

A Study on Domestication and Foreignization in Translation of Contemporary American Literature

– Take Hillbilly Elegy as an Example

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Abstract:

Domestication and foreignization are popular perspectives in studying translations of foreign literature. However, books describing the real conditions of foreign societies published in recent years have seldom been studied. *Hillbilly Elegy* is a popular book in recent years that focuses on white Americans from lower classes, who are an important part of the American population but easily ignored. By studying the application of the translation strategies of Domestication and Foreignization in the Chinese translation of *Hillbilly Elegy* and the cultural elements, this paper tries to explore how Domestication and Foreignization are employed in the translation of contemporary foreign literature to convey the realities of today's international society in a way that can preserve the original connotation and manifest the beauty of Chinese. Hopefully, this study can also lead more people to pay attention to contemporary literature translation and the reality of today's international society.

Keywords: Domestication and Foreignization; literature translation; *Hillbilly Elegy*; Cultural Exchange.

1. Introduction

Language and culture are inseparable. Language is the carrier of culture, and culture is the essence of language. It is precisely because of their close relationship that when translating between two languages, translators should consider the conversion of language forms and the uniqueness of the culture reflected by the language to promote communication and understanding between different cultures. Since Venuti proposed the translation strategies of Domestication and Foreignization in 1995, the two translation strategies have played an important role in translation [1]. There is much previous research on domestication and foreignization, but the choice of the two translation strategies is also quite controversial. Schleiermacher, a German theologian and translator, published an article in 1813 in which he pointed out that the translator should either try not to disturb the author and let the reader draw closer to the author; Or try not to disturb the reader, let the author as close to the reader as possible [2].

By studying the original and Chinese version of *Hillbilly Elegy*, this research aims to have an insight into the employment of translation strategy of Domestication and Foreignization. Also, it tries to gain insight into the role of cultural differences in adopting a translation strategy.

The textual analysis will be the methodology of this research, and the paratext of translations will be explored to find more information about cultural differences. Here are questions that will be answered in this research:

- 1) What is the translation strategy of Domestication and Foreignization applied in *Hillbilly Elegy*?
- 2) What's the impact of cultural differences on translation?

2. Fundamental Issues of Domestication and Foreignization

2.1 Domestication and Foreignization

Lawrence Venuti, a famous American translation theorist, put forward the translation methods of Domestication and Foreignization in his book *The Invisibility of the Translator* in 1995.

2.1.1 Definition of Domestication

Domestication is to adopt a transparent and smooth style in the translation to minimize the differences between the translation and the source language. In the translation process, translators aim to make what is reflected by the source language closer to the target language to achieve "cultural equivalence" between the source language and

the target language [3].

2.1.2 Characteristics of Domestication

Domestication is a translation method based on the target language and its characteristics. In translation, attention is paid to the target language readers. This strategy focuses on the acceptance and understanding of the target language to better convey the meaning and information of the source text. Although Domestication translation makes literature easier for target readers to understand, it is not conducive to absorbing the nutrition of foreign languages and cultures. Venuti, who introduced “domestication,” views this translation strategy unfavorably since it involves “an ethnocentric reduction of the foreign text to target-language cultural values.”

2.1.3 Definition of Foreignization

Venuti defines foreignization as “an ethnodeviant pressure on those [target-language cultural] values to register the linguistic and cultural difference of the foreign text, sending the reader abroad” [4]. In other words, foreignization refers to preserving the cultural and linguistic features of the source language.

2.1.4 Characteristics of Foreignization

Venuti’s translator (in)visibility paradigm can be summarized as A translated text is judged successful—by most editors, publishers, reviewers, readers, and translators themselves—when it reads fluently, when it gives the appearance that it is not translated, that it is the original, transparently reflecting the foreign author’s personality or intention or the essential meaning of the foreign text [5]. Foreignization introduces the readers to the original text’s cultural background and language environment so that the readers can feel the uniqueness of the original text. It advocates keeping the cultural connotation of the source language in the translation process, enriching the target language’s culture, and enriching the linguistic expression of the target language. It can maintain the exotic atmosphere of the original in a way that intentionally breaks through the translator’s habits [6]. But it neglects whether readers can understand and accept it.

2.2 Debates on Domestication and Foreignization

The study and divergence of domestic and foreignization strategies are important issues in the field of translation around the globe. The debate between domestication and foreignization can be traced back to the fundamental contradiction of translation, namely, whether the translation should be faithful to the original text’s form or content [7]. In the West, Lefevere supports the domestication strategy

and believes that the “foreignizing” translation is strange and incomprehensible to the translator. Nida advocated that the expression form of the translation should be integrated into the translator’s culture; thus, domestication translation was adopted in the translation process [8]. However, Venuti regards domestication translation as an expression of ethnocentrism, racism, cultural narcissism, and imperialism [9].

In China, such a translation strategy has also been under heated discussion. In the preface of the Chinese edition of “Le Père Goriot”, Fu Lei proposed that in terms of effect, translation should be like a painting, and what it pursued was not similarity in form, but in spirit. Qian Zhongshu argued that the ideal of translation was “sublimation”. He believed that sublimation was converting one language to another while completely preserving the native color without rigidity [10].

