

A Comparative Analysis of Translations of *The Little Prince* Based on the Child-centered Perspective

-- Taking the English Translations of Liu Mingjiu and Zheng Kelu as Examples

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Abstract: In today's literary world, the proportion of children's literature is not high and is often overlooked by people compared to traditional literature, science fiction, poetry, and others. Children's literature has a narrower audience compared to these genres, and the unique characteristics of the child audience have led to a consistently lower level of academic attention to children's literature. China has always introduced excellent children's literary works from various countries around the world, making the translation of children's literature quite important. However, there is currently a lack of corresponding research on children's literature and child-centered perspective. Therefore, this article approaches the analysis of translated children's literature from the perspective of literary translation appreciation. It examines aspects such as vocabulary, sentence structures, rhetoric, etc., combined with selected passages from *The Little Prince*, in order to analyze the strengths and weaknesses of translation in children's literature. The hope is to provide some new insights into the translation of children's literature.

Keywords: Children's literature translation; Translation appreciation; Child-centered perspective; *The Little Prince*

1. Introduction

In recent years, with the progress and development of society, as well as the continuous enhancement of China's comprehensive national strength and the people's yearning for a better and happier life, more and more individuals have turned their attention back to books and literature. Among them, children's literature has also gained a certain degree of attention. However, an overview of the Chinese literary academia reveals that, whether it be domestic children's literature or translated foreign children's works, the level of attention to children's literature in China remains insufficient. This may be related to the target audience of such works. Children's literature has always occupied a relatively marginal position in the literary field. The literary works we are most familiar with are typically essays, poetry, and so on, with almost no trace of children's literature. It was only in the last decade or so, with the increasing attention given to children as a demographic by the state and society, and the continuous development and improvement of disciplines such as child psychology and early childhood education, that public focus has shifted toward children and children's literature. The "child-centered perspective" is more of a guiding principle adhered to by translators when translating children's literature, after fully understanding and respecting the values and status of children's perspectives.

The paper selects two Chinese translations of *The Little Prince*: the version translated by Liu Mingjiu and by Zheng Kelu. By examining the translation techniques of both versions in relation to the linguistic, physiological, and psychological characteristics of children, the paper explores the advantages and shortcomings of different approaches. It also compares how different views of children influence the translations, aiming to help the public establish a foundational understanding and framework for children's literature and its translation.

2. Child-centered Perspective

"The core competencies required of children's literature translators include a profound understanding of the essence of children's literature, a keen awareness of style and stylistic translation ability, as well as a sense of mission and responsibility toward 'translating for children'" (Jiang Jianli & Xu Derong, 2014). From this perspective, it is clear that the translator's view on children's literature is largely shaped by their perception of children. If a translator does not possess a deep and nuanced understanding of both children's literature and child readers, they may easily fall into the trap of neglecting the needs of children's literature and its audience. Consequently, the translated work is unlikely to offer a high level of reading experience or aesthetic pleasure. This highlights the importance for translators to adopt a child's perspective when translating children's texts, minimizing unnecessary linguistic burdens, enhancing reading enjoyment, and avoiding overly adult-like, formal, or scholarly translations that could deprive children of the joy of reading. Chen Bochui also advocated for the idea of "being willing to stand with children, listening with their ears, seeing with their eyes, and especially feeling with their hearts" (Chen Bochui, 1959).

It is evident that a high-quality translation of children's literature requires the translator to faithfully and skillfully present the essence of the original work that most effectively resonates with young readers. This places greater demands on the translator to maintain an appropriate understanding of childhood and to approach the translation from a genuinely child-centered perspective.

3. Comparative Analysis of Translations in *The Little Prince*

"The greatest distinctiveness of children's literature, as opposed to adult literature, lies in the fact that its creators are adults in positions of power, while its recipients are children, who occupy a subordinate position in society. This creates an inherent contradiction in children's literature: a cultural gap between generations that is difficult to bridge" (Liu Siyu & Zhang Yaoping, 2022). Unlike other literary works, when analyzing the translation of children's literature, we primarily approach it from several different perspectives, such as the language adapted for children, children's learning abilities, and their psychological and physiological cognitive capacities. The following examples will analyze the differences between two translations based on these aspects.

3.1 Frequent Use of Childlike Language

ST: "I had let my tools drop from my hands. Of what moment now was my hammer, my bolt, my thirst, or my death."

Liu: "我把自己的工具扔在一旁。我才不在乎我的锤子、我的螺丝钉哩,还有将来要来的口渴与死亡,也都去它!"

