult to observe its aesthetic value [5]. In literary works, foregrounding refers to the deliberate placement of certain elements in the foreground of the work to highlight the importance and future development of these contents. Zhang Cui noted that foregrounding language is often used in novel texts, and these rich corpora provide readers with inspiration and a wider range of thinking space [6]. In addition, foregrounding takes on many forms in literary works, and the specific manifestations are as follows. First, highlight themes. The theme of a literary work is its core, and the author uses various means to put the theme in the foreground of the work, in order to arouse readers’ attention and thoughts. Second, emphasize character traits and behaviors. In literary works, the character is the soul of the work, and the author places it in the foreground of the work by shaping their character traits and behaviors so that readers can better understand the theme and connotation of the work. Third, describe the environment and atmosphere. The environment and atmosphere are important components of literary works, and the author describes the environment and atmosphere in detail, puts it in the foreground of the work, so that readers can better feel the emotion and atmosphere of the work. Forth, use symbolism. In literary works, the author often uses symbolism to put symbols in the foreground of the work, which makes it easier for readers to understand the meaning.

In addition, foregrounding also appears in general conversation, scientific and technological texts as well as literary texts. As for general conversation, language is certainly automated, but suddenly one of the parties to a conversation uses a very unusual expression intended to activate the conversation and give a sense of surprise. This attention-grabbing expression is foregrounding language. However, the overall feature of scientific and technological texts is standardized language use, strong logic, and always maintaining objective statements. If it is spoken to non-professionals, it may involve foregrounding and produce special effects. Some people believe that in literary language, authors often violate the norms of language and create words that ordinary people do not use, resulting in the appearance of foregrounding language. Scholars often distinguish between foregrounding language intentionally used in ordinary communication and foregrounding language intentionally applied for artistic aesthetic purposes, believing that the latter is more important. Therefore, some unconventional expressions in literary works are deliberately chosen by the author and have a motive behind them. Without motivation, prominence is not significant, so foregrounding is meaningful in artistic style because it is a motivated choice. In conclusion, foregrounding is a phenomenon in literary works where the author deliberately places certain elements in the foreground to emphasize their importance. Therefore, through analyzing and understanding foregrounding, readers can better grasp the theme and connotation of the work.

3. Foregrounding in Literary Translation

Foregrounding is widely used in literary translation, which can help translators better convey the meaning of literary works and enhance the readability and comprehensibility of translation. The following is the specific embodiment of foregrounding in literary works. In a single language, the author intentionally uses language that deviates from the norm, thus generating foregrounding. Translators should discriminate between English sentences that may lead to Chinese deviation and distinguish between the prominence caused by different language systems and the foregrounding caused by the author's deliberate deviation from the language system. For the expressions with the characteristics of the source language system, domestication translation strategy can be adopted. The original text of these sentences does not deviate from the language convention, so the translation should be corresponding.

In addition, when discussing the application of literary stylistics in translation studies, Shen Dan put forward the concept of "deceptive equivalence", that is, "the translation refers to the same thing as the original text, but the literary value or significance is far from each other" [7]. From this perspective, many translations that are supposed to be loyal to the original actually betray the original, because some of them are not in line with Chinese expression habits. In literary translation, whether to retain the foregrounding expression of the original is mainly based on the following two points. Firstly, whether this foregrounding expression is important; Secondly, it also depends on the acceptability of Chinese. When there is a conflict between the faithfulness of the source text and the fluency of the translation, the translator must choose the lesser of the two evils. In short, if the purpose is to facilitate daily communication, then authentic Chinese is the highest standard pursued by the translator.

4. The Application of Foregrounding in Literary Translation

Ye Zinan, a translation scholar, first proposed that foregrounding can be used in translation practice. He pointed out that translators should indeed be faithful to the foregrounding caused by the author's deliberate violation of the conventions of the source language. Translators have the responsibility to restore the language foreground into Chinese foreground [8]. The application of foregrounding in literary translation mainly involves identifying, extracting, and highlighting the foreground in the original text. Specifically, translators need to conduct a thorough analysis of the original text, determine the most prominent and important parts, and then adopt translation strategies such as modifying sentence structure, adding modifiers and using specific vocabulary to reflect these foregrounding parts in the translation.

Leech summarized the stylistic features and summed up eight kinds of deviations: deviations in phonetics, vocabulary, grammar, writing, semantics, dialects, registers and historical years [9]. Halliday divided deviation into two categories: one is deviation in violation of norms, emphasizing "quality"; the other is deviation in establishing and strengthening convention, emphasizing "quantity" [2]. It can be said that in translation, the foregrounding or prominence of language mainly comes from the syntactic differences between English and Chinese, but it is more than that, it may exist at all levels of language. For example: italics in United Nations documents, grammatical errors in computer operation manuals, passive voices in scientific and technological articles, short sentences in general, and cultural expressions in the linguistic and cultural system are all the foregrounding phenomenon.

Example 1. Talent Professor Smith has. Money Professor Smith has not.

