

获第二届全国优秀社会科学成果专著奖

**LITERARY
STYLISTICS
AND FICTIONAL
TRANSLATION**

DAN SHEN

文学文体学与小说翻译

申 丹 著



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by Dan Shen

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**In loving memory of my mother
Wenting Zhang**

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

1.1. BASIC AIMS

Literary stylistics and literary translation have rarely been considered in relation to each other. Despite the fact that the literary translator's choice of words, syntax etc. frequently raises stylistic issues and that literary translation therefore constitutes a congenial area of stylistic investigation, attempts at applying stylistics to literary translation have so far, in relation to English and Chinese at any rate, been scarcely made. Thus, in contrast with the more or less sophisticated stylistic analysis widely undertaken in Anglo-American intralingual literary studies for the past thirty years or so (stylistics, it must be noted, was not introduced into mainland China until around 1980), criticism of literary translation, particularly of the translation of prose fiction, has remained remarkably traditional, characterized by general and impressionistic comments on style or by an intuitive analysis with a notable lack of sensitivity to subtle stylistic devices. To bring studies of literary translation up to date and to improve, as a result, the quality and standard of literary translating, there is surely an urgent need to replace traditional impressionistic approaches by more precise and more penetrating stylistic models and methods. The first aim of the present book is therefore to argue, mainly by way of practical analysis, for the usefulness and necessity of a stylistic approach to the study of literary translation in general and of the translation of prose fiction in particular.

Stylistics, however, is not here taken for granted. And this brings us to another basic aim of the present book, which is to explicate the nature, function and validity of literary stylistics as a discipline (with reference to English only). The stimulus for this explication came from two contrastive sources: the vagueness of the

claims made by some proponents on the one hand and the fallaciousness of the attacks made by some opponents on the other. While issues such as the objects of investigation and, more significantly, the characteristic mode of argumentation of stylistics will be discussed in considerable detail, no attempt is made to summarize its historical development, or to study and compare the linguistic models employed by stylisticians, for such a study lies beyond the scope of the present book.

In accordance with the two basic aims, this book is divided into two major parts, with the first part examining stylistics as a discipline and with the second arguing and demonstrating the application of stylistics to the translation of prose fiction. It need hardly be said, though, that the contribution to stylistics which this study seeks to make is not confined to the first part. The problems and solutions that emerge in interlingual fictional transfer, as will be extensively analysed in the second part, help to reveal certain of the essential aspects of novelistic technique, offering fresh insights into the functions or values of stylistic devices as well as into the relevant literary conventions which condition the writer/translator's choices and which tend to remain opaque within the boundary of a single language.

1.2. LITERARY STYLISTICS

Anglo-American literary stylistics originated and developed under the combined influence of developments in modern linguistics, Anglo-American practical criticism, French structuralism, the Russian Formalist School and the Prague Linguistic Circle. Marked by the use of linguistic models in the interpretation of literary texts, this is a discipline mediating between literary criticism and linguistics of different levels and in various forms.

This intermediary discipline is referred to, apart from the unqualified title "stylistics," either as "literary stylistics" or as "linguistic stylistics."¹ The epithet "literary" stresses its difference from a descriptively-oriented approach to literary texts, an approach

which treats literary texts as data or as formal linguistic objects; and an approach where the main thrust is directed towards the possibility or necessity of applying linguistic theory to the description of literary texts, and/or towards the exemplification of the linguistic system with the textual features concerned, and/or towards the explication of a linguistic model adopted in the analysis (see, for instance, Halliday 1966 & 1967:217-223; Sinclair 1966 & 1968; Thorne 1965 & 1969; Levin 1967; Carter 1982). With the aim of supporting or promoting literary interpretation and taking literary texts as communicative acts, literary stylisticians operate along the lines of traditional common-sense based interpretative strategies of literary significance, focusing on linguistic choices which are thematically or artistically motivated.

The epithet "linguistic" emphasizes on the other hand the difference between this intermediary discipline (which is based on or informed by modern linguistics) and the more traditional approaches to literary style. If the discipline in question can be treated, at least in part, as an extension of practical criticism, the extension mainly lies in linguistic observations and insights, in the analytic and systematic knowledge of communicative and linguistic norms (cf. Carter 1982:4-7). In this discipline, that is to say, the emphasis falls both on the explicitness or precision of the linguistic description and on the resultant literary effects. Analysts are often eclectic in approach, drawing on whatever different linguistic models are called for in the analysis.

