

A Corpus-Based Study on the Translation Style of the English Version of Wang Anyi's *The Song of Everlasting Sorrow*

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Abstract: *This study takes the English translation of Wang Anyi's The Song of Everlasting Sorrow as its research object. Based on the Chinese-English Parallel Corpus of Mao Dun Literary Prize-Winning Works, it adopts a mixed quantitative and qualitative method to conduct a multi-dimensional investigation into the linguistic features and translation style of the target text. Quantitatively, with the aid of corpus tools, this research systematically calculates key indicators at the lexical and syntactic levels of the translation (including standardized type-token ratio, high-frequency word distribution, average sentence length, etc.), and carries out a comparative analysis with reference to the Translation English Corpus (TEC). Qualitatively, it undertakes a close reading of the translator's concrete translation strategies by examining linguistically distinctive units with prominent stylistic significance, such as four-character structures, proper nouns, proverbs and poetic lines. The findings reveal that at the lexical level, the translation shows a certain tendency of simplification, with its lexical richness slightly lower than that of the reference corpus. At the syntactic level, the average sentence length of the translated text is notably longer, and the translator tends to reconstruct the rhythmic flow of long sentences in the original work through coordinate structures and punctuation devices. At the cultural and rhetorical levels, the translator mostly adopts foreignization-oriented translation strategies, retaining the original cultural imagery and linguistic rhythm to a considerable extent by means of transliteration, literal translation and contextual compensation. On the whole, under the coordination of the multi-layered strategies of "lexical simplification, syntactic complexity and cultural foreignization", the translation realizes the cross-linguistic reproduction of the original style. Methodologically, this study integrates corpus-based empirical analysis and close textual reading, which helps to deepen the multi-dimensional understanding of literary translation style.*

Keywords: *The Song of Everlasting Sorrow*; Corpus-based translation studies; Translation style; Wang Anyi.

1. INTRODUCTION

Wang Anyi's *The Song of Everlasting Sorrow* constructs a panorama of urban life with a distinct Shanghai-style temperament, featuring a delicate and intricate narrative voice and a highly rhythmic linguistic style. Since its publication in 1995, the work has not only occupied an important position in the field of contemporary Chinese literature, but has also successively won important awards including the 4th Shanghai Literature and Art Award and the Mao Dun Literary Prize, establishing its canonical status. As a novel with a highly self-conscious linguistic style, *The Song of Everlasting Sorrow* is distinguished not only by its narrative level but also by its prosaic quality, musicality and density of details; its linguistic form itself constitutes an essential part of the textual meaning.

In terms of cross-cultural communication, the English translation *The Song of Everlasting Sorrow* (2008), completed by Michael Berry and Susan Chan Egan in collaboration, has provided a crucial pathway for the work to enter the English literary system. Since its publication, the translation has received considerable international attention, including a nomination for the Lois Roth Award for a Translation of a Literary Work, and has aroused certain repercussions among English-speaking readers. Reviews from mainstream Western media and general readers generally point out that the translation has reproduced the linguistic rhythm and narrative temperament of the original work to a large extent, making this version a typical case for examining the issue of "style reproduction" in literary translation.

Although existing studies have conducted valuable explorations on the English translation of *The Song of Everlasting Sorrow* from the perspectives of translation studies, reception research and cultural communication, as far as translation style itself is concerned, current achievements are mostly dominated by qualitative analysis, focusing on close textual reading and impressionistic judgments, and lacking systematic argumentation based on quantifiable linguistic evidence. Against the background that translation research methodologies are increasingly developing toward empiricism and data orientation, this deficiency has, to a certain extent, restricted the in-depth understanding of the translator's linguistic choice mechanisms and stylistic features.

In view of this, inspired by the corpus-based translation research paradigm advocated by Mona Baker, this paper attempts to introduce a mixed method of quantitative and qualitative analysis to conduct a multi-dimensional investigation of the linguistic features of the English translation of *The Song of Everlasting Sorrow*. Specifically, the research extracts key indicators at the lexical and syntactic levels (such as standardized type-token ratio, high-frequency word distribution, average sentence length, etc.) through a self-built bilingual corpus, so as to reveal the distribution characteristics of the translation in terms of lexical diversity, discourse organization and syntactic complexity. Meanwhile, combined with linguistically distinctive units with prominent stylistic significance such as four-character structures, proper nouns, proverbs and poetic lines, it carries out a close reading of the translator's translation strategies.

At the theoretical level, this paper not only focuses on the statistical features of the translation in linguistic form, but also attempts to incorporate these features into the interpretive framework of translation style and translation universals. Furthermore, combined with Lawrence Venuti's discussion of "domestication/foreignization", it elucidates the translator's strategic choices in the cross-cultural context. Through this analytical approach integrating "data, text and theory", this paper aims to answer the following questions: What systematic characteristics does the translation present at different linguistic levels? To what extent do these characteristics reflect the translator's stylistic orientation? And how does the adjustment of linguistic forms serve the reproduction of the original style in literary translation?

Overall, taking the English translation of *The Song of Everlasting Sorrow* as a case study, this paper attempts to establish a closer dialogue between corpus-based methods and literary translation research, so as to provide an analytical paradigm with both empirically and explanatory power for the study of translation style.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Since the release of the English translation of *The Song of Everlasting Sorrow*, research on its translation and cross-cultural dissemination has grown considerably. Overall, however, existing scholarship still displays clear fragmentation in research approaches and theoretical integration. Classified by research paradigm, relevant studies can be broadly grouped into three categories: the cultural research approach centered on translation and reception, the close-reading approach focused on translation strategies, and the empirical research approach that has preliminarily adopted corpus-based methods.

