

Translator's Style in Fictions: A Corpus-based Study of the Chinese Version of *Never Let Me Go*

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Abstract: This article sets out to probe into the translator's style in the reflections of the translations of *chengyu*, *sizige*, and *idioms* these three types of *lexis* applied in the China version of *Never Let Me Go*, by means of the self-complied parallel corpus in Sketch Engine. According to the quantitative analysis with statistics and calculations of the proportions of each translation procedure use with the aid of the corpus model, the research result reflects the translator's style that he is visible and manifests his voice as a translator in the target text. Based on it, there are qualitative analyses of the translator's motivations from social and cultural context, target readerships' needs, and individual linguistic preferences these three aspects. This investigation aims at providing theoretical and methodological references for the field of the further corpus-based translation studies of Ishiguro's literatures.

Keywords: Corpus-based Studies of Literary Translation, Translator's Style, Translation Approaches and Strategies, Typical Chinese Lexis

1. Introduction

There have been decades of the development of literary translation studies, which involves numerous literature genres, such as fiction, prose, essay, poem, opera, drama, etc. Moreover, since the end of the 20th century, different scholars have attempted to combine this traditional research with corpus technology in science and technology field, which not only brings a significant promotion and innovation of literary translation studies, but also creates a new research field: corpus-based studies of literary translation.

The writer of the chosen novel *Never Let Me Go* is one of the most famous and influential contemporary British novelist, also the Nobel Prize in Literature winner in 2017, Kazuo Ishiguro, who was born in Nagasaki, Japan in 1954 and moved to the UK with his parents in 1960^[1]. After graduating from University of Kent and then accepting postgraduate courses of creative writing in University of East Anglia, he started his career as a writer.⁶ His nine works of fiction - *A Pale View of Hills*, *An Artist of the Floating World*, *The Remains of the Day*, *The Unconsoled*, *When We Were Orphans*, *Never Let Me Go*, *The Buried Giant*, *Klara and the Sun*, and *Nocturnes: Five Stories of Music and Nightfall* - include the following themes: the discussion of the identity of the immigrants; the criticism and reflection of crimes of Japanese militarism during World War II; introspection of humanity, racial issues, and other human civilization conditions; rethinking of science and technology progress as well as a series of relevant social ethical problems it brings, etc.^[2] Moreover, the nine literatures contain some consistent styles: the language is generally concise and easy to understand without complicated or unfamiliar words; the narrative is relatively slow-moving without any features that can excite the readers or any particularly beautiful vocabulary or sentence; the atmosphere in the story is basically pessimistic and passive with no happy ends; the narrative perspective is always the first person by his or her memory, and there are many *daoxu* (i.e. a special Chinese narrative technique that some memory parts suddenly insert into the normal narrative) during the narration.

2. Literature Review

Different research viewpoints of translator's style are put forward by a variety of scholars previously, many of which are conducted on the basis of self-built corpus models. Baker (2000)^[3] is the pioneer to do research on translator's style. She creates a comparable corpus simply for the investigation of target language's linguistic characteristics, the research object of which is the linguistic styles and features of a translator's target text compared to the source language or other translation versions of the same original (Baker 2000^[3]; Olohan 2003^[4]). In her study, the styles of the two English

