



A New Approach to the Framework of Children's Literature Translation Criticism: A Case Study of The Wednesday Wars

Mengying Xiang

School of Foreign Studies, Yangtze University, China

Email: 2789602912@qq.com

Received: 13 Jul 2024; Received in revised form: 10 Aug 2024; Accepted: 15 Aug 2024; Available online: 24 Aug 2024

©2024 The Author(s). Published by Infogain Publication. This is an open-access article under the CC BY license

(<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>).

Abstract— Translation criticism is an indispensable part of translation activities, playing a crucial role in improving the quality of translations and advancing the development of the discipline. This paper uses the American children's literature work *The Wednesday Wars* as a case study to propose a new approach to the framework of children's literature translation criticism. Combining both macro and micro perspectives and guided by the principle of child-centeredness, the study analyzes the translation from four dimensions: accuracy, readability, literary quality, and educational value. It explores effective translation methods and techniques for children's literature and reflects on the standards of a translation criticism framework for this genre.

Keywords— Children's literature, framework of children's literature translation criticism, translation methods and techniques



I. INTRODUCTION

In recent years, there has been a significant increase in the translation and introduction of foreign children's literature in China. According to data from the National Bureau of Statistics, from 2015 to 2020, children's books consistently accounted for the largest share of book imports. With China's rapid economic and social development, "children's literature" has gradually become an important factor in enhancing the country's cultural soft power. The growing demand has fueled the development of children's literature translation, making studying framework of children's literature translation criticism an important topic among scholars. A scientific and effective framework for translation criticism in children's literature is crucial for

promoting its development.

The *Wednesday Wars* is a representative work by American author Gary Schmidt, which won the Newbery Medal in 2008 and has been praised by many adult readers as their "favorite book". The story humorously depicts the experiences of a seventh-grade student, Holling Hoodhood, particularly focusing on Wednesday afternoons when, as the only Presbyterian in his class, he has to spend time alone with the stern Mrs. Baker. These Wednesday afternoons witness Holling's growth journey, from harboring hostility toward Mrs. Baker to forming a pure friendship and learning the values of courage, sincerity, love, and tolerance. This paper takes the well-known translator Gao Xuelian's translation, *The Wednesday Wars*, as an example to propose

a new approach to the framework of children's literature translation criticism. This approach combines macro and micro perspectives, with "child-centeredness" as its core, analyzing the translation methods and techniques used from the dimensions of accuracy, readability, literary quality, and educational value, and verifying its practical application with specific examples.

II. FRAMEWORK OF CHILDREN'S LITERATURE TRANSLATION CRITICISM

Israeli scholar Zohar Shavit argues that children's literature occupies a marginal position in the literary polysystem, and Professor Zhang Guolong from the College of Literature at Beijing Normal University also points out that Chinese children's literature is a marginalized "minor discipline", making the translation of Chinese children's literature even more marginalized. Currently, research on children's literature translation in China mainly focuses on the historical study of children's literature translation, modern translators, and discussions on children's literature translation phenomena from various perspectives. However, there is relatively little exploration of the framework of children's literature translation criticism. In recent years, Chinese scholars have achieved varying degrees of success in research perspectives and outcomes in children's literature translation criticism. Xiao Honglin (2006) proposed criteria for children's literature translation criticism, emphasizing the importance of viewing translations from a child's perspective and applying objective and fair standards to supervise and critique children's literature. Building on this foundation, Xu Derong significantly advanced the development of the framework for children's literature translation criticism. Xu (2014) established a framework that includes three parameters: accuracy, readability, and literary quality of children's literature, and proposed child-centered equivalence as the standard for children's literature translation. He also outlined a practical approach that combines comprehensive analysis with textual analysis. With further research into the framework of children's literature translation criticism, Xu Derong (2017) integrated the truth-seeking and pragmatic comprehensive model with the internationally recognized The Common European Framework of Reference for Languages: Learning,

Teaching, and Assessment, proposing a quantitative method of graded scoring. This criticism model organically combines the definition of criticism parameters and evaluation standards with quantification, promoting the objectivity and scientific nature of children's literature translation criticism. Zhao Xiyuan and Zhang Yan (2021), on the other hand, explored new approaches to children's literature translation criticism from the perspective of stylistic features, combining domestication and foreignization strategies, but did not focus on the finer details of translation methods. In the West, scholars are more concerned with the issues and challenges of translating children's literature, particularly the cultural specificities in translating classic works such as *Alice in Wonderland* (Natalia Kaloh Vid, 2024) and *Harry Potter* (Jan Van Coillie & Jack McMartin, 2020, p.12), but discussions on the framework of children's literature translation criticism remain insufficient.