First, studies from the perspective of translation studies and cultural research mainly examine the reception mechanism and cultural significance of *The Song of Everlasting Sorrow* in cross-cultural transmission. Representative work includes Wu Yun (2012, 2014), who explores how the translator balances textual strangeness and target-language readability from the perspective of heterogeneity treatment and the ethics of literary translation. Such research is mostly grounded in theories related to "the representation of the Other" and cultural translation, with its core concern being: in the context of global literary circulation, how contemporary Chinese literature enters the Western literary system via translation and is re-interpreted and re-received. Relevant interview-based studies have further uncovered the translators' strategic thinking in practical operation, offering valuable first-hand evidence for understanding the production of the translated text. Nevertheless, this approach tends to prioritize macro-level cultural interpretation and pays relatively limited attention to the concrete linguistic mechanisms realized in the target text.

Second, research focusing on translation strategies and textual analysis centers on the linguistic treatments adopted by the translator at specific levels. For example, Zhu Zhenwu (2017) draws on the framework of "domestication/foreignization" proposed by Lawrence Venuti to systematically analyze how the translator negotiates between "the representation of the Other" and reader acceptability. Such studies typically rely on typical textual instances to conduct close readings of culture-loaded terms, rhetorical expressions and narrative techniques, thereby summarizing the translator's general tendencies. Their strength lies in revealing the micro-mechanisms of specific translation practices, yet their limitations are equally notable: on the one hand, analyses rely heavily on researchers' subjective judgments and lack verifiable quantitative support; on the other hand, individual cases are not systematically integrated, making it difficult to form a structured understanding of the overall style.

Third, alongside the development of corpus-based translation studies, some scholars have begun to apply quantitative methods to the analysis of the English translation of *The Song of Everlasting Sorrow*. For instance, Wang Xiaoli (2015) takes degree adverbs as a starting point and, through source-text and target-text comparison, identifies a tendency toward intensification in the translated text, interpreting this as a means to highlight characters'

emotions and conform to English expressive norms. Methodologically, such research draws on the corpus approach advocated by Mona Baker, providing a new empirical foundation for translation style research. However, existing quantitative studies generally focus on isolated linguistic phenomena (e.g., particular word classes or grammatical features) and have not established systematic connections across multi-layered linguistic structures (lexis–syntax–discourse), leaving their explanatory power open to further development.

A synthesis of the above three strands of research shows that, although current scholarship on the English translation of *The Song of Everlasting Sorrow* has addressed cultural, strategic and linguistic dimensions, two major shortcomings remain. First, research paradigms are relatively disconnected, with insufficient integration between qualitative and quantitative analysis. Second, definitions of “translation style” mostly remain at the level of empirical description, lacking systematic construction supported by multi-dimensional linguistic evidence. To some extent, this state of affairs has hindered a deeper understanding of the translator’s linguistic choice mechanisms and stylistic characteristics.

Against this background, this paper seeks to integrate and expand existing methodologies: on the one hand, it employs a self-built corpus and multiple quantitative indicators to examine the translation systematically at the lexical and syntactic levels; on the other hand, it conducts qualitative analysis by focusing on linguistically marked units with strong stylistic significance, including four-character structures, proper nouns, proverbs and poetic lines, to compensate for the interpretive limitations of purely quantitative research. Through this combined approach of “quantitative description and qualitative interpretation”, the study aims to transcend the constraints of single research paradigms and offer a more comprehensive and analytically robust re-examination of the translation style of the English version of *The Song of Everlasting Sorrow*.

3. RESEARCH DESIGN

3.1 Research Data

The corpus employed in this study is the Chinese-English parallel sub-corpus of *The Song of Everlasting Sorrow* under the Chinese-English Parallel Corpus of Mao Dun Literary Prize Winning Works. The source text in Chinese and its English translation were aligned at the sentence level through Paraconc software with manual proofreading. Quantitative analyses at the lexical and syntactic levels were subsequently conducted using the corpus tools WordSmith 8.0 and AntConc 3.5.8. The corpus consists of approximately 160,643 Chinese characters in the source text and 202,557 English words in the translated text. As a bilingual parallel corpus, it is used to investigate the stylistic correspondence between the source text and the target text. Meanwhile, the English translation data are compared with reference to general English corpora (such as the British National Corpus, BNC) in the analysis to enhance the explanatory power of the findings.

3.2 Research Content and Research Questions

Wang Anyi’s *The Song of Everlasting Sorrow* is renowned for its delicate and intricate narration, with a linguistic style marked by distinct characteristics of Shanghai-style writing and feminine narrative temperament. How such highly stylized literary language is reproduced in the target language during translation constitutes a key issue in the study of translation style.

Against this background, this study combines corpus-based methods with close textual reading to examine the linguistic features of the English translation at both lexical and syntactic levels, and further analyzes the translator’s strategic choices in handling culture-loaded expressions, so as to explore the translator’s style and the underlying translation orientations.

