

Analyzing the Translation of Environment Based on English Versions of *The New-Year Sacrifice*

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Lu Xun is a famous writer, and scholars have been studying him and his works. *The New-Year Sacrifice* is a famous novel in Lu Xun's works, which tells the tragic story of Xianglin's wife. Environmental description plays an important role in the whole story. Based on the Corpus of Lu Xun of Shaoxing College of Arts and Sciences, this paper analyzes the translation of environmental description in different English versions of the novel and the expression of implied meanings, and considers the points of attention in the translation of environmental description.

Keywords: *The New-Year Sacrifice*, environmental description, implied meanings

Introduction

Lu Xun is a famous literary scholar who made significant contributions to the fields of fiction and prose, whose works and ideas have influenced countless people in China, with masterpieces, such as *Wandering* and *Call to Arms*. His works and ideas have influenced countless people in China. Scholars have been studying him and his works with undiminished enthusiasm, exploring their connotations in depth, from the works themselves to their translations. *Wandering* is a collection of 11 novels by Lu Xun, including "The Eternal Flame" and "The Happy Family". *The New-Year Sacrifice* is one of the famous ones, which recounts the tragic life of Sister Xianglin from "my" perspective and expresses the author's sympathy for the poor people symbolised by Sister Xianglin. It is often said that one of the three elements of a novel is the setting, so it is clear that setting description is very important in the narrative of a novel.

A search for "translation of environmental descriptions" on the Internet yielded 69 results, but there were only about 10 articles related to both "environmental descriptions" and "translation", of which most of them are on the Chinese translation of environmental descriptions in foreign works. Liang Jinxiang (1987) studied the translation of character descriptions and environmental descriptions, arguing that the translation should be able to express the same communicative function as the original by mastering some common sentences and conventions. Qin Hongmei (2006) studied how the translation of environmental descriptions can reproduce the beauty of the original work from the translation of *Tess*, and believes that the translator should be familiar with the style of the original author as well as the actual needs of the work; otherwise, even if the text is faithful to the original text, it will still deviate in the divine rhythm. Liu Lan and Tan Yanping (2018) analyzed the translation of environmental descriptions based on the English translation of Ba Jin's work—*Family*. The article analyzes

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each of the three aspects of natural scenery, social environment, and life scenes, and concludes that Mr. Shaboly mainly adopts the method of direct translation plus additional translation in his translation. Ye Xueqing (2018) took *Rebecca* as the object of study, and takes the Chinese translation of environmental descriptions as an example, proposing translation strategies for environmental descriptions: augmented translation and subtracted translation.

In *The New-Year Sacrifice*, environmental descriptions play an important role throughout the whole text, and there are a total of 50 results for “*The New-Year Sacrifice*, environmental descriptions” on the China National Knowledge Internet (CNKI), but there are only about 10 papers with both keywords. The role of environmental descriptions was analysed separately. Wang Shunshun (2011) studied the novel from the perspective of the description of the typical environment and the portrayal of characters, and analysed in detail the role of these two aspects in expressing the author’s thoughts and emotions. Zhang Chuanquan (2011) divided the setting into natural and social environments and provided a detailed analysis of the role of environmental descriptions. Wen Duohua (2013) looked at six environmental descriptions in the novel, exploring how they set off the tragic fate of “Xianglin’s wife”. From these papers, we can see that the environmental descriptions in *The New-Year Sacrifice* are very important and the implied meaning is worthy of readers’ consideration.

Lu Xun’s works were translated into English as early as 1926, and the English translation has been a hot topic of research. A search for “*The New-Year Sacrifice*” in English translation on CNKI yielded 22 results, most of which focused on the translation strategies of culturally loaded words within the novel. Zhang Xiaojie (2008) studied the translation through appellation, dialogue, and phrasing from the perspective of intentionality. Yang Jianding (2018) compared and contrasted five English translations of *The New-Year Sacrifice* in terms of the translation of the triple connotation of culturally exclusive words. Su Peidan (2019) studied the English translation of *The New-Year Sacrifice* by Yang Xianyi and Dai Naidie as an example to analyze the treatment such as adaptive transformation made by the two translators in their translation. Pei Junhao and Dong Yinyan (2021) took Yang Xiangyi’s translation as a study to analyze the translation of traditional cultural elements in *The New-Year Sacrifice*. So far there are fewer studies on the translation of environmental descriptions in *The New-Year Sacrifice*. This paper compares the translation of environmental descriptions in three English translations of *The New-Year Sacrifice* according to the Lu Xun Corpus of the Shaoxing Academy of Arts and Sciences, and considers the points to the translation of environmental descriptions.