3. Analysis of Chinese Translation Version of Hillbilly Elegy

3.1 Analysis of the Lingual Dimension

3.1.1 Diction

Example 1: You see, I grew up poor, in the Rust Belt, in an Ohio steel town that has been hemorrhaging jobs and hope for as long as I can remember.

你们要知道，我的童年很穷困，生活在铁锈地带 (Rust Belt)* 俄亥俄州的一座钢铁城市。

注释：指美国一些曾经繁荣今已衰落的地区。

(Notes: Refers to areas of the United States that were once prosperous but are now in decline.)

Learning about Rust Belt in the United States and its history is an important step in understanding American society’s real history and current state. The translation of “Rust Belt” mainly adopts the translation method of Foreignization and is supplemented with explanatory notes, which enables Chinese readers to accurately understand the connotation of “Rust Belt” and, at the same time, gives them a more direct understanding of the current social problems in the United States.

Your culture has you long before you have it; understanding your culture is a lifetime work [11]. Rust Belt, while it may initially present some obstacles to the reader’s understanding, can serve as a puzzle piece and a clue that enriches the reader’s understanding of American history and, in the meantime, leads the reader to explore an important period of American history on his or her initiative. During the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, the northeastern United States and the region around the Great Lakes, with its easy access to water transportation

and abundant minerals, became a center of heavy industry. The Appalachian Mountains area was once highly developed. However, ever since the United States moved into an economy dominated by services and high-tech industries, the heavy industry in these areas began to decline. Many factories were abandoned, and machines once kept roaring around the clock were covered with rust. This area fell into the “Rust Belt”.

The “Rust Belt” witnessed the rise and decline of heavy industry in the United States, as well as the social changes in the post-industrialization era. It tells us the tragedy of the Achilles’ heel of the Gilded Age and the struggles of generations in a country. This period of history has profoundly impacted American politics, religion, and many other aspects. To a certain extent, today’s America is inseparable from this period of history. To understand contemporary America, learning about America’s past is necessary. Rust Belt is the key to knowing about the modern American society. The Foreignization Translation Strategy adopted here retains American characteristic words, which are deeply rooted in the characteristics of the original text. Adding an exotic element to the Chinese version, this translation stimulates readers’ interest in English literature and culture, through which readers can also better understand the history, politics, and current society of the country of the source language.

Example 2: We call minnows “minners” and crayfish “crawdads.”

我们把鲦鱼叫作“条儿鱼”，把小龙虾叫作“喇蛄”。

The translation of “minners” into “条儿鱼” is mainly based on the method of domestication. In doing so, the translator achieves two goals at the same time. Firstly, the translator noticed the similarity in pronunciation between minnows and minners, like a kind of alliteration, and found two similar words in Chinese, “鲦鱼” and “条儿鱼”. It maintains the feature of the original text. Secondly, the term “条儿鱼” echoes with the original text. Minnows and minners are examples given to support that “Hillbillies like to add their twist to many words.” Adding “儿” to a noun is a common way for Chinese to show their twist. It is a term used by ordinary people in their daily life. So, it forms a parallel structure, conveying the same meaning with similar supporting details before and after the translation.

Rhotic accent, which means adding “儿” to a noun, has its origin back to the Liao dynasty. It gradually became the sound of “er” like we say nowadays through the Jin, Southern Song, Yuan, Ming and Qing dynasties. It has its roots in traditional Chinese culture and developed along with Chinese history. So, applying a rhotic accent in the

translation of miners also successfully reflects the cultural connotation of Chinese society.

3.1.2 Sentence Pattern

Example 3: You can just imagine a well-bred housewife watching out the window in horror as her Kentucky-born neighbor slaughtered squawking chickens just a few feet away.

设想一下，当一位“高贵”的家庭主妇看向窗外时，就在几英尺之外，来自肯塔基的邻居正在屠杀咯咯乱叫的鸡，这场景会令这位家庭主妇感到多么的恐惧。

Domestication is applied in translation about the pattern of this sentence. The short phrase “in horror” in English is translated into a separate short sentence in Chinese. Similarly, “just a few feet away”, which is an adverbial of place directly following the end of the sentence, is separated by a comma to form a new sentence in the Chinese version. Moreover, in the original text, “you can just imagine”, which contains the subject, leads directly the subordinate clause without any punctuation. In contrast, in the translation, the translator changes this part into an imperative sentence, which grammatically can form an entirely independent sentence and is also separated by a comma. Taking a more macro view, this long sentence in English is divided into five short sentences by the translation process. Domestication Translation Strategy in this sentence not only increases the readability of the text but also shows the beauty of the Chinese language. Therefore, this sentence is a typical example of the difference between the sentence patterns in English and Chinese. Long sentences are frequently used in English, while short sentences and punctuation are preferred in Chinese.