translators Peter Bush and Peter Clark are explored from type/token ratio, average/mean sentence length, and reporting structure these three dimensions. According to her result, Clark's works have lower type/token ratio, shorter average/mean sentence length and more use of past tense and direct speech, which make the works more concise than Bush. Olohan (2003)^[4] also uncovers the frequency of the uses of auxiliary verb and linking verb's ellipses and integrities in Peter Bush and Dorothy S. Blair's works in accordance with Baker's methodology of a comparable corpus. In his result, Bush prefers to use contracted forms in his translations than Blair does in hers, and Bush's style is unofficial whereas Blair's is official. With the same methodology, Saldanha (2011a^[5], b^[6]) makes a series of investigations of the translator's styles on Peter Bush and Margaret Jull Costa from the perspectives of loanwords as well as the uses of reporting verbs "say" and "tell". Furthermore, Johnson (2016)^[7] compares the narrative style of Julian Barnes's *The Sense of An Ending* with its Italian version on the basis of Leech's language variation theory. According to his finding, not the same as that in the source text, the translated text does not use first person narrative perspective; besides, the time reference marks and explanatory narrative marks frequently appear in the translation. In Johnson's opinion, it is related to the translator's translation strategies and purposes, as well as his personal linguistic habits. Apart from that, Li (2020)^[8] compares the translator's style of Bonnie S. McDougall and W. J. F. Jenner from the observation of the way they deal with culture-specific words in the English version of A Cheng's *The Chess Master*. The result shows that Bonnie prefers literal translation in order to restore the original content and the aesthetic style of the original form in the source text, which reflects the translator's translational standpoint of separating Chinese culture; whereas Bonnie also chooses liberal translation to handle culture-specific words based on target language cultural context if these words will cause misunderstandings to target readers. Jenner combines liberal translation, literal translation, and transliteration these three approaches, whose aim is to eliminate the foreignizing cultural elements in the target text, as well as diminish the cultural content and linguistic features in the source text. The differences in the two translated texts, from Li's viewpoint, are associated with the translator's readership positioning, translation principles and purposes, as well as the social and cultural context of the target language.

Moreover, Winters (2004a^[9], b^[10], 2007^[11], 2009^[12]) explores a lot the difference in style between two German translators Oeser and Orth-Guttmann from the perspectives of the loanwords, reporting words, and modal particles in the two German versions of F. Scott Fitzgerald's *The Beautiful and Damned* based on a parallel corpus. According to the results, Oeser is more inclined to use loanwords and common conjunctions than Orth-Guttmann is, and there is a significant difference on the use of particle "wohl". Similarly, based on the same corpus mode, Bosseaux (2006)^[13] investigates the cultural words and proper nouns in the two French versions of Virginia Woolf's *The Waves* and finds out that one translator prefers foreignization to try to keep the form and connotations of the original words; while the other frequently uses domestication to eliminate the foreignizing elements as much as possible. Additionally, Huang (2014)^[14] discovers different translators' ways of dealing with *liangkexing* (i.e. a kind of narrative that can be understood as the character's internal monologue, and can be understood as the description from the narrator as well) narrative discourse based on the three English versions of Lao She's *Rickshaw Boy: A Novel*. This study indicates that English translators prefer to put the readers into the story and characters whereas Chinese translators prefer to use third person past tense, which will distance the readers from the characters.

3. Goals and Research Questions

3.1 Significance and Goals

Kazuo Ishiguro has attracted much attention in Chinese society since the achievement of Nobel Prize in Literature in 2017. His nine works - eight novels and one collection of short stories - have all been translated and published several editions not only in China, but also in Taiwan. However, compared with other Nobel Prize in Literature writers, like Mo Yan, whose works and the corresponding translations have been studied extensively in China, there are relatively few scholarly articles or books involved the studies of Ishiguro's literary works, especially their translations in Chinese academia nowadays. Although there are some relevant academic journals and papers on CNKI, the research viewpoint is all the analysis of literary texts; in other words, the previous scholars simply did research the themes and plots, the interpretation of the rhetoric skills and characters, the illustration of narrative and style, etc. There are no studies of the translated text of Ishiguro's works currently, neither traditional research nor contemporary corpus-based studies. In addition, as mentioned before, *chengyu*, *sizige*, and idioms are all typical Chinese vocabulary, which are also the reflections of the

Chinese translator's self-manifestation in the target text. However, it can be noticed in the above reviews that the translations of these three types of lexis are rarely selected as the research material not only in the field of traditional literary translation studies, but also that of corpus-based fiction translation studies, which specifically means that not the same as the studies in other present dimensions, the research in the area is not only inadequate, but also not forming a relatively intact system. In this case, from the author's point of view, it is worth promoting and exploring the research on the above two aspects.