Introduction to the English Translation of *The New-Year Sacrifice*

This paper takes the English translation of *The New-Year Sacrifice* in the Lu Xun Corpus of the Shaoxing Academy of Arts and Sciences as the object of study. There are three versions of the article, the first being translated by Yang Xianyi and Dai Naidie (referred to as “Yang’s translation”). The second is a translation by the American translator William Lyell (known as the “Lyell’s translation”), who specialized in the study of Lu Xun and translated all of his works. Finally, there is the translation by Lan Shiling (known as the “Lan’s translation”), a well-known British translator of contemporary Chinese literature who translated several Chinese authors and published translations of Lu Xun’s complete novels.

Comparison Between the Original and Translated Versions of Environmental Descriptions

Environmental descriptions play a very important role in novels. Firstly, they can provide a background for the storyline. Secondly, it can set the mood and pave the way for the development of the novel. At the same time,

the description of the setting can also help the author express his emotions. In *The New-Year Sacrifice*, there are not only descriptions of the natural environment, but also descriptions of the social environment, and this article focuses on the translation of the descriptions of the natural environment. There are six environmental descriptions in the text, four of which are chosen for this paper, two of which are the main descriptions, in the opening and closing sections, and two of which are brief descriptions in the text.

The Main Environmental Descriptions

Opening Environmental Descriptions

Example 1: ……新年的气象……灰白色的沉重……闪光……更强烈了，震耳的大音……幽微的火药香。

Yang's translation: "...proclaim the New Year's ...pallid, lowering evening clouds ...to the Hearth God ...bigger bangs ...died away, ...faint whiffs ...".

Lyell's translation: "...proclaimed the imminent arrival ...grey and heavy clouds ...muffled sound ...the crisper cracks of fire-works being set off close The crisper cracks of fire-works being set off close at hand were much louder, and before your ears had stopped ringing, the faint fragrance of gunpowder would permeate the air".

Lan's translation: "... even heaven itself mark its approach ... heavy, grey evening clouds ... dull ... bidding farewell to ... make his annual report ... close by ... the faint ... hanging in the air ... died away".

The opening paragraph introduces the time in which the story takes place. It is "New Year's Day" and there is "New Year's weather" everywhere, which should be a joyful and lively scene. The two adjectives "grey" and "heavy" are used in conjunction, which are out of place with the "New Year's weather" and set a grey tone for the whole story. The three translators have basically adopted a straightforward approach in translating this passage, and the difference is basically in the choice of adjectives. Yang's translation starts with the adjectives "pallid" and "lowering", which are in line with the meaning of the original text, and the word "lowering" gives people a sense of oppression as the clouds press down, the same sense of oppression that traditional feudal bondage in society gives, and echoes the later provisions for the preparation of the "blessing" and the "worship". Both Lyell's and Lan's translations choose the adjectives "grey" and "heavy", which are faithful to the original text, but seem to be less heavy than "lowering". In the second half of the text, all three translators are also very consistent with the original, like "faint whiffs", "permeate", or "hang in the air". All three translators are very subtle in their choice of words, which are vivid and at the same time in line with the original text.

Ending Description of the Environment

Example 2: ……音响的浓云……团团飞舞……繁响的……懒散……舒适……疑虑，……祝福的空气……天地圣众……牲醴和香烟……醉醺醺……蹒跚……无限的幸福。

Yang's translation: "... drowsily ... vaguely ... ceaseless explosion ... enveloped ... dense cloud of noise ... mingling ... whirling snowflakes. enveloped ... medley ... relaxed; the doubt ... preyed ... swept clean away ... only ... the sacrifice ... reeling with intoxication ... boundless good fortune".

Lyell's translation: "... drowsiness ... vaguely aware ... faint but continuous ... skyful ... dense and resounding clouds. Thickened by ... held ... enfolding arms. Wrapped ... comforting symphonic embrace ... well-being ... free of worldly cares ... worries and concerns ... plagued ... totally swept ... happy atmosphere ... enjoying ... in their honor. comfortably ... staggered ... shower ... infinite blessings".

Lan's translation: "... faint ... dense ... blanketed the town. I accepted its comfortable, torpid embrace, letting the New Year's I accepted its comfortable, torpid embrace, letting the New Year's Sacrifice cleanse me of the doubts and misgivings that had troubled me all day. Having sated themselves on offerings and incense, the spirits of heaven and earth were lurching drunkenly about the sky, preparing to bestow joy everlasting on the good burghers of Luzhen".

