
Review

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Gender in Literary Translation: A Corpus-Based Study of the English Translations of Chenzhong De Chibang, Lingzi Meng. Singapore, Springer (2019). ISBN 978-981-13-3720-8

Emerged in the late 1980s, academic inquiry into gender and translation studies has become a thriving field in recent decades. While most of the studies on gender and translation are based on the existentialist assumption of female identity and the radical notion of patriarchy (Baker, 1998; Hu, 2016). The book *Gender in Literary Translation: A Corpus-based Study of the English Translations of Chenzhong De Chibang* addresses the interconnection between gender and translation issues from a new perspective that is based on the post-structuralist discursive conceptualizations of gender and language. Combining three diverse but related disciplines of corpus linguistics, translation, and gender studies, the book provides theoretical and practical perspectives on how gender identity is constructed in translation by employing the Critical Discourse Analysis framework and corpus methodology. This interdisciplinary and empirical translation research has presented itself as an exciting and innovative study that expands the research scope of both gender studies and translation studies.

The volume consists of six chapters. The first chapter starts with a historical review of how gender and language converge, followed by introducing the current development of the intersection between gender and translation studies. It also lists out clear research objectives of examining gender construction and representation in literary translation by studying two English translations of a Chinese novel Chenzhong De Chibang [沉重的翅膀] using corpus tools and techniques. In this chapter, the author also discusses the possible contributions of the study to various relevant fields, including cultural studies, gender studies, gender and language studies, and translation studies.

The second chapter gives a detailed literature review on gender and translation, in which the author identifies three paradigms of feminist translation studies. The first paradigm is mainly based on the assumption of sex/gender difference between men and women, and the second paradigm adds a dynamic dimension to the notion of gender by taking it as a discursive process. The author points out that the third paradigm of gender and translation studies has witnessed the combination of feminist translation studies and feminist linguistics, taking in perspectives “informed by the theories and practices from the discipline of gender and language studies” (p. 10). After offering a solid critique and evaluation of these three paradigms, the author justifies the applicability of a corpus-based approach to gender studies used in her study. In this chapter, previous studies conducted on the Chinese novel and its translations are also reviewed.

In chapter three, the author provides a detailed introduction to the study's theoretical framework and research approaches. The theoretical framework is primarily related to post-structuralist theories, including the theorization of language and subjectivity and the definition of discourse and power. Based on such a framework, the essentialist notion of gender is deconstructed and replaced with a post-structuralist one postulating that gender is a dynamic process resulting from power asymmetries and negotiation. In this chapter, critical theories have been introduced in clear and progressive steps,

including Michel Foucault's theorization of power and discourse and Judith Butler's concept of gender performativity, to help readers sort out the delicate intricacies of gender, discourse, and discourse power. After providing the theories that lay the foundation for the study, the author proposes integrating critical discourse analysis to study the interrelation between gender, discourse and power with contextual factors.

A detailed methodology of the study is presented in chapter four, including methodological basis, ways to collect and analyze data, and issues of researcher subjectivity. The author innovatively adopts a corpus-based approach combined with CDA as the theoretical interface to investigate the translations from both microscopic and macroscopic perspectives. Data collection and analysis comprises six steps, namely, selection of text, a compilation of a Chinese-English parallel corpus consisting of one source text (i.e., the Chinese novel) and two target texts (i.e., Gladys Yang's translated version and Howard Goldblatt's translated version), identification of gender-related discourses in the source text, examination of the representation (or distortion) of these discourses in the target text, and functional analysis of the target texts. In addition to the six linguistic features: modal auxiliaries, passive voice, there-be structure, emphasizees, amplifiers and downtoners listed for the research, the author also incorporates corpus statistics, translator's mediation, and gendered discourses for an all-round investigation.

Chapter five reports on the results of the textual analysis. Investigation into the aspects concerning the language used by the two translators (e.g., corpus statistics, modality, transitivity, pragmatic features, and the translators' conscious mediation) indicates some consistent patterns regarding the translators' language use and their representation of gendered discourse. Based on the findings, the author concludes that the translators adopted different approaches in constructing the gendered discourses in their respective translations. Specifically, the female translator is more manipulative in rewriting the texts that are hostile against women, whereas the male translator is comparatively more faithful to the original text. It is worth noting that several supportive examples and substantial statistics are provided to support such a claim. Possible factors that may give rise to such differences are also discussed in this chapter.

In the last chapter (Chapter six), The author readdresses some questions raised in Chapter one and claims that the female and male translators have constructed distinct gender identities due to their different translation approaches. She also discusses the limitations and implications of the study. The author admits that her research is confined to a case study involving only one source text, which might limit the generalizability of the conclusions. She also acknowledges that the research could have been further strengthened by first-hand information from interviews with the translators and publishers.

Overall, this book presents an innovative and empirical approach to examine how language, gender and translation interact. However, some areas could have been improved. For example, the author only uses a limited range of paratextual elements such as preface, afterword, footnotes and the list of characters in her study. It should be noted that other paratextual materials such as interviews with or essays written by the author and the translators are equally important. As the two translators, i.e., Gladys Yang and Howard Goldblatt, are both recognized as established translators in the field, it might not be too difficult to find some interview reports about their views on translation. Such paratextual materials can significantly reinforce the findings and claims of the study. The monograph is a unique and valuable publication exploring the interplay between gender and translation in the Chinese context. It also represents a welcome addition to the variety of recent works that adopt an empirical approach to studying translation which possesses some uniqueness as "a mediated communicative event" (Baker 1998:243).

References

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