

Children's Literature Adaptation Studies: Interdisciplinary Theoretical Resources with a Special Focus for Education*

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ABSTRACT: Children's literature adaptation research is an interface study between children's literature study and adaptation studies. It has the common characteristics of two relatively marginalized research fields, and also shows distinct interdisciplinary attributes due to its interface nature. In the current situation where literary research is constantly seeking innovation and going in-depth, the interdisciplinarity and corresponding interdisciplinary practices of children's literature adaptation research reflect its cutting-edge research directions, while also mapping out some development trends of literary research as a whole. This paper starts from the theoretical discussion of children's literature adaptation studies, reflects on its conjunction points of education studies (with a special focus), narrative studies, cognitive studies, and digital humanities to scrutinize its interdisciplinary theoretical resources, and attempts to explore how the underlying attributes of children's literature adaptation research combine with interdisciplinary theoretical resources to promote its own development.

EET/TEE KEYWORDS: Children's literature adaptation; Education; Narratology; Cognitive science; Digital humanities.

Introduction

Children's literature research has made great progress over the past few decades. At present, there are relatively detailed studies on various sub-genres

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of children's literature, such as poetry, animal stories, fantasy novels, school novels, science fiction novels, ecc. However, adapted children's literature has not received due research attention. The reason is that adapted works are more constrained by the original works, and most scholars believe that children's literature adaptation is merely to simplify the original work to adapt to the reading and cognitive levels of child readers, with little potential to be tapped. Since adaptation is merely simplification, regardless of changes in the original work, era or nationality, there are only adjustments in the degree and method of simplification, lacking research value. However, through careful research on adapted children's literature, it is found that children's literature adaptation is not simply equivalent to simplification, but is more influenced by many factors such as historical context, literary tradition and the development of children's literature itself. It is against this background that adapted children's literature research has gradually become in-depth, theoretical and interdisciplinary.

1. Interdisciplinary theoretical resources of children's literature adaptation research

Adaptation research is an important branch of children's literature research. Adaptation refers to «any modification of a work as it moves across boundaries of media or genres, including, of course, the boundary between adult and children's literature»¹. Adapting adult works into children's works is cross-genre adaptation, while adapting novels into movies is cross-media adaptation². In the process of adaptation, a source system and target system are generated. In addition to presenting the content and form of the original work in a new way, in order for the adapted work to be accepted by the target system (for example, the adaptation from serious literature to popular literature may imply changes in language style, plot structure and even theme, and cross-media adaptation means a complete change in presentation), modifications must be made to the original work based on the characteristics of the target system. Different genres have different characteristics and conventions, and readers are often different. For example, adapted children's works, as well as adaptations

¹ H.-H. Ewers, *Fundamental concepts of children's literature research, literary and sociological approaches*, London, Taylor & Francis, 2009, p. 179.

² As mentioned in the following text, cross-generic adaptations often traverse time and culture (region), and here, cross-generic and cross-media also exhibit overlap. Because the term «genre» can refer to «the style or category of artistic works, it can also specifically denote «literary works with a particular form, style, or purpose (OED). Therefore, cross-media adaptation, such as the most common adaptation of novels or plays into films, is actually crossing genres. The term «cross-generic» used in this paper is narrow and refers only to crossing various genres within the literary system. It specifically indicates the transition from adult literature to children's literature.

from serious literature to popular literature. Changes in readers mean that the stylistic features, narrative methods, styles, and structural features of the works, as well as the knowledge, customs, moral norms and ideologies reflected in the works, all need to be adjusted accordingly. These are all issues that need to be studied in adaptation. Although cross-genre adaptation seems simple, complex changes are often involved. In fact, cross-genre adaptations often also cross time, culture (region) and reader age at the same time. Many adapted works have original works from a long time ago. Even if the reader's region does not change, the social environment in which the readers live is somewhat different. Not to mention that with the emergence of the global village, literary works have extremely strong regional mobility. Even if the language is the same, different versions in different regions often change due to differences in social and cultural factors³.

The change in reader age is the main consideration for adapting adult works into children's works. This makes children's literature adapted works have a stronger educational purpose and be more conservative. In summary, when crossing genre boundaries, works often also cross other boundaries at the same time. For adapted children's literature research, since the social and historical background factors, educational concepts, ideologies, ecc. reflected in the works are often implicit, contained under the vivid story plot level, or because the work has become a classic for a long time, people have become too familiar with it to notice, it is often relatively difficult to carry out textual analysis on a single work alone. However, by studying the differences between its versions in different historical periods and different media, we can better tap the implicit factors, which is an advantage of comparative adaptation research.

Children's literature research has always been a brand-new field full of vigorous vitality, especially good at incorporating methods, paradigms, and materials from various disciplines and fields into its constantly developing territory, inherently with great interdisciplinarity and cross-field nature. Adaptation research itself is also an interdisciplinary and cross-field area. Therefore, adapted children's literature contains rich, brand new theoretical resources, with huge potential to continuously shape and adjust future development directions.

