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Discursive Heterogeneity in Chinese Literature

A Semiotic Analysis of the Construction of the Narrator and the Narratee

Abstract: In this paper we explore the marks of discursive heterogeneity in literary works produced in situations of language and culture contact. We analyze novels written by contemporary Chinese authors who live outside the People's Republic of China and produce their work in English and French: Qiu Xiaolong (裘小龙) and Dai Sijie (戴思杰), respectively. We address marks of heteroglossia and discursive heterogeneity and explore the construction of the narrator and the narratee in their novels. In order to validate our analysis, we compare these authors with a Chinese writer who lives and produces his work in China: Mo Yan's on his French and Spanish translated novels. Taking into account the discursive strategies deployed and the polyphonic marks, we demonstrate that Qiu and Dai construct Chinese narrators and Western narratees, while Mo Yan constructs Chinese narrators and narratees. In our analysis we apply notions of polyphony from Bakhtin and Ducrot, rhetoric concepts from Olbrecht-Tyteca and Perelman, the notion of discursive heterogeneity by Authier, and the discursive ethos analysis proposed by Maingueneau.

Keywords: ethos; heteroglossia; narratee; narrator; polyphony

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1 Introduction

A literary work can be seen as a form of persuasive discourse in which a speaker and an audience are delineated.

The “oriented” nature of the utterance (Bakhtin 1985) entails adjustments necessary for the efficacy of the persuasive rhetoric inherent to the literary work: the setting up of points of agreement, the offsetting of the aspects of a non-homogeneous *doxa* in the subject of the enunciation, and the disambiguation of meanings. In this paper we address marks of discursive heterogeneity appearing in literary work in situations of contact between languages and cultures, with the purpose of analyzing the construction of a narrator and a narratee.

Our analysis takes into consideration a corpus of novels of Chinese writers, and explores the marks of discursive heterogeneity directly related to the contact between languages and cultures. The selected authors live and write outside the People’s Republic of China. They are Qiu Xiaolong (裘小龙), who lives in the United States and writes in English, and Dai Sijie (戴思杰), who lives in France and writes in French.¹ We also take into account the Spanish translation of the novels of these authors, and of some works of Mo Yan, Nobel Prize winner in 2012, who writes in Chinese in the People’s Republic of China, with the aim of analyzing and contrasting the marks emerging in each case over the process of translation. Thus, we consider three situations of discursive production: first, the Chinese author who writes in another language outside China; secondly, the Chinese author who writes in Chinese in his own country, and finally, the process of translation in which a transformation of the text is produced – a “linguistic transposition” in Genette’s (1989: 263) terminology – in its passage into Spanish. As for these three situations, we focus on the first, we make references to the second for comparative purposes, and we keep the third one to validate our hypothesis. The analysis of the marks of discursive heterogeneity enables us to deduce the construction of different discursive scenes with regard to the way in which the narratee is delineated.

1 Although considering the works of authors living outside the Chinese territory as a part of Chinese literature may be a matter of debate, we consider this approach as based on a tradition that analyzes in this way, for instance, the francophone or “of French expression” literature produced outside France. In this sense, Ying Li-Hua (2010) also holds this point of view:

Recent years have seen major efforts to rewrite the history of modern Chinese literature to take into account authors in the Chinese diaspora beyond the three major regions of China, Taiwan, and Hong Kong. Leading the group that attempts to grapple with the complexity of the field are Dominic Cheung, David Der-wei Wang, and Shu-mei Shih, who have proposed, each with his or her own emphasis, a new conceptualizing framework and terminology: *Huawen wenxue* (Chinese-language literature) or *Sinophone literature*.

2 Discursive heterogeneity

Jacqueline Authier (1984) distinguishes between **constitutive heterogeneity**, which does not appear marked in the textual surface, and of which the enunciator is in most cases not conscious, and **shown heterogeneity**, which appears clearly in the textual surface. As for the first kind, it is perceptible in the presence of the interdiscourse, which marks the relation between a particular discourse with all the preceding ones, with other voices. Regarding the second kind, it is reflected in the ruptures in the continuity of the discourse.