This study aims to probe into the manifestations of translator's style in the translations of *chengyu*, *sizige*, and idioms by means of the corpus-based approach. The author launches a target text-oriented research with the parallel corpus model in his study, in the hope of finding out the reflections of translator's style in the translations of the above three kinds of typical Chinese words. The current study intends to start further discussions on such three kinds of Chinese lexis translations applied in the target texts, offering theoretical and methodological references for later researchers aspiring to engage in the field of corpus-based translation studies of Ishiguro's literatures, which could possibly help them create more innovative research angles. In addition, it also aims to open up a new perspective of research not only in traditional literary translation studies, but also in corpus-based studies of literary translation, especially the field of fiction translation studies, which would be beneficial for further discovering the essence of translation, and meanwhile expanding the corpus-based studies topics, investigation scopes and translation studies ideas as well. Moreover, the current research topic is expected to exploit the studies of the foreign Nobel Prize winner - Kazuo Ishiguro - his literary works' translations, attempting to make contributions particularly on the improvement and development of both the traditional and corpus-based literary translation studies in Chinese academia.

3.2 Research Questions

Here are also the research questions that the author will investigate:

- (1) What translation procedures does the translator apply in the above lexis?
- (2) What might be some of the possible motivations for the translator to use such procedures?

This study will discuss the translator's style around the above two research questions.

4. Methodology

4.1 Research Perspective

Since *chengyu*, *sizige*, and idioms belong to linguistic aspect, particularly lexical category without doubt, and most of these three kinds of Chinese lexis are mostly made up of nouns and noun phrases, the research angle of the current study follows the research standpoint of linguistic perspective, in particular, the lexical level, more specifically, nouns and noun phrases, as well as their uses of translation approaches and strategies on the basis of a self-built parallel corpus in Sketch Engine.

4.2 Theoretical Framework

4.2.1 The Classifications of Translation Procedures as well as Chinese lexis

The two translation strategies "domestication" and "foreignization" proposed by Venuti (1995: 19-20)^[15] are adopted for the exploration of the application conditions of *chengyu*, *sizige*, and idioms translations. Furthermore, there are eight translation approaches put forward by Newmark (1988)^[16] that are employed in the later textual analysis as well. Additionally, two classification charts are provided, about the translation procedures in Table 1, and about the detailed categories of the three types of vocabulary in Table 2:

Table 1: The Classification of Translation Strategies and Approaches

Translation Procedures		
Translation Strategies	Domestication	Foreignization
Translation Methods	Communicative Translation	Word-for-Word Translation
	Idiomatic Translation	Literal Translation
	Free Translation	Faithful Translation
	Adaptation	Semantic Translation

Table 2: The Category of Chinese Vocabulary

Chinese Lexis		
<i>Chengyu</i>	<i>Sizige</i>	Idioms
<i>Chengyu with Allusions</i>		Colloquialism
<i>Common Chengyu</i>		AA(B)
		ABB
		ABA
		ABAC
		AABBC
		AB(C)AB
		Buzzword

4.2.2 Rewriting Theory

In order to discuss the translator's motivations, the theory proposed by Levefere is adopted as the current study's theoretical framework. To be specific, Levefere (1992)^[17] puts forward three main factors influencing translation work, which are poetics, ideology, and patronage respectively. Poetics here specifically means the mainstream standards, strategies, views for translation from the current society. Ideology particularly represents the political system, political discourses, political philosophy from the current ruling class, as well as the policy orientation and censorship for translation from the organs of power. Patronage can be understood as the patron individual, like sponsors or the translator himself, or the patron group, such as publishing house, for translation activities. From his perspective, the translator would consciously or even unconsciously “rewrite” the original to comply with his or his patronage’s poetics or ideology. Additionally, he also proposes that the rewriters are able to “choose to indulge the system and be limited into the range of the rules by the system”, or “even choose to resist the system and work outside its control” (ibid: 13)^[17]. Levefere’s opinion is actually in common with one of Even-Zohar’s that the translator ought to lay stress on his translation’s acceptability in general or if the target culture is in a stable state (Chang 2004: 29)^[18].

4.3 The Chosen Material

In view of the limited space, the current study selects three chapters of the original^[19] and the corresponding Chinese version translated by Zhang Kun^[20] as the corpus materials, which are chapter 1, chapter 19, and chapter 22 respectively. The main reason of such selection decision is that in terms of research data collection, the number of *chengyu*, *sizige*, and idioms in these three chapters is the most among the whole 23 chapters of the novel, which are 67, 88, and 99 respectively.