Zheng: "我放下了工具。我不在乎我的锤子、螺栓、口渴和死亡。"

The sentence and expressions in Example 1 emphasize simplicity and accessibility. In the second sentence of Liu's translation, the use of the particle "哩" stands out. "哩" functions both as an interjection and as a common expression in children's spoken language and colloquial usage, making it more aligned with the linguistic habits of children. This choice not only brings the text closer to the target audience but also adds a fluidity that was absent in the original, better capturing the protagonist's current state and psychological activity. In contrast, Zheng's translation leans more towards formal written language, faithfully reproducing the original content but without specifically addressing the needs of young readers. In this sentence, one can observe Liu's use of an expansion technique, as he adds the phrase "还有将来要来的" (and what is to come in the future). While this expansion is open to discussion, it could have been more effective if the phrase were divided into four shorter sentences. Nevertheless, it is undeniable that the interjection added in Liu's translation successfully transforms the text into one brimming with childlike charm, making it more relatable to young readers and bridging the distance between them and the text.

3.2 Converting the Abstract into the Concrete

ST: ... I had never learned to draw anything except boa constrictors, outside and inside.

Liu: 除了蟒蛇整体图和蟒蛇剖面图以外,我就不会画任何别的东西了。

Zheng: 我压根没有学会绘画,除了画身体封闭的蟒蛇和被剖开的蟒蛇。

The original text includes the term "boa constrictors", which is a relatively specialized term and might be difficult for children to understand. However, from another perspective, this is also part of the value of children's literature—it serves as a form of popular science to a certain extent. Furthermore, children's literature often includes illustrations and other elements that align with children's reading habits. Therefore, the translator's choice of rendering it as "大蟒蛇" (giant boa snake) is acceptable.

Similarly, the phrase "outside and inside" in the original refers to the internal and external aspects of the snake. However, Liu has rendered this as "蟒蛇整体图和蟒蛇剖面图" (overall diagram of the boa and cross-sectional diagram of the boa). This formulation is overly technical and uses specialized terminology, which does not preserve the original's concise and accessible expression. In fact, it introduces more complex vocabulary, making it more difficult for children to understand. This increases the reading difficulty and creates unnecessary barriers, making the translation overly formal and potentially causing children to lose interest or patience with this portion of the text. In contrast, Zheng translated it as "身体封闭的蟒蛇和被剖开的" (the intact boa and the dissected boa), which simplifies the meaning of the original, making the translation more conversational and easier for children to grasp. However, "身体封闭的" (intact body) is somewhat wordy; it would be better to use "完整的" (complete), which sounds more natural and better corresponds to the original meaning, aligning more closely with children's cognitive abilities and reading habits.

3.3 Skillful Use of Rhetoric and Enhancement of Rhythm

ST: "For some, who are travelers, the stars are guides. For others, they are no more than little lights in the sky. For others, who are scholars, they are problems. For my businessman they were wealth. But all these stars are silent. You – you alone – will have the stars as no one else has them."

Liu: "对于那些旅行者,星星可以指明方向,对于芸芸众生,星星只不过是微弱的光亮。对于那些学者,星星意味着一些研究课题,对于我碰见过的那个生意人,星星就是黄金。可是,对于所有这些人来说,星星都是不会出声的,而对你来说,星星则完全不同……"

Zheng: "对于旅行者来说,星星是向导。对别的人来说,星星只是一些小闪光。对学者来说,星星是他们探索的问题。对于我遇

见的那个商人来说, 星星是黄金。但所有这些星星都沉默不语。你呢, 你会拥有任何人都没有的星星……”

This passage presents a dialogue between the Little Prince and the narrator, “I”. Liu’s translation exhibits a certain linguistic tension and literary flair, while maintaining simplicity and conciseness. It also captures the distinctive character of the Little Prince, such as when he says that “I” can possess a completely different sky, vividly reflecting his deep appreciation for their friendship. Although the four-character idiom “芸芸众生” (all living beings) is somewhat unsuitable for children’s literature, its frequent usage in daily life makes it more conversational, and thus accessible for young readers, adding an element of interest to the reading experience. Zheng’s translation also maintains clarity and conciseness while preserving literary qualities, striking a good balance between readability and literary style. Both translators retained the parallel structure of “对于...来说, ...” (for..., to...), enhancing the emotional impact of the sentence, making it more rhythmic and pleasant to read. This not only makes the sentence more vivid but also deepens the imagery of the stars, making them appear more three-dimensional and real in the readers’ minds.

From these selected excerpts, it is evident that children’s literature and its translation demand higher standards in terms of language, expression, and readability compared to general literary works. Translators must have a deep understanding of both the original text and the reading habits and life experiences of children.

4. Conclusion

This article primarily analyzes two Chinese translations of *The Little Prince* from the perspectives of the characteristics of children’s literature, the views of children, and the child-centered perspective. In comparison, Liu’s translation is better and fully embodies the child-centered perspective. The language used for children is both skillful and appropriate, with a correct view of childhood deeply embedded in the translator’s mindset. On the other hand, Zheng’s version somewhat lacks in this regard. The translation of children’s literature must take the child-centered perspective and the views of children as its starting point and guiding principle, presenting a translation that is both suitable for and beloved by children.

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