

Narrative Stylistics Research: Review, Current Status, And Prospects

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Abstract: This article summarizes the status of narrative stylistics research since 1960. The first part of the article reviews its historical development in two stages, describing the formation of narratology and stylistics and the possibility for their combination. The second part of the article discusses the current research status of narrative stylistics, which mainly focuses on the practical level of literary translation and non-literary translation, but there is no lack of research combined with other new fields, and on this basis, it points out the current shortcomings of narrative stylistics, and the prospect of its development based on the above aspects.

Keywords: Narrative stylistics, translation, synthesis.

1. Introduction

Narrative stylistics, a fusion of two vital cross-disciplines of narrative and stylistics, originated from the structuralist school in the late 19th and early 20th centuries, and was influenced by literary critics and gradually developing into an independent discipline. Narrative stylistics takes into account the analysis of the narrative structure of the text as well as the analysis of linguistic form, and has a vigorous vitality. In the past 50 years, the research on narrative stylistics has flourished. Since 1960, research in the fields of narratology and stylistics has gradually emerged, and research on the integration of the two disciplines has gradually appeared, based on which scholars have integrated narrative stylistics with different disciplines. One of the most widely used is to combine it with translation research, and the combination of the two includes both literary and non-literary translation, which provides a new theoretical perspective for the field of translation. Therefore, the author thinks it is necessary to review the development of narrative stylistics and make certain prospects for its future development.

2. Review of the Development of Narrative Stylistics at Home and Abroad

The research on narrative stylistics in China and the West is more synchronized: the research on narrative stylistics in China started in 1980, and now its development has been more mature. But in the early stage of development, scholars' research on narrative and stylistics was in a state of separation, and most of the research focused on a single field of narrative or stylistics, which failed to jump out of the limitation to see the commonality and combination of narrative and stylistics. On the other hand, the research on narrative stylistics in the West is 20 years earlier than that in China. Although the two are in an independent state at first, Western scholars think more critically about the relationship between the two and put forward three ways of combining the two, on the basis of which narrative stylistics took shape in 1990 and flourished. In order to make the development process of narrative stylistics more clear, this paper roughly divides the development of narrative stylistics in the past into two stages.

2.1. The Possibility of Combining Narrative and Stylistics

At the beginning of the 20th century, the structuralist school emerged and put forward the analytical method focusing on structure and form, coupled with the rise of postmodernist literature after the mid-20th century. Literary works then presented a complex narrative structure and narrative mode, structuralist narrative came into being, and a lot of representative figures emerged. For example, Roland Barthes, a representative of French structuralism, explored the role of narrative structure and symbols in his works such as *The Structural Analysis of the Novel and Measures of Symbolism*, and believed that symbols and linguistic structure could decipher the deeper culture and connotation. As well, structuralist narratologist Todorov Tzvetan explores narrative structure and narrative meaning in his work *The Myth of Narrative*. He argues that narrative can reveal human culture and values through signs and symbols. In addition to this, Paul Ricoeur, Edmund Leach, and other representatives of structuralism have greatly enriched the theory of narrative and brought indelible contributions to narrative.

Structuralist narratology got rid of the shackles of literary criticism at that time, shifted from the outside to the inside of the text, paid more attention to the scientific and systematic nature as well as the narrative structure and the connection of the elements within the narrative works. It further improved the level of literary criticism, found a new perspective of literary criticism, but also deterred the development between the literary works and the social and historical as well as cultural environments to a different extent.[1]

In western countries, the development of narrative and stylistics is more synchronized. In the 1960s, stylistics developed rapidly with the help of linguistics, and the two are linked closely, which is reflected in the fact that the definition of stylistics emphasized the application of linguistics. Many stylists believed that only through the method of linguistics could they grasp the structure of the language, and make a precise and systematic portrayal of linguistic features. However, as more and more stylists treat textual analysis as a tool for textual interpretation rather than for linguistic promotion, and complex and difficult to understand linguistic terminology has become a barrier to many stylistic studies,

making the path of stylistic development based solely on linguistics gradually unworkable. In this regard, the scholar Simpson adopted a broad definition of stylistics, which is "stylistics is a method of textual interpretation that puts language in the first place." This broad definition easily makes it difficult to distinguish stylistics from New Criticism, but it has inspired people to think about stylistics not only to maintain its original characteristics, but also to expand the camp of literary research, which has laid the foundation for the combination of stylistics and other disciplines.[2]

