

A Comparative Study of Chinese Versions of *A Rose for Emily* from the Perspective of Feminist Translation

Yiting Bao^{1,*}, Minyao Li² and Xinyue Tang³

¹College of Foreign Languages, University of Shanghai for Science and Technology, Shanghai, China

²School of English Studies, Beijing Language and Culture University, Beijing, China

³School of Interpreting and Translation, Beijing International Studies University, Beijing, China

*Corresponding author: 2115080401@st.usst.edu.cn

Abstract:

A Rose for Emily is a novel by William Faulkner during dramatic social changes in the South. It profoundly exposes the oppression of women by patriarchal society while also embodying the feminist ideals of freedom and equality. This paper, within the theoretical framework of feminist translation, selects three representative Chinese translations of “*A Rose for Emily*” and conducts a comparative analysis from the perspectives of vocabulary choice, sentence style, and emotional expression. Employing the research method of textual analysis, the paper compares the translation versions by Yang Qishen, Zhang Helong, and Liu Yang, observing the extent to which the feminist nuances are conveyed in the translation process. It is found that the translators’ gender and comprehensive background do not necessarily determine their ability to handle feminist themes in the text. Rather, the transmission of feminist nuances in the original text depends more on each translator’s understanding of the text’s essence and translation capacity. This paper aims to provide new translation perspectives for translators through the comparative study of the three translations while offering Chinese readers a new view of the novel in Chinese.

Keywords: Feminism; *A Rose for Emily*; feminist translation theory.

1. Introduction

1.1 Feminist Translation Theory

The feminist translation theory originated from the “cultural turn” in the 1980s, which was prompted by the aftermath of the Western feminist movement. This led to an awakening of female consciousness in literary translation, known as the “female perspective.” As a product of feminism and translation, feminist translation theory has been the focus of research since its inception, as it has expanded the scope of translation studies and provided scholars with a new perspective--the translator’s gender. Initially, feminist translation theory did not focus on specific text translation techniques but on cultural demands and political strategies. It broke the traditional binary opposition between author-translator and original text-translation, viewing the translation as an extension of the original text’s life and playing a crucial role in the inheritance of the original text. Professor Flotow, a leading figure in feminist translation practice, pointed out that “translation in the era of women is also a reshaping of previous female protagonists, a rewriting of the gender characteristics

and attitudes previously attributed to women.[1]” This translation theory aims to eliminate discrimination against women in social, political, family, and employment fields and achieve true gender equality through strategies such as “supplementation,” “prefaces and footnotes,” and “hi-jacking”[1].

1.2 *A Rose for Emily*

The American Civil War is of profound significance, and Faulkner’s short story *A Rose for Emily* is a vivid reflection of the influence of the Civil War on American culture. Faulkner, as a Southern writer rooted in the land of the United States, takes his familiar hometown life and characters as material and deeply reflects on the society and history of the South and is committed to seeking ways to establish a new order, new moral concepts, and values. Under the background of the northern modern civilization attacking the Southern traditional society, *A Rose for Emily* describes the story of Emily, the heroine of the old aristocrat in the South, who was deeply oppressed by her father and was destroyed in thought and spirit, and finally chose to poison her lover and share the bed with the corpse. In *A Rose for Emily*, Faulkner deeply exposes the

persecution of women in the patriarchal society and, at the same time, reflects the feminist thought of freedom and equality [2].

1.3 The identity of translators

1.3.1 Qishen Yang

Qishen Yang (1909-1996), the first translator of *A Rose for Emily* in Chinese Mainland, was the editor of the National Compilation and Translation Institute, the editor of the Middle School Textbook Editorial Committee of the Ministry of Education during the Republic of China, the editor of Fudan Digest and the consultant editor of Modern English Studies. Mr. Yang was teaching at Fudan University for a long time and was an expert in studying British and American literature in China. Even before the founding of the PRC, he had published tens of thousands of translated articles in Digest, covering the fields of Western literature, history, and philosophy. As a knowledgeable and respected translator, he published many renowned translations, including *Thief, Soviet: A Civilization, Selected Readings of English Literature*, etc.

1.3.2 Helong Zhang

Helong Zhang is the Vice Dean of the Literature Research Institute at Shanghai Foreign Studies University and Deputy Director of the Center for English and American Literature Research at Shanghai Foreign Studies University. He mainly focuses on teaching, researching, and translating English and American literature. He serves as the Deputy Editor in Chief of the Essays on English and American Literature Research and Director of the Shanghai Translators Association.

In the preface of Zhang's translation of *A Rose for Emily*, Professor Zhang spoke highly of how Mr. Yang's dealt with the translation of the title. He believes that most translators tend to misunderstand the title "A Rose for Emily." Such a rose is not given by a lover to Emily to express the affection of love. Rather, it indicates that after Emily's death, the people of the town offer a rose as a tribute at her funeral. Therefore, Professor Zhang Helong believes that Mr. Yang Heshen's Chinese translation of "A Rose in Memory of Emily" aligns more with the original meaning. Unfortunately, many later editions have replaced "A Rose in Memory of Emily" with "A Rose Dedicated to Emily". Later, Zhang Helong translated the title of his book as "A Rose to Mourn Emily," aiming to highlight or reiterate readers' grieving over Emily as "a collapsed monument," as well as the conclusive narrative implications of the entire work [3].