Since entering the 21st century, interdisciplinarity has become an important development direction of children's literature research. Even in general literary research, interdisciplinarity has always been an important driver of development. Psychology, sociology, anthropology, history, philosophy and other disciplines have provided important theoretical frameworks and important

³ For example, the introduction to *Adapting Canonical Texts in Children's Literature*, published by Continuum in 2013, mentions that the book will analyze works adapted across periods and cultures. It will combine them with children's concepts from different periods and regions for analysis.

concepts for literary research, giving rise to many literary research paradigms such as psychoanalysis, structuralism, and existentialism, greatly promoting the development of literary research. Interdisciplinary research is of particular importance to children's literature research. Since the academic background of children's literature researchers is very broad, unlike general literary researchers who mainly come from literature and foreign language departments, children's literature researchers also have a considerable number from art colleges, education colleges and even philosophy departments. Therefore, the academic attributes of children's literature research have been interdisciplinary from the beginning, and its research paradigms include literature research, education, psychology, art, philosophy and so on. In recent years, under the vigorous rise of cognitive science and big data, children's literature research has also been influenced by these new research methods. The interdisciplinary nature of children's literature research has brought exceptionally rich research methods and academic exchange atmosphere, while also bringing practical problems such as scattered academic backgrounds of researchers and barriers to academic exchange. Therefore, it is necessary to emphasize the interdisciplinary academic exchange and integration of children's literature, change the current situation of scattered researchers and research methods, focus on integration and refinement from the perspectives of discipline construction and platform construction, which will greatly benefit the further development and prosperity of children's literature research. In August 2020, the Ministry of Education announced the independent secondary discipline settings of «Interdisciplinary», the fourteenth first-level discipline in China. Zhejiang Normal University, which has accumulated rich children's literature research in China over the years, successfully applied for the secondary discipline of children's literature research, which also marked the interdisciplinary nature of children's literature being recognized and encouraged by the national education authority.

The interdisciplinarity of children's literature research is mainly reflected in its academic nature, institutional nature and connotative nature. The academic discipline of children's literature in China has been classified under several different first-level disciplines, which shows both its relatively lagging and embarrassing situation, and its innate interdisciplinary nature, so its disciplinary affiliation and disciplines are ambiguous. At present, children's literature research in China can be found in literature, foreign languages, education, philosophy and other departments. Researchers from these different academic backgrounds have contributed a wide variety of research methods to children's literature research. Overseas, children's literature mainly exists in English departments and schools of education. For example, the outstanding international children's literature expert Maria Nikolajeva taught in Stockholm, Sweden for many years, and then she went to the UK as the dean of the Faculty of Education at the University of Cambridge. The conversion of this teaching and research atmosphere also prompted her to focus more on the educational

significance of children's literature in her later research. Compared with other disciplines, children's literature research as an academic system appeared relatively late. In the West, it was in the 1980s and 1990s, while in China it was after the National Conference on Juvenile and Children's Publishing Work held in Lushan, Jiangxi in 1978, that it was successively established in colleges and universities such as Zhejiang Normal University at that time⁴.

The institutional nature of children's literature discipline is more evident in the output of children's literature research. Internationally, there are a total of 4 children's literature research journals included in A&HCI, including the «International Research in Children's Literature» published by Edinburgh University Press, UK, «The Lion and the Unicorn» published by Johns Hopkins University Press, «Children's Literature in Education» published by Springer Netherlands, and «History of Education and Children's Literature» published by Edizioni Università Macerata, Italy. Judging from the titles of these four journals, two are related to education, reflecting the close inherent interdisciplinary connection between children's literature and education. In addition, «International Research in Children's Literature» published a special issue on *Theorizing Minds: Narrative and Cognition from Infancy to the Fourth Age* edited by Sarah Falcus and Alice Waller in 2019, also showing the strong influence of cognitive research, which is currently developing vigorously, on children's literature. John Stephens, the former president of the International Children's Literature Association, once said that more than ten years ago, he had the idea of opening a column on cognitive research in children's literature research journals, but since this methodology was not widely accepted in children's literature academia at that time, it was not implemented. However, cognitive research in children's literature now seems to be raging like wildfire. There are not only famous cognitive narratologists like Lisa Zunshine from outside the children's literature circle, but also children's literature authorities like Maria Nikolajeva who have published groundbreaking works in the field of cognitive research in children's literature, attracting widespread attention and research interest from academia. Zunshine studied the comic book adaptation for school-age children of *Pride and Prejudice*, and pointed out that there are many preserved three-layer embedded cognitions but also many that are «downgraded» to two layers in the Marvel Animation comic adaptation of *Pride and Prejudice*. She believes that adapting a novel into a comic book must inevitably simplify the plot and characters, but this does not mean that cognitive embedding must also be downgraded⁵. On the contrary, such downgrading is often an unconscious act of the adapter, different from

⁴ W. Wei, *Zhongguo Er'tong Wenxue Fazhanshi [History of Chinese children's literature]*, Shanghai, Shanghai Youth Children's Publishing House, 2007, p. 2.

