A Comparative Study on Two English Versions of Fu Sheng Liu Ji from the Perspective of Foregrounding Theory

Yunxi Li

School of Foreign Languages, Sichuan Normal University, Chengdu, 610101, China

Abstract

Aiming to appreciate the charm of literary works and provide suggestion for literary translation, this paper takes translated versions of Fu Sheng Liu Ji (an autobiography written by Shen Fu, a literary writer in the Qing Dynasty of China) as study objects to compare translators' differences in translating foregrounding languages. The translation versions are Six Chapters of a Floating Life, translated by Lin Yu-tang, and Six Records of a Floating Life, translated by Leonard Pratt and Chiang Su-hui. Through this comparative study, it is found that the emphasis that translators given to foregrounding theory influence the effect of translated text.

Keywords

Foregrounding Theory; Literary Translation; Fu Sheng Liu Ji.

1. Introduction

Since its publication, many translators have translated Chinese literary work--*Fu Sheng Liu Ji* into English. The most famous translated versions are the translations by Lin Yu-tang and Pratt & Chiang Su-hui respectively. In order to reproduce the beauty of original text, translators have used rhetorical devices in their translations which have been attracting scholars of this field. Some of them studied the ideology embodied in translation from the perspective of hermeneutics, while others studied it from the perspective of cultural contextual adaptation or from the perspective of functional translation theory. However, these above studies were mostly limited to abstract analysis and paid little attention to the special language expressions in this work. This paper attempts to analyze how the linguistic features of Chinese literature are reflected in translation by taking the English versions of *Fu Sheng Liu Ji* as examples, and to re-evaluate the importance of foregrounding theory in literary translation. At first, the paper will analyze the previous studies on the foregrounding theory and the application of this theory in translation and on *Fu Sheng Liu Ji*. Then there comes the conclusion that literary works can convey a specific aesthetic effect by using foregrounding languages. Later, there will be a comparison between the two English versions of *Fu Sheng Liu Ji*. On the semantic, lexical and syntactic level, the study on foregrounding phenomenon in *Fu Sheng Liu Ji* can help readers to grasp the essence of literary translation.

2. Literature Review

2.1. Previous Studies on Foregrounding Theory

"Foregrounding" is used in artistic painting, meaning to highlight the features of people or things in a prominent position while the rest of the people or things forms a background. At the beginning of the 20th century, Russian formalism introduced the foreground concept into the linguistic category, and proposed that poetic language was to violate the convention and break away from "automation". Foregrounding is to achieve artistic and thematic purposes and deviate from the norm to produce a unique thematic effect or artistic effect. As the origin of foregrounding theory, *Poetics* is a book Aristotle pointed out that "…the unfamiliarity due to

this deviation from normal usages will raise the diction above the commonplace, while the retention of some part of the norms will make for clarity".

Foregrounding is the practice to make something stand out from the surrounding words and images. It is "the throwing into relief of the linguistic sign against the background of the norms of ordinary language."(Wales, 2001, p.157) It is generally used to highlight important parts of a text, to aid memorability and/or to invite interpretation. Pal Garvin was the first to use the term as a translation of the Crech aktualisace (literally means "to actualize") in the 1960s and to borrow the terms from the Prague school of the 1930s. Later this concept was applied to literature by Russian formalism. Formalists then widely accept the idea of de-familiarization, and the concepts they use, such as de-familiarization, de-automation and deformation, eventually lead to the concept of "prospectization". Later "foregrounding" as a complete concept was first put forward by Mukarovsky of Prague structuralism in his article "Standard Language and Poetic Language" in 1964. The foregrounding theory of Mukarovsky emphasizes mainly one aspect of variation in literary works. From the view of functionalism, Halliday argued that prominence as the phenomenon of linguistic highlighting and "foregrounding is the motivated prominence that is related to the subject or the theme of a text" (340). In his opinion, foregrounding included qualitative and quantitative prominence and could be applied to analyze both literary and non-literary texts. He distinguishes between two concepts: foregrounding (foregrounding or outstanding) and significance (prominence, namely deviation). He believes that only the meaningful deviation from the interpretation of the text and the focus of stylistic analysis can form "foreground", In other words, "significance" and "foregrounding" are not only reflected in the intention of a particular sentence or paragraph, but also related to the motivation of the author and the overall intention of the author in the text. Leach makes a systematic generalization and summary of language deviation in poetry. He divided language into three levels: the formal level (including grammar and vocabulary), the semantic level (including indicative and cognitive meaning) and the implementation level (including speech and written form). The poet can exercise his concession at any of the above levels, that is to say, the deviation can occur at all levels of language, providing a wide space for the poet to use language creatively. Therefore, based on the semantic, syntactic and lexical levels, this paper makes a comparative analysis on the translation of two English versions of *Fu Sheng Liu Ji* from the perspective of the foregrounding theory.