III. CHILD-CENTRIC APPROACH

Children's literature translation in China originated in the late Qing Dynasty and early Republican period, flourished during the "May Fourth" Movement, underwent a political shift in the 1930s and 1940s, and reached a peak after the Reform and Opening-up period (Gao Luyi, 2017). The rise of children's literature translation has driven the development of modern Chinese perspectives on childhood. With the wave of the May Fourth New Culture Movement, advanced ideas of "child-centered" philosophy by figures such as Dewey, Montessori, and Piaget were introduced to China, prompting a shift in the perception of children and the recognition of their status. Guo Moruo applied child-centered principles to children's literature and its translation. In the new era, the child-centric philosophy continues to evolve. Unlike adult literature, children's literature is designed to be suitable for the psychological development of children, contributing to their healthy growth. The target audience for children's literature is children, whose psychological level, cognitive capacity, and comprehension abilities differ from those of adults. A high-quality translation of children's literature should not only accurately convey the content using language that children can understand and enjoy, but it must also align with children's psychological needs, stimulating their curiosity

and desire for knowledge. The child-centric theory influences word choice, sentence structure, and the transmission of emotions in translation. Only when children's literature translations are centered on the child, evoking their interest in reading and emotionally resonating with them, can such works be effectively passed down.

IV. CASE ANALYSIS

4.1 Faithfulness to the Original-Accuracy

Accuracy is the starting point of translation and is a fundamental principle in the translation of children's literature (Xu Derong & Jiang Jianli, 2014). An accurate, fluent, and expressive translation is crucial for readers to comprehend the original author's thoughts and intentions (Cui Bin, 1991). Here, accuracy refers to the precise reproduction of both subjective and objective information from the original text, including spelling, idiomatic expressions, and logical sequence, as well as the storylines, scenes, environments, character portrayals, and psychological aspects depicted in the original, even extending to the subjective feelings the original text elicits in its readers. In children's literature translation, accuracy is not limited to textual information but can also be reflected in various aspects, such as the original text's font, size, layout, color, and other visual elements like illustrations and symbolic imagery, which contribute to the work's style. Eugene A. Nida stated that style is not the icing on the cake, but an integral part of interlingual communication (2001, p. 4). If word choice is inappropriate, comprehension is difficult, or content unsuitable for the target age group appears, it will inevitably harm the style and fluency of the translated text.

4.1.1 Whether Mistranslation

The first aspect of assessing "accuracy" is to examine the translation's grasp of the original content, including whether mistranslations, omissions, misinterpretations of words, or incorrect word collocations have occurred. Translators may appropriately add or omit content from the original text, but they must be mindful of maintaining a proper balance. Although such errors are difficult to entirely avoid in lengthy and complex texts, any occurrence of these issues is bound to affect the storyline and character development.

Example 1

Source Text: In the real world, people fall out of love little by little, not all at once.

Target Text: 在这个现实的世界中，人们是逐渐相爱的，而不是突然之间。

Analysis: This sentence highlights the protagonist Holling's skepticism about the romantic development between the main characters in *Much Ado About Nothing*. Considering the subsequent narrative about the previously cold interactions between Holling's parents, it is evident that translating "fall out of love" as "逐渐相爱" is a mistake, where the preposition "out" was misinterpreted as "in", leading to a mismatch between the translation and the original text. This error results in a lack of coherence within the translated sentence, confusing the reader. Accuracy is the foundation of all translation.