⁵ L. Zunshine, *What to expect when you pick up a graphic novel*, «SubStance», vol. 40, n. 1, 2011, pp. 114-134.

the conscious simplification of plot and characters. Nikolajeva synthesizes the views of many scholars in the field of cognitive criticism, and points out that cognitive criticism is an interdisciplinary approach to studying literacy and literature. She points out that the contribution of cognitive criticism is to study the problem of reader intervention. Children's literature is a unique literary form, because speakers and listeners are at different cognitive levels. Children's literature researchers have accepted various theoretical frameworks, but none of them can replace cognitive criticism to carry out research on child readers with different cognitive skills. Therefore, cognitive criticism of children's literature is not about using new theories to interpret some texts, but about introducing a whole new, cognitive criticism-based theory tailored to children's literature⁶. Nikolajeva has carried out children's literature cognitive criticism from aspects such as world knowledge, possible world theory, Theory of Mind, creative mindreading, self-consciousness, episodic memory, ethics, and has profound guiding significance for the development direction of the discipline.

In addition to education and cognition, children's literature research also intersects with world literature, feminism, ethnic studies, myth studies, sociology, film studies, game studies, science fiction literature, bibliography, publishing studies, and library information science. Western academia has long paid close attention to children's literature research related to feminism and ethnic minority studies. For example, the journal «Jeunesse: Young People, Texts, Cultures» published by the University of Winnipeg, Canada focuses on these aspects. Moreover, it also launched a special issue on *Laughter in Children's Literature* in 2020, further expanding the interdisciplinary horizons of children's literature research, and received active submissions from scholars in the fields of psychology, sociology and anthropology.

The academic connotations of children's literature research also reflect distinct interdisciplinary characteristics. In general, a mature academic discipline often has relatively fixed basic courses and research directions. However, looking through children's literature textbooks and introductions at home and abroad, it is not difficult to find that their contents are often unique. Many Chinese children's literature textbooks are linked to early childhood education and elementary education, focusing on the educational application of children's literature, or focusing on the folklore research of children's literature. Foreign children's literature research introductions reflect even richer interdisciplinarity, with representative works such as Peter Hunt's *International Companion Encyclopedia of Children's Literature* (Routledge, 1996). The book was co-edited by 116 people, divided into two volumes, 5 parts, a total of 112 chapters and 1280 pages, a real «giant» in children's literature research achievements and even literary research achievements. Its

⁶ Z. Feng, *Introduction*, in M. Nikolajeva, *Reading for learning, cognitive approaches to children's literature*, Shanghai, East China Normal University Press, 2019, pp. 17-18.

compilation is divided into five categories: theoretical and critical perspectives, forms and sub-genres, contexts, applications, and national and international research. Specific chapters are further set up under these, such as ideology, cultural materialism, linguistics, stylistics, reader response, psychoanalysis, feminism, pictorial studies, narratology, intertextuality, comparative literature and other mainstream critical paradigms in general literary studies in the category of theoretical and critical perspectives; design, publishing, reviewing, censorship, awards, TV, movies, libraries in the context category, reflecting the many branches of children's literature research. Many of these chapters are not pure literary criticism, but intersect with cultural studies and even more distant disciplines.

However, interdisciplinary research should not be arbitrarily «matched» like a catchphrase or gimmick, but should be based on some kind of affinity between the research content and theoretical research of the two disciplines being crossed. This may be reflected in the high similarity of research content, or it may be reflected in the potential for new development directions and shaping of research methods. At present, children's literature adaptation research has good affinity with narratology, education research, literary cognitive research, and consumer theory. Therefore, these possible cross directions have taken shape to some extent in children's literature research, showing strong potential for development. This paper will attempt to take the intersection of children's literature adaptation research with narratology, education, and cognitive research as examples to explore the interdisciplinary theory and practice of children's literature adaptation research.

2. Combination of children's literature adaptation research and education research

Children's literature and education can be said to be inseparable from birth. Unlike adult literature, which is more overtly entertaining and leisurely, children's literature has been explicitly and educationally relevant from its inception to the present. However, how children's literature exerts its educational function and what kind of educational function it exerts has always been controversial. In this regard, there was the earlier romantic view of education advocated by Rousseau during the Romantic period, emphasizing anti-authoritarianism and respect for children's nature. There was also the more carefully designed and more pragmatic view of children's education advocated by the American pragmatism school Dewey in the 20th century. Which educational view gains the upper hand and becomes mainstream can profoundly affect children's literary creation and canonical children's literature adaptation of that era.