Mukarovsky first introduced foregrounding into linguistics as a complete notion in "*Standard Language and Poetic Language*", he advocated foregrounding as de-automatization and as an approach of explaining the differences between the poetic and everyday language.

In *Lexical Foregrounding: A* Perennial *Problem in Translating Literary Communication*, Manoocher Tavangar, the Iranian scholar first mentioned foregrounding theory in translation study, and he dealt with some problems concerning translating foregrounded lexical items. He noted that attention should be paid to problems related to the translation of lexical foregrounding which acted as a pervasive stylistic device in some literary communication.

In China, Ye Zi-nan made a breakthrough in the study of foregrounding and translation by advocating applying the theory into translation study and practice for the first time, he held that translators should pay attention to two kinds of foregrounding in translation practice, namely, foregrounding created by intentional distortion of some language with certain purposes and foregrounding caused by different linguistic systems. What's more, he maintained that translators should try to retain those foregrounded elements of the original works in the translated versions while some foregrounding language should not be translated in some cases.

Having explored the prospects of using foregrounding theory in stylistics course in *Narratology and the Stylistics of Fiction*, Shen Dan emphasized the significance of deviation in the translation of literary works. In her opinion, deviations always bear important stylistic effects and play a

vital role in portraying characters, weaving plot and expressing the theme of works. Thus, in the process of translation, deviations should be attached importance to.

2.2. Previous Studies on the Translation of Fu Sheng Liu Ji

It is apparent that most of papers on the English translation of *Fu Sheng Liu Ji* will take the translation strategies or methods as examples to prove their theories. On the whole, translators have explored different translation theories and specific translation strategies reflected in this work. However, few scholars have studied *Fu Sheng Liu Ji* from the perspective of the foregrounding theory. Hence, some examples will be given bellow to show how scholars analyze this work and to contrast their advantages and disadvantages.

In A Comparative Study of the English Versions of *Fu Sheng Liu Ji*——From the Perspective of Text Linguistics, the author takes seven standards of textuality as its theoretic framework and attempts to do a comparative study of the two English versions of *Fu Sheng Liu Ji*, in order to explore the similarities and differences between the two versions concerning safety standards of textuality, the reasons behind the differences, and to find out some inspiration for translation. The most obvious difference between the two English versions of *Fu Sheng Liu Ji* is that Lin Yu-tang put emphasis on different intertextual quality relationships names, versions emphasizes target text into textuality more by changing image is unique to Chinese culture into their English counterparts, while Pratt and Chiang put more emphasis on the source text into textuality by keeping the original image and providing explanations. Comparing translators' processing ways of the original text, it is easy to find out that, the foreground theory in Lin's translation is not as widely used as it is in Pratt and Chiang's version. In addition, from this paper, we can learn that the author realized the translators' intentions and provide his own opinions from the perspective of text linguistics, but he failed to analyze expression ways of *Fu Sheng Liu Ji* among which the foregrounding remains dominance.

In previous studies, researchers paid attention to the various manifestation strategies used in Lin Yu-tang's translation, such as cohesion, interpretation, rhetoric and word manifestation, which makes the translation coherent and smooth, rich in linguistic images and clear in meaning. It can effectively and completely convey the content of the original text and solve the difficult problems caused by language differences in the translation process. The concept of manifestation refers to the process of adding information that can be inferred from the context but only exists implicitly in the source language. Researchers didn't study translation from the perspective—foregrounding theory. It is far from enough to study only one translation version of *Fu Sheng Liu Ji*.

Functionalist translation theory is well proven to be beneficial and instructive in the analysis of translation of cultural default examples by Lin Yu-tang and Pratt Leonard & Chiang Su-hui. There are still some inevitable limitations however. Firstly, the previous studies concentrated on the cultural differences between the source text and the translation text but ignored that language is the medium of culture, which shows the importance of analyzing the expression ways of the source text. The source text often applied foregrounding languages. Secondly, only five categories of cultural default are studied in previous studies and some categories can be divided into more detailed categories such as defaults concerning material and social culture. It can be better if the study can combine cultural defaults with foregrounding theory. Hence, only if we pay enough attention to this theory, can we better understand foregrounding features of literary works and ensure the accuracy of translations.

