

A study of the narrative reconstruction in Gladys Yang's English version of *Big Lin and Little Lin*

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Abstract

As an important carrier of cultural communication, Chinese children's literature has aroused widespread repercussions in the world with its unique narrative and emotional expression. This paper focuses on the narrative reconstruction strategy of Gladys Yang's English version *Big Lin and Little Lin*, and explores how it can achieve the effective international dissemination of Chinese children's literature through the adjustment of narrative perspective, narrative time and narrative discourse. The research conclusion shows that Gladys Yang's narrative reconstruction strategy not only faithfully conveys the spirit of the original work, but also greatly enhances the international acceptance of the translation. This practice provides valuable experience for the cross-cultural communication of Chinese children's literature.

Keywords

Big Lin and Little Lin, Chinese children's literature, narrative reconstruction, translation

1. Introduction

As a milestone of modern Chinese children's literature, Zhang Tianyi's *Big Lin and Little Lin* (大林和小林) occupies an important position in the history of literature with its unique narrative innovation. The novel uses comparative narrative techniques to tell the story of the twins Big Lin and Little Lin, who eventually go to different endings because of different ideas and life experiences. Big Lin became a delicious lazy parasite, and finally starved to death in the gold heap; Little Lin was industrious and brave, and grew up to be a good boy. The work sublimates the comparison of brothers' fates into a metaphorical expression of class contradictions, criticizes the insincerity of the ruling class in the old society, praises the revolutionary spirit of the working people's tenacious struggle in pursuit of a happy life, and reflects profound critical and educational functions.

The English version *Big Lin and Little Lin* is written by the famous translator Gladys Yang. As an important achievement of the overseas dissemination of Chinese literature in the 1950s and 1960s, it shows unique translation wisdom in narrative reconstruction. As an outstanding translator of Chinese literature, Gladys Yang has translated a large number of classic works in cooperation with her husband Yang Xianyi. When translating *Big Lin and Little Lin*, she accurately captures the humorous characteristics and critical spirit of the original text, and creatively realizes the narrative reconstruction of Chinese children's literature in the process of

English translation in three aspects: narrative perspective, narrative time and narrative discourse, which provides a valuable translation case for the international communication of Chinese literature.

2. Theoretical Framework of Narrative Reconstruction

2.1 An Overview of the Development of Foreign Narrative Theory

Narratology is a theory of narrative research that is influenced by structuralism. It has gone through nearly 40 years of development [1]. It has gone through two stages: classical narratology and post-classical narratology. The classical narratology rose in France in the 1960s, and its theoretical construction was influenced by structuralism and Russian formalism. Scholars in this period focused on the text itself, trying to explore narrative works by analyzing the narrative grammar, narrative perspective, time structure and other elements in the works. However, classical narratology has gradually revealed its limitations due to its excessive emphasis on text closure. In the 1970s, multi-theoretical branches such as rhetoric narratology and cognitive narratology are constantly emerging to jointly construct the theoretical system of post-classical narratology. By integrating the knowledge of linguistics, sociology, psychology and other disciplines, it expands the research scope to the fields of cultural ideology and readers' cognitive mechanism, and realizes the innovative transformation of narratology theory.

Compared with classical narratology, post-classical narratology develops the concept of Narrative, breaks through the framework of traditional structuralism, and expands the boundaries of narratology. In his *Narrative Discourse*, Gerard Genette, the representative of French structuralist narratology, first clarified the meaning of narrative and pointed out that the narrative he involved refers to narrative discourse, which is a narrative text in a literary sense [2]. This book takes Proust's novel *À la recherche du temps perdu* as the research object, summarizes the laws of literary narrative, and analyzes the structure and function of narrative text from five aspects: Order, Duration, Frequency, Mood and Voice. Genette's analysis focuses on narrative discourse, while focusing on the relationship between the level of narrative discourse and the level of the story to be narrated.