According to the above combing of narratology and stylistics, it can be seen that they have their own focus. Narratology focuses on the analysis of narrative structure, while stylistics focuses on the analysis of language form. In order to overcome the shortcomings of their own single discipline, scholars from both sides have carried out explorations, and the explorations made are roughly divided into three types. First, stylistics as the main body, using the narratological framework for analysis. This kind of exploration is more moderate, but easily subject to its own limitations, because stylistics itself pays more attention to its own linguistic characteristics. Even if it borrows the framework of narratology, it can only solve the symptoms but not the root of the problem, which ultimately leads to the neglect of some important structural skills. Secondly, there are some radical opinions, which use the stylistics to annex narratology. Both of them have their own characteristics, if the annexation of this way will make the final analysis become more one-sided, and will lose the stylistics itself focus on the essence of language features. The last exploration is to combine narrative and stylistics to become a new independent discipline called narrative stylistics. Of course, there are still some differences between the two. Take the subject matter of novels as an example, narratology is more concerned with the chapter structure of novels and their subtle narrative techniques, while stylistics analyzes the lexical and syntactic features of novels as well as the intriguing articulation between sentences and other linguistic phenomena with the help of linguistic theories only. Therefore, taking into account both narratological and stylistic theories, we can analyze the different features of the narrative and stylistic dimensions of the text in an integrated way. The narratologist then will not feel empty without the support of linguistic imagery, nor will the stylist be unable to see the whole picture of the work and lose the understanding of whole picture.[3]

Western scholars hold a critical attitude towards the viewpoints of narratology and stylistics. In order to make their own disciplines better developed, scholars actively explore and endeavor to break down the barriers between narratology and stylistics, and explore the possibility of narrative stylistics becoming an independent discipline. However, in China, the situation of non-interference between the stylistics and narrative disciplines is very serious. Although some studies on narrative or stylistics are in full swing in their own fields, scholars either explore the development of ancient Chinese narrative, such as Yang Yi's discussion in *Narrative Theory and Cultural Strategies*, in which the classical narrative works show us the narrative wisdom of China in the past thousand years, or trace the roots of the formation of the stylistics.[4] And Wang Jun uses a stylistic approach to elaborate the humor in the text through a systematic method of vocabulary, syntax, and rhetoric, with a novel and fascinating perspective in article on the stylistic interpretation of humor in *The*

Bequest of Thirty Thousand Dollars.[5] However, separate studies inevitably make the development of the two fields somewhat one-sided, and domestic research still has a long way to go.

2.2. The development and maturity of the theory of narrative stylistics

The discipline of narrative stylistics involves various forms of narrative texts such as literature, movies, advertisements, etc. At the literary level, scholars mainly study the narrative structure, narrative mode and narrative techniques in literary works. By analyzing the narrative elements in the text, researchers reveal the author's intention, narrative strategy and the literary value of the work, so as to deeply understand the connotation and charm of the literary work. Translation, as a cross-linguistic and cross-cultural communication method, coincides with the research focus of narrative stylistics. Because translators need to accurately grasp the narrative features and elegance of the original text and convey its essence to the target language readers, the translated text can then retain the charm and emotion of the original work and resonate with different cultural backgrounds, which makes many scholars focus their research on the field of translation. The translation research under the perspective of narrative stylistics is usually analyzed from three aspects: narrative time, narrative perspective and narrative distance.

Narrative time includes narrative sequence, narrative frequency and narrative distance, which usually depend on the purpose of the story and the complexity of the plot. Narrative sequence can be linear, i.e., recounting events one by one according to the order in which they occurred, or non-linear, i.e., using recollections or flashbacks to link events together. The frequency of a narrative, on the other hand, refers to the number of times an event occurs as the word suggests. Some narratives will take the means of repeated telling to emphasize their importance and impact, but many more will only be mentioned once, thus setting the tone for the entire plot. The temporal spacing of a narrative, on the other hand, refers to the time interval between events. Some narratives may lengthen the intervals in order to emphasize plot development or character traits, while others may reduce the intervals in order to enhance the coherence and compactness of the plot. In general, when telling a story, the order, frequency and spacing of narratives should be in line with the development of the plot, so as to make the story more vivid and fascinating.