In the texts of both Qiu and Dai discursive heterogeneity can be noticed in the negotiation of the enunciator with an exterior, with an *other*, in relation with which he constructs his discourse through glosses, explanations, etc. We observe the presence of recurrent forms of shown heterogeneity aimed at reinstating information. It is not necessary information for a Chinese reader. That is, it presupposes a narratee who does not have certain knowledge about the world, which he would possess if he were Chinese.² So, there is room to ask, for instance, to whom are the “two words” addressed, in one of the first pages of Dai Sijie’s *Balzac and the Little Chinese Seamstress* (the underlining in this and all quoted texts is ours):

Deux mots sur la rééducation: dans la Chine rouge, à la fin de l'année 68, le Grand Timonier de la révolution, le président Mao, lança un jour une campagne qui allait changer profondément le pays : les universités furent fermées, et « les jeunes intellectuels », c'est-à-dire les lycéens qui avaient fini leurs études secondaires, furent envoyés à la campagne pour être « rééduqués par les paysans pauvres » (Dai Sijie, 2000: p. 11.)

(A few words about re-education: towards the end of 1968, the Great Helmsman of China's Revolution, Chairman Mao, launched a campaign that would leave the country profoundly altered. The universities were closed and all the "young intellectuals," meaning boys and girls who had graduated from high school, were sent to the countryside to be "re-educated by the poor peasants.")

The underlined fragment is part of the information that every Chinese reader knows, but that is not necessarily shared by the Western reader.

Let us see another example: In the following paragraph of Qiu’s *Red Mandarin Dress* we observe a mark of the alterity in the expression “was regarded”, which changes the center of perspective and introduces another voice:

² We use the term “narratee” as defined by Genette (1989).

He decided to go to the Starbucks Café on Sichuan Road. Starbucks, along with McDonald's and Kentucky Fried Chicken, had mushroomed in the city. The café was regarded as a cultivated resort for the elite, and the atmosphere there was supposedly quiet and peaceful. At the café, where he was nobody, he could have an undisturbed morning and concentrate on the paper. (Qiu 2008: 119)

The expression “was regarded” refers to the perceived from a point of view different from that of the narrator. The use of passive voice suggests the point of view of a “collective voice”, a widespread and impersonal opinion. It is clear that the specification of this point of view is virtually unnecessary for a Chinese reader, as he shares the knowledge of the widespread perceptions in his environment. That is, through a shown heterogeneity, this paragraph restores information that most probably would not be given if the text were oriented to a Chinese narratee. The discursive heterogeneity works in these cases by setting up a doxic horizon not shared between the narrator (whose voice, as we see, refers to a Chinese guarantor) and the narratee.³

3 The doxa and the construction of the narratee

As Gilles Declercq (1992) points out, “the ideological component emerging from the particularization of place [*topos*] is all the more evident as its content moves away from contemporary Western ideology”. From the Chinese point of view the opposite occurs, that is: the more *topos* moves away from contemporary Chinese ideology, the more evident becomes its particular character and its ideological component.

So we can ask: what discursive strategies are used to offset these particular characters of places and doxa in the subject of the enunciation when contact between different cultures – Chinese and Western – is posed, when there is a Chinese narrator and a non-Chinese narratee?

Let us see an example showing the distance between the doxic horizon of both cultures. In *Red Mandarin Dress*, Inspector Chen, the main character in

³ We use the term “guarantor” as employed by Maingueneau (2002). For this author, in every discourse it is possible to recognize a “tone” that refers to a “voice” which, in turn, provides a corporeality to the “guarantor”, to whom a series of psychological and physical features are attributed. That is, the guarantor can be conceived of as the “embodied subjective instance” that accounts for the identity of the subjective positionings present in the discourse. In this corporealization the stereotypes and the social representations of a particular community come into play.

Qiu's novels, resorts to the Oedipus complex to argue that a certain person could be the killer they are searching for:

"Oedipus complex?" Yu repeated.

"A son's subconscious sexual desire for his mother."

"What? That's supposed to help us find a boy who grew into a middle-aged man who is capable of committing three murder cases in three weeks?" Yu said without trying to conceal the satire in his tone. "That's totally beyond me."