To explain this phenomenon, we have to start with the difference in expression habits and cultural differences. English is an analytic language emphasizing logic and coherence, and long sentences can better express complex ideas and opinions. In addition, English grammatical structures such as connectives and clauses also support the formation of long sentences. Moreover, long English sentences also focus on detailed descriptions and express delicate emotions through adjectives and adverbs. Chinese short sentences, on the other hand, focus on simplicity and clarity. The short sentences facilitate the transmission of information and reflect the unique rhythm of Chinese. Also, it is worth noting that Chinese emphasizes the profound connotation of the expression, which is implicit and intriguing.

The difference between long and short sentences also shows Chinese and American cultural differences. Chinese people are more subtle and introverted. Chinese culture places less emphasis on precise information delivery than

American culture. Instead, it focuses on the subtle expression of emotion. Moreover, it does not emphasize grammatical and syntactical accuracy as much as American culture; for example, important grammatical structures, such as subjects, are likely to be neglected in Chinese. However, Chinese people are quite concerned with emotional expression and mood and pay attention to the beauty and rhythm of language. Translation of this sentence by Liu Xiaotong and Zhuang Yishu has taken cultural differences into consideration, and it has a conspicuous performance in the inheritance and dissemination of Chinese culture.

3.2 Analysis of the Cultural Dimension

3.2.1 Language Style

Example 4: My grandparents—Mamaw and Papaw—were, without question or qualification, the best things that ever happened to me.

我的外祖父母——阿公和阿嬷——无疑且无条件地是我生命中最美好的人。

The translation of “阿公和阿嬷” not only achieves the Domestication Translation strategy at the diction level but also reflects the cultural aspects of the Chinese language very well.

“阿公和阿嬷” is the name given to grandparents in the dialects of Chaoshan, Minnan, Taiwan, Fujian, and Chaozhou in Guangdong. This kind of address is characteristic of the southern region of China, loaded with the unique culture of the southern region. When reading it, you can feel the specific cultural atmosphere of the Hakka culture.

In addition, due to the exchange and integration of different cultures all across China, “阿公和阿嬷” is not only in frequent use in the Hakka language but also popular all over the country China. Even people in Harbin know this special kind of appellation. Nowadays, this kind of address has become a symbol of Chinese culture, and “阿公和阿嬷” can make Chinese readers from all over the country feel the warmth and sense of belonging brought by traditional culture.

The translation between “Mamaw and Papaw” and “阿公和阿嬷” reaches the height of the cultural dimension of translation. It drives communication between two cultures through the translation of two languages. Domestication Translation at the cultural level can not only promote the target language readers’ understanding and acceptance of the original work of literature but also promote mutual respect and exchanges among different cultures and civilizations all over the world, enrich the diversity of world culture, and promote the harmonious development of cul-

ture of the globe.

4. Discussion

These two translation methods have their disadvantages and advantages. The foreignization strategy is more likely to highlight the discourse of the source language, construct its discourse status, and make the others subservient to the author of the source language. Domestication, on the other hand, refers to adopting the expressions that readers of the target language are accustomed to convey the substance of the original text, which boosts the readability of the translated text. Although Domestication and Foreignization may appear to be two very different strategies, their relationship is not antithetical. Therefore, in the translation process, it is very important to choose between the two. In addition, it is worth noting that the choice of translation strategy varies with the development of the target language culture over time. *Hillbilly Elegy* differs from classic English literature; it is published and focuses on the modern time, during which “cultural confidence” is attached more importance.

In an era in which “cultural confidence” is increasingly emphasized, the translation of Liu Xiaotong and Zhuang Yishu mainly adopts the Domestication Translation Strategy, supplemented by the Foreignization Translation Strategy. It achieves a good equivalence regarding diction, sentence pattern, and language style. For acceptance of translation, domestication is suggested to play the main role so that readers can better understand the original text’s meaning. Still, the basic function of Foreignization cannot be ignored, which enables readers to be more in line with the international community and understand the real world outside the country with different languages through literary works.

In the meantime, the application of Domestication and Foreignization is not only an adoption of translation method; it determines the communication of two cultures. So, domestication translation also benefits cultural exchange, preservation, and inheritance. Translators in the modern era are not only doing paperwork; they have an important role in the never-ending progress of cultural exchange and development.

5. Conclusion

In the context of globalization and increasingly close cultural exchanges between countries, the emphasis of translators on Domestication and Foreignization Translation Strategies in literature translation has also changed with the times. This research has explored the employment of Domestication and Foreignization Translation in *Hillbilly*

Elegy. The translators adopted a translation strategy based on domestication and supplemented by Foreignization. Based on ensuring the original meaning, the translators seek language and expression that is easier for the readers to understand. The translation of *Hillbilly Elegy* retains Chinese expressing habits and reflects the characteristics of the Chinese language in the translation, such as conciseness and implicitness, which is conducive to the inheritance and dissemination of the beauty of the Chinese language. In conclusion, the Chinese translation of *Hillbilly Elegy* successfully reflects Chinese “cultural confidence” while promoting cultural exchange between America and China. As a translation of English literature, it incarnates national cultural adherence and inheritance.

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