3. A Comparative Analysis on Two Versions of Fu Sheng Liu Ji

3.1. Overall Evaluation of Two English Versions of Fu Sheng Liu Ji

Languages in Lin's version are concise and vivid. When dealing with cultural factors of the original text, he adopted the translation strategies of domestication and dissimilation. On the one hand, these strategies made it easy for readers to comprehend. On the other hand, some cultural phenomenon with Chinese characteristics has been preserved. Compared with Lin's translation, the most prominent feature of Pratt & Chiang's translation is the faithfulness to the original text and the culture of the source language. They tried to preserve the heterogeneity of the original text through various methods. An important part was added in this version: appendix. It is very helpful for readers to understand the cultural background and the full text. Foregrounding theory is applied in both of the two versions of translation. This paper will analyze the similarities and differences in the translation of cultural factors in the two versions through several specific examples.

3.2. The Application of Foregrounding Theory in Fu Sheng Liu Ji

Compared with the bold and unrestrained language expression in other writers' works, the language and content in *Fu Sheng Liu Ji* are relatively implicit. Shen Fu highlighted the spirit of seeking truth and beauty with concise and vivid writing. A variety of rhetorical devices are widely used in literary works, all of which reflected the author's unique attitude towards life and aesthetic interest. The first two chapters describe the unforgettable memories of Shen Fu especially those about his wife--Chen Yün. The last two chapters describe his frustration in life and flashbacks of travel memories. This paper will focus on analyzing the foregrounding phenomenon embodied in the author's emotional expression to feel the unique charm of this work.

3.2.1. On the Semantic Level

Foregrounding theory on this level refers to semantic logic deviation causing the highlights of original text's meaning. These highlights must be related to the whole meaning of this work so as to explain the author's intention. By drawing upon this kind of foregrounding, the author was able to freely express his feelings.

ST:"'秋侵人影瘦，霜染菊花肥。'"(Shen , 2009: 16)

TT:

"'Touched by autumn, one's figure grows slender. Soaked in frost, the chrysanthemum blooms full.'" (Lin, 1999: 5)

"'We grow thin in the shadows of autumn, but chrysanthemums grow fat with the dew.'"(Pratt & Chiang, 2015: 2)

Shen Fu's quote of this line was to show that Chen Yün was gifted in literature. This line is from the poem she wrote in the spare time after embroidering. When translating this line, Lin Yu-tang's translation used the inverted structure to put the verb in the first place, and adopted the rhetoric of dual in the sentence pattern. The contrast between blooming chrysanthemum and the thin figure perfectly highlighted the bleak prospect of autumn. In Pratt and Chiang's translation, compared with the version of Lin Yu-tang, they only applied syntactic linearity but did not comprehend the author's intention: to imply Yün's tragic destiny by a line full of sorrow. Pratt and Chiang failed to convey the meaning of foregrounding language in this sentence.

ST:"夏蚊成雷，私拟作群鹤舞空。"(Shen, 2009: 37)

TT:

"When mosquitoes were humming round in summer, I transformed them in my imagination into a company of storks dancing in the air."(Lin, 1999: 81)

"During the summer, whenever I heard the sound of mosquitoes swarming, I would pretend they were a flock of cranes dancing across the open sky. And in my imagination they actually would become hundreds of cranes."(Pratt & Chiang, 2015: 28)

This quote is taken from Shen Fu's recollection of his childhood in Chapter two, which describes the story of a young man who saw mosquitoes as white cranes. It can be seen that the author compared the mosquito to the white crane, the mosquito sound to the thunder respectively through the figurative rhetoric. His intention was to reflect the children's dreamy imagination. The description of thunder-like mosquito sounds was to describe the amount of mosquitoes in the summer. It can be found in two translations that translators had different ways to translate these images. But the common place is that there is no direct link between the sound and thunder. Although Lin's translation directly described the buzzing of mosquitoes, it fails to reflect the noise of their cries. Pratt and Chiang directly used the word "swarming" to paint the picture that the sky is full of mosquitoes. Although two translations are not perfectly reflected foregrounding features of this sentence, Pratt and Chiang's translation is preferred.

3.2.2. On the Syntactic Level

Foregrounding theory on this level means the violation of the standard sentence order. There are a variety of foreground methods on the syntactic level. This part mainly analyzes the over-regularity of syntax and the use of marked theme in literary translation.