This study intends to address the following research questions:

- 1) At the lexical level, what lexical features does the English translation exhibit in terms of indicators such as standardized type-token ratio (STTR), average word length, and high-frequency word distribution? To what extent do these features reflect tendencies of lexical simplification or normalization in the translated text? At the syntactic level, what characteristics does the translation display in syntactic complexity and information organization as reflected by average sentence length and sentence structure distribution?
- 2) What major translation strategies does the translator adopt when dealing with stylistically marked four-character

structures and culture-loaded expressions (including proper nouns, proverbs, and poetic sentences)? How do these strategies influence the cross-linguistic reproduction of the original style?

3) Is there a consistent stylistic orientation between the above quantitative features and qualitative strategies? In other words, does the translator lean more toward foreignization or domestication overall?

4. Quantitative Analysis at the Lexical Level

4.1 Standardized Type-Token Ratio (STTR)

A *type* refers to a distinct lexical item in a text, regardless of repetition and case differences, whereas a *token* refers to every actual occurrence of lexical items in the text (Baker, 1995). The Type-Token Ratio (TTR) is commonly used to measure lexical diversity in a text, that is, the richness and variety of lexical usage (Yang, 2002: 153). However, as TTR values are susceptible to text length, their explanatory power is limited when comparing corpora of different sizes. For this reason, corpus-based translation studies typically adopt the Standardized Type-Token Ratio (STTR) as a more robust indicator.

In this study, WordSmith Tools 8.0 was used to calculate the STTR of the English translation of *The Song of Everlasting Sorrow*, with the results presented in **Table 1**.

Table 1: STTR Statistics of the English Translation of *The Song of Everlasting Sorrow*

Indicator	English Version
Types	12,644
Tokens	202,557
TTR	6.25
STTR	43.60

According to the statistical results, the STTR of the English translation is 43.60. For reference, the STTR of the fiction sub-corpus in the Translational English Corpus (TEC) is 44.63 (Olohan, 2004: 80). The close values indicate that the overall lexical distribution of this translation is highly consistent with that of general translated English fiction corpora.

Nevertheless, further comparison reveals that the STTR of the English translation of *The Song of Everlasting Sorrow* is slightly lower than the benchmark value of the TEC. Although this difference is not statistically significant, it remains meaningful for interpretation within the framework of corpus-based translation studies. A lower STTR suggests a certain degree of repetition in the translator's lexical choice and relatively restricted lexical diversity in the target text. This feature can be regarded as an instance of the common "simplification" tendency in translated texts, whereby translators tend to select more common or high-frequency words to reduce expressive complexity (Baker, 1995).

From the perspective of translation practice, such mild lexical simplification may be associated with the pursuit of readability in literary translation. On the one hand, the original text of *The Song of Everlasting Sorrow* features delicate language and dense rhetoric; the translator may have improved the fluency of the target text by moderately reducing lexical diversity during discourse reconstruction. On the other hand, in the context of cross-cultural communication, the translator may have consciously employed more conventional vocabulary to lower the cognitive burden for target-language readers. Consequently, while maintaining literary expressiveness, the translation exhibits a feature of "controlled variation" at the lexical level.

4.2 High-Frequency Word Analysis

High-frequency words refer to lexical items that occur repeatedly and with high frequency in a given corpus. In corpus linguistics, high-frequency words are predominantly grammatical function words (e.g., articles, conjunctions, pronouns), whose distribution not only reflects the basic structural features of a language but also, to a certain extent, reveals the discourse organization and language usage patterns of a text (Hunston, 2002). In translation studies, the investigation of high-frequency words is regarded as an important approach to identifying translator's style and translational tendencies (Zhao, 2020: 67–73).

This study employs WordSmith Tools 8.0 to conduct word frequency statistics on the English translation of *The Song of Everlasting Sorrow*. Due to space constraints, Table 2 only lists the top 10 most frequent lexical items.

For reference corpus comparison, according to statistics from the Bank of English, the top five most frequent words in native English corpora are *the, of, to, and, and a* (Hunston, 2002: 4); in the Translational English Corpus (TEC), the corresponding order is *the, and, to, of, and a* (Olohan, 2004: 78). The comparison shows that the ranking of high-frequency words in the English translation of *The Song of Everlasting Sorrow* is closer to that of the TEC and differs to some extent from general native English corpora. This phenomenon indicates that the translation exhibits typical features of “translational English” in the use of function words, tending to follow the relatively stable linguistic patterns found in translated texts.

Further analysis reveals that the conjunction *and* features a remarkably high frequency in the translated text. A cross-reference with the source text shows that this phenomenon is closely related to the syntactic structure of the original Chinese. *The Song of Everlasting Sorrow* makes extensive use of commas to link clauses, forming long, gently paced and progressively layered sentence structures; in the English translation, the translator frequently employs *and* to achieve intra-sentential cohesion, reconstructing a similar linearly progressive structure in the target language. This strategy not only reflects the reproduction of the original syntactic rhythm but also demonstrates a tendency toward “explicitation” at the syntactic level, whereby the translator adds connective devices to clarify logical relations (Baker, 1995).

In addition, the personal pronouns *she* and *her* rank high on the high-frequency word list (7th and 8th respectively). This distributional feature is closely associated with the novel’s theme centered on female characters as the narrative focus, indicating that the pronoun system in the translation effectively maintains the narrative focus and perspective structure of the original work.

In terms of verb forms, past-tense forms appear extensively among high-frequency words, showing that the translation adopts retrospective narration as its dominant mode. This tense choice not only conforms to the conventional norms of English narrative discourse but also constructs a sense of temporal distance at the pragmatic level, endowing the narration with a reminiscent and historical discourse effect.