By now, stylistic investigation has been extended to all levels of linguistic structure and to all the three major literary genres of poetry, prose fiction, and drama. During the past twenty years or so, there has emerged an increasing interest in fictional prose but on the whole poetry, because of its higher frequency of foregrounding and the shorter length of the text as a thematic unity, has been given more attention. Thus, although the second part of this work will focus on the translation of prose fiction, in discussing stylistics as a discipline, I shall quite often touch on stylistic analysis of poetry. It is true that the two genres differ considerably in terms of stylistic

properties (the phonological property, for instance, does not feature in the novel while modes of speech are hardly found in poetry). But the conventions which underlie the literary significance of linguistic form are essentially the same in both genres; and this in turn determines that stylistic analyses of both, as will be discussed in Chapters Three and Four, share fundamentally the same mode of argumentation.

The discussion of stylistics as a discipline will start, in the following chapter, from a scrutiny of its characteristic concern. A basic distinction between linguistic habits and aesthetically motivated choices will be drawn as a prelude to a consideration of two contrasting levels of stylistic investigation, viz., linguistic form and, with reference to traditional realistic fiction in particular, fictional 'facts'. Insofar as realistic fiction is concerned, the aesthetic function of linguistic form can usually be located at the level of narrative discourse in contradistinction to the level of fictional reality. This distinction, which comes from the French structuralists' distinction between *histoire* (the narrated story) and *discours* (narrative discourse), lends perspective to the traditional distinction between "what" and "how" or "content" and "expression" (see Fowler 1977; Chatman 1978). While narrative discourse (or narrative style) is the direct object of linguistic analysis, fictional 'facts' are essentially extralinguistic (with the exception of the verbal reality composed of a character's speech, thought or mind-style), an area where linguistic models, leaving aside the analogous or quasi-models employed by structuralist critics, usually do not apply. Such a distinction is not only helpful but also necessary in view of some rather extravagant claims made by linguists or stylisticians, such as the following:

as no science can go beyond mathematics, no criticism can go beyond its linguistics (Whitehall 1951:713)

Surely one may call all textual facts "linguistic" in a loose sense. But the distinction between truly linguistic facts and, strictly speaking,

extralinguistic facts usually holds, in relation to realistic fiction at any rate. If the purpose of a stylistician is to explicate how textual facts give rise to the total meaning of the work, the analyst must take account of both. The analysis of the latter, however, would depend, instead of on a linguistic knowledge of the workings of (or effects in) language, primarily on common-sense based close observation of the relation between the fictional 'facts' involved and their aesthetic function (see the discussion in 2.2.2.).

The consideration of the objects of investigation of stylistics naturally leads us to a discussion in Chapter Three of the stylistician's characteristic mode of argumentation. The stylistician's typical progression in argument from one frame of reference, that of linguistic form, to another, that of literary significance, has been subjected to a series of criticisms. I have singled out and shall argue against two contrasting attacks: one made by Roger Pearce from the perspective of a linguist and the other by Stanley Fish from the viewpoint of a critic. While Pearce's charge is seen to be based on a misunderstanding about the purposes of literary stylistics and about the conventional nature of signification, the influential paper written by Fish "What is stylistics and why are they saying such terrible things about it?" (1973) also displays a notable lack of understanding of the nature, function and validity of stylistics as an intermediary discipline. By analysing various charges made by Pearce and Fish and by exposing a number of intentionally or unintentionally misleading devices involved in their argument, I hope to help reveal the true nature of the typical mode of argumentation used by literary stylisticians, providing a reliable, though not necessarily comprehensive, picture of its theoretical foundation, its analytic procedure and its main characteristics. The picture may gain further clarity not only from a comparison made between this stylistic mode and two others (i. reading from linguistic form to personality and ii. a study of the relation between impressionistic terms like "terse" or "complex" and identifiable structural properties), but also from a discussion of the essential similarity and contrast between the present stylistic mode and Fish's own "affective stylistics."

In Chapter Four, which is largely complementary to Chapter Three, we shall come to a consideration of the objectivity of the stylistician's primary frame of reference, i. e. the linguistic basis, an objectivity which, though taken for granted by stylisticians, is seriously challenged by Stanley Fish in "What is stylistics and why are they saying such terrible things about it? Part II" (1980). I shall argue, as a major premise, that the distinction between "objective" and "subjective" as usually drawn does not apply to a phenomenon such as language and, further, that, in the social reality of language, objectivity is, in effect, a matter of conventionality: in more specific terms, what is conventional is objective and what is personal is subjective. Starting from this basic premise, an explication and evaluation will be taken up in terms of the different degrees of objectivity of the three correlated levels involved in the stylistician's characteristic mode of argumentation: structural feature, psychological value and literary significance. This is followed by a discussion of Fish's challenge to the objectivity of the stylistician's linguistic basis, a challenge which is wrongly based on a failure to discriminate between convention and interpretation. By way of the explication and the discussion as such, I hope to throw some further light on the nature, function and validity of the stylistician's characteristic mode of argument in particular and of stylistics as an intermediary discipline in general.