4.4 The Compilation of Parallel Corpus

A parallel corpus is compiled for the current study to uncover the translator’s style reflected in the above three types of vocabulary in the target text. This corpus named “Never Let Me Go and its Chinese Version” is established by Sketch Engine. The selected chapters and their corresponding translations are scanned by iPhone’s scanning function and then extracted by OCR websites, as well as proofread carefully by the author himself respectively. After that, the two documents with Word format are imported into computer-aided software Memsource, the align function of which can be utilized effectively for aligning the English and Chinese texts sentence by sentence. After the accomplishment of this alignment work, a single Xlsx file is imported into Translation Memory in Memsource first, and then a single TMX file is exported from it and imported into the self-compiled parallel corpus in Sketch Engine for data analysis after the manual proofreading. According to the quantitative analysis of the original words or phrases and their homologous translations, the identifications of the method and strategy used in each Chinese vocabulary, as well as the calculations of their employment ratios in the three types of lexis, can be revealed accordingly.

5. Research Results

The author’s own statistics of the quantitative distribution of the totally 253 pairs of three kinds of vocabulary in the three chosen chapters are as follows:

Table 3: Numbers of Three Types of Lexis in Each Chapter

Chapter No.	Chengyu	Sizige	Idioms
1	13	13	40
19	26	19	43
22	22	19	58

With the assistance of Sketch Engine, each kind of vocabulary's translation approach as well as strategy in each chapter can be identified and calculated. Only the entire amount of each method employed for these three types of lexis and the corresponding proportions in the three chapters are shown and calculated. The particular quantity and ratio of the sub-types of *chengyu*, *sizige*, and idioms are not reflected because of the restricted research time. The numbers and percentages of these words' translation procedures are demonstrated in Table 4 and 5 below:

Table 4: The Quantities of Translation Procedures

Chapter No.	Domestication				Foreignization			
	Communicative	Idiomatic	Free	Adaptation	Semantic	Faithful	Literal	Word-for-Word
1	5	60	0	0	1	0	0	0
19	7	77	0	0	4	0	0	0
22	11	85	0	0	2	1	0	0
Total Number	23	222	0	0	7	1	0	0

Table 5: The Corresponding Ratios of Translation Procedures

Chapter No.	Domestication				Foreignization			
	Communicative	Idiomatic	Free	Adaptation	Semantic	Faithful	Literal	Word-for-Word
1	23.00	222	0	0	7	1	0	0
19								
22								
Proportion	9.09%	87.75%	0	0	2.77%	0.40%	0	0
Total Proportion	96.84%				3.17%			

From the data shown in the above charts, it can be found that the number of idiomatic translation is the most among all the eight approaches with 222, the percentage of which, is naturally the highest with 87.75%. The second most approach is communicative translation with 23 in total and 9.09%. The total numbers of semantic and faithful translation are respectively 7 and 1, the percentages of which are 2.77% and 0.40% respectively. There is no number and proportion of the rest four translation approaches, which means that there is no application of them in the translations. Moreover, the total proportion of domestication is 96.84%, while the total percentage of foreignization is simply 3.17%. The proportion of domestication is significantly higher than that of foreignization, which shows the obvious reflection that the use of domestication is in an absolutely dominant position.

In accordance with the observation of the above data, there is an exploration of the result of the translator's style that the translator prefers domestication strategy, to be specific, frequently employing idiomatic translation and sometimes applying communicative, semantic as well as faithful translation approaches in the target text, the uses of *chengyu*, *sizige*, and idioms are his translation procedures' direct reflection. One thing here should bear in mind that even though Newmark (1988)^[16] explains idiomatic translation as the distortion of text connotations due to the frequent use of target idioms or *chengyu*, these extracted samples are all the common words or phrases in the source text. This indicates that opposite to the interpretation, this behavior makes the target language more vivid than the source language rather than destroying their original meanings.

At this point, the first research question is resolved as well that the translator mostly adopts domestication strategy, chooses idiomatic translation but seldom communicative translation method; he rarely utilizes foreignization strategy as well as semantic and faithful translation approaches.