In summary, the distribution of high-frequency words in the English translation of *The Song of Everlasting Sorrow* not only reflects the reproduction of the original syntactic structure and narrative perspective but also presents the normalization and “explicitation” features commonly observed in translated texts. Through the selection and distribution of function words, the translator sustains the style of the original work while enhancing the acceptability and readability of the translation in the target language.

Table 2: Statistics of the Top 10 High-Frequency Words in the English Translation of *The Song of Everlasting Sorrow*

No.	Word	Frequency	Percentage in Text (%)
1	THE	11,451	5.65
2	TO	5,632	2.78
3	AND	4,739	2.34
4	OF	4,712	2.33
5	A	4,476	2.21
6	WAS	3,690	1.82
7	SHE	3,246	1.60
8	HER	3,009	1.49
9	IN	2,962	1.46
10	THAT	2,504	1.24

4.3 Word Length Distribution

Word length serves as one of the key indicators for measuring lexical complexity in a text. In corpus-based translation studies, word length distribution and average word length are frequently employed to examine the degree of lexical complexity and normalization tendencies in translators’ lexical choices (Olohan, 2004). Generally speaking, the frequent use of shorter words correlates with high frequency, common usage and processing convenience, while longer words tend to appear in more specialized or highly written discourse.

Table 3 presents the statistical results of word length in the English translation of *The Song of Everlasting Sorrow*. In terms of distribution, 3-letter words account for the highest proportion (23.7%), followed by 4-letter words (19.8%), 2-letter words (14.7%), 5-letter words (12.5%) and 6-letter words (8.5%). The top six word-length categories together make up 82.79% of the total text, indicating that the translation is dominated by medium and short words in its lexical composition.

This distribution pattern largely reflects the translation's reliance on high-frequency basic vocabulary. Function words in English (such as the, and, of, to, etc.) and common content words are typically short in form. The concentrated distribution of medium and short words is therefore not only a structural feature of English itself but also closely related to the frequent use of function words in the translated text. Combined with the preceding analysis of high-frequency words, it can be observed that the translator achieves discourse cohesion and syntactic organization through extensive use of short words, thereby reducing overall processing complexity at the lexical level.

In terms of the average value, the average word length of this translation is 4.39, which is largely consistent with the average word length of 4.36 in the fiction sub-corpus of the Translational English Corpus (TEC) (Olohan, 2004: 80). This result suggests that the translation conforms strongly to general translated fiction in terms of word length, with no significant deviation.

From the perspective of translation studies, however, this medium-and-short-word-dominated distribution can still be interpreted within the framework of "simplification". The translator's preference for more common and shorter lexical items helps improve the readability and processing efficiency of the target text. Especially when rendering the delicate and elaborate descriptions in the original work, controlling word length and complexity balances information density and reading fluency to a certain extent.

Accordingly, the word length distribution of the English translation of *The Song of Everlasting Sorrow* exhibits coexisting features of "conventionalization" and "simplification". On the one hand, its overall values align with the benchmarks of translational corpora, reflecting the normativity of translated texts; on the other hand, the concentrated use of medium and short words reveals the translator's adaptive strategies at the lexical level. Such strategies serve the smooth development of literary narration and facilitate the reception and dissemination of the translation in the target-language context.

Table 3: Percentage Distribution of Major Word Lengths in the English Translation of *The Song of Everlasting Sorrow*

Word Length	Percentage in English Translation (%)
1-letter	3.59
2-letter	14.7
3-letter	23.7
4-letter	19.8
5-letter	12.5
6-letter	8.2
7-letter	6.85
8-letter	4.3
9-letter	2.68

5. Quantitative Analysis at the Syntactic Level

Corpus-based studies at the syntactic level usually take mean sentence length as the starting point. As an important indicator measuring syntactic complexity and information density, mean sentence length not only reflects the structural organization of a text but is also often regarded as one of the key quantitative markers of translator's style (Hu, 2017: 230). Generally speaking, a longer sentence length corresponds to more complex syntactic structures and a higher degree of information integration.

According to the statistical results from WordSmith Tools 8.0, the mean sentence length of the English translation of *The Song of Everlasting Sorrow* is 33.41 words. As noted by Sara Laviosa (1998: 8), in general corpora, the average sentence length of translated English texts is approximately 24.1 words, while that of original English narrative texts is around 15.6 words. In comparison, the sentence length of this translation is notably higher than both types of corpora, indicating a high level of syntactic complexity and information-carrying capacity.

This significant deviation does not reflect the common “simplification tendency” in translated texts; instead, it points to a relatively rare phenomenon of “complexification”. From the perspective of parallel textual analysis, this feature is closely associated with the syntactic structure of the original text. The original *The Song of Everlasting Sorrow* extensively employs long sentences formed by multiple clauses linked with commas. Such sentence structures are both prose-like and rhythmical, demonstrating a distinct rhetorical style and prosodic sense.

In the translation process, the translator Michael Berry did not drastically simplify the original syntax, but reconstructed it through coordinate structures and punctuation devices in English (such as semicolons and conjunctions), thereby reproducing the linear progression and rhythmic layers of the original text in the target language. For example:

Example (1)

Source text: 最先跳出来的是老式弄堂房顶的老虎天窗，它们在晨雾里有一种精致乖巧的模样，那木框窗扇是细雕细作的；那屋披上的瓦是细工细排的；窗台上花盆里的月季花也是细心细养的。

Target text: First to appear are the dormer windows protruding from the rooftop tingzijian of those traditional longtang buildings, showing themselves off with a certain self-conscious delicacy; the wooden shutters are carefully delineated, the handmade rooftop tiles are arranged with precision, even the potted roses on the windowsills have been cared for painstakingly.

