Translating the Gendered Discourse: A Corpus-Based Study of the Chinese Science Fiction The Three Body Problem

Authors : Yi Gu

Abstract : The Three-Body Problem by Cixin Liu has been a bestseller Chinese Sci-Fi novel for years since 2008. The book was translated into English by Ken Liu in 2014 and won the prestigious 2015 science fiction and fantasy writing Hugo Award, drawing greater attention from wider international communities. The story exposes the horrors of the Chinese Cultural Revolution in the 1960s, in an intriguing narrative for readers at home and abroad. However, without the access to the source text, western readers may not be aware that the original Chinese version of the book is rich in gender-bias. Some Chinese scholars have applied feminist translation theories to their analysis on this book before, based on isolated selected, cherry-picking examples. Thus this paper aims to obtain a more thorough picture of how translators can cope with gender discrimination and reshape the gendered discourse from the source text, by systematically investigating the lexical and syntactic patterns in the translation of Liu's entire book of 400 pages. The source text and the translation were downloaded into digital files, automatically aligned at paragraph level and then manually post-edited. They were then compiled into a parallel corpus of 114,629 English words and 204,145 Chinese characters using Sketch Engine. Gender-discrimination markers such as the overuse of 'girl' to describe an adult woman were searched in the source text, and the alignment made it possible to identify the strategies adopted by the translator to mitigate gender discrimination. The results provide a framework for translators to address gender bias. The study also shows how corpus methods can be used to further research in feminist translation and critical discourse analysis.

Keywords : corpus, discourse analysis, feminist translation, science fiction translation
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