Yu had never heard of the so-called Oedipus complex. Absurd as it might sound, however, it was not unlike the chief inspector, who was known for his unorthodox ways.

"No, I don't think it's too likely, either," Chen said in an unperturbed way, "but according to the theory, he's probably a middle-aged man with a traumatic experience in his childhood, possibly during the Cultural Revolution. And he must have had conflicting feelings toward the woman who wore the original mandarin dress."

"That's a novel theory indeed," Yu exclaimed. "So after waiting twenty years, his passion for his mother suddenly drove him into a frenzied killing streak."

"It's not my theory, Yu," Chen said. "Still, it explains some of the contradictions." (Qiu 2008: 115, 116)

Freud's theory appears linked to a foreign cultural horizon marked by the interrogative modality in Yu's enunciate, his "sarcasm", the fact that he had never heard of the Oedipus complex before, and the "*unorthodox*" character of the theories of Inspector Chen, who in turn explains, "*It's not my theory*". Beyond the fact of being shared or not, in the Western cultural horizon the Freudian theory, and the Oedipus complex particularly, would not cause strangeness. Later, a character claims,

"Chinese people will not be bamboozled by your psychological terms like Oedipus complex." (ibid.: 260)

Inspector Chen Cao studied English literature at the university but "finished" by being a policeman. Apart from having studied some psychoanalysis throughout his career, he translated literary works from English into Chinese; this explains his knowledge of the West, which exceeds that of his colleagues. This is why in the novel *A Case of Two Cities* he is commissioned to go to the United States as coordinator of a group of Chinese writers.

There, the Chinese writers feel very disappointed to see that their works are not available in the bookstores, and that many of the university professors do

not know their names nor have ever read their texts. Besides, they are overcome by many daily matters related to cultural distance:

Chen listened patiently as his delegation vented their frustrations. “No thermos bottle in the hotel room,” Bao started the angry chorus on a small note. “I cannot even have a cup of hot tea.” “Nonsmoking area,” Zhong joined in.

“Is this a free country? Nothing but hypocrisy. The Americans dump their cigarettes in China. They rip us off in a big way. Now we are not allowed to smoke the cigarettes bought with American dollars.” (Qiu 2007: 224)

“You know what?” Shasha said. She had changed her clothes again, and now in her pajamas, barefoot, she appeared at home. “Pearl told me that Pizza Hut is a cheap fast-food restaurant here. In Beijing, it is a high-end place. A pizza costs more than an ordinary Chinese worker’s daily income. That is capitalism.” (Qiu 2007: 224)

One of the writers in the delegation complains about the hotel beds, and cannot understand how “a human body” can “rest on those spring mattresses”. However, Inspector Chen does not experience this culture shock:

With his educational background, he is provided a sort of cushion for the culture shock of the delegation. (Qiu 2007: 237)

It is worth noting that in the works of Chinese writers produced outside China, the author’s place of enunciation, and the tension between the Chinese and the foreign are often metaphorized through the cultural ubiquity of some of the characters. This happens in Qiu’s novels with Inspector Chen, but also in Dai Dijie’s *Le Complexe de Di*, where the main character, Muo, is a Chinese who studied psychoanalysis in France and then returns to his country to try and practice as a psychoanalyst, as well as in *Par une nuit où la lune ne s’est pas levée*, of the same author, whose protagonist, a French woman who speaks perfect Chinese, travels to China and becomes totally acculturated in her new setting.

We have selected some fragments where the doxic distance between the West and China is observed. In the following example we see how the author establishes aspects of the doxa while simultaneously distancing himself from his own mother tongue – shown heteroglossia – and becoming a commentator of his own speech:

Le nom complet du juge est Di Jiangui, Di étant son nom de famille [. . .], Jiangui son prénom, un prénom très répandu parmi les Chinois dont la naissance coïncida avec celle de la République communiste, en 1949, et qui signifie ‘Construction de la Patrie’, en

référence à une déclaration solennelle que Mao fit sur la place Tian'anmen, de sa voix de contre-ténor, un tantinet tremblante. (Dai Sijie 2003: 76).