In this example, the original text consists of several short clauses connected by commas and semicolons, forming a clearly rhythmic compound structure. The translation reconstructs this syntactic pattern correspondingly with semicolons and coordinate structures, allowing multiple semantic units to unfold within a single sentence. This approach not only retains the progressive descriptive rhythm of the original text but also achieves concentrated expression of information in the target language.

From the perspective of translation strategy, the retention and reconstruction of such long sentences reflect the translator’s orientation of “stylistic convergence” at the syntactic level, that is, maintaining the original syntactic organization as much as possible rather than converting it entirely into the more typical short sentence structure of the target language. Meanwhile, this strategy is consistent with the translator’s own emphasis on reproducing the original style. As stated in his interview, when dealing with the extensive prose-like descriptions in *The Song of Everlasting Sorrow*, he strove to reproduce the narrative tone and rhythm of the original text in the translation and avoid excessive domestication (Wu Yun, 2014).

Accordingly, the English translation of *The Song of Everlasting Sorrow* exhibits a feature distinct from typical translated texts at the syntactic level: it shows a certain degree of simplification and normalization at the lexical level, while presenting significant complexification and stylistic retention at the syntactic level. This combination of “lexical simplification and syntactic complexification” reflects the dynamic balance struck by the translator between readability and stylistic reproduction.

6. Qualitative Study on Non-Linguistic Features in the English Translation of The Song of Everlasting Sorrow

In the study of translation style, relying solely on quantitative indicators can hardly fully reveal the linguistic features that carry aesthetic functions and cultural connotations in a text. It is therefore necessary to combine qualitative analysis and conduct close readings of the translator’s strategies by examining expressive forms with prominent stylistic significance. The term “non-linguistic features” in this paper does not refer to strictly extralinguistic factors, but to linguistic units that are difficult to capture by purely statistical means yet play a key role in stylistic construction, such as four-character structures, culture-loaded words, and poetic expressions. An analysis of the translation of these elements allows for a deeper understanding of the translator’s style and underlying translational orientation.

6.1 Translation of Four-Character Expressions

Four-character structures are highly condensed and rhythmically rich forms of expression in Chinese, widely used

in narrative, descriptive and lyrical discourse. In literary texts, four-character phrases serve not only semantic functions but also important rhetorical and rhythmic roles, including parallelism, enumeration and phonological enhancement. The extensive use of four-character structures in *The Song of Everlasting Sorrow* constitutes a vital component of its linguistic style.

The Song of Everlasting Sorrow has been awarded the Newman Prize for Chinese Literature. In her award citation, scholar Dai Jinhua pointed out that the work possesses a distinct stylistic identity in its language, with its detailed descriptions exhibiting a high degree of aesthetic tension (Dai, 2017). The sinologist Wolfgang Kubin also emphasized that the novel features a musical sense of rhythm and repetitive structures at the linguistic level (Liu, 2012: 206). Against this background, how to reproduce the rhythmic and rhetorical effects carried by four-character structures in English poses a major challenge for the translator.

As there is no formal unit in English that corresponds exactly to Chinese four-character phrases, the translator Michael Berry mainly adopted strategies of formal reconfiguration and rhythmic transposition when handling such expressions. That is, he reconstructed the original rhetorical effects in the target language through coordinate structures, syntactic repetition, imagery expansion and other devices. For example:

Example (2)

Source text: 它不是那种大起大落，可歌可泣，悲天恸地的苦衷，而是狗皮倒灶，牵丝攀藤，粒粒屑屑的。

Target text: It is not the kind of grand and heroic suffering that moves heaven and earth, but base and lowly, like pebbles and dirt, or the tentacles of ivy creeping stealthily out of bounds.

In this example, the original text employs six consecutive four-character structures to create a strong effect of parallelism and contrast, marking a semantic shift from grand narrative to trivial reality. Although the translation does not match the four-character form item by item, it reconstructs the original contrastive relation through coordinate structures such as “heaven and earth”, “base and lowly” and “pebbles and dirt”, and enhances descriptive concreteness via imagery expansion (e.g., “ivy creeping”). This treatment reflects the translator’s use of semantic and rhetorical compensation to preserve the expressive tension of the original text when formal equivalence is unattainable.

Example (3)

Source text: “爱丽丝”是女人的心，丝丝缕缕，又细又多，墙上壁上，窗上幔上，都挂着的。地上床上，桌上椅上，都铺着的。

Target text: Like a woman’s heart, Alice Apartments is made up of countless silken filaments: on the walls, the windows, the beds, the floors, the tables and chairs; in sewing boxes, in makeup cases, in the clothes hanging up in the closet, threading in and out of golden and silvery beads.

In this example, the original text constructs a dense and rhythmically charged descriptive rhythm through reduplicated words (“丝丝缕缕”) and parallel short clauses. Although the translation does not employ rhyme or repeated word forms, it establishes syntactic parallelism through consecutive prepositional phrases (“on the..., in the...”), thereby reproducing the progressive rhythm of the original in the target language. This method of achieving rhythmic reproduction through syntactic repetition echoes the use of high-frequency conjunctions and long sentence structures discussed earlier, demonstrating the translator’s consistent strategy at the discourse level.

