

## Stylistic Contrasts of Three Chinese Versions of King Lear

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### Abstract

Language and culture are inseparable. Language reflects culture, and it is not only a carrier of culture but also a tool for cultural exchange. Translation involves not only two languages but also two cultures. This dissertation is intended for comparing and analyzing the styles of the three translation versions of King Lear. From the linguistic and cultural perspective, comparison is made between the three versions of King Lear translated by Bian Zhilin, Liang Shiqiu and Zhu Shenghao respectively. The different translation styles of the three versions show that the translator's style is the product of the combination of the original author's writing style and the translator's translation characteristics. Some enlightenment might come out of the result: among the three versions, the closest translation to the style of the original is Bian Zhilin's.

### Keywords

Translation Style; Translation Strategy; King Lear.

### 1. Introduction

King Lear, the English tragedy written by Shakespeare, was a worldwide hit and still attracts a large number of readers today. The representative Chinese translated versions are those by Bian Zhilin, Liang Shiqiu and Zhu Shenghao. Through the analysis and comparison of the three translations, we can easily find that there are many similarities in the choices of words, the adjustment of sentence structure and language expression. However, after a comprehensive analysis of the three versions, the author find that there are differences between the three translations from the macroscopic to the microscopic level. Though these three versions are translated based on the same novel, the differences in translation strategies, social and cultural backgrounds, and translators have led to the differences in the overall translation styles of the three versions. It is especially necessary to compare the translation styles of the translators, deepen the study of Shakespeare's works, and investigate the relationship between the translation style and the author's writing style.

Style refers to the characterized use of the language of a text or the choice of the speaker's way of speaking. It is based on the components of language that characterize a text and varies according to history, function, and other factors. The stylistic theory of translation focuses on the stylistic meaning of the original language and the adaptability of the translation style to the original language based on the analysis of the stylistic meaning of the original language. It studies not only the stylistic means of expression of the original language, but also how to make the translation appropriate to the stylistic expression of the original language.

Did the translators of King Lear reproduce or imitate the style of the original author? Which translation is closer to the style of the original work? This paper will analyze these issues.

## 2. Stylistic Contrasts of Three Chinese Versions of King Lear

### 2.1. Translation Style of Bian Zhilin's Version

Bian Zhilin (1910-2000) was a famous poet, translator and researcher of foreign literature in China. During his sixty years of authoring and translating activities, he has made remarkable achievements in the fields of poetry composition, foreign literature translation and criticism. Bian's translation of Four Shakespearean Tragedies is even hailed by Mr. Wang Zuoliang as the pinnacle of his translation career.

Bian Zhilin held that Shakespeare is a poetic genre, so as a poet he adopted the strategy of translating poetry from poetry to poetry. He believed that since Shakespeare is a poetic drama, the translation should also return the original face of the poetic drama, the only way to fully maintain the face of the original work in order to reproduce the same or similar effect. The following is a comparison of the linguistic style characteristics of the original and the translated version with examples.

e.g. Original text:

Meantime we shall express our darker purpose.  
Give me the map there. Know that we have divided  
In three our kingdom; and 'tis our fast intent  
To shake all cares and business from our age,  
Conferring them on younger strengths, while we  
Unburden'd crawl toward death.

Translation version 1:

现在我宣布我暗中定下的主意。  
把那张地图给我。该知道我已经  
把国土分成了三份。我下定决心，  
人老了，就摆脱一切政务的牵挂，  
把它们交卸给年轻的力量，让自己  
一身轻以终天年。

(Bian, 2001:350)

From the above example, it can be seen that Bian Zhilin maintains the same poetic form as the original work. The rhyme sense is reflected in the phrases "our darker purpose", "our fast intent" and "Unburden'd crawl toward death". Bian Zhilin translates these phrases as "我暗中定下的主意"、"我下定决心" and "一身轻以终天年" respectively, and their colloquial speech is clearly marked and their rhyme and rhythm are obvious. The rhyme and rhythm are obvious, reflecting Bian Zhilin's language style. His choice of words is meticulous, Chinese-style and literary, emphasising the use of four-character patterns. He adopted the literal translation strategy.