Qin Xiubai noted that grammatical foregrounding is reflected in the fact that some languages do not conform to the grammatical rules and conflict with the language rules of the language [10]. This sentence is obviously not in line with the expression habits of Chinese and deviates from the

conventional Chinese language. In terms of Chinese acceptability, translation should be within the acceptable range. Therefore, based on the concept of foregrounding, attention should be paid to the deviation of the original text from the perspective of stylistic style, so it is necessary to simply adjust the word order, so as to faithfully convey the charm of the original text.

Example 2. He died yesterday.

Except for a very few sentences, most English sentences need to be adjusted when translated into Chinese, so that they do not deviate from the conventions of Chinese and do not cause foregrounding or prominence, because these sentences do not deviate from the conventions of English and do not attract the attention of English readers, this is especially important.

Example 3. "I kep it from her arter I heard on it," said Mr. Peggotty, "going on high a year..."

Example 3 is mainly the deviation of dialects in foregrounding. Qin Xiubai proposed that writing foregrounding refers to the variation caused by the violation of conventions in the writing of certain words [10]. It can be seen that there are some spelling mistakes in the original text, so when translating, attention should be paid on this. Hence, the better version should be faithful to the original text, grasp the change of vocabulary, figure out the context of the original text, and notice the deviation of dialect. In addition, translators need to grasp the style of the original text and obviously notice the deviation of dialect here, which can better show the elegance of the original text and be more in line with the expression habits of Chinese.

Example 4. From all of these the people are in flight, and they come into 66 from the tributary side roads, from the wagon tracks and the rutted country roads. 66 is the mother road, the road of flight.

Levin proposed that there are two kinds of deviations in language: qualitative deviation and quantitative deviation. Qin Xiubai put forward that quantitative foregrounding refers to the recurrence of certain language components at an extraordinary frequency [10]. Quantitative foregrounding in the novel is the author's repeated use of symbolic words or key sentences to achieve the effects of prominence, emphasis, interpretation, supplement, enhancement and so on. For example, the repeated use of words such as "Road 66" is sufficient to illustrate this point.

Example 5. We got to get a tire, but, Jesus, they want a lot for a ol' tire. They look a fella over. They know he got to go on. They know he can't wait. And the price goes up. Take it or leave it.

Qin Xiubai believed that foregrounding of sentence patterns includes inversion and ellipsis of sentence elements, use of parallelism and emphasis, and excessively long or short sentences to make the language novel and unique [10]. In terms of chapter layout, Hehua Lianzi and Han Qiqun proposed that the author adopts the alternating arrangement of "narrative chapters" and "interspersed chapters". Through constantly changing personal perspectives, the distance between readers and the whole story is shortened, and a variety of interpretation ideas are provided for readers [11]. The author explains the social background and situation of the Jode family in a monologue narrative way, and highlights the interspersed chapters from a unique perspective "to ensure that readers have a comprehensive understanding of this socio-economic tragedy." Therefore, in the process of translation, the translator should notice the deviation of perspective, master the language characteristics of the original text, and pay attention to the treatment of short sentences in order to reproduce the style of the original text.

In addition, the application of foregrounding in literary translation will also involve the following aspects. First, use synonyms or near-synonyms. When translating literary works, translators can choose near-synonyms that are similar or relatively equivalent to the original text based on the cultural background of the target language and the reading habits of the readers in order to make the translation more adaptable. Second, use culturally equivalent expressions. When there is content related to the target culture in the original text, the translator can use equivalent expressions to the target culture in order to achieve better dissemination and cultural integration.

Third, adopt creative translation. Translators can also apply creative translation methods to translate freely or add content according to the meaning of the original text and the characteristics of the target culture, so as to make the translation more readable. Forth, switch languages. When translating literary works, translators can convert the language form in the original text, such as translating the poetry form into prose form or the prose form into poetry form in the original, so as to achieve better communication effect. In short, foregrounding is widely used in literary translation, which can help translators better convey the meaning of literary works and enhance the readability and comprehensibility of translation.

5. Conclusion

The foregrounding theory put forward by St. Petersburg scholar Irina Vladimirovna Arnold in the middle of the 20th century was quite revolutionary at that time, because it aims to establish the relationship between the formal level of language and the meaning of the text, enabling the reader to decode the author's information. Arnold identified four main factors that reveal the prospect of conceptual text meaning: the dominant position of the text, the repetition at different language levels, the cohesion of stylistic devices and the expectation of being defeated, which provides a key for understanding the author's information and position. This theory is universal and easy to apply, and it is still widely used by scholars working in the field of text linguistics and stylistics.

Foregrounding can make the translation more colourful, fluent, and faithful to the original, improving the accuracy and readability of translation. At the same time, it can also enhance the reader's reading experience, making it easier for them to understand and accept the translation. Additionally, foregrounding can help translators better understand the original work and conduct a more in-depth interpretation and analysis. Because the aim of applying foregrounding in literary translation is to improve the quality and effectiveness of translation. Therefore, it is particularly important to distinguish the three concepts of automation, foregrounding and prominence in literary translation. In conclusion, translators need to explore the application principles of foregrounding theory and give full play to its unique advantages in translation.

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