4.1.2 Supplementary Information

The translator's role is to "eliminate misunderstandings" (Newmark, 2001, p. 211). Given children's limited comprehension abilities, translators must fully consider the target age group and address the difficulties in understanding that arise from cultural differences. In the translation, a total of 26 footnotes were used to provide brief explanations of the original content, along with multiple instances of amplification, endnotes, or paraphrasing to clarify cultural references in the original text, thus helping readers overcome cultural barriers.

Example 2

Source Text: Instead, you pull a string on them and a bad record plays.

Target Text: 而是像一只提线木偶，或者一张坏掉的唱片，总是滔滔不绝的重复着那几句话。

Analysis: Holling interprets Mrs. Baker's gaze as hate. In his urgency to seek comfort from his parents, Holling finds that they do not understand him at all, merely repeating their thoughts without truly listening. If the translation were to stick strictly to a literal translation without additional explanation, readers might find it confusing and unclear. Therefore, the translator, while conveying the original information, adds supplementary explanations to help the target audience grasp the meaning of the text, aiding in their understanding of the characters and the protagonist's psychological state, which in turn facilitates better comprehension of the characters' emotions.

4.2 Smooth and Fluent-Readability

Children's literature is either read aloud by parents or read independently by children, requiring translators to consider the psychological and intellectual levels of young readers, using language that children find enjoyable, simple, easy to understand, and pleasant to hear. Readability is a crucial aspect of the framework of children's literature translation criticism. Since the target audience is children, word choice should be both concise and clear to facilitate understanding while also being vivid enough to spark the reader's imagination. In terms of sentence structure, the translation should be natural, concise, easy to understand, and engaging, carefully maintaining the original text's rhythm and recreating its style.

4.2.1 Conformity to Children's Expressive Habits

The target audience for children's literature translation is children. Overly foreignized texts can increase reading difficulties, reduce cultural identification, and cause readers to lose interest in reading (Tong Minjun, 2011). Given children's limited vocabulary, obscure words, and awkward sentences that even adults find challenging, it's unrealistic to expect children to engage with the text. Therefore, translating children's literature requires language that aligns with children's thinking patterns.

Example 3

Source Text: Mrs. Sidman was grumbling more than a little by the time we got back.

Target Text: 我们回去时，西蒙夫人嘀嘀咕咕地抱怨个不停。

Analysis: Holling loses all the classroom cooking utensils that he had packed in his backpack while hiking, leaving the teachers unable to cook. Unlike Mrs. Baker, who is close to the students, Mrs. Simon is portrayed in the novel as distant, keeping herself as far away as possible from the "mischievous kids". The translator converted the original word "grumbling" into the verb phrase "嘀嘀咕咕地抱怨" using a form with reduplication and onomatopoeia, words that have a distinctly childlike quality. This vivid choice of language effectively conveys Mrs. Simon's impatience with Holling, creating a strong visual image and clearly defining her character.

4.2.2 Smooth Sentences

Ensuring the readability of the translation hinges primarily on maintaining smooth and fluent sentences. Compared to the content itself, children are more attuned to the rhythm

and cadence of a work. Language that is melodious and rhythmically strong not only captures the interest of young readers but also helps to engage their emotions. The translation should be logically sound, with a well-structured and naturally flowing narrative, avoiding translationese and overly Europeanized language.

Example 4

Source Text: But if anyone had ever walked in and plinked a key or sniffed the artificial tropical flowers or straightened a tie in the gleaming mirror, they sure would have been impressed at the perfect life of an architect from Hoodhood and Associates.

Target Text: 若是有人进来，敲一敲琴键，闻一闻加热带花，或者站在亮堂堂的镜子前整一整领带，就会陶醉于这一切由胡佛设计协会的设计师倾力打造的完美生活。

Analysis: The original sentence was a conditional adverbial clause, but the translation broke it down into several shorter sentences and employed verb reduplication to translate the predicates as "敲一敲", "闻一闻", and "整一整". These brief verbs carry a light and casual tone, highlighting the lively nature of the young protagonist, Holling, and enhancing the overall enjoyment of reading.