The educational function of children's literature is not limited solely to the content contained in the works. Certainly, any children's literature work can include explicit educational elements such as scientific knowledge and moral educational concepts within the text, which can be viewed as explicit and direct educational functions. However, children's literature can also encompass more implicit educational functions, such as those implicit in the process of literary communication. As child readers, they are not necessarily carriers of inherent values and preferences that they need to adhere to themselves; on the contrary, the works often serve to convey and repeatedly instill various norms dictated by adults. This is, in fact, a part of children's socialization. Therefore, if people consider the implicit author as a measure of moral and aesthetic values, then the value judgments of adults in the works always occupy a dominant position, even if not immediately apparent, at least in the end moments. The implicit presence of the adult author may be manifested in various ways, including the authority of adult characters in the story, comments from the narrator as an off-screen voice, the spiritual mentorship of child protagonists, and even the subjective values and moral standards of the world experienced by the protagonist. Although they do not appear in the specific form of characters, they are the main driving force behind the progression of the entire novel's story, and of course, they carry adult values. Therefore, fundamentally speaking, the educational function of children's literature is to «transmit cultural values, behavioral norms, and the prevailing moral standards in the adult world»⁷.

The close connection between children's literature and education is also reflected in the influence of the educational concepts of the era on adaptation, and sometimes appears in a more specific and even authoritative way, just as the curriculum standards for textbook adaptations. First of all, from the original creation of children's literature, because children's literature is still a cultural commodity, the motivation and choices of consumers are very important when it is purchased and consumed. This is quite different from the consumption of adult literature. Especially in China, children generally have a heavy academic burden, and the time they can freely dispose to read is very limited. However, under the current vigorous promotion of language reform across the education sector, reading distinguished works and masterpieces has become the top priority in Chinese language education, with higher and deeper requirements for reading famous works and masterpieces: on the one hand, extensive reading that emphasizes accumulation of large quantities is required, while on the other hand, students are also required to have a deeper grasp of the connotations of literary works. This poses even higher reading requirements within students' already very limited spare time. Therefore, parents must have a very strong educational orientation and practical consideration when purchasing literary

⁷ A. Béghin, D. Julia, translated by X. Bian and H. Shen, *Western children's history*, Beijing, Commercial Press, 2016, pp. 477-478.

works for their children. They must emphasize the educational value of reading literary classics in the limited time squeezed out. As a result, this leads to prudent consideration by consumers of children's literature. They will not arbitrarily purchase too many unnecessary works, but will definitely not be stingy about all those works that have indeed been proven to be of great value. Under the guidance of such a book market, the original creation of children's literature must of course cater to parents' demands for education.

What is different about adapted children's literature from ordinary children's literature is that works that can be adapted are often classics, but there are so many classics and masterpieces lists are so long, so which ones should be adapted? This is undoubtedly determined by education. More specifically, it is determined by the specific requirements of the mother tongue curriculum, that is, the Chinese language curriculum, for adaptations of famous works of children's literature and world literature, and this specific educational requirement is determined by the Chinese language curriculum standards.

The Ministry of Education began pilot trials of the new curriculum standards for the compulsory education stage in some provinces and regions of China from 2001, and promulgated the *Compulsory Education Curriculum Standards* in 2011 on the basis of the pilot work. This standard is commonly referred to as the new curriculum standards. Compared with the old curriculum standards, the «new» of the new curriculum standards is primarily reflected in the positioning of the Chinese language curriculum. The old curriculum outlines positioned the Chinese language curriculum from the perspective of language, emphasizing its instrumentality and knowledge, while the new curriculum emphasizes that the Chinese language curriculum is an integration of language and culture, proposing that «Chinese is the most important communication tool and an important part of human culture. The unity of instrumentality and humanities is the basic characteristic of the Chinese language curriculum»⁸.

The year after the new curriculum standards were issued, *Guangming Daily* invited the core members of each curriculum standard revision group to interpret the spirit of the new curriculum standards. They pointed out: «The permeation of subject curriculum standards in the Chinese language curriculum is a manifestation of the will of the state. Countries around the world pay special attention to whether the mother tongue education curriculum reflects mainstream ideology. The revision of the Compulsory Education Chinese Language Curriculum Standards this time strengthens the ideological guidance of the socialist core value system»⁹.

⁸ Ministry of Education, *Yiwu Jiaoyu Yuwen Kechen Biaozhun [Curriculum Standards for Compulsory Education in Chinese]*, Beijing, Beijing Normal University Press, 2011, p. 2.

⁹ *Zhuanjia Jiedu Xinkebiao Xiuding Neirong: Yuwen Kecheng Bianzai Naer? [Experts interpret the revised content of the new curriculum standard: what changes in the Chinese course?]*, «Guangming Daily», February 15th, 2012.

The new curriculum standards for elementary school Chinese language made higher requirements for reading, giving the following guiding opinions on extracurricular reading in Appendix 2:

Long literary masterpieces, such as Wu Cheng'en's *Journey to the West*, Shi Nai'an's *Water Margin*, Lao She's *Camel Xiangzi*, Luo Guangbin and Yang Yiyuan's *The Red Rock*, Daniel Defoe's *Robinson Crusoe*, Jonathan Swift's *Gulliver's Travels*, Charlotte Bronte's *Jane Eyre*, Maxim Gorky's *Childhood*, Nikolai Ostrovsky's *How the Steel Was Tempered*, ecc.¹⁰