(The judges's full name is Di Jianguai, being Di the surname [. . .] and Jianguai, his first name, a very common name in China, the emergence of which coincided with that of the Communist Republic in 1949, and meaning 'Construction of the Fatherland', in reference to a solemn declaration made by Mao with a little shaky countertenor voice at Tiananmen Square.)

Paradoxically, with this discursive strategy he specifies his identity, as if saying "I know what I am talking about because I am Chinese". That is, he constructs the *ethos* of a Chinese guarantor. It is worth noting that the narrator does not expect the narratee to know the aspects of the doxa established by him: the "solemn declaration made by Mao" (that we have just referred to), and the fact of a certain surname being common; so here also he delineates a non-Chinese narratee.

4 Narrative strategies

Given the analysis above, and a number of other examples studied that we do not present here, it can be concluded that the texts of Dai and Qiu configure a Western narratee. In fact, the authors provide information that a Chinese narratee does not need.

Dependent on the construction of the narratee, the inclusion of explanations for the non-Chinese reader is made sometimes by means of a narrative strategy consisting of introducing a foreign character in the narrative, as an interlocutor of a Chinese character. Thus, for instance, in Qiu's *A Case of Two Cities* and *A Loyal Character Dancer*, the explanations necessary for a non-Chinese reader are validated through the incorporation of a Western character (Catherine Rohn, an American police officer assigned to the case) with a certain relevance in the plot, and to whom different pieces of information are provided throughout the story.

A second strategy consists in referring to topics of the past or some element of the Chinese culture to explain present facts. Given the genre of the novels written by Qiu Xialong, this procedure is fully justified since it takes place when Chief Inspector Chen Chao or some of his colleagues are considering how to solve or contextualize a police mystery.

Finally, there is a third procedure that simply breaks the discursive heterogeneity to introduce a voice addressed to the narratee in order to provide an

explanation that cannot be justified within the narrative logic. In this case, the narrator pauses the narration, and another voice appears to describe or present something not necessary for a Chinese reader, but is relevant for the Western reader. For instance,

It was the night of Dongzhi, he realized. [...] In the Chinese lunar calendar, Dongzhi comes on the longest night of the year, important in the dialectical movement of the yin and yang system. As yin moves to an extreme position, it turns into the opposite, to yang. So it was conventionally a night for the reunion of the living and the dead. (Qiu 2008: 260)

In other cases, comments on the Chinese political reality are introduced and an opinion is given. This happens in the following fragment from *Enigma of China*, where the comment (underlined) is in the voice of a character, Pei Qin, the wife of one of Chen's colleagues:

But who gave the Party officials the right to do all those horrible things in the first place? China has a one-party system, with absolute power, absolute media control, and an absolute highway to corruption.

These strategies configure also a discursive “Chinese” *ethos* by presenting a series of facts pertaining to that cultural horizon.

5 Language contact: Shown and not-shown heteroglossia

When speaking of heteroglossia we refer to the presence of different languages in an utterance.⁴ This concept is appropriate for our object of study since we are analyzing texts where the presence of two languages is obvious. To analyze the language contact we must, in the first place, distinguish the shown and the not-shown heteroglossia. By the first denomination we mean the case in which, along with the main language of the text, there is a manifest presence of another language. This can be noticed in the proper nouns, as it happens in this fragment of Qiu Xiaolong's *When Red Is Black*, where we see that the proper nouns refer to another language, Chinese:

⁴ The notion of heteroglossia used here is not that of Bakhtin. In fact, the definition given by this author concerning the concept matches the notion of constitutive heterogeneity held by Authier.

Lindi, Xiuzhen, Uncle Kang, Little Zhu, and Aunt Huang arrived. (Qiu 2005: 201)

There is also evidence in the following example (in which the construction of a Western narratee is clear), where a Chinese character speaks about the transcription of his name into *pinyin*:

“Interesting! Like my name in Chinese Pinyin phonetics, it starts with a J too.” Jia was keeping his composure. (Qiu 2008: 241)

The shown heteroglossia is clearer yet when Chinese words are included in the text, such as “kang” in this passage:

He secured the table against the window. It wasn’t that comfortable to sit on the kang. A real kang was a long earthen bed with coals burning underneath, the people sitting above with their legs comfortably crossed under them, and with a small table in the middle during_mealtime. Here he saw only a resemblance of one, but he took off his shoes, climbed on, and started keeping watch on the hotel. (Qiu 2013: page?)