ST: "'马嵬之祸，玉环之福安在？'"(Shen, 2009: 74)

TT:

"'What about the fat Yang Kueifei who died at Mawei?'" (Lin, 1999: 220)

"Considering the disaster that befell her at Mawei," I said, "where was Yang Kuei-fei's good fortune?"* (Pratt& Chiang, 2015: 74)

*"Yang was an imperial concubine who was rather plump and is supposed to have so this distracted the T'ang Emperor Hsüan Tsung that he almost lost the dynasty to rebel An Lu-shan. She was executed by loyalist troops at Mawei."

This is a dialogue between Shen Fu and Chen Yün. As Chen mentioned in the previous text that well-built people are blessed, she thought Lan-kuan (an plump actress) is a blessed lady. Shen Fu did not agree on this, so he quoted the image of Yang Kueifei (a famous imperial concubine in Chinese history) to refute. The original text fails to reflect the foregrounding theory, but it's necessary for translator to introduce the cultural background for readers. Lin Yu-tang's translation used "fat" to describe Yang Kueifei, but the information is so little that readers who are not familiar with Chinese history might be confused. In Pratt and Chiang's translation, there is an appendix to provide more information about Yang Kueifei. By using the appendix, the image of Yang is highlighted in this sentence.

ST: "当是时，孤灯一盏，举目无亲，两手空拳，寸心欲碎。"(Shen, 2009: 62)

TT:

A solitary lamp was shining then in the room, and a sense of utter forlornness overcame me (Lin, 1999: 175).

When it happened, there was a solitary lamp burning in the room. I looked up but saw nothing, there was nothing for my two hands to hold, and my heart felt as if it would shatter (Pratt & Chiang, 2015: 59).

High frequency of numerals in a sentence is also a typical example of foregrounding. The aim that Shen Fu adopted this method was to quantify the small number of things and to vividly depict the disappointment and loss of beloved wife at that time. Both the translators have noticed the author's empathic approach in this sentence. So they firstly used "solitary" to describe the light, which is usually used to describe the feeling of helplessness. The aim is to further highlight his loneliness. The translation of the first half sentence is unified with the foregrounding theory as the original text. However, Lin Yu-tang applied liberal translation in the second half of the sentence which failed to highlight the prospect. By contrast, in Pratt and Chiang's translation, the word "nothing" was emphasized twice in total. The repetition has presented the image of the helpless author to the readers. This translation strategy is highly consistent with foregrounding features in the original text.

3.2.3. On the Lexical Level

The application of foregrounding theory on this level in literary works is reflected in the repetition, duality and parallelism of words on the one hand, and the transfer of meaning (metaphor, personification, allusion, etc.) on the other hand. Among them, word repetition and word meaning transfer are the most commonly used means in literary creation.

ST:"芸既长，娴女红，三口仰其十指供给，克昌从师修脯无缺。" (Shen, 2009: 15)

TT:

When Yün grow up and had learnt needlework, she was providing for the family of three, and contrived all ways to pay K'eh Ch'ang's tuition fees punctually (Lin, 1999: 5).

As she grew older, she became very adept at needlework and the labor of her 10 fingers became to provide for all three of them. Thanks to her work, they were always able to afford to pay the tuition for her brother's teachers (Pratt & Chiang, 2015: 1).

In the translation, it can be seen from the original text that both "三口"（three mouths） and "十指"（ten fingers） are typical metaphors. "三口" refers to Chen Yün's family of three, while "十指" refers to Chen Yün's physical labor. Through these rhetoric devices, the author emphasized Yün's responsibility to support family and her efforts to improve living standards. And the sentence has implied that she lost her father at an early age, and the family was impoverished. By comparing with the number "3" and "10", the author highlights the heavy burden of family that Yün bears, leaving a hint for Yün to displease her husband's family because of her younger brother's misbehavior.

In Lin's translation, he translated "十指" into needlework instead of ten fingers. Foreignization is the translation strategy he used to help foreign readers understand the meaning. He was aware of the differences of thinking patterns between Chinese and Western readers: Chinese readers can associate numbers with heavy works while Western readers may feel confused. In the version of Lin Yu-tang, though the languages appear to be concise and clear, it seems that he ignored the connotation and the foregrounding theory highlighted in the original text. In Pratt and Chiang's translation, there retains the explanation of "三口"and"十指" and

complement. The translators noticed the special expression and highlighted it in the midst of the translation. Although this processing is not very accord with foreign readers' thinking pattern, it enables them to appreciate the beauty of different cultures.

ST:"是时风和日丽，遍地黄金，青衫红袖越陌度阡，蝶蜂乱飞，令人不饮自醉。"(Shen, 2009: 47)

TT:

The sun was beautiful and the breeze was gentle, while the yellow rape flowers in the field looked like a stretch of gold with gaily dressed young men and women passing by the rice fields and bees and butterflies flitting to and fro--a sight which could make one drunk without any liquor (Lin, 1999: 117).