Narrative perspective refers to the perspective and position adopted by the narrator or teller in a text. Under different narrative perspectives, people can present different narrative effects and expressions. Therefore, when telling a story, the choice of narrative perspective is very important, and different narrative perspectives will affect the readers' understanding and feeling of the story. Generally speaking, narrative point of view includes first person point of view, third person point of view and omniscient point of view. First person narrative point of view means that the narrator is also a participant in the story and tells the story as "I". This narrative point of view allows the reader to better understand the inner world of the main character and feel his or her emotions and thoughts. For example, "I" spent a good time in the story, the reader can more easily resonate with "I", resulting in good memories. Third-person narrative point of view means that the narrator is not a participant in the story, but rather tells the story from the point of view of an observer.

Through the third-person narrative point of view, the reader can understand the situation and behavior of all the characters from an objective point of view, without being influenced by the personal emotions of the main character. This narrative point of view allows the reader to take a more rational view of the plot and characters in the story and to have a more comprehensive understanding of the story as a whole. Omniscient perspective means that the narrator in the story possesses knowledge of the thoughts and feelings of all the characters and is able to penetrate into the inner world of each character. Through the omniscient perspective, readers can gain a deeper understanding of each character's motivations and psychological changes, and thus have a more comprehensive understanding of the entire story. In conclusion, since the choice of narrative perspective can affect the presentation and effect of a story, and different narrative perspectives can bring readers different reading experiences, it is necessary to choose a suitable narrative perspective according to the plot and purpose when telling a story.

Narrative distance refers to the relationship and position of the narrator in the story with the events and characters in the story, which can affect the narrative style and effect of the story. Narrative distance can be categorized into close narrative and distant narrative. Proximity narrative refers to the narrator standing in the story of the character's point of view, in the first person or third person limited perspective narrative. Readers then are more likely to empathize with the characters in the story to produce emotional resonance. Distant narrative means that the narrator stands outside the story and narrates from an objective point of view, usually from a third-person omniscient perspective. This kind of narrative will make the story seem more objective and calm, and can better show the whole picture and background of the event, but readers are often difficult to deeply understand the inner world of the characters. The choice of narrative distance depends on the purpose and effect of the story. Close distance narrative is suitable for telling personal stories and emotional stories, which can better arouse the reader's emotional resonance; long distance narrative is suitable for telling objective facts, historical events, etc., which can better show the whole picture and background of the events. When the narrative distance is far away, the translation may be more objective, neutral and closer to the expression of the original text. When the narrative distance is closer, the translation may be more emotional and more in line with the reader's cultural background and language habits.

In translation, the appropriate narrative distance should be determined according to the context and intention of the original text to ensure that the translation meets the readers' comprehension needs. Appropriate narrative distance can make the translation closer to the original meaning, and at the same time can make it easier for readers to understand and accept the content expressed. Narrative distance can be adjusted by various means. For example, word and sentence changes are one of the effective means to adjust the narrative distance, and the author can use words or sentences that deviate from the conventional expression habits to describe or narrate, so as to achieve the purpose of adjusting the narrative distance. In addition to lexical and syntactic changes, the translator's omission of foregrounding language in parts of the original text and the treatment of punctuation in parts of quotations also deviate the narrative distance of the translated text.[6] Foregrounding can be called an important part of

stylistic theory and an important means of conducting textual analysis. The linguistic act of foregrounding takes the form of language that is unfamiliar and uncommon to the readers, so as to make the text produce the effect of unfamiliar expression, increase the narrative distance of the text, and then make the reading psychology of the readers change prominently, so as to lead the readers to pay attention to the linguistic changes and to the author's intention or artistic effect"[7]

In addition to the above two aspects that can influence narrative distance, we can also classify narrative distance in detail according to the linguistic characteristics of the original text, for example, the translation criticism theory adopted by Wang Shuhuai in his narration of narrative distance, which subdivided narrative distance into three points, i.e., aesthetic distance, cognitive distance as well as emotional distance, which are beyond the limitations of literary translation and more from a macro point of view in the different cultural backgrounds of and seek similar narrative distance among readers of different cultural backgrounds.[8] In conclusion, we should pay attention to the grasp of narrative distance in translation and flexibly utilize different translation strategies to ensure the accuracy and fluency of translation.