"Translation is a kind of re-narrative, which is a process in which the translator reconstructs the narrative logic in the translation based on the narrative clues of the original work" [3]. Starting from Genette's narrative theory, narrative reconstruction refers to the creative process of reconstructing narrative logic by using the target language based on the original text. The translator needs to deeply analyze the events and plots of the original text, and adjust the narrative order and narrative speed according to the narrative time, mode and voice, combined with the reading habits and cultural background of the target readers. The use of appropriate language to express unique cultural images enables the translation to be faithful to the original narrative while meeting the reading needs of the target language readers.

2.2 An Overview of the Development of Domestic Narratology Theory

The development process of domestic narrative reconstruction has gone through four stages: theory introduction, local practice, dialogue construction, development of tradition. From 1980 to 1985, after years of political criticism and reform and opening up, the Chinese literary research community welcomed objectivity and scientificity, attached importance to formal aesthetic research, and provided an ideal development soil for classical narratology. Yuan Kejia [4] translated Barthes's *L'activité structuraliste* and integrated structuralism with narrative techniques, and narratological research first appeared in the domestic academic field.

In the middle and late 1980s, Chinese scholars actively tried to apply it to local text research, laying the foundation for Chinese narratology. Chen Pingyuan [5] combines Todorov's narrative theory with Chinese literary tradition, and analyzes the context of Chinese traditional culture from three aspects of time, angle and structure in *The Transformation of Narrative Mode of Chinese Novels*, which opens up the interdisciplinary research path of narratology. Meng Fanhua created *The Art of Narrative* [6] and analyzed the position and function of narrative in literary works from the aspects of narrative perspective, narrative tone, narrative language, narrative rhythm and narrative mode.

In the 1990s, scholars combined Western classical narratology with the tradition of narrative research in China, and achieved many results [7][8] puts forward the research path of reduction-reference-penetration-

integration by comparing Chinese and Western narratology with the framework of “dual-structure thinking of Tao and technology”, aiming to construct a narrative theory that draws on the Western model and has Chinese characteristics. Fu Xiuyan’s *Pre-Qin Narrative Research* [9] starts from the narrative source, emphasizes the influence of the differences between Chinese and Western narrative backgrounds on the narrative rules, traces the theoretical construction to the origin of Chinese literature, and deepens the historical dimension of localized narrative research.

At the beginning of the 21st century, the translation and introduction entered the stage of synchronization with the West. Shen Dan’s “Unnamed Translation Library” series of books systematically presented the development of classical narratology, laying a theoretical foundation for the dialogue between China and the West. The Chinese-American sinologist Timothy C. WONG’s article *Chinese Narrative* appears in the Routledge Encyclopedia of Narrative Theory in the form of an independent article, which indicates that the academic community clearly regards Chinese narrative as the foundation of theoretical construction. Fu Xiuyan’s *Chinese Narratology* [10] analyzes the cultural genes of Chinese narrative from the dimensions of myth, artifacts and auditory narrative, and emphasizes the differences between local characteristics such as auditory narrative and Western narrative. At the same time, the academic community began to focus on academic exchanges to promote the deepening of research. The successful convening of the first National Symposium on Narratology in 2004 and the first International Conference on Narratology in 2007 marked the formation of an international platform for regular dialogue.

3. Narrative Reconstruction of Children’s Literature Translation

Children’s literature is a general term for all kinds of literary works with unique artistry and rich value created for children and suitable for them to read [11]. Children’s literature is an important carrier to construct children’s spiritual world. Therefore, the study of Chinese children’s literature translation is a key link to promote cultural exchanges between China and foreign countries and promote the international dissemination of Chinese children’s literature.

In the 1980s and 1990s, the publication of two classic works, *Children’s Fiction in the Hands of the Translators* and *Linguistic Acceptability in Translated Children’s Literature*, which focused on the adaptation of translation and the mechanism of text transformation, marked the initial formation of the academic system in this field. Then, the study of children’s literature translation in the West has undergone a shift from text-centered, child-centered to cultural-centered research, showing an explosive development trend in the early 21st century. *Translating for Children* launched by Meta [12] provides academic guidance for the application of narrative reconstruction strategy in the field of children’s literature translation from multiple perspectives such as cross-cultural communication and reception aesthetics. The collection *Children’s Literature in Translation: Challenges and Strategies*, edited by Jan Van Coillie & Walter P. Verschueren [13], puts forward the translation strategy of narrative reconstruction, which shows how the narrative reconstruction strategy skillfully balances the fidelity of the original text with the acceptability of the target language readers.