1.3.3 Yang Liu

Yang Liu is a freelance translator. Her works include Chi-

nese translations of *The Loves of Judith, A Place Called Freedom, American Notes*, etc. However, most of her personal information remains unknown.

2. The comparative analysis of Chinese versions of *A Rose for Emily*

2.1 Lexical choice

Example: As if that quality of her father, which had thwarted her woman's life so many times, had been too virulent and too furious to die. [4]

Yang's translation: "她父亲的性格三番五次地使她那作为女性的一生平添波折,而这种性格仿佛太恶毒,太狂暴,还不肯消失似的。"[5]

Zhang's translation: "她作为女人的一生因为父亲而屡受挫折,她父亲那种性格的影响仿佛因为太过狠毒、太过暴躁而久久难以消失。"[3]

Liu's translation: "仿佛父亲的品性已经一次次令她作为女性的人生充满荆棘,而那品性是如此恶毒,如此狂暴,始终不肯消逝一般。"[6]

In the preceding text, the town residents regarded Emily's father as a towering figure wielding a whip, standing in her way, implying that he strictly adhered to the Southern aristocratic Puritan ethics. As the head of the family, he continually used his inherent authority to demand and discipline Emily. Under the gaze of patriarchy, he compelled her to become an elegant lady, symbolizing the southern area of the United States. He drove away countless suitors with his "whip," depriving Emily of the freedom to choose her path in life [7]. This directly leads to the distortion of Emily's character and burdens her with heavy mental shackles. Her decision to be with Homer, who was far removed from her social standing after her father's death, can be seen as a rebellion against her father's extreme control and a "continuation" of his control over her. However, if Emily did not have such a father, all of this could have been avoided, and at the very least, she would not have ended up spending her remaining days with a corpse.

Comparing the three versions of translations, Liu's and Zhang's versions remain more faithful to the original text, conveying only the profound impact of the father's violent personality on Emily without pointing out the cause of her tragic fate. While Yang, despite being male, adopts a supplemental approach, adding a feminist color to the translation. Yang's translation adds the word "平添," which means "to add something without reason and unexpectedly," effectively explaining that if Emily's father did not have such strong controlling tendencies, she might not have chosen to be with Homer, nor would she have chosen to spend her life in darkness with his corpse [8]. Her life as a woman would not have been so fraught with

adversity. Additionally, Yang's translation takes a female perspective, conveying to the reader that the reasons for Emily's tragic life are not solely confined to her character and personal choices but are also inexorably linked to the objective oppression of patriarchy from her father. By the original text, Emily always lived in her father's shadow, completely losing the autonomy and independent personality that any individual should have. She was unable to truly control her destiny. Under her father's extreme control, Emily's thoughts and spirit were severely damaged, and she gradually lived as a soulless shadow. The word “平添” in Yang's translation expresses the female voice vividly, portraying the main reasons for Emily's tragic life and her plight under the oppression of patriarchy.

2.2 Sentence Style

Example: We remembered all the young men her father had driven away, and we knew that with nothing left, she would have to cling to that which had robbed her, as people will [4].

Yang's translation: “我们也知道她现在已经一无所有, 只好像人们常常所做的一样, 死死拖住抢走了她一切的那个人。”[5]

Zhang's translation: “我们还知道一无所有的她只能对这个曾经剥夺她婚恋权利的人恋恋不舍。这也是人之常情嘛。”[3]

Liu's translation: “大家都记得他父亲赶走了那么多的年轻人, 现在她一无所有, 也只好将情感寄托在夺走她一切的那个人身上, 这也是人之常情。”[6]

The original text here consists of two sentences translated differently by Yang, Liu, and Zhang. In terms of sentence form, Yang and Liu's translation keeps the same pace as the original text, and their translation restores the original short sentences' predominant style [9]. Zhang translates the text into one long and one short sentence, emphasizing on “with nothing left” and “cling” in one long sentence, which inevitably weakens the tone of the original intended to convey that the extreme oppression of the patriarchal society had left Emily with nothing [10]. Although the three translators all translate “with nothing left” into a concise word “一无所有”, such processing is in line with the Chinese context and makes it easy for readers to understand the severe persecution and exploitation Emily suffered in thought and spirit, the but three translators' understanding and processing of the meaning of the original sentence are different.