3. Current Status of Narrative Stylistics Research

Narrative stylistics and translation studies is a profound field involving the intersection and integration of many disciplines such as language, literature and culture. At present, some important theories and methods have been developed in the academic world for analyzing and studying narrative stylistics and translation phenomena.

3.1. Narrative Stylistics and Literary Translation

Narrative stylistics theory itself is characterized by a close connection with literary texts, in which Shen Dan, a pioneering researcher of narrative stylistics in China, mainly takes novels as an example in his book *Narrative and Novel Stylistics*, that is to say, "on the level of formal skills of novels, 'discourse' and 'genre' are complementary to each other. Only by taking both of them into account can a more comprehensive study of the formal skills of novels be carried out. 'genre' are complementary to each other, and only by taking both into account can we conduct a more comprehensive study of the formal skills of the novel", so most of the current translation studies from the perspective of narrative stylistics focus on literary texts.

For example, in article *Narrative Stylistics Interpretation of The Life and Times of Michael K*, Wang Aili analyzes the character perspective, narrative space, ideology and speech function in literary texts from the four aspects of the clever connection between chapters, spatial perspective, ideological perspective, and free quotes; Song Yue and Sun Huijun, in their article *English Translation of the Novel "Shouting in the Drizzle"* from the perspective of Narrative Stylistics put forward the translation framework of narrative stylistics, analyzing how to maintain the narrative style of the original literary text in translation from the three aspects of narrative time, narrative perspective and narrative distance, so that the target readers can keep the narrative distance similar to the readers of the original text.

Besides, Western translation studies on narrative stylistics also focus on literary texts, such as Cockeril's monograph

Styles and Narratives in Translation: the Contributions of the Four Fans of Futayatei (Cockerill 2006). The book analyzes a number of translations by the Japanese author and translator of Russian literature, Futabatei Shijimi, from the stylistic and narrative perspectives, mainly describing the development of Futabatei Shijimi's translation style and the influence of translation practice on his literary creation; Parks, a famous novelist, puts forward his own view in *Translation Styles: a Literary Approach to Literature for Literature in Translation* (2nd ed.), which states that "If there is one surprising thing about translation studies, it is its increasing tendency to gravitate towards linguistic theory or the politics of publishing, or to concentrate on discussing isolated and often unsolvable translational dilemmas and forgetting the way in which literature operates as an agglomeration of meanings"; Boase-Beier has also shown in *Stylistic Approaches to Translation* (2006) that the cognitive approach in translation studies has been a major factor in the development of translation studies. Boase-Beier also shows that the cognitively ambiguous stylistic perspective in translation studies integrates the correlation theory in linguistics, literature, hermeneutics in criticism, traditional rhetorical theory, and translation theory, and mainly takes poetry translation as an example, which can be said to provide a new analytical perspective for translation studies to a certain extent.[9]

Literary translation is defined as the translation of a literary work from one language into another language, and maintaining the style and emotion of the original work in the process of translation, which coincides with the emphasis of the theory of narrative stylistics itself. Therefore, the research on translation practice report under the perspective of narrative stylistics in China also focuses mainly on the field of literature, such as the research on the translation of the literary texts *Atonement*, *The Time Machine*, *The Secret Garden*, and *The Legend of the Eagle Shooting Heroes: The Birth of the Heroes*, which enables the translators to add local characteristic expressions on the basis of faithfulness to the original text, so as to make the translations more in line with the reading habits of the readers of the target language.

3.2. Narrative Stylistics and Non-literary Translation

With the rapid development of narrative stylistics in the field of literary translation and the growing maturity of the theory of narrative stylistics, some scholars have turned their attention to non-literary translation, exploring the possibility of combining non-literary translation with narrative stylistics.