The related research on the translation of children’s literature in China started late, and the earliest relevant research results can be traced back to Liu Shusen’s *On the narrative voice characteristics of modern Chinese foreign novel translation* [14]. With the prosperity of the children’s literature market, the translation of children’s literature has developed unevenly in both theory and practice. The translations of children’s literature emerge in an endless stream, but there are few special studies on the translation of children’s literature [15]. By retrieving “children’s literature translation” in CNKI, the results show that almost no one was interested in this field before 2005, and then it gradually showed a good trend, but there are few related research results, only more than 200 articles. Its research direction is reflected in two aspects.

The first is the study of translation strategies of children’s literature. Yang Fan [16] analyzes the influence of narrative perspective on the translation of landscape description through the case of *Anne of Green Gables* from the perspective of narratology and the theory of fusion of horizons. Geng Qianqian [17], based on the theory of narrative stylistics, studies the English version of *The Fling King* from the aspects of narrative perspective, narrative order, reporting language and person name predicate. Zhu Hongyu [18] adopted the “dichotomy” of narratology as the theoretical framework and analyzed the differences between the cognitive frameworks of children readers in the source language and the target language through the Chinese translation practice of *A World of Dogs*.

The second is the practical exploration of children's literature translators. Ma Liqing [19] applied Mona Baker's narrative theory to interpret Lu Xun's works from the perspective of space-time construction and reorientation of characters and events, which expanded the application scope of narrative theory in translation practice. Huang Wenjuan et al. [20] analyzed the translation trend by commenting on *Introduction to Children's Literature Translation* and proposed that translation should focus on the core position of children readers and the aesthetic experience of re-narration.

This study summarizes Genette's narrative theories in *Narrative Discourse* and *Nouveau discours du recit*, and classifies them into three levels: narrative perspective, narrative time, and narrative discourse. In the process of studying the narrative reconstruction strategy of Gladys Yang's English translation of *Big Lin and Little Lin*, this paper will start from these three levels, resort out the narrative logic of the original work and compare and analyze the narrative reconstruction strategy of the translation according to the narrative elements and theoretical framework proposed by Genette, aiming to reveal Gladys Yang's unique narrative processing method in children's literature translation and provide new translation ideas for Chinese children's literature translation research.

Table 1: Three Levels and Corresponding Elements of Genette's Narrative Theory

Three levels	The application of Genette's narrative theory
narrative perspective	Voice (Genette, 1983:212)
narrative time	Order, Duration, Frequency (Genette, 1983:33-133)
narrative discourse	Mood (Genette, 1983:161)

4. Analysis of the Reconstruction of Narrative Perspective

In his *Nouveau discours du recit*, Gerard Genette analyzes the relationship between narrative and story, and gives a clear explanation of the concept of Voice. He believes that Voice focuses on who tells the story, who listens to it, and how these elements are presented in the narrative process. In other words, Voice focuses on the narrator's adjustment of narrative information, which is about exploring how the narrator tells the story and what kind of interaction exists between the narrator and the protagonist.

4.1 Narrative Subject Strategy Adjustment

Genette regards "narrator" as the narrator in the text, whose function is to construct narrative discourse through linguistic behavior. This concept includes the author outside the text and the characters inside the text. In the process of translation, Gladys Yang promotes the development of the plot through the characters' own language and actions, reduces the direct intervention of the narrator, shortens the distance between the narrator and the reader and enhances the sense of substitution.

Example 1

The original text: 包包穿着很好看的水晶鞋子，身上穿着大礼服，这礼服是洋铁做的，一点皱纹都没有。 [21]

Translation: Bao Bao was wearing beautiful crystal boots and a cloak made of tin with not a wrinkle in it. [22]

The original text adopts the omniscient narrative perspective, with Zhang Tianyi's subjective judgment on the bag dress, such as "这礼服是铁做的". The translation subtly transforms the author's objective comments into the act of wearing a "cloak made of tin". This kind of processing reduces the direct intervention of the narrator, enables readers to perceive the story scene more autonomously, making the narrative more natural and smooth and enhancing the immersion of English readers when reading.