6. Discussion

In accordance with the above research results, this part will attempt to uncover the translator's motivations of the translation procedures, namely, his preference of domestication strategy use, his self-manifestation of style as a translator, mainly because it would be worthwhile for the researchers to probe into the nature of translation studies and practice more deeply. Since the translator's style is a consistent choice, which could not be explained as neither barely from the styles of the original or the translator nor merely the results of language constraints (Hu & Xie 2017)^[21], the motives are probed

from not only the individual translator, but also the attributions out of the languages and texts. The explanations are interpreted from the following three out-of-corpus aspects: social and cultural environment, target readers' circumstances, and the translator himself.

6.1 Social and Cultural Context

The mainstream poetics in China is faithfulness, which has become an acknowledged and uniform regulation in traditional translation studies by default. Under this almost immutable unwritten standard, Zhang Kun, as an ordinary translator rather than a famous one, will be condemned and criticized by different groups from the society if he foreignizes too much in his text. He has to translate by following the social mainstream norm without choice. Moreover, it is related to patronage as well. Shanghai Translation Publishing House is the largest comprehensive publishing house in China specializing in translation, which has a quite long history to publish translations specifically for China readers since 1978 and can be viewed as the translator's patronage. There is no doubt that the most primary target readership of the press is Chinese readers, the product positioning of which must be considered. It is certain for the publisher to ask the translator to make his language in the translation understandable and acceptable to the readers, as this could cause a high sale in China book market and earn profits. As a sponsor, the translator must conform to the demands presented by the publishing house, otherwise he would be suddenly discharged of contract or his translation would not be published for sale.

It is highly possible that the translator makes a compromise during his work out of the consideration of the social and cultural translation specification and the patronage's needs: most *chengyu*, *sizige*, and idioms he chooses are common words without obvious cultural or historical connotations, the way of whom could not against the mainstream idea in the society and avoid the condemnation or criticism from the translation academia on the one hand; on the other hand, the decision of domestication strategy could fulfill his patronage – the publishing house's two "tasks": the target text's acceptability as well as the business performance, not only adapting this translated work to the China market, but also meeting the publisher's need of commercial profit. One prerequisite that should bear in mind is that these words are merely one of the components in a sentence not the key elements affecting the themes of this novel. In this respect, the original meanings are not changed but delivered accurately to the readerships.

6.2 Target Readerships

Consider, for a start, that Zhang Kun is a typical and local Chinese translator, whose mother tongue is Mandarin and translation is published by a famous Chinese publishing house, the most of his target readers are Mandarin-native Chinese people. Since there is no age classification in this translation, it can be understood that it is for all ages, from the children to the elderly in the society. Consider that most readers in this group are general public with normal level of educational and reading abilities, it is presumable that the vast majority of them accept typical modern Chinese language, namely, contemporary and "fashionable" Mandarin vocabulary use and sentence order and grammar structure the most. Therefore, for the sake of the most target readerships' recognition and acceptance, the translator certainly chooses appropriate Mandarin linguistic expressions in his work to be in line with the readers' language cognition scope. The above-mentions are explicit requirements, whereas the use of *chengyu*, *sizige*, and idioms is the implicit demand from the readers. Chinese public prefers to say these types of lexis not only in the written expressions, but also in their daily life, because on the one hand, it has become an expression habit for Chinese people and the rhythm sounds beautiful for them; on the other hand, using such words can save time to some extent and meanwhile precisely and succinctly convey the connotations. Besides, as mentioned above, Chinese readers expect to read a fluent and easy-understanding translation with the maintenance of all foreignizing elements. As a native, Zhang is also bound to be influenced by this linguistic culture. Since he is a professional literary translator mastering two languages – Chinese and English as well, there are some modifications and polishings in his target text from Zhang to comply with the mainstream readers' requirements. As a result, he decides to domesticate the source language, stands out his voice, and make himself visible, attempting to keep his target language consistent with the contemporary and popular Mandarin expression styles and present a highly fluent and readable translation with acceptable language as well as linguistic fashions but no confusions or misunderstandings to his target readers; at the same time, this translating way would not violate the readers' inner criteria.