An interesting example of the conflicts that heteroglossia can pose, as a reflection not only of linguistic but also of cultural contact, is visible in the following fragment, when Chen wants to buy a beverage but can find only foreign ones with their brands translated into Chinese, such as 可口可乐, 百事可乐, 雪碧, etc. Along with the Chinese denomination Zhengguanghe (pinyin for 正广和), he finds foreign brands transcribed into Chinese and reproduces in his text the Chinese denominations in English. Chen reflects on the process of adaptation of these brands to the Chinese cultural horizon (“not so Americanized”):

He also looked for a bottle of Zhengguanghe lemon water, but he saw only a variety of American brands: Coca Cola—Delicious, Enjoyable; Pepsi—Hundreds of Things Enjoyable; Sprite—Snow Pure; 7-Up—Seven Happiness; Mountain Dew—Excited Wave. At least the translations of the drinks were not so Americanized, he contemplated in wry amusement. (Qiu 2008: 32)

This text is virtually incomprehensible for anyone unacquainted with the process of brand translation in China, where brand names are adapted to respond not only to the necessity of transcription into another writing system, but also to a search for a meaning that will make the product attractive according to the Chinese semiotic universe. As Lotman (2005) points out, signs work in a semiotic continuum, which he denominates semiosphere, and receive interpre-

tations within this space. Outside the semiosphere, semiosis is impossible.⁵ In the quoted paragraph, the narrator does not explain what he means, for instance, when he mentions “Sprite—Snow Pure”, where “Snow Pure” is simply the literal meaning in English of the sinograms that form the name of the Sprite brand in Chinese (pronounced *xuěbì* and written 雪碧). Thus, paradoxically, the narrator seems to be overtaken by the Chinese identity of the author, stationed in the adjacent ground of two different semiospheres: his culture of origin, and the Western one. In fact, the presuppositions that he claims in this segment do not match with the narratee he had constructed throughout the text, and that he continues to construct afterwards, who does not have the information presupposed here.

On the other hand, not-shown heteroglossia occurs when the discursive scene delineated in the text indicates the presence of another language, even if not manifested. So it is in the texts of Qiu Xialong featuring Inspector Chen, who is a Chinese living in China and interacting with other Chinese in his environment. In the following scene, for instance, we know, by the cotextual information, that the dialogue among Professor Bian, his daughter Fengfeng, and Inspector Chen is in Chinese and not in English, as it was written:

A young woman walked light-footed into the living room. She looked to be in her early thirties, dressed in a black mandarin dress and high-heeled sandals. She relieved Chen of the ham and put it on the coffee table.

“Fengfeng, my most capable daughter,” Bian said. “A CEO of an American-Chinese joint venture.”

“A most unfilial daughter,” she said. “I studied business administration instead of Chinese literature. Thank you for choosing him, Chief Inspector Chen. It’s a boost to his ego to have a celebrity student.”

“No, it’s an honor for me.” (Qiu 2008: 18)

In this sense, shown heteroglossia works as the verification of the presence of that other language, which in many other parts of the text is “made invisible” or not-shown.

⁵ “Only within such a space is it possible for communicative processes and the creation of new information to be realised” (Lotman 2005: 207)

6 Language contact: The translation

In the case of Spanish translations, heteroglossia is marked in the paratext since it is visibly a translation, with a translator's name and a title in the original language. In the texts of Qiu and Dai, however, it would be a second-degree heteroglossia, because there is a presence of Chinese (shown and not-shown), English or French (indicated in the paratext), and Spanish.

When comparing the Spanish translation of the works written in French and English with the ones written in Chinese, we see that in the first case the translator's paratext (the translator's notes, commentaries, and observations previous to the text) is not voluminous, whereas in the second case its presence is much more noticeable. Our hypothesis is that this is related to the construction of the narratee, which differs in each case. As we have seen, when a Western narratee is constructed in the original text, diverse cultural or historical aspects appear already "explained" or tackled through different strategies, since the narratee is presupposed to ignore them; this way, the Spanish translator finds that a good deal of the difficulties related to the cultural distance have been smoothed. Contrarily, a Chinese writer like Mo Yan, who writes in China for Chinese readers, presupposes the narratee's knowledge about the Chinese world, which necessarily leads the translator to reinstate those pieces of information when working the text for another addressee, in this case a Western one.