Faulkner uses the phrase “cling to” to describe the unusual reaction of the heroine, Emily, to her father's death. In this regard, Yang translates as “死死拖住”, emphasizing Emily's desperate and twisted mental state, “死死拖住” shows Emily's struggle and is the sign of her resistance, which makes a reasonable foundation for the plot

of Emily's falling in love with Hemmer without fear of criticism and poisoning her lover, highlighting the pursuit of freedom of feminist thought. Zhang translates it as “恋恋不舍”, while Liu translates it as “将情感寄托在”. Both translators emphasize Emily's emotion, highlighting the endless loneliness and fear brought to Emily by her father's death. Because of her father's extreme repression, Emily has lost her emotional autonomy, and she is completely dependent on her father emotionally, and her mind and spirit cannot be independent. The translation by Zhang and Liu cleverly evokes the readers' pity for Emily's weakness and misfortune. In general, the translation of sentences by Yang, Liu, and Zhang has its characteristics due to the three translators' different understanding of the original text and the grasp of the character of the heroine, Emily.

2.3 Emotional expression

Example: Up to the day of her death at seventy-four, it was still that vigorous iron-gray, like the hair of an active man. [4]

Yang's translation: “直到她七十四岁去世之日为止, 还是保持着那旺盛的铁灰色, 像是一个活跃的男子们的头发。”[5]

Zhang's translation: “在她七十四岁去世的那天, 头上仍然是充满活力的银灰色, 犹如脑袋灵活的人们的头发。”[3]

Liu's translation: “直到七十四岁去世之时, 那头交发一真保持着旺盛的铁灰色, 如同活跃男子的头发一般。”[6]

Regarding the description of Emily's appearance in her later years, “the hair of an active man” was kept straight in both Yang's and Liu's translations to depict Emily as an energetic old woman, even though she is already in her seventies and barely stays in contact with others. Indeed, Emily's characteristic is highlighted by the direct comparison of gender highlights. However, in Zhang's version, instead of literal translation, he changed the sentence to “the hair of a clever person,” removing males as a comparative object. Such translation better echoes the theme of the novel.

We've all known Emily as a symbol of feminism. Outsiders view her as a typical southern lady who strives to abide by the rules of local tradition, yet she shares her bed with the corpse of her lover for 40 years. Emily's personality manifests itself through her attempts to break through the norms and take control of her destiny. It's so unexpectedly distinctive and unorthodox that it doesn't need to be realized through comparison with men. Weakening the contrast between female characters and men and adopting a neutral perspective to describe them more objectively is also an important proposition in feminist narratives in

recent years. Therefore, by avoiding gender comparison, Zhang presents a deeper understanding of Emily's characteristics, which reflect her strength and imply the independence of female characters and the translator's respect for the protagonist in terms of the expression of emotion.

3. Conclusion

In this paper, we apply textual analysis to study and compare the different Chinese versions of *A Rose for Emily*. From lexical choice, sentence style, and emotional expression, we can conclude that there is no necessary connection between the translator's gender background in handling feminist-themed texts. Rather, the quality of translation depends more on the translator's understanding of the theme and their comprehensive translation skills. However, the purpose of studying Faulkner's translated novels from a feminist perspective is not to evaluate or compare the translator's ability but to provide readers with a new perspective to observe the process of feminist expression in translation, bring alive such a classic feminist text from a feminist perspective and call upon translators to pay closer attention to the feminist translation in retaining its original style.

The three Chinese versions of *A Rose for Emily* have their features and strengths. However, it's difficult to provide a perfect translation in dealing with such a literary classic, especially given its unique historical background and feminist trends. Therefore, for translators, achieving objectivity and neutrality in dealing with feminist themes while perfectly presenting the intended emotions remains a highly challenging task, and we hope that this paper can serve to help more translators in dealing with feminist translations to come.

Authors Contribution

All the authors contributed equally, and their names were listed alphabetically.

References

- [1]FLOTOWLV. Translation and Gender: Translating in the 'Era of Feminism' [M]. Shanghai: Shanghai Foreign Language Education Press, 2004.
- [2]Luo Liuping. A Rose to Emily in a feminist perspective [J]. Journal of Liuzhou Vocational and Technical College, 2009,9 (01): 143-146 + 155.
- [3]Translation by Zhang Helong, Rose to Emily, Publishing Office of Shaanxi Normal University, 2015
- [4]William Faulkner, Collected stories of William Faulkner, West Point, N.Y.: Faulkner Concordance Advisory Board, 1990.
- [5]Selected by Tao Jie, essence of Forkner's Works, Hebei Education Press, 1990
- [6]Translation by Liu Yang, A Rose to Emily, Jiangsu Literature and Art Publishing House, 2014
- [7]Konka Yi. Analysis of the female writing in A Rose to Emily [J]. Comparative Research on Cultural Innovation, 2022,6 (15): 13-16.
- [8]Sui Xiaobing, Song Xinpei. Exploration of feminist translation strategies for Chinese-English translation [J]. Shanghai Translation, 2019 (4): 42-47.
- [9]Lau Andy. Appreciation of "A Rose for Emily" —— Analysis of domain theory and translator theory mentioned by Hatim and Mason Yang Dishen's Translation (English) [C] Research on the Development of Foreign Language Education and Translation (Volume 9). School of Foreign Languages, East China University of Science and Technology; 2020:8.DOI:10.26914/c.cnkihy. 2020. 003748.
- [10]Xu Yuanyuan. A Rose for Emily Chinese translation study [D]. Beijing Foreign Studies University, 2019