6.3 The Personal Habits of Linguistic Expression

Although the target readers could have some direct or indirect impacts on the literary translator's choices and decisions, the factor of the individual translator's language use preference should not be ignored or excluded. It is involved with personal cognitions of language. Even though without an interview with the translator, there is still a deduction from the analyst that after receiving classical and modern Chinese literature education, he has been knowledgeable at the above three kinds of vocabulary and very familiar with correct and adequate manipulations of such vocabulary in various contexts. Assume that if a translator is not proficient in using such three kinds of vocabulary or does not have sufficient knowledge in this area, it is impossible for him to apply these words so much and frequently in his translations. Besides, there is, perhaps, even a special perception in the translator's mind that the employments of such three types of lexis can manifest the pronunciation aesthetics, historical classics, as well as typical traditions and cultures. Suppose this inference is true, it is highly probable that there is a manipulation of modern Chinese language in the translator's texts, where there is a reflection of his Mandarin vocabulary preference and the way of linguistic expression habit, whether adopting Chinese traditional vocabulary or adding or splitting original English words, realizing his personality, and meanwhile arousing Chinese readers' memories of outstanding traditions and essences.

As for the repeated use of these three kinds of lexis, there is another indication that it is associated with the translator's habit of vocabulary use. One probable case is about the scope of the habitual word application. In particular, some Chinese words are frequently used too much by the translator not only in his work, but also in his daily routines, which would cause a gradually limited range of diverse frequently-used word. When he is dealing with such original words with similar or same meaning, there is a possibility that he would instinctively think of choosing those frequently-used Chinese words several times to translate instead of creating other synonyms to achieve the effect of vocabulary diversification. Maybe he knows some other similar common or new words but cannot choose them at the first time. Another probability is that since Chinese people may have formed such a habit to express or behave like the target texts show in their daily life, these words are applied to translate repeatedly or added in for the consistency of Chinese people's perceptions of these routine and habitual expressions as well as behaviors. There is even another case, presumably, is for emphasis effect on the Chinese discourse of the translation, which would properly follow the way of expressing emotions in the context of Chinese literary texts.

7. Conclusion

In conclusion, this investigation selects three chapters of Kazuo Ishiguro's novel *Never Let Me Go* and its corresponding China translated text as the research materials, and concentrates on the examination of two proposed hypotheses, and the explorations of the two research questions: the adoptions of translator procedures of *chengyu*, *sizige*, and idioms these three types of lexis by the translator, and the motivations of his translational behaviors. The empirical methodology of this investigation is not only on the basis of traditional translation theories, namely, Venuti's theories of domestication and foreignization strategies, as well as Newmark's eight translation approaches, but also by the mean of a contemporary translation technology, namely, a computer-aided translation software Memsource, a corpus system Sketch Engine, and OCR websites. According to the quantitative analysis with the aid of the parallel corpus, as well as the total proportions of the translation procedures in the total 253 selected samples, the research result shows a discovery of the translator's style that he adopts domestication strategy and applies idiomatic translation approach in most of his translations. However, combined with Chang's ideas, since it is translated by a Chinese translator and published in China mainly for Chinese readers, different to the mainstream views in western translation studies academia, this translator is visible in his work, and manifests his voice as a translator. Apart from that, from the qualitative analysis based on Lefevere's perspectives, another opinion from Venuti, as well as the analyst's assumptions, there are two external attributions, which are social and cultural context and the conditions of target readerships respectively, as well as another internal one that is attribute to the translator himself, namely, his individual linguistic expression preferences. Until here, it can be found that the two research questions have been basically solved.

In accordance with this research, the aims of the author is on the one hand, to apply corpus-based approach into the research in relation to translations of culture-specific terms in literature, in order to realize the combination of corpus linguistics with translation studies on lexical aspects; on the other hand, to provide two new research perspectives – one is the viewpoint of translated text for the studies

of Ishiguro's works, and the other is the standpoint of typical Chinese vocabulary for the translation studies of Ishiguro's novels – for the sake of making theoretical contributions as well as references to the relevant fields of research.

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