### 2.2. Translation Style of Liang Shiqiu's Version

Liang Shiqiu began to translate Shakespeare's plays in 1930, and then in 1967 he completed his translation and publish *Shakespeare's Complete Works* (37 volumes of plays and 3 volumes of poems). Liang Shiqiu's version of Shakespeare's plays mainly followed the following principles: "To be faithful to the original text, though not word by word, at least as far as possible, sentence by sentence, never abridging the original text as some people of the time did, while preserving Shakespeare's punctuation as far as possible." When translating Shakespeare, he went through a lot of studying and analyzing, and finally selected the Oxford version without any additions or deletions as the original material. He also read extensively a lot of commentaries by many

Shakespeare experts and made meticulous comparison and identification, so as to make the translation consistent with the original work as far as possible.

Whether the translation style of Liang Shiqiu's translation reflects the principle of faithfulness as much as the content, let's observe and analyze from Example 1.

Translation version 2 : 现在我要宣示我的更秘密的计划。把地图给我。你们知道, 我已经把我的国土分为三块: 我已决心要使我的衰老之身摆脱一切的烦剧, 交给年轻的人去做, 我好轻松的爬向死所。(Liang, 2001:17)

Liang Shiqiu translated the phrases "our darker purpose", "our fast intent" and "Unburden'd crawl toward death" into "我的更秘密的计划", "我已决心" and "我好轻松的爬向死所" respectively. This shows that his language is more Europeanized and employs the literal translation strategy. On the whole, this example shows that Liang Shiqiu has perceived Shakespeare's language style and retained the rhythm of the original text, although it is not as colloquial as the original, the language is fluent and vivid.

### 2.3. Translation Style of Zhu Shenghao's Version

Zhu Shenghao's translations are mainly in prose style, but where the original lines are in rhyme, they are also translated in literary rhyme. The principles he followed in translating Shakespeare are as follows: "He seeks to maintain the charm of the original work to the greatest extent possible. He must seek the next best thing, and must faithfully convey the meaning of the original text with clear and clear words and phrases. But he does not dare to agree with the rigid translation of word-by-word and sentence-by-sentence comparison." After his version was published, the reviews have been overwhelmingly positive. Wang Yuanhua once said, "Zhu's translation can be said to be second to none in conveying the meaning of the play. ....It is not only beautiful and fluent, but also are appreciated in rhyme, tone, rhythm and other subtleties of the text, and is the best translation of Shakespeare I have ever read."

Translation version 3 : 现在我要向你们说明我的心事。把那地图给我。告诉你们吧, 我已经把我的国土划成了三部分; 我因为自己年纪老了, 决心摆脱一切世务的牵萦, 把责任交卸给年轻力壮之人, 让自己松一松肩, 好安安心心地等死。(Zhu, 2016:5)

Zhu Shenghao translated the phrases "our darker purpose", "our fast intent" and "Unburden'd crawl toward death" into "我的心事", "决心" and "让自己松一松肩, 好安安心心地等死" respectively. That is, he adopted the translation strategy of free translation, which is modern, vernacular, not obscure, and more readable. In general, Zhu's translation style is characterized by the use of words close to colloquialism and more vivid, but the language is less faithful than the above two versions.

### 2.4. A Comparative Analysis of the Three Versions

From the above analysis, it can be learned that Bian Zhilin's version and Liang Shiqiu's version are closer to the original work King Lear from the perspective of semantic transformation. However, from the perspective of language style, further comparison is needed to observe the translation style of each text.

e.g. Original text:

Of all these bounds, even from this line to this,  
With shadowy forests and with champains rich' d,  
With plenteous rivers and wide-skirted meads,  
We make thee lady: to thine and Albany's issue  
Be this perpetual.