Overall, in handling four-character structures, the translator did not rigidly adhere to formal equivalence but achieved functional reproduction of the original rhetorical effects using syntactic and semantic resources. This strategy not only avoids the unnaturalness that might result from mechanical literal translation but also preserves the rhythmic and aesthetic features of the original to a certain extent. In terms of translational orientation, this practice can be regarded as a form of controlled foreignization: that is, preserving the stylistic features of the source text as much as possible without violating the norms of the target language.

6.2 Translation of Proper Nouns

As an important component of linguistic systems, proper nouns perform a referential function that goes beyond merely identifying specific entities; to a large extent, they also carry profound cultural information and socio-historical contexts. As Yang Qingbo and Yang Yinling (2012) point out, proper nouns cover an extremely broad range, from physical geography and historical allusions to social institutions and daily life, all of which reflect the cognitive patterns and value structures inherent in a particular cultural system. In literary translation, therefore, proper nouns serve not only as semantic units but also as highly condensed carriers of cultural meaning, and their translational strategies directly shape the representation and reception of source-language culture in the target language.

From the perspective of translation theory, proper nouns are generally regarded as typical culture-specific items. In handling such linguistic units, translators often face translatability tension: on the one hand, they need to preserve the uniqueness of the source culture as much as possible; on the other hand, they must take into account the target readers' comprehension ability and acceptance habits. Within this tension, translators usually negotiate dynamically between foreignization and domestication (cf. Lawrence Venuti). At the operational level, this manifests in the integrated use of multiple strategies such as transliteration, free translation, explanatory translation and annotation.

In the English translation of *The Song of Everlasting Sorrow*, the translator Michael Berry adopts an overall composite strategy of "transliteration first, supplemented by explanatory translation and annotation" when dealing with proper nouns. This strategy demonstrates respect for the formal integrity of the source culture while accommodating the cognitive needs of target-language readers, striking a relative balance between cultural preservation and information transmission.

Take the translation of *longtang* (弄堂) as an example. The translator renders it as "longtang—the enclosed alleys". This version first introduces the source-language cultural concept directly into the target context via the transliteration "longtang", preserving *longtang* as a spatial notion with distinct local and cultural symbolic significance. Compared with a simple rendering of "alley" or "lane", this approach avoids the weakening or even erasure of cultural imagery. However, transliteration alone cannot enable target readers to fully grasp the connotation of the term, so the translator further supplements its meaning through the explanatory phrase "the enclosed alleys" following a dash. This combined strategy of "transliteration and explanation" ensures the translation maintains cultural heterogeneity while achieving basic intelligibility, representing a typical instance of controlled foreignization.

In addition to spatial proper nouns, the translation of cultural and artistic proper nouns reflects a similar strategic orientation. For example:

Example (4)

Source text: 收音机是供听评弹，越剧，还有股票行情的，波段都有些难调，丝丝拉拉地响。

Target text: Whether the radio is tuned to Suzhou pingtan storytelling, Shaoxing opera, or stock market updates, the reception is poor and the broadcast is always accompanied by a buzzing hiss.

In this example, *pingtan* (评弹) and *Yue opera* (越剧) are highly culture-loaded proper nouns representing distinct regional art forms. Instead of adopting bare transliteration (e.g., "Pingtan", "Yue Opera") or general categorization (e.g., "Chinese opera"), the translator employs a pattern of "transliteration + restrictive specification". Specifically, "Suzhou pingtan storytelling" not only retains the original name of *pingtan* but also clarifies its regional identity and artistic form by adding the geographic marker "Suzhou" and the functional description "storytelling"; "Shaoxing opera" defines its cultural origin via the place name "Shaoxing". To a certain extent, this approach achieves cultural anchoring, helping target readers cognitively situate unfamiliar concepts by supplying background information.

Functionally, this translational strategy carries multiple implications. First, it helps prevent the generalization of cultural concepts. Uniformly rendering *pingtan* and *Yue opera* as "Chinese opera" would erase the differences between operatic genres and dilute the cultural specificity of the text. Second, through moderate explanatory expansion, the translation realizes a degree of "explicitation", making cultural information self-evident to source-language readers explicit in the target language. Third, this treatment reflects the translator's trade-off between informativeness and fluency: explanatory components must not be overly verbose, so as not to disrupt the reading

rhythm, yet must provide sufficient information to support comprehension.

Notably, this “transliteration and explanation” strategy maintains high consistency throughout the translation, indicating that it is not an occasional choice but a key constituent of the translator’s style. In terms of overall translational orientation, this path differs from full domestication (complete substitution with existing target-language concepts) and extreme foreignization (transliteration alone without explanation), instead occupying an intermediate position between the two. This approach reflects a conscious choice by the translator in the context of cross-cultural communication: preserving the visibility of the source culture while lowering comprehension barriers through moderate adaptation.

A further connection can be observed between the translation strategy for proper nouns and the overall style of the translation when combined with the preceding quantitative analysis. At the lexical level, the translation shows a certain tendency toward simplification; yet at the cultural level, the translator consciously resists the cultural loss that such simplification might bring about by retaining and explaining proper nouns. This tension between “linguistic simplification and cultural preservation” constitutes one of the defining stylistic features of the translation.