At the end of the 20th century, Herman, a representative figure of narrative research, proposed "post-classical narrative" for the first time, hoping to get rid of a single research perspective and research object by integrating the perspectives of other disciplines. Through continuous development, postclassical narratology has gradually broadened the definition of traditional narrative and enriched the research object. As a result, people have been able to extend the study of narrative stylistics to non-literary categories by borrowing the methods of post-classical narrative studies.

For example, in article "Translation and Conflict-Narrative Elaboration", Mona Baker describes translation as a complex act that requires the translator to interpret the culture involved in addition to language conversion. In the process of translation, direct language conversion may lead to

misunderstanding and resentment of the target language readers, which requires the translator to weigh the pros and cons according to the actual situation, and make a translation in line with the current environment and position. In addition, the author believes that social status and one's own position will also affect the translation result. [10]Therefore, translation is an act that integrates language, society, culture and politics. Baker's view coincides with the characteristics of foreign propaganda translation, and some scholars use Baker's theory as a guide to apply narrative stylistics to the study of foreign propaganda translation. For example, Xu Hong expresses his viewpoint in his article, firstly, the author takes the two sentences of "A horse kills a dog on the road" and "A dog lies in the thoroughfare, and a horse kills it with its hooves" as an example, which tells that even if the authors seem to express the same result, the different narrative constructions will make different readers have different interpretations. Different readers will interpret them differently because of the different narrative constructions. If the horse is the cause and the dog is the effect, people will sympathize with the dog and think that the dog is innocently implicated, but if the dog is the cause and the horse is the effect, people will think that the dog is to blame. [11]From here, it can be seen that narrative construction can have a great influence on the translation of foreign propaganda texts. Therefore, the author believes that under the guidance of narratology, what the translator needs to convey is not the discourse description of the original text, but the purpose of the foreign propaganda to be achieved, so as to build up the national image, disseminate the voice of the country and improve the national discourse power.

Besides, the research on scientific and technical translation under the perspective of narrative stylistics has also made some progress. For example, Yang Zhiting proposed the possibility of combining non-literary translation, especially scientific and technological translation, with narrative stylistics in his article *Narrative Reconstruction in Scientific and Technological Translation under the Threshold of Narrative Stylistics*. It is argued that the development of post-classical narratology and the formation of narrative stylistics signify that the categories included in the concept of narrative are expanding, enabling non-literary translation to be included in the category of narrative. As a matter of fact, as a natural narrative discourse, both scientific and technical discourse and non-technical discourse involve the questions of "what to say" and "how to say it". Moreover, scientific and technological discourse has its own distinctive narrative statute, and if it is combined with narrative stylistics, it can provide a new research perspective for scientific and technological translation.

Scientific and technological language usually contains the narrative part of storytelling, but unlike literary language, scientific and technological discourse emphasizes logic and pays more attention to non-episodic narrative. Therefore, according to Yang Zhiting, when translating scientific and technological texts, it is necessary to pay attention to not only "what" and "how", but also the connection between the two. What to say is determined by the original text, of course, we can not deviate from the original scientific and technological logic and content, which is also the first principle of scientific and technological translation, that is, we usually emphasize the "faithful", but "how to say" needs to be translated. How to say requires the translator to create the same or similar statute with the original text, because only in this way can we

minimize the narrative distance of the target language readers and reproduce the same narrative style. Yang Zhiting also cites a relevant example in his article, namely, the Chinese-to-English translation of scientific and technological texts, to illustrate that in translating short sentences in the field of science and technology into English. Although fidelity is important, disregarding the statutes of the original text will make the translated text read with a sense of fragmentation.[12]

The above examples show that narrative stylistics has made great contributions to the development of non-literary translation, and it also proves that the combination of the two is feasible from two non-literary translation fields, namely, foreign propaganda text and scientific and technological text. By combining narrative stylistics with non-literary translation, translators can translate texts from a more macroscopic and comprehensive perspective, and correctly utilize the emotional, aesthetic and cognitive impact of the translated text on the target readers. However, due to the common belief that the theory of narrative stylistics cannot be reconciled with non-literary translation, the research on narrative stylistics in the field of non-literary translation is still at the initial stage. Although some scholars have conducted pioneering research, the relevant research is still insufficient, and most of the people's translation practice is still to combine it with conventional literary translation, and they have failed to make breakthrough achievements.