4.2 Optimize the Perspective Through Transitional Words

In Gladys Yang's translation works, adding transitional words is an important narrative reconstruction strategy to optimize information transmission and enhance text adaptability. By introducing transitional words, the translation effectively alleviates the skipping and abruptness that may occur in the process of information transmission, transforms one-way compact information output into progressive expression, and guides readers

to participate in text interpretation from a perspective closer to the context of the story by delaying the rhythm of information release, so as to realize the transformation from passive receiver to active participant.

Example 2

The original text: 再仔细一看，原来不是玻璃，是冰糖。

Translation: Oh no, when you look carefully, it wasn't glass crystal but sugar.

The original text directly presents the observation results, and the information transmission lacks buffering. The translation adds the transitional word "Oh no" to simulate the surprise emotion when discovering the truth, and shortens the understanding distance between the reader and the narrative information through the emotional transitional word. It creates a short suspense effect. The narrator guides the reader to experience the process of "discovery-surprise-disabuse" together. This transitional expression effectively slows down the relatively direct narrative rhythm of the original text, allows the reader to participate in the observation and enhances the coherence and interactivity of the text.

4.3 Application of Language Expression Conventions

Genette proposed that the relationship between the narrator and the narrative information is not only reflected in the content level, but also in the language form. The audience of children's literature is mainly children's group, which shows a special preference for concrete, emotional and interactive language in the stage of cognitive development. Therefore, flexible sentence patterns, colloquial expressions and rich interjections constitute the typical characteristics of children's literature language. Gladys Yang integrates these expressions of English children's literature into the translation. Through the reconstruction of language form, it ensures the effective transmission of the core semantics of the original text, and also conforms to the expression form of the target cultural context.

Example 3

The original text: 唧唧说：“我真快活！这下子可真好。”

Translation: "What fun this is!" said Gee Gee. "I really am in luck."

The translation uses the exclamatory sentence "What fun this is" to quickly capture the reader's attention and strengthen the intensity of emotional expression, which is in line with the cognitive characteristics of children's intuition and emotion. In terms of vocabulary selection, the use of simple and easy-to-understand spoken words such as "fun" and "luck" is in line with children's language reserves and usage habits, reducing the reading threshold. At the same time, colloquial expression makes the narrative tone closer to children's daily communication, and successfully creates a real and sensible children's perspective in the translation, so that small readers have a strong sense of substitution and resonance in the reading process.

5. Analysis of the Reconstruction of Narrative Time

Genette pointed out that there must be two time orders in narrative, namely story time and narrative time. Story time refers to the time state of the story's natural occurrence, and narrative time refers to the time state presented by the story in the text. In the process of studying story time and narrative time, Genette put forward three concepts: narrative order, narrative duration and narrative frequency.

5.1 Narrative Order

Genette believes that the study of the chronological order of narrative is to compare the order of arrangement and connection of time or event segments in narrative discourse. In other words, order mainly focuses on the order of events on the timeline. Gladys Yang's translation, by skillfully adding time markers as a narrative reconstruction strategy, enables foreign readers to better grasp the development of the story.

Example 4

The original text: 蜜蜂们和蚂蚁们还是舞着唱着。于是就刮来了一阵风。这阵风越刮越大，越刮越大，就把唧唧刮的飘了起来。

Translation: The bees and ants went on singing and dancing till a wind sprang up. The wind became stronger and stronger, stronger and stronger, till it carried Gee Gee up into the air.

In the original text, the story is advanced by natural narration, the connection between events is slightly brief, and the continuity of time and the causality of events are not clear enough. The translation cleverly reconstructs the narrative sequence. The translator adds “till” twice to point out that the bees and ants continue to sing and dance until the wind appears. With the gradual progress of order, it helps young readers understand the coherent development logic of events from the wind to the chirp, and strengthens the relationship between the front and back of time. This approach makes the time order of the story more in line with the cognitive habits of the target language children, and helps small readers easily understand the sequence of the story.