In summary, the English translation of *The Song of Everlasting Sorrow* adopts a composite strategy centered on transliteration, supplemented by explanatory translation and annotation, in its handling of proper nouns. This strategy not only ensures the effective transmission of cultural information but also preserves the regional and cultural characteristics of the original work to a considerable degree. From the perspective of translation style, this approach represents the translator’s delicate calibration between readability and cultural representation, demonstrating his strategic awareness and aesthetic pursuit in cross-cultural contexts.

6.3 Translation of Proverbs and Poetic Lines

In literary translation, proverbs and poetic lines, as highly condensed linguistic forms, carry not only rich semantic information but also profound cultural traditions and aesthetic paradigms. Beyond its narrative dimension, *The Song of Everlasting Sorrow* extensively incorporates proverbs and classical poetic lines, even employing them in chapter titles, thereby introducing a poetic dimension into the novel’s narrative structure. This writing technique creates an aesthetic space resonant with traditional culture alongside realistic narration, forming one of the distinctive markers of the work’s linguistic style. Accordingly, how to render these highly culture-loaded and literary expressions in translation becomes a crucial issue for the translator.

From the perspective of translation studies, proverbs and poetic lines also qualify as typical culture-loaded expressions. Yet unlike ordinary proper nouns, they often possess multiple features: semantic conciseness, rhetorical symbolism, and cultural allusiveness. This means their translation involves not only meaning transfer but also the reproduction of rhetorical functions and aesthetic effects. In this process, the translator must strike multiple balances among semantic fidelity, formal reproduction, and reader accessibility.

In the English translation of *The Song of Everlasting Sorrow*, the translator Michael Berry adopts an overall strategy based on literal translation supplemented by contextual support in rendering proverbs and poetic lines. That is, on the premise of preserving the original imagery and mode of expression as much as possible, he helps target-language readers construct meaning through contextual cues. To a large extent, this strategy reflects a translation orientation inclined toward foreignization (cf. Lawrence Venuti), while avoiding comprehension barriers through discourse-level adaptation.

Example (5)

Source text: 流言的浪漫在于它无拘无束能上能下的想象力。这想象力是龙门能跳狗洞能钻的。

Target text: What makes gossip romantic is its unbridled imagination. With the imagination completely free from all fetters, gossip can leap through the dragon’s gate and squeeze through the dog’s den.

The phrase “龙门能跳狗洞能钻” in this example is a proverb with distinct folk characteristics. “Leaping through the dragon’s gate” implies the cultural connotation of promotion and breakthrough, whereas “squeezing through the dog’s den” carries undertones of compromise and flexible adaptation. Their juxtaposition forms a vivid expression of flexible advancement and retreat, depicting the fluidity and adaptability of gossip.

In the translated text, the translator does not domesticate the proverb (e.g., by converting it into an existing English fixed expression), but instead employs literal translation, rendering it as “leap through the dragon’s gate” and “squeeze through the dog’s den”. This approach preserves the original cultural imagery to the greatest extent, allowing target-language readers direct access to the symbolic system of the source language. At the same time, preceding phrases such as “unbridled imagination” and “free from all fetters” provide contextual grounding for the proverb’s connotation, reducing difficulty in comprehension to a certain degree.

From the perspective of translation strategy, this practice reflects a principle of imagery preservation: prioritizing the retention of core imagery in proverb translation, while shifting explanatory elements to the surrounding context. This strategy not only prevents the loss of cultural imagery but also realizes meaning transfer through discourse compensation, demonstrating considerable translational regulatory ability.

Another example:

Example (6)

Source text: 它还有无穷的活力，怎么也扼它不死，是野火烧不尽，春风吹又生的。

Target text: It also has boundless energy—nothing can kill it dead. Wildfires burn but, come spring, the grass will grow again.

This example cites the classical Chinese poetic line “Wildfires cannot burn it out; when spring winds blow, it grows again”, from Bai Juyi’s *Ode to the Ancient Plain Grass: Farewell Song*, used to metaphorize the tenacious vitality and regenerative nature of gossip. This line carries not only a clear metaphorical meaning but also common natural imagery and life philosophy typical of classical Chinese poetry.

The translation also adopts a literal approach, rendering the line as “Wildfires burn but, come spring, the grass will grow again”. Although the translation does not retain the metrical and parallel structure of the original poem, it achieves relatively complete reproduction at the level of imagery: keywords such as “wildfires”, “spring”, and “grass” construct a natural landscape corresponding to the original. Meanwhile, the translator simplifies the syntactic structure to align with the conventions of English narrative discourse, achieving a balance between form and readability to a certain extent.

From the perspective of cross-cultural communication, the translatability of such poetic lines largely depends on the universality of their imagery. Themes such as natural cycles, growth, and regeneration enjoy cross-cultural cognitive foundations. Thus, even if target-language readers are unfamiliar with the specific source of the line, they can grasp its implied meaning through the imagery itself. In this context, literal translation is not only feasible but also helps enhance the literary quality and cultural depth of the translation.

Furthermore, the strategies employed by the translator in handling proverbs and poetic lines are essentially consistent with the proper noun translation strategies analyzed earlier: dynamic balancing between cultural preservation and reader acceptability. Yet a difference remains: proper nouns rely more on annotations and explanations, whereas proverbs and poetic lines depend more on contextual support and the self-explanatory nature of imagery. This shows that the translator flexibly adjusts strategies across different types of culture-loaded expressions to achieve optimal translational effects.