3.3. Narrative Stylistics and Others

With the continuous development of science and technology, narrative stylistics is gradually combined with some novel research methods, such as the analysis of translation stylistics based on corpus. The author, Huang Libo, suggests that the text analysis using corpus can be divided into three steps: firstly, it is necessary to use specific statistical tools to examine the formal characteristics of the target text, such as standard deviation of sentence length, Wordlist, narrative frequency and so on. Secondly, a specific retrieval tool is used to retrieve and label the above quantities and frequencies. Finally, a secondary search is performed based on the labeling in the second step. The combination of corpus and narrative stylistics mainly occurs after counting the original texts, using the theory of narrative stylistics to analyze the change of narrative perspective and the manifestation of narrative persona, summarizing the relevant laws and contributing to the subsequent development of narrative stylistics.[13]

In another article, the author also elaborates on the corpus stylistic view, that is, the stylistic view of translation has gone through four stages of evolution, namely, the rhetorical stylistic view, the linguistic stylistic view, the narrative stylistic view and the corpus stylistic view, and the corpus stylistic view means that through the use of different software, different parameters of the translated text are visualized, so as to make us have a deeper understanding of the translator's style and the original text. Besides, the author also looks forward to the future development of the corpus stylistic view, i.e., by comparing the parameters.[14] The author proposes an analytical framework for the corpus stylistic view, and believes that the continuous development of modern computers has broadened the prospect of the corpus stylistic view, which provides greater possibilities for the study of translation.

4. Summary

Narratology, as an interdisciplinary field involving many disciplines such as literature, history, psychology, etc., mainly studies the narrative structure and narrative mode of the target text. Its development has gone through three important stages: structuralism, post-structuralism, and the cognitive turn, and its research focus has shifted from the form and structure of narrative and narrative symbols and sign systems to the practice and meaning of narrative. The research then focus to the relationship between narrative and cognition, which is believed to play an important role in shaping our cognitive style and thinking mode.

And stylistics, which is the study of language use as well as rhetorical devices in literary works, has gone through three important stages in its development. The first stage is the classical stylistics stage, which is the pursuit of standardized and regularized literary expressions; the second stage is the modern stylistics stage, which pays more attention to the historical and cultural background behind the literary works and opposes the principle of over-normalization; and the third stage is the post-modern stylistics stage, which puts more emphasis on the diversity of the texts and criticizes the traditional theoretical framework of stylistics. Stylistics mainly focuses on the form of literary works and the author's writing intentions and techniques, and in this way, it digs out the intrinsic laws and characteristics of literary works. With the development of stylistics, people's understanding of literature has become more comprehensive, which helps people discover the intrinsic value of literature. With the continuous development of narratology and stylistics, the two continue to broaden their own research fields and research methods, and the rise of interdisciplinary research has laid an important foundation for the combination of the two, narrative stylistics can be formed, providing a new perspective and method for understanding human culture, history and social phenomena.

With the formation of narrative stylistics as an independent discipline, many translation scholars have applied it to the field of translation. Because narrative stylistics is closely related to literary themes, a lot of research has been focused on the field of literary translation, and the research on the combination of literary translation and narrative stylistics has gradually matured. However, many scholars believe that narrative stylistics can be extended to non-literary fields because of the interdisciplinary nature of narrative, and scholars have made breakthroughs in the fields of foreign propaganda translation and scientific and technological translation. However, the combination of narrative stylistics and non-literary translation is still in the early stage, and many other non-literary fields of translation are still seldom involved, and some of the researches are still stuck in the theoretical part, which is not closely combined with the practice. There exists a large space for researches. Besides, scholars have kept pace with the times by combining narrative stylistics with corpus, analyzing different features of translations under the perspective of narrative stylistics and summarizing them, which further promotes the growth and development of narrative stylistics and increases the possibilities of combining narrative stylistics with other disciplines.

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