4.3 Full of Interest-Literary Quality

Literary quality is a crucial parameter in the framework of children's literature translation criticism. Some translators believe that the simple language structure of children's literature requires only a direct translation of content. However, this perspective is biased. Excellent children's literature is rich in meaning, with a distinct style and emotional depth. Translators must not only grasp the essence of children's literature but also pay attention to its "literary" characteristics. Rhetoric is an effective means of creating childlike fun (Xu Derong, 2004). In literary translation, language serves as the vehicle for emotion, and the handling of rhetoric tests the translator's language comprehension and translation skills. Appropriately translating rhetorical devices such as puns, personification, and exaggeration, which help to emphasize and enhance characters and plots, is a key marker of literary quality.

Example 5

Source Text: We sat beside each other by the fire, silent, watching the jewels change and glow first into white diamonds, then into sapphires, then into rubies.

Target Text: 我们彼此依偎着，围着火堆，安静地，看着

宝石的光芒变幻莫测，一会儿是亮闪闪的钻石，一会儿是蓝宝石，一会儿又变成了红宝石。

Analysis: This passage describes a scene where the students are camping in the wilderness. In just a few words, the author employs two rhetorical devices: metaphor and parallelism. From the translation, it is evident that the translator adhered to the structure of the original sentence, preserving the rhetorical techniques used in the source text. The firelight is metaphorically compared to flickering gems, reflecting the rich imagination and creativity of children. The translator used a literal translation method to link two seemingly unrelated elements. Additionally, parallelism is employed to describe the changing colors of the firelight using different colored gems, maintaining a logical flow and strong rhythm. Although these rhetorical devices may seem simple, they add interest to the translation and create a vivid image.

4.4 Edutainment-Educational Value

Children's literature is a golden key that unlocks children's minds (Fan Jing, 2019). It is not only a form of entertainment for children but also carries significant educational value. The educational function is one of the essential characteristics of children's literature. Through children's literature, children can develop a correct worldview, outlook on life, and value system while appreciating and creating beauty. Therefore, the educational value of children's literature translations must also be considered. A well-translated piece of children's literature can help children experience proper moral concepts and aesthetic qualities while expanding their knowledge base.

4.4.1 Knowledge Education

Children are at the peak of their learning capacity. Although their literacy skills and knowledge are limited, books can greatly enrich their knowledge and broaden their horizons. The knowledge conveyed through children's literature can be categorized into two types. The first is language-related knowledge, such as new words or well-crafted sentences. The second type involves general knowledge about life or specific fields, taught through the characters and situations in children's books.

Example 6

Source Text: And so save me from my undeserved humiliation.

Target Text: 这样才能救我于水深火热之中。

Analysis: As a middle school boy playing the role of a fairy on stage, Holling hoped that no one he knew would watch the performance. However, he later learned that Mrs. Baker was collecting students' ticket stubs for extra credit, which only deepened his embarrassment. He wished for a disaster or an atomic bomb to erase any news of the performance, hoping to salvage his dignity. The translator did not opt for a literal translation but instead employed the common Chinese four-character idiom “水深火热”, thereby teaching readers its usage while making the sentence smoother and more natural.

4.4.2 Moral Education

Children are at a critical stage of value formation. During the process of joyful reading, they are subtly influenced by correct moral values, integrating education with entertainment, which contributes to the development of a well-rounded character.

Example 7

Source Text: It's not always smiles. Sometimes the real world is like Hamlet. A little scared. Unsure. A little angry. Wishing that you could fix something that you can't fix. Hoping that maybe the something would fix itself, but thinking that hoping that way is stupid.

Target Text: 有时，现实世界就像哈姆雷特一样，并不总有欢笑，而是有一些惶恐、不确定，还有一些愤怒。有时你希望某个根本不可能实现的愿望能变成现实，甚至像天上掉馅饼那样能坐享其成，可这样的想法本身就是愚蠢的。

Analysis: The translator has rendered the term “fix” into various expressions such as “实现愿望”，“变成现实”，“天上掉馅饼”和“坐享其成”。 This multiplicity of translations conveys to readers that “way is stupid”, teaching them that life is unpredictable and that one must strive diligently and not easily give up to create “miracles” like Captain Baker, even in perilous situations.