In summary, the English translation of *The Song of Everlasting Sorrow* features literal translation as the primary approach, supplemented by contextual compensation, in its rendering of proverbs and poetic lines. This strategy largely preserves the original cultural imagery and poetic expression, lending a certain degree of foreignness to the target text. At the same time, through discourse-level adaptation, the translator avoids comprehension barriers that might result from excessive foreignization, thereby reconciling literariness and readability.

Combined with the analysis of the whole paper, it can be further concluded that the translation displays an internally consistent stylistic orientation across different linguistic levels: simplification at the lexical level, complexification at the syntactic level, and a pronounced foreignizing tendency at the cultural and rhetorical levels. The translation of proverbs and poetic lines constitutes a key manifestation of this overall style. Through imagery retention and contextual compensation, it enables extended reproduction of the source culture in the target

language and stimulates readers' aesthetic perception and interpretive space in cross-cultural reading.

7. Results and Discussion

Integrating the quantitative statistics and qualitative analysis presented above, the stylistic features of the English translation of *The Song of Everlasting Sorrow* can be systematically outlined across lexical, syntactic, and cultural-expressive dimensions. On the whole, the translation exhibits a multi-dimensionally intertwined translation style, in which differentiated strategies are adopted at different linguistic levels to realize the cross-linguistic reconstruction of the original work's linguistic aesthetics and cultural connotations.

First, at the lexical level, the Standardized Type-Token Ratio (STTR) of the translation is slightly lower than the benchmark value of the fiction sub-corpus in the Translational English Corpus (TEC), indicating a certain degree of repetition and controlled variation in lexical usage. This feature can be interpreted within the framework of the "simplification" tendency proposed by Mona Baker, whereby the translator tends to choose more common and less cognitively demanding lexical items to improve textual readability and acceptability. Meanwhile, the high-frequency word analysis further reveals that function words (especially the conjunction *and*) account for a significant proportion in the translation, which not only reflects the "explicitation" of discourse cohesion but also demonstrates a linguistic orientation toward normalization and "explicitation". In other words, the translator clarifies implicit logical relations in the original text in the target language by increasing grammatical connective devices, thereby enhancing discourse coherence.

Second, at the syntactic level, the average sentence length of the translation is notably higher than the average of both original English texts and translated English texts. Rather than following the conventional simplification tendency of translated texts, this phenomenon displays a trend of complexification. A comparative analysis of the source text and the target text shows that this feature mainly stems from the translator's conscious retention of the original syntactic structure. The original *The Song of Everlasting Sorrow* extensively employs long sentences formed by a string of multiple clauses, creating a progressive, rhythmically rich prose-like expression. Instead of splitting them into shorter sentences more consistent with English conventions, the translator reconstructs the syntax using coordinating conjunctions and punctuation marks (such as commas and semicolons), thereby reproducing the narrative rhythm and rhetorical prosody of the original in the target language. This treatment indicates that the translator tends to pursue stylistic convergence at the syntactic level, prioritizing the preservation of the source text's structural features over full adherence to target-language norms.

Third, at the cultural and rhetorical levels, the translator's handling of four-character structures, proper nouns, proverbs, and poetic lines further highlights his overall translational orientation. For four-character structures, the translator achieves rhythmic transposition through parallel structures and syntactic repetition, reconstructing the original rhetorical effects where formal equivalence is unattainable. For proper nouns, the strategy mainly combines transliteration and explanatory translation, retaining cultural reference while providing necessary elaboration to ensure effective transmission of cultural information. In translating proverbs and poetic lines, the translator prefers to preserve the original imagery, rendering its meaning explicit through literal translation and contextual compensation. Essentially, these strategies reflect a foreignization-oriented translational stance (cf. Lawrence Venuti), yet such foreignization is not absolute but a form of controlled foreignization: maintaining the visibility of source-language culture and expressive forms as much as possible without significantly compromising readability.

Notably, the above-mentioned features at different levels are not isolated from one another, but together form a translational style structure with internal tension. Specifically, the translation tends toward simplification at the lexical level to reduce comprehension difficulty, toward complexification at the syntactic level to reproduce the original rhythm, and toward foreignization at the cultural level to convey cultural specificity. This combination of "lexical simplification, syntactic complexification, and cultural foreignization" not only reflects the translator's dynamic balancing of multiple translational objectives but also mirrors the commonly observed strategic differentiation in literary translation: different linguistic levels serve distinct functions, jointly contributing to the reconstruction of the overall style.

8. Conclusion

This study conducts a systematic investigation of the English translation of *The Song of Everlasting Sorrow* from multiple dimensions, including lexis, syntax, and cultural rhetoric, revealing the multi-faceted characteristics of

the translator's linguistic choices and strategic applications. The research finds that the translator exhibits a tendency toward simplification and "explicitation" at the lexical level, demonstrates active retention of the original rhythmic structure at the syntactic level, and adopts a predominantly foreignizing stance at the cultural level. These three dimensions complement one another functionally, jointly constructing a translational style structure characterized by the coexistence of simplification, complexification, and foreignization. This structure not only reflects the translator's strategic differentiation across different linguistic levels but also indicates that stylistic reconstruction in literary translation does not follow a single orientation, but rather constitutes a dynamic balance interwoven with multiple objectives. Through the description and interpretation of such translational phenomena, this study also seeks to provide a referential analytical paradigm for corpus-based research on the translation style of contemporary literature.

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