The nine full-length literary works given as examples in the curriculum standards are worth noting. The nine works include four Chinese works (including two of the Four Great Classical Novels) and five foreign works, of which three are British and two Russian. Considering China's historical relations with Russia (especially the Soviet Union) and the revolutionary nature of these two Russian works, the three British works are very conspicuous here, and no full-length literary masterpieces from any other countries are selected. Moreover, these three British works are quite selectively chosen instead of extensively covered: two are 18th century adventure fiction, and the other is *Jane Eyre*, which is hugely popular in China. In terms of popularity, it seems that no other foreign novel can be mentioned in the same breath as *Jane Eyre* in China. Therefore, the inclusion of the two British adventure fictions indicates that the Chinese education community sees quite appreciable qualities in them, just as Wen Rumin, convener of the primary school Chinese language curriculum revision working group of the new curriculum standards, pointed out: «In cultivating basic Chinese language abilities, the Chinese language curriculum must pay attention to the edification of excellent culture on students, so that students' emotions, attitudes, values, moral cultivation, aesthetic interest are enhanced, and good personality and sound personality are nurtured»¹¹. The role of these two novels in nurturing students' values determined their inclusion in this short recommended reading list, and also determined the direction of their adaptation.

3. *Combination of children's literature adaptation research and narratology*

Western children's literature and its modern concepts have a long history, but academic research emerged relatively late, and the lack of children's literature

¹⁰ Ministry of Education, *Yiwu Jiaoyu Yuwen Kechen Biaozhun* [Curriculum standards for compulsory education in Chinese], Beijing, Beijing Normal University Press, 2011, p. 2.

¹¹ *Zhuanjia Jiedu Xinkebiao Xiuding Neirong: Yuwen Kecheng Bianzai Naer?* [Experts interpret the revised content of the new curriculum standard: what changes in the Chinese course?], «Guangming Daily», February 15th, 2012.

theory is also obvious. The main problem is that although it has borrowed many mature critical theories and achieved some results, it has not been able to develop a critical theory suitable for its own characteristics. International leading children's literature scholar Peter Hunt (1985) pointed out that other critical theories cannot be directly applied to children's literature, because the way literary criticism theories read texts is very different from the way children read texts. Against this background, he and Maria Nikolajeva jointly pointed out that narratology is of great significance and has broad application prospects for children's literature (Peter Hunt, 1985; Maria Nikolajeva, 2001, 2004, 2009).

The explanatory power of narratology for children's literature lies mainly in three points. First, unlike other general literary research methods, narratology pays more attention not to the explicit story content, that is, the question of «what is told», but to the narrative forms that are often overlooked in the reading process, that is, the question of «how it is told», including narrative voice, focus, implied author, narrative distance and other non-content textual features. Narratology refers to the former as story and the latter as discourse. The dichotomy of story and discourse is the starting point for narratological research. It is on this basis that narratology reveals an important essential feature of children's literature, namely the communication pattern between adult narrators and child narratees. This distinction can also further explain the essential characteristics of some subgenres unique to children's literature, such as the dual narrators of picture books, that is, the text narrator and the pictorial narrator. There are complex relationships between the two, referencing, complementing, opposing, conflicting and even subverting each other. In addition, narrative analysis also often pays attention to the fusion or separation of the narrative voice and the focalizer, that is, the distinction between «who is telling the story» and «who is seeing/hearing». Furthermore, the «paratext» proposed by narratology has also become a common term in literary studies, referring to elements in literary works that do not belong to the «text» (as opposed to the concept of «text», such as covers, prefaces, illustrations, afterwords, footnotes, and even publicity materials, outtakes, ecc.¹² These are also important components and vitality sources of today's increasingly media-oriented children's literature, but are rarely concerned in traditional literary studies. Therefore, with the intervention of narratology, some essential characteristics of children's literature that were not revealed or consciously expounded in previous children's literature criticism can be highlighted, thus enabling us to examine the essence of children's literature as well as the characteristics of new forms and genres of children's literature from a more comprehensive perspective.

¹² G. Genette, M. Maclean, *Introduction to the paratext*, «New Literary History», vol. 22, n. 2, 1991, p. 263.

Secondly, narratology has gone through two stages of classical narratology and postclassical narratology, and has become a prominent discipline in contemporary global literary studies. Its vitality lies in the fact that narratology has constantly developing and renewing core concepts with considerable operability and powerful explanatory power, while also having very good universality. Therefore, whether it is classical narratology's narrative voice, narrative perspective, narrative time, narrative space, or implied reader and implied author in narrative communication, they have all become widely recognized and accepted concepts in general literary research. Current postclassical narratology has successfully combined the core concepts of narratology with the context of literary research, and extensively draws on the core principles of other branches of literary research, giving rise to many schools such as cognitive narratology, feminist narratology, unnatural narratology, rhetorical narratology, transmedia narratology, thus further developing narratology. And children's literature is a relatively unique genre or form within literature. The core dual audience of children's literature, namely the distinction between adult and child readers, is suitable for analysis using concepts such as implied author, implied reader, narrative communication, narrative voice in narratology, and even dual narrative processes. This is beyond the reach of other critical theories.