Translation version 1 :

在这些界线内，从这条一直到那条，  
 里边有茂密的森林、肥沃的田野、  
 丰饶的河流，还有辽阔的草原，  
 都归你，由你和阿尔巴尼的子孙  
 世代相传。(Bian, 2001:351)

Translation version 2 : 所有在这界线以内，由这一边到这一边，有的是成荫的森林，肥沃的原野，丰富的河流，广阔的牧场，我完全给你领受：由你和阿班尼的后裔永远承继。(Liang, 2001:19)

Translation version 3 : 在这些疆界以内，从这一条界线起，直到这一条界线为止，所有一切浓密的森林、膏腴的平原、富庶的河流、广大的牧场，都要奉你为它们的女主人；这一块土地永远为你和奥本尼的子孙所保有。(Zhu, 2016:6)

By comparing the three versions, it is obvious that the three translators' styles of word choice are very different. First of all, the translation of quantifiers. For example, "Of all these bounds, even from this line to this" is translated by Bian as "在这些界线内，从这条一直到那条", while Liang translated it as "所有在这界线以内，由这一边到这一边" and Zhu translated it as "所有在这界线以内，由这一边到这一边". There is no difference in the meaning of either "疆界" or "界限". The words "条" and "边" reflect the difference in the quantifiers. Secondly, the choice of adjectives is also different: Bian chose "茂密、肥沃、丰饶、辽阔", Liang chose "成荫、肥沃、丰富、广阔", and Zhu chose "浓密、膏腴、富庶、广大". The differences in the language styles of the three translators can also be seen by the adjectives. In addition, when translating the last sentence "Be this perpetual", all three translators used the translation method of addition. Bian translated it as "世代相传", Liang translated it as "永远承继" and Zhu translated it as "永远为...所保有". All three translators added verbs.

e.g. Original text:

To thee and thine, hereditary ever,  
 Remain this ample third of our fair kingdom,  
 No less in space, validity, and pleasure,  
 Than that conferr'd on Goneril.

Translation version 1:

你，和你的千秋万代的后嗣，  
 就领有这三分之一的美好国土，  
 论幅员，论价值，论享用，全都不差于  
 赐给戈奈丽尔的那一份。

(Bian, 2001:352)

Translation version 2 : 我的美丽的国土之广大的三分之一，永远属于你和你的后裔；在区域价值和趣味方面，都不下于给刚乃绮的那一块。(Liang, 2001:19)

Translation version 3 : 这一块从我们这美好的王国中划分出来的三分之一的沃壤，是你和你的子孙永远世袭的产业，和高纳里尔所得到的一份同样广大、同样富庶，也同样佳美。(Zhu, 2016:7)

To begin with, the three translators have very different interpretations of "hereditary ever". Bian translated it as "千秋万代的后嗣", Liang translated it as "永远属于...的后裔". Zhu Shenghao, on the other hand, translated it as "子孙永远世袭的产业" by using the method of additive translation. According to the Collins Dictionary, a title or position in society that is hereditary is one that is passed on as a right from parent to child. Meanwhile, according to the

Seventh Edition of the Modern Chinese Dictionary, “后嗣” refers to a descendant; “后裔” refers to the descendants of a person who has died. Therefore, Bian’s translation here is not consistent with the original text. Liang, on the other hand, did not translate the meaning of “hereditary”. However, according to the modern Chinese dictionary, the meaning of “产业” is “land, house, factory, and other property (mostly private)”, which is not the same as the meaning expressed in the original text. From my perspective, it can be translated as “将由你和你的子孙永远世袭”. The translation of “No less in space, validity, and pleasure” also reflects the different styles of the three translators. Bian translated it as “论幅员, 论价值, 论享用, 全都不差于”, Liang as “在区域价值和趣味方面, 都不下于”, and Zhu as “同样广大、同样富庶, 也同样佳美”.

After analyzing the above two translation examples, we can find Bian’s translation style are based on the literal translation strategy and language style is more literary, emphasizing four-character form and dramatic form. While Liang biased literal translation and used more Europeanized language and Zhu applied free translation and vernacular language.

### 3. Conclusion

The analysis and comparison of the styles of the three versions of King Lear show that the translation style is closely related to the original author’s writing style. It is the product of the translator’s combination of the author’s writing style and his own translation characteristics. Different personal experiences of the translators lead to their own translation characteristics, and different translators’ styles emerge. Therefore, Zhu Shenghao’s version is the most impressive and the best in expressing the dramatic tension of the original text. Liang Shiqiu’s version is the most faithful to the original, without any deletions or additions, but it is slightly weaker in terms of readability of the translation. Bian Zhilin’s version, on the other hand, is entirely in the form of poetry, and it can be said that its translation form is the most faithful to the original text.

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