5.2 Narrative Duration

Duration explores the relationship between the length of narrative time in the text and the actual time of the story. In Gladys Yang’s translation, the scene of the key points is expanded many times, the narrative rhythm is slowed down, the narrative time is prolonged, and the foreign children’s readers can feel the key plot more carefully.

Example 5

The original text: 海面上出现了许多水泡，像大大小小的珠子一样。

Translation: A great many bubbles floated to the top of the sea, like pearls of different sizes.

In the key plot of Big Lin’s party falling into the water, the original text advances the plot with short words and the rhythm is fast. The word “floated” is added to the translation, which transforms the original static “appearance” into a continuous action, making the scene description more dynamic and lengthening the narrative duration of the action process. At the same time, “floated” echoes the later metaphor “like pearls of different sizes”, making the visual presentation of bubbles from appearing to floating into beads more coherent through the addition of dynamic details. This approach fits the reading habits of foreign children’s favorite scene description, so that they can feel the key picture of the falling scene.

5.3 Narrative Frequency

Narrative frequency is used to describe the repetitive correspondence between text narrative language and story content. Its core is to analyze the difference between the number of events and the number of narratives. When an event is repeatedly mentioned in the text, it will bring about the problem of redundancy in the expression, which will cause the reader to lose interest in reading. In order to solve this problem, Gladys Yang adopts the method of simplifying the repeated mention of events to deal with the narrative frequency, so that the text can still highlight the key information while being concise.

Example 6

The original text: 比如作文，也是听差们替他作。算术题目也是听差们替他算。

Translation: They wrote his compositions and worked at his sums for him.

The translation merges two events originally described separately into one sentence, and connects them with “and”, avoiding repeating the expression “听差们替他们...” Such a structure simplifies the sentence, but through the parallel structure “wrote his compositions” and “worked at his sums”, it still retains the behavior in the original text wants to emphasize, making the expression more compact.

6. Analysis of the Reconstruction of Narrative Discourse

When telling a thing, it can be said more or less, or from this or that point of view; it is this ability and the way in which it is exercised that are involved in the category of narrative mode. In the process of translation, Gladys Yang makes adaptive adjustments to the original text from multiple dimensions, so that the translation can better integrate into the English cultural context while retaining the narrative charm of the original text, and realize the cross-cultural communication and value transmission of Chinese children’s literature works.

6.1 Adjustment of Discourse Presentation Mood

Narration is to complete the transformation between the narrative layers through narration, that is, the transformation of narrative layers. Turning direct speech into indirect speech means that the narrator changes from directly showing the character's discourse to reporting discourse, which makes the direct dialogue between the reader and the character interval and enhances the narrator's sense of existence. This narrative reconstruction strategy adopted by Gladys Yang can highlight the character's personality more, so that readers can understand the character's discourse and the author's views on the character from the narrator's perspective.

Example 7

The original text: “嗯，爸爸说的：‘一个人总得干活。’”

“因为爸爸是穷人呀。财主老爷就不用干活。爸爸说的：‘你看有田有地的可多好！’”

Translation: “But father told us to work hard.”

“That's because father was poor. Rich folk don't have to work. And father used to envy those gentlemen all their land.”

In the original text, Big Lin paraphrases his father's words “你看有田有地的可多好”，which is presented in the form of direct quotations, without clearly revealing emotional tendencies, and the inner character and value orientation of the characters are in a relatively obscure state. Gladys Yang translates this sentence by cleverly adding the word “envy” to give the text new narrative tension. The jealousy contained in “envy” not only reveals the coveting psychology of others' wealth and status behind the discourse, but also reflects its negative image of coveting comfort and contempt for the working people through the report of Big Lin. The narrator can effectively convey the critical attitude towards Big Lin and help foreign readers perceive the negative image of him more intuitively.

6.2 Cultural Adaptive Transformation

Mood is the way of information presentation in narration. In the process of translation, attention should also be paid to the expression habits and cultural adaptability of the target language. Gladys Yang transforms the dialect and colloquialism of the original work into standard English, while retaining the colloquial color through ellipsis, rhetorical questions and other sentence patterns. Under the premise of ensuring the standardization of the text, the vividness of the original work is restored to the maximum extent, and the relationship between language norms and style reproduction is balanced.