The setting in the last paragraph comes at the end of the whole narrative, after the previous tragic story, which should have been depressing at this time, but the author's writing is not so heavy on the surface, from the incongruous "New Year's weather" at the beginning, to the tragic story of "Sister Xianglin", to the description of the natural environment at the end; it is clear that the "snowflakes" here can be seen as traditional bondage. The three translators have also adopted a direct translation approach in their translations, and it can be seen that several of them are also very consistent in their choice of words, with the words "dense", "prey on my mind", and "swept clean away" in Yang's translation; "a skyful of dense and resounding clouds" in Lyell's translation; "well-being and felt wholly free", "dense", "blanket", "comfortable, torpid embrace", etc., in Lan's translation which contrasts the greyness of the preceding text with the relaxed state of mind of "I".

Short Descriptions of the Environment

There are four short descriptions of the environment in the text, which are few words and short compared to the descriptions at the beginning and end, but they form an overall echo and are useful in the coherence of the plot.

Example 3:愈阴暗了.....下起雪来.....满天飞舞.....烟霭和忙碌.....乱成一团糟。

Yang's translation: "The sky became overcast and in the afternoon it was filled with a flurry of snowflakes, some as large as plum-blossom petals, which merged with the smoke and the bustling atmosphere to make the small town a welter of confusion".

Lyell's translation: "The sky grew ever darker. By afternoon it had actually begun to snow. From horizon ... blending ... soft ... urgent activity, snowflakes ... danced through the air ... off balance ... throwing ... into ... hopeless disarray".

Lan's translation: "That New Year's Eve, an overcast sky began disintegrating into snowflakes as big as plum-blossom petals that mingled with the smoke and prevailing bustle, adding a kind of frenzied confusion to the town".

This description follows the preparations for the blessing, which, like the beginning, should be a frenzied scene, but the author's wording makes the reader feel out of place in the New Year's weather, and "a mess" is a very direct expression. In terms of translation, the three translators also follow a straightforward approach, with Yang's translation choosing "overcast", "bustling atmosphere", and "a welter of confusion". Lyell chose "grew darker", "off balance", and "hopeless disarray" and Lan used "overcast", "prevailing bustle", and "frenzied confusion". The three translators have basically translated the intent of the original work, and the wording is also very much in line with the original text. The words "grew darker" and "hopeless disarray" in Lyell's translation are consistent with the tone of the text, and set the scene for the story of Sister Xianglin later on.

The last example I have chosen is a description from the middle of the essay, in which the main character "I" meets "Sister Xianglin". "I" was asked with some strange questions and felt uneasy inside and then sat alone in the study.

Example 4:阴沉的雪天.....

Yang's translates: "...the oppressive snowy weather...".

Lyell's translates: "...the gloom of the snow-filled skies...".

Lan's translation: "...a sky gloomy with snow...".

The phrase "I" is a bit uneasy after meeting "Sister Xianglin". For the word "阴沉的", Yang chose the word "oppressive", while Lyell and Lan chose "gloom/gloomy". Maybe Yang's word "oppressive" is more appropriate and fits the plot and atmosphere of the text.

Conclusions

After comparing the environmental descriptions in the original text and the translations of the three translators, the author believes that the attention to environmental descriptions can be divided into two general points, namely, faithfulness to the original text and conformity to the context. Firstly, the translation as a whole should be faithful to the original text. If it deviates from the original text, the translator's purpose of translation will not be achieved and it will not be able to convey the original author's intention to the readers, so among the standards of translation, the requirement of "faithfulness" is always important. Secondly, the choice of words in the translation should be in line with the context. In expressing a meaning, the translator has many words to choose from, which also reflects the translator's textual skills, for example, in Example 1, for "沉重的", Yang chose the word "lowering", and in Example 4, "gloomy" for "阴沉的". Although the other two translators have no problem with their choice of words, which are in line with the original text, but a comparison with Yang's choice shows that Yang's words in these two cases is more in line with the context of the original text.

Therefore, in order to bring the role of environmental descriptions into line with the original text, the translator must first fully understand the original text and understand the overall tone of the text, whether it is cheerful or sombre, and then look at the role of environmental descriptions in the whole text, whether it sets the mood or sets the scene, all of which are worthy of consideration by the translator. Finally, it is a matter of taking these factors into account and, on the basis of fidelity, paying attention to the choice of words, keeping with the tone and mood of the original text.

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