The wind and sun was exquisite. The earth was golden, and the blue clothes and red sleeves of strollers filled the paths between the fields, while butterflies and bees flew all around us. The scene was so intoxicating one hardly needed to drink (Pratt & Chiang, 2015: 40).

In the original text, "黄金""青衫""红袖" are the application of metonymy. "黄金" refers that quantities of yellow flowers are blooming everywhere, while"青衫""红袖"refers to the colorful clothes that young men and women wears. Shen Fu used flowery languages to describe beautiful sceneries of spring and to highlight his nostalgia and unforgettable memories of the past old days. By contrasting the two versions, it can be found that Lin Yu-tang described several sceneries in a sentence, while sentences in Pratt and Chiang's version are nearly equal in length and with similar structure. This translation is more consistent with the original expression on the logic basis. And the language can impress readers through the author's foregrounding expressions. In the translation of the last sentence, the two translators happened to agree on each other. They both used a scene, namely "a sight" and "the scene", to highlight the intoxicating specific things in the preceding text. This is the choice made by both the translators after analyzing the original text.

ST: "兽云吞落月，弓月弹流星。"(2009: 30)

TT:

Beast-clouds swallow the sinking sun/And the bow-moon shoots the falling stars (Lin, 1999: 55).

Beast-like clouds eat the setting sun the bow-like moon shoots falling stars (Pratt & Chiang, 2015: 19).

"Swallow" means "to make food, drink etc. go down your throat into your stomach" and it also means "something is taken in or completely covered so that they cannot be seen or no longer exist separately." "Eat" means "to put food in someone's mouth and chew it". In this sentence, "swallow" better describes the momentum that the author intends to convey. Through comparison, it can be seen that the vocabulary that Lin Yu-tang used are more magnificent than Pratt and Chiang. It can highlight the momentum of the original poem to the maximum extent.

When writing literary works, authors sometimes create some new words to express a special meaning, which can highlight the theme and make these works more extraordinary. In dealing with cultural-loaded words, both Lin and Pratt flexibly adopted a variety of translation methods to help readers to comprehend. When translating words associated with culture, they preferred to apply foregrounding languages to remain the unique Chinese culture.

4. Conclusion

Foregrounding theory has been applied in both of the two English versions of *Fu Sheng Liu Ji*, but Pratt & Chiang paid more attention to foregrounding features than Lin Yu-tang did. The emphasis that translators given to foregrounding theory influence the effect of translated text. By using foregrounding languages to translate, translators can enable readers to appreciate the rich imagination and deep feeling of the author on different levels: vocabulary, syntax, semantics etc. This paper, thus, provided some inspiration to translate literary works from the perspective of foregrounding theory.

References

[1] Aristotle, "Poetics." The Works of Aristotle Translated into English[C]. Ed. Smith, J.A. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1912.

[2] Leech, N. A Linguistic Guide to English Poetry[M]. Beijing: Foreign Language Teaching and Research Press, 2001.

[3] Leech, N. & Short, H. Style in Fiction: A Linguistic Introduction to English Fictional Prose[M]. New York: Longman Inc., 1983.

[4] Li Qiaoling & Zhang Guanzhi, Research on Translation of Chinese Culture-loaded Words from the Perspective of Cultural Schema Theory--a Case Study of Lin Yutang's English Version of Six Chapters of a Floating Life[J]. Journal of Southwest University of Science and Technology (Philosophy and Social Science Edition), 2019(05): 42-46.

[5] Mukarovsky, J. S. "Standard Language and Poetic Language." Twentieth Century Western Critical Theories[M]. Ed. Zhu Gang. Shanghai: Foreign Language Education Press, 2003.

[6] Shen Dan, Literary Stylistics and Fictional Translation[M], Beijing: Peking University Press, 1998.

[7] Shen Fu, Fu Sheng Liu Ji[M]. Beijing: China Youth Publishing Group, 2009.

[8] Shen Fu, Six Records of a Floating Life[M]. Trans. Pratt & Chiang Su-hui. Jiangsu: Yilin Press, 2015.

[9] Shen Fu, Six Chapters of a Floating Life[M]. Trans. Lin Yu-tang. Beijing: Foreign Language Teaching and Research Press, 1999.

[10] Wales, K. The Translators' Invisibility: A History of Translation[M]. London & New York: Routledge, 2001.

[11] Ye Zinan, Advanced Course in English-Chinese Translation[M]. Beijing: Tsinghua University Press. 2001.