V. SUMMARY AND REFLECTION

Through in-depth analysis and discussion of Gao Xuelian's translation of *The Wednesday Wars*, this study constructs a child-centered framework for the children's literature translation criticism, integrating both macro and micro perspectives. This framework, grounded in the dimensions of accuracy, readability, literariness, and educational value, not only provides concrete evaluation standards and

guidance for the practice of translating children's literature but also reveals a series of strategies and techniques for effective translation. Accuracy forms the foundation of the criticism framework, using methods like amplification and annotation can effectively bridge readers' comprehension gaps. Readability is paramount, employing techniques like transposition and redundancy ensures that the translation aligns with children's reading habits. Literariness serves as an essential criterion, utilizing literal translation to retain the original rhetorical devices enhances the translation's interest and preserves the stylistic features of the original text. Educational value is an indispensable component, using four-character idioms and polysemous words allows young readers to learn knowledge subtly. This study demonstrates that adhering to this critique framework can significantly improve translation quality, better conveying the spirit and values of the original work, while also promoting the development of the discipline of children's literature translation.

Admittedly, the analysis and discussion in this study still carry a degree of subjectivity, and the framework of children's literature translation criticism requires further refinement and scientific research to advance the development of children's literature translation.

REFERENCES

- [1] Xiao, H.L. (2006). The reader's consciousness in translation criticism of children's literature. *Tianfu Xinlian* (S1), 242-243.
- [2] Xu, D. R. & Jiang, J. L. (2014). On the Framework of Translation Criticism in Children's Literature. *Foreign Language Studies* (02), 66-71+112. doi:10.13978/j.cnki.wyyj.2014.02.001.
- [3] Xu, D. R. & Yang, S. (2017). On the "truth-seeking-pragmatic" comprehensive model of children's literature translation criticism. *Foreign Language Studies* (01), 85-90. doi:10.13978/j.cnki.wyyj.2017.01.015.
- [4] Zhao, X. Y. & Zhang, Y. (2021). A New Approach to Criticism of Children's Literature Translation--The Wind in the Willows Translation as an Example. *Modern English* (03), 74-76.
- [5] Vid, Natalia. (2024). Culturally Specific Elements in Russian Translations of Alice's Adventures in Wonderland. *Translation and Literature*. 33. 29-51. 10.3366/tal.2024.0573.
- [6] Coillie, Jan Van & McMartin, Jack. (2020). Introduction: Studying Texts and Contexts in Translated Children's Literature. In Jan Van Coillie & Jack McMartin (eds). *Children's Literature in Translation* (pp.11-37). Belgium: Leuven University Press.
- [7] Gao, L. Y. (2017). More than a hundred years of children's literature translation of Sojour. *Publishing and Distribution Research* (03), 102-104+93. doi:10.19393/j.cnki.cn11-1537/g2.2017.03.029.
- [8] Cui, B. (1991). The accuracy of translation. *Language and Translation* (03), 62-64.
- [9] Nida, E. A. (2001). *Language and Culture: Contexts in Translating*. Shanghai: Shanghai Foreign Language Education Press.
- [10] Newmark, P. (2001). *A Textbook of Translation*. Shanghai: Shanghai Foreign Language Education Press.
- [11] Tong, M. J. (2011). Introduction to the characteristics of children's literature and its translation principles. *Journal of Xinxiang College (Social Science Edition)* (03), 126-128.
- [12] Xu D. R. (2004). Ruminations on children's literature translation. *Chinese Translation* (06), 35-38.
- [13] Fan, Jing. (2019). Translation of English-Chinese Children's Literature from the Theory of Reception Aesthetics - A Comparison of the Translation of Chinese Translations of Xiao Mao and Ren Solu's Charlotte's Web. *Shenzhen Social Science* (02), 124-132+159.
- [14] Gary D. S. (2007). *The Wednesday Wars*. Boston New York: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt.
- [15] Gary D. S. (2007). *The Wednesday Wars*. Translated by Gao, X. L. Hainan Publishing House.