1.3. APPLYING STYLISTICS TO LITERARY TRANSLATION

Literary translation, particularly the translation of prose fiction, has benefited very little from recent developments in linguistics. "In the typical linguistics-oriented study of translation," as Lefevere observes, "some lip service is usually (almost ritualistically) paid to literary translation, but this serves more often than not as an excuse to skip the problems connected with the particular type of translation and to move on to what are considered the 'real' issues" (1981: 52). Indeed, just as a purely linguistic description of literary text

does not have much to offer to literary criticism, translation studies with only a linguistic concern have little or no bearing on problems characteristic of literary translation. I shall discuss in some detail, at the beginning of the second part, the inadequacy of linguistics-oriented general translation studies when applied to literary discourse. The remedy, though, may be readily sought in literary stylistics, which, not only informed by modern linguistics but also taking literary competence or sensitivity as a prerequisite, can provide interesting insights into the aesthetic functions of the verbal choices, particularly the subtle stylistic or rhetorical choices, made by the author and by the translator.

It is understood that literary translating is a complex process subjected to the influence of numerous variable factors, such as whether the translation should be source-language-oriented or target-language-oriented, or whether a given original should be adapted for certain pragmatic purposes. The dimension to which stylistics has the potential of making most contribution is chiefly formal or structural. By sharpening one's sensitivity to the workings of the language system, by improving one's understanding of the function of stylistic norms, and by enhancing one's awareness of how literary conventions and the writer's creative acts combine to make linguistic form take on aesthetic significance, stylistics operates to help the literary translator to achieve functional equivalence or expressive identity. What is involved is of course not only the aesthetic function of linguistic features in the respective languages but also the stylistic correspondence, which is often not contemporary, between the two languages involved.

Now, the fact that I have chosen to concentrate on the translation of prose fiction – more specifically, of the traditional realistic kind – is not due to a belief that prose fiction should be placed at the centre of poetic discourse. Rather, it is to be accounted for by the fact that problems associated with the translation of realistic fiction as a literary genre have been most neglected and, further, that many of those problems, which may be subsumed under the heading “deceptive equivalence,” can be quite effectively dealt with by stylistics.

tic analysis. As shall be discussed in 5.2.2., “deceptive equivalence” is found in both of the two contrasting dimensions of narrative structure: the narrative discourse and the narrated story.

Generally speaking, in traditional realistic fiction, the writer’s manipulation of linguistic form at the level of narrative discourse functions not as an end in itself but rather as means for various thematic effects, such as efficient characterization, or for making the fictional reality operate more effectively in the work’s thematic design. At this level, the occurrence of “deceptive equivalence,” which conveys approximately the same fictional ‘facts’ but fails to capture the aesthetic effects generated by stylistic or rhetorical devices in the original, is primarily ascribable to the fact that, in translating realistic fiction, the translator is inclined to establish equivalence at the level of “paraphrasable material content” (Bassnett-McGuire 1980:115), focusing on the represented fictional reality and overlooking the novelist’s formal operations over and above the experience depicted. Such an inclination is attributable not only to the usually isomorphous relation between the fictional world and the real world (allied to the resultant suspension of disbelief) but also to the translator’s lack of awareness of the novelist’s verbal artistry which is much less obtrusive than that of the poet’s. Responsible for the translator’s stylistic non-discrimination is the backwardness of fictional translation studies which have on the whole remained impressionistic and which often go no further than “referential equivalence” (it should be clear that “deceptive equivalence” at the level of narrative discourse typically constitutes referential equivalence). There is surely an urgent need to introduce stylistic analysis as a means of exposing “deceptive equivalence” as such, and as a means of enhancing the translator’s stylistic competence, one that is essential to achieving functional equivalence in literary translation.

In realistic fiction, a large part of the aesthetic significance resides in the created fictional reality which is “expressed through, rather than inherent in, language” (Leech & Short 1981:2). At this level, “deceptive equivalence” takes the shape of distortion of fictional ‘facts’ which is mistaken by the translator as some form of