Thirdly, children's literature contains rich paratextual features and multimodal, multimedia nature, embodied in common elements in children's literature such as picture books, illustrations, and varied use of words. These happen to match narratology's research into paratext and narrative communication, as well as the multimodality of transmedia narratology. It can be seen that children's literature and narratology have very good affinity.

Narratology mainly studies macro-level structural and strategic aspects as well as micro-level narrative elements in the text, such as narrative voice, while stylistics explores the micro-local textual features, such as word choice, word order, sentence patterns, ecc., forming a good complementary relationship with narratology. This is also the complementary relationship and integrated application of narratology advocated by Professor Shen Dan of Peking University in *Narratology and Novel Stylistics Studies* (2004) and many papers. In a category like children's literature that pays particular attention to stylistic expressiveness and rhetorical effects of works, the combination of narratology and stylistics is complementary. Not only that, as Professor John Stephens points out, children's literature research often focuses more on themes and content, and language is rarely explicitly concerned. But in fact, children's literature works have very prominent stylistic features, reflected in their creative use of vocabulary, as well as phenomena of breaking away from conventions in layout and printing, such as using different or even invented fonts, exaggerated font sizes, deformed layouts, ecc., to attract child readers and increase their reading interest, thus enhancing the utility of reading and writing in terms of style strategies. From a deeper level, «these (studies) might include choice

of vocabulary and grammar, use of metaphorical language, its types and frequencies, characteristic patterns of linkage, orientation of narrative voice to existents (events, characters, settings) in the text. Some aspects of this stylistics may be common to several writers of the same period, a shared stylistics»¹³. Not only that, stylistics is not just a superficial study of linguistic style, but can also help us explore how the text constructs identity characteristics. Reality of form and meaning is constructed through language: by analyzing how language works, we get closer to understanding how our culture constructs itself, and where we fit into that construction. Language enables individuals to compare their experiences with those of others, a process that is a basic aim of children's fiction. In some children's literary works, the creative and exaggerated use of language itself, and even the unconventional use of language, are important sources of the work's sense of humor, which partly explains why nonsense poetry is almost entirely regarded as belonging to the realm of childhood.

The applicability of narrative theory to children's literature research is often reflected in the following aspects. Firstly, the narrative modes of novels can generally be divided into telling and showing, which is the categorization in general literary research. The telling was stronger in 18th century novels. Since Henry James and Flaubert advocated the retreat of the author from novels, showing has been more favored in novels with a stronger literary consciousness, and some even advocate eliminating the traces of telling as much as possible. However, children's literature is different. Because children's literature has emphasized educational, recreational and accessibility for child readers since its birth, telling is particularly prominent in children's literature, and the traces of narration are more obvious. This is often reflected in the direct communication and dialogue between the author and the reader (especially the use of interjections), and the use of story-within-story structures (such as *Arabian Nights*). The didactic meaning and moral function of children's literature can be conveyed more fully to child readers through direct narrative communication. In addition, from a cognitive perspective, telling often implies a framework with very obvious embedded cognitions, that is, who is the cognitive subject? Whose thoughts, thinking and emotions are reflected by the cognized object? This is manifested more clearly in formal features, and child readers can more easily grasp the complex embedded cognitive relationships. Showing is different, because it emphasizes immersion and hiding the traces of the narrator, which often leads to more covert and complex cognition, with a lack of formal markers in discourse relationships. As a result, child readers may become very confused and unable to smoothly find the interpersonal relationships between different characters and discourse levels. In other words, children may not be clear who is speaking and who is being narrated. In addition, picture books, due to their

¹³ J. Stephens, *Linguistics and stylistics*, in P. Hunt (ed.), *International companion encyclopedia to children's literature*, 1st ed., London, Routledge, 1996, p. 56.

conciseness and rich dialogues, have their own unique characteristics in the relationship between telling and showing, often manifested as more frequent switching and even integration between the two. Therefore, researching the narrative strategies of children's literature from the perspective of telling and showing is a very important proposition.

Secondly, children's literature research has a widely accepted premise that it is created by adult authors for child readers. The two are not equal, but have significant differences and binary oppositions. Adult authors stand in a position of power as creators, moral norm makers, storytellers (and thus information senders and revealers); while child readers stand in a passive, disadvantaged position as readers, recipients of moral information, and narratees. The unequal power relationship and binary opposition between adult authors and child readers is deeply rooted, so although in adventure fiction, child protagonists are often temporarily given special power and ability, this can only happen in an otherworldly realm (fictional world) separate from the real world, such as *The Chronicles of Narnia*, and in the end of the story the child protagonist will still return to being ordinary. The adult/child binary narrative originating from children's literature is an adult telling a story to a child. It is rooted in the mission of children's literature to educate through entertainment, and is ultimately realized in the narrative text of children's literature. Wayne C. Booth, the founder of rhetorical narratology, proposed the concept of implied author early on. He analyzed in detail that in addition to the traditional author and reader, the narrative communication process also includes implied reader and implied author. The so-called implied author is the image of the author and the attitude of the author constructed by the reader based on the text during the reading process. This constructed author is called the implied author. He may have some distance from the real author in terms of ideology, worldview, and attitude. However, for any work, the implied author constructed from the work itself during the reading process is the one that best matches the characteristics of the text itself, especially in terms of ideology and values. Therefore, the «death of the author» referred to in literary theory actually refers to the real author, while the implied author never dies, because he is a textual concept, a constructed concept, one with the text. In this sense, the so-called implied reader is the ideal reader implied in the text that corresponds to the implied author. In this way, a complete loop of the narrative communication process is formed. After the concepts of implied author and implied reader are introduced, we can more easily grasp the adult/child binary narrative unique to children's literature, that is, the implied reader or even the surrogate reader often has a very strong correlation with the implied author. The two share many aspects that can be jointly owned in terms of values and attitudes. The child, on the other hand, can actually be replaced by the implied reader. In this way, the traditional adult/child binary opposition in children's literature research can be thought about more conveniently, completely and accurately with the image