Example 8

The original text: 叭哈和唧唧去吃了喜酒。

Translation: Ba Ha and Gee Gee went to their wedding.

“吃喜酒” is the expression of Chinese marriage culture. Direct translation may make English readers confused due to the lack of relevant cultural background. Gladys Yang translated it as “went to their wedding”, which avoided the difficulty of understanding caused by cultural differences, maintained the fluency of the text, and enabled English readers to understand the plot without obstacles.

6.3 The Strengthening of Characters' Emotional Intention

Genette emphasizes that one of the core functions of the mode is to convey the deep information of the discourse through the details of the language. The use of it determines that the narrator provides the reader with more or less details in a direct or indirect way, and the narrator can also adjust the information it provides according to the cognitive ability of the story participants [23]. Gladys Yang enhances the emotional tension of the text and makes the translation more suitable for English children's emotional perception habits through the description of characters' actions and the processing of lines and sentences.

Example 9

The original text: 他说：“吓呀，那可是个凶恶的敌人！”

Translation: “Oh my!” he gasped. “He must be a dangerous man!”

The original text expresses Big Lin's fear in a relatively implicit way through the interjection “吓呀” and the adjective “凶恶”. Gladys Yang's translation adds the action description of “gasped”, vividly showing the character's shortness of breath due to fear, so that readers can feel the character's panic more intuitively. It converts “吓呀” into “Oh my!” is a common exclamatory sentence in English, which not only conforms to the oral habits, but also enhances the exclamatory tone; it replaces the simple statement with the speculative sentence of “must be” to further exaggerate Big Lin's concerns.

7. Comprehensive Analysis of Narrative Reconstruction

In terms of narrative perspective, Gladys Yang reduces direct comments, strengthens character dialogue and behavior description, and realizes reasonable reconstruction of narrative perspective by adjusting the perspective of narrative subject, optimizing transitional cohesion strategy and adapting to the expression habits of target language, so as to effectively narrow the psychological distance between readers and texts and enhance the sense of immersion in reading.

In terms of narrative time, Genette's division of story time and narrative time, as well as the three cores of narrative order, duration and frequency, provides theoretical guidance for time reconstruction in children's literature translation. In terms of order, Gladys Yang makes the development of the story more in line with the understanding logic of the target readers by adding clear time markers or adjusting the order of events. In terms of duration, Gladys Yang strengthened the appeal of the story by expanding the description of key scenes and slowing down the narrative rhythm. In terms of frequency, Gladys Yang balances the narrative density of repetitive events, avoids redundancy and retains the original emphasis effect, and ensures that the narrative rhythm is relaxed by adding time markers and adjusting the order of events; expand the description of key scenes, balance the narrative density of repeated events, and ensure that the narrative rhythm is relaxed.

In terms of narrative discourse, Gladys Yang ensures that the translation conforms to the reading expectations of English children in terms of language form and cultural connotation from three dimensions: discourse presentation, cultural adaptability transformation and emotional intention strengthening. Through the transformation of the form of the character's discourse quotation, the character's personality is highlighted, the dialect spoken language is transformed into standard English to achieve cultural adaptability, and the character's emotional intention is strengthened to make the emotional expression of the translation more vivid and natural.

8. Conclusion

The marginalization of children's literature translation research is closely related to the characteristics of subject research and the consciousness and mentality of researchers. The unique value of this research needs to be deeply explored by the academic circles [24]. Under the background of promoting cultural self-confidence and deepening cultural exchanges and mutual learning, children's literature, as an important carrier of Chinese cultural communication, undertakes the important mission of telling Chinese stories to the world and conveying Chinese voice. Based on Genette's narrative theory, this study conducts a narrative reconstruction study on Gladys Yang's English translation of *Big Lin and Little Lin*, aiming to explore the translation path of children's literature and improve the international communication efficiency of Chinese children's literature works. Through the creative transformation of language and culture, it opens a window for the world's children to understand Chinese culture and Chinese spirit, helps to construct Chinese discourse and Chinese narrative system, and promotes the creative transformation and innovative development of Chinese excellent culture on a global scale.

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