As we have seen, in *Enigma of China*, Qiu Xiaolong refers to the "kang" (炕):

He secured the table against the window. It wasn't that comfortable to sit on the kang. A real kang was a long earthen bed with coals burning underneath, the people sitting above with their legs comfortably crossed under them, and with a small table in the middle during mealtime. Here he saw only a resemblance of one, but he took off his shoes, climbed on, and started keeping watch on the hotel. (Qiu 2013: page?)

Now, it is most likely that a Chinese reader will not ignore what a *kang* is. Let us see how it appears in the case of a text of Mo Yan:

La casa, destartalada, sólo tenía tres cuartos, y en el kang no había ni esteras. (Mo Yan 2013: 30).⁶

In the footnote, the Spanish translator (Anne-Hélène Suárez Girard) points out:

⁶ “家中只有三间东倒西歪屋，炕上连席子都没有”

1. Cama de obra con un sistema de calefacción por circulación de aire caliente que, de día, con los edredones y almohadas doblados en un rincón, sirve para sentarse, hacer labores, jugar, etc. Es propia sobre todo de las casas rurales del norte de China.

(“A brick bed with a hot-air circulation system, that during the day, with the quilts and pillows folded in a corner, is used for sitting, needleworking, playing, etc. It is mostly characteristic of the rural houses in Northern China.”)

In the aforementioned text of Qiu, the presence of the *other* works by breaking the continuity of the discourse (thus allowing the detection of the polyphony) when it leads to an explanation that wouldn't have to be given except for that presupposed presence of someone who does not share a range of knowledge or even is not immersed in the same interdiscourse. Although not often pointed out, the notion of interdiscourse, many times taken for “evident”, must be considered as historical, cultural, and socially determined. In some sense, it is the presence of the *other* that makes possible the building and delimitating of an “I”.

7 Conclusions

In this work we have explored the marks of discursive heterogeneity in literary works produced in situations of language and culture contact. By analyzing a corpus of literary works produced by contemporary Chinese authors writing outside China and in a language other than Chinese, we could detect rhetorical procedures related to the tension between the Chinese world and the Western world that allow us to determine the construction of a Chinese narrator and a non-Chinese narratee.

First, in these works the use of diverse strategies such as the inclusion of explanatory segments (metadiscursive and/or metalinguistic operations) that presuppose a narratee alien to the cultural and linguistic Chinese horizon, as well as the presence of non-Chinese characters to legitimate explanations given to a Western narratee are verifiable.

Secondly, we pointed out the shown and the not-shown heteroglossia in the analyzed texts. In the case of both Qiu and Dai heteroglossia is present in the original versions of their works. Contrarily, in the case of Mo Yan it is nearly absent in the original.

Finally, we analyzed how language and culture contact is reflected in the Spanish translations in the translator's marks in the paratext. We compared the translations' paratexts in the case of Chinese authors who write outside China

with the case of Mo Yan. We could confirm that in the case of the first the paratext is limited compared to the second one. We consider that this accords with the observation we had made about the construction of a non-Chinese narratee in the first case, and of a Chinese narratee in the second one: the volume of information that must be provided in the text is different in each case.

In sum, the different observations made in texts of authors writing outside China make it possible to determine that, although the narrators constructed in their works are Chinese narrators (which can be deduced from the discursive marks, the placing, and the construction of an ethos that shows a range of knowledge and a cultural belonging), the narratee they construct is a Western one (or non-Chinese, at least). In the case of Mo Yan, both the narrator and the narratee share language, doxa, and cultural horizon.

Our hypothesis is that the observations presented in this paper could also extend to an important number of Chinese writers who write outside China in some other language. It could be thought that this is a consequence of foresight by the authors regarding the circulation of their works in the Western market. However, today many of the works produced by those authors circulate inside China, too. Which poses the possibility of extending the analysis to the case of the translations of these works into Chinese.

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