and relationship of implied author and implied reader, which is conducive to discovering the educational concepts, rhetorical effects and even ideological intentions behind the works.

Thirdly, children's literature contains rich illustrations and 'paratexts', which are an important part of the narrative and one of the main differences from adult literature. Illustrations are one of the unique charms of children's literature. The famous international Hans Christian Andersen Award rewards children's writers and illustrators separately, while in the major American children's literature awards, the Caldecott Medal is awarded specifically to picture books, reflecting the important position of illustrations in children's literature. Illustrations are not only an important component of children's literary works, they can even become defining elements of genres, thus divided into chapter books with almost pure text, picture books with intertwined and complementary text and pictures, graphic novels dominated by drawings, and even wordless picture books with only drawings and no text. It can be seen that as the proportion and importance of pictures in the whole work increases, genres also change continuously. Picture book research is an important area of children's literature research, with representative scholars such as Bettina Kümmerling-Meibauer in Germany. Scholars study the relationship between pictures and words. The two are sometimes contrasting and complementary, but more often asymmetrical or even conflicting. This is because pictures and words belong to two different media at the fundamental level. The former is synchronous and abstract, while the latter is diachronic and precise. Therefore, pictures can tell content and details that words in the text do not narrate, while words can clarify overviews, ideas and information that pictorial art as a visual medium cannot directly convey to readers. In addition to the different attributes of the media, the information of the two may also be asymmetrical. It can be the pictorial information is more prominent, while the words are merely ornamental and indicative; it can also be that the words dominate, while the pictures appear more as concrete and intuitive supplements; they can even have conflicting or subversive intentions in terms of theme and ideology. This is often an avant-garde exploratory direction, or a narrative strategy reluctantly adopted under the pressure of social censorship and moral norms. In short, the relationship between pictures and words is subtle, rich, and individualized.

Paratexts are another prominent narrative feature of children's literature. According to Genette's definition, paratexts are «those liminal devices and conventions, both within the book and outside it, that form part of the complex mediation between book, author, publisher and reader: titles, forewords, epigraphs, and publishers' jacket copy are part of a book's private and public history»¹⁴. Paratexts include all kinds of elements, such as prefaces, postscripts, covers, back covers, and even extra-textual or non-textual elements such as

¹⁴ Genette, Maclean, *Introduction to the paratext*, cit.

interviews with the author and outtakes. Children's literature paratexts are particularly rich, reflected in the abundant back page recommendations, cover elements (including various awards, reading list recommendations, illustrations, ecc.), opening words, prefaces, introductions, reader's guides, concluding reading comprehension summaries, exercises, and even reference answers. What these paratexts have in common is that they are all part of the book as a commodity, but do not belong to the main text of the story, and sometimes are not even written by the author of the work. The paratextual elements are important formal features that distinguish children's books from adult books. Lacking these paratexts would greatly detract from the characteristics of these works. Therefore, research on paratexts, especially from a narrative perspective, can help us understand the functions and attributes of children's literary works more profoundly.

4. *Combination of children's literature research and digital humanities*

There are currently very few crossover results between children's literature research and digital humanities research, probably because both are very young research fields that are still in a period of continuous development and expansion, so large-scale crossover research has not yet appeared. At present, according to the author's incomplete statistics, there are only five journal papers and no monographs. Therefore, instead of exploring the intersection between children's literature adaptation research and other research fields as in the other sections, this section starts with children's literature research in a broader sense to explore the possibilities and prospects of its intersection with digital humanities research.

Moreover, applying digital humanities to children's literature research has particularities, mainly because digital humanities is not a purely research concept, but also an infrastructure project, including digitization, information extraction, database building, and even entity and relation extraction for documents. In this sense, children's literature research, especially research on classics and historical versions of children's literature, can benefit greatly from digital humanities. Take myself as an example. During my PhD, I tried to find various historical versions of children's editions of *Robinson Crusoe* and *Gulliver's Travels*, but after an exhaustive and time-consuming search on various websites, I harvested little, basically only able to find that some special collections of foreign university libraries had physical books, but had no access. By a stroke of serendipity, I discovered that the Baldwin Library of Historical Children's Literature at the University of Florida Libraries contained collections of thousands of historical versions of various kinds of children's literature. Best of all, all the children's books in this library were digitized and could be downloaded online. This

at once solved the problem of collecting materials for my PhD dissertation, and I had materials to work with for subsequent research. It can be seen that collection of books, archival processing and other infrastructures are extremely important for carrying out literary research. Traditional library management only needs to purchase, collect and manage books, while the infrastructure of digital humanities emphasizes digitization and information processing of these collected documents, which greatly expands the access channels of these precious historical documents. Digital humanities infrastructure is by no means a remote technical fringe far removed from researchers. On the contrary, it is at the core of digital humanities. Taking the digital humanities portal websites in China as an example, about one third of the achievements section is related to the processing of works, documents, and collections, such as *Reflection and Progress on Organizing and Researching Ancient Chinese Literary Works-Centered on Han Yu's Poems*, *Digital Humanities In and Out: Image Materials Retrieval, Utilization and Research in Modern and Contemporary Literature and History Research*, *Digital Humanities Research on Cultural Heritage – Taking Foreign Digital Humanities Projects as Examples*, and so on.

It is the same situation outside of China. Professor Vanessa Joosen of the University of Antwerp, Belgium has carried out crossover research between digital humanities and children's literature in recent years. She published a report on research progress in the International Research in Children's Literature (IRCL). Feeling that children's literature research has been relatively slow in adopting the techniques of the digital humanities disciplines, she proposed a method of digitizing, annotating and analyzing XML texts to study the implicit age norms conveyed in children's books. Using digital tools, she conducted analysis on the distribution of sounds, topic modeling, syntax and vocabulary of Bart Moeyaert's *Seventeen Books* and Philip Pullman's *The Scarecrow and his Servant* from the perspective of studying information about implicit age norms in the works, pointing the way for further close reading narrative analysis¹⁵.

In her next paper, she combined distant reading and close reading strategies to comprehensively understand the role of age in Kuijter's works, in order to answer a series of questions: What explicit views on age do Kuijter's books provide? What implicit age norms can be inferred from his characterization? To what extent does the age category of the intended reader determine the form and themes of Kuijter's novels? She first obtained or created digital text files of all 32 of Kuijter's novels and short story collections from his complete works, extracted all metalanguage reflections and corresponding age information from the annotated books, and provided a topic model to study how a set of direct speech of characters is differentiated from other speech. Using this method, she linguistically explored the differences between child and adult speech in Kuijter's

¹⁵ V. Joosen, *Research in action: constructing age for young readers*, «International Research in Children's Literature», vol. 14, n. 3, 2021.

books, in particular whether adolescent and adult characters use different vocabulary, as well as the topics and stages of life they seem to like to talk about¹⁶.

In addition to digital humanities as infrastructure, another intersection of digital humanities and literary studies (including children's literature) is stylistic analysis using corpus linguistics, especially quantitative stylistic analysis. In 2022, the top international journal of stylistics, «Language and Literature», published a special issue on *Children's Literature and Stylistics*, which included a paper entitled *A Style for Every Age: A Stylometric Inquiry into Crosswriters for Children, Adolescents and Adults*. The authors, Walter Havert *et alii*, used quantitative stylistics to investigate the cross-writing of authors for child and adult readers. They analyzed the works of 10 Dutch and British writers to trace potential differences in their individual styles and similarities between authors. The study found that textual style is often more strongly correlated with the expected age of the reader than the period in which it was written. Young adult literature clusters more tightly with literature for adults. The stylistic style associated with a young readership is unique in most of the study corpus, even across authorial differences¹⁷.

Conclusion

As the current trend sweeping all disciplines, interdisciplinarity has influenced all sciences and arts. Whether agreeing or disagreeing, scholars need to think about how academic research should continue under this trend. For literary research, interdisciplinary work should obviously not be used as a slogan or gimmick, but should be based on some kind of affinity between the research content and theoretical research of the two disciplines being crossed. This may call on interdisciplinary theoretical resources that can actually match and couple, so as to attack internal disorders with external force, display new content, features and issues that were difficult to glimpse under previous methods and paradigms for this field, and thus promote constant updates and deepening of academic research. As an interface study between the sub-genre research of general literature and adaptation studies, children's literature adaptation research inherently has interdisciplinary attributes in terms of research objects and personnel, so under this interdisciplinary academic trend it shows strong potential to combine with narratology, education, digital humanities and so

¹⁶ W. Haverals, V. Joosen, *Constructing age in children's literature: a digital approach to Guus Kuijer's Oeuvre*, «Lion and the Unicorn», vol. 45, n. 1, 2021.

¹⁷ W. Haverals *et alii*, *A Style for every age, a stylometric inquiry into crosswriters for children, adolescents and adults*, «Language and Literature», vol. 31, n. 1, 2022.

on, and we might as well follow its inherent logic and take advantage of the times to further promote its prosperity and innovation from the perspective of interdisciplinary theories and practices.