

Article

An Evaluation of Chinese-English Translation from the Perspective of House's Translation Quality Assessment Model-Taking Memories of Beiping by Zhang Peiji as an Example

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Abstract: Based on Juliane House's Translation Quality Assessment (TQA) model, this paper evaluates the translation quality of Lao She's classic essay *Memories of Beiping* and its English translation by Zhang Peiji. The study systematically compares the degree of match and mismatches between the source text (ST) and the target text (TT) across three register dimensions: Field, Tenor, and Mode. Guided by the evaluative criteria and comprehensive framework of House's model, this paper argues that Zhang's translation successfully captures the profound nostalgia and lyrical prose style of the original text. It achieves a high degree of equivalence in both emotional intent and information transmission, demonstrating a strong overall profile match. Nevertheless, minor dimensional mismatches persist in the subtle conveyance of a few culture-specific items and colloquial nuances. Through detailed case analyses, this study aims to explore effective pathways for Chinese essays to "go global" while preserving their authentic cultural essence.

Keywords: House's Model; Translation Quality Assessment (TQA); *Memories of Beiping*; Zhang Peiji's English Translation

1. Introduction

In the long history of translation practice, how to achieve effective conversion between two languages has always been a central and widely debated topic among scholars. Consequently, numerous divergences have arisen regarding the formulation of translation quality standards and evaluation methodologies. In the development of Western translation quality assessment (TQA) theories, the models proposed by Juliane House and Katharina Reiss have garnered widespread recognition. House's core argument posits that the essence of translation lies in maintaining semantic, pragmatic, and textual equivalence throughout the process of linguistic transfer. Accordingly, her TQA criteria are based on these three dimensions to measure the degree of equivalence between the TT and the ST: the higher the degree of equivalence, the better the translation quality.

Focusing on House's TQA theory, this paper applies her model to analyze the English translation of *Memories of Beiping* in *Selected Modern Chinese Essays 1* by Zhang Peiji [1] from three aspects: Field, Tenor, and Mode.

2. House's Translation Quality Assessment Model

Prior to the 1970s, the field of translation studies lacked a systematic theory for evaluating translation quality. This gap was addressed when Juliane House first proposed a structured evaluative framework in her monograph *A Model for Translation Quality Assessment*, laying the foundation for a scientific appraisal of target text quality. Drawing upon Halliday's systemic functional linguistics, the core philosophy of House's model is grounded in register analysis. It emphasizes that the essence of translation lies in

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maintaining semantic, pragmatic, and textual equivalence when linguistic units are transferred from the source language to the target language [2].

The model consists of four interrelated components: register, genre, individual textual function, and the linguistic text. At the register level, House adopts Halliday's triad of "Field, Tenor, and Mode": Field refers to the subject matter and social action; Tenor encompasses the social relations and role affinity among participants, emotional elements, and temporal provenance; and Mode denotes the medium and channel through which the author/translator and readers engage with the text. To overcome the limitations of register analysis alone, House incorporates genre as a social category into her model to elucidate the deep structure of the text [3].

The operational procedure of House's model involves four primary steps: first, analyzing the function of the ST based on register analysis; second, comparing the ST and the TT to identify and analyze any "mismatches" in the TT; third, determining whether the translation is an overt translation, which aims to transmit the contextual function of the ST, or a covert translation, which employs a "cultural filter" to achieve an equivalent communicative effect; and finally, formulating an evaluative statement regarding the translation quality [2].

Overall, by systematically comparing the degree of match between the TT and ST across various dimensions, and by calculating both overt and covert errors within the lexical and situational contexts, this model provides a scientific, systematic, and highly efficient methodology for the comprehensive assessment of translation quality [4,5].

3. An Evaluation of the English Translation of Memories of Beiping from the Perspective of House's Model

3.1. Analysis of the ST

To establish a solid foundation for the subsequent quality assessment of the English translation, this section provides an in-depth analysis of Lao She's essay *Memories of Beiping* across five dimensions: Field, Tenor, Mode, text type, and textual function.

3.1.1. Field of the ST

Field, or the province of discourse, refers to the subject matter, the topic being addressed, and the social action taking place in the text. In *Memories of Beiping*, Lao She constructs a delicate emotional narrative centered on "nostalgia for one's hometown." Unlike typical expository essays that introduce urban landscapes, the Field constructed here is a highly personalized, reminiscent narrative that emphasizes the interweaving of emotion and memory. The core topic focuses on various facets of the ancient city of Beiping; however, rather than providing an objective geographical or historical account, the text presents a portrayal and eulogy imbued with intense personal affection.

In terms of vocabulary, Lao She employs a large number of words related to daily life details, such as "tadpoles", "morning glories", and "vegetable stalls", encapsulating the everyday atmosphere of Beiping within fragmented memories. Syntactically, the alternating use of long and short sentences makes the narrative shift between soothing rhythms and exclamations, closely aligned with the natural flow of nostalgic emotions. The textual structure expands from personal experience to descriptions of urban spaces, and further highlights Beiping's unique charm through comparisons with European metropolises like London and Paris. The essay culminates in the final exclamation, "I am moved to tears; how I truly miss Beiping!", pushing the overall nostalgia to its climax.

3.1.2. Tenor of the ST

Tenor refers to the relationships among the participants in the text, including the author, the readers, and the characters involved.

Regarding the author-reader relationship, the essay utilizes a first-person narrative, which significantly narrows the distance between the author and the audience. Lao She interacts with his readers in an exceptionally sincere tone. Right at the beginning, he confesses, "I do cherish, however, a genuine love for Peiping - a love that is almost as

inexpressible as my love for mother." This almost confessional candor immediately builds intimacy with the audience. Rather than assuming the detached stance of an intellectual, the author positions himself as a wanderer approaching his hometown with a child-like heart, recounting his feelings in a conversational manner. Consequently, readers experience a tacit emotional resonance rather than a unidirectional sermon.

In terms of personal stance, the author is a loyal devotee and deep lover of Beiping. He likens his love for Beiping to the love for his mother, describing it as "the kind of love as inspired by music or painting," and emphasizing that this affection has dissolved into his "blood, character, and temperament." His stance is highly subjective and exclusive ("With Peiping possessing my heart, I can never become attached to either Shanghai or Tianjin."), reflecting an intense regional attachment and personal identity.

3.1.3. Mode of the ST

Mode refers to the channel and medium through which the author/translator and the readers engage with the text, including the distinction between spoken and written language, as well as the requirement for real-time interaction.

Although *Memories of Beiping* belongs to the written mode as a publicly published essay, its language is saturated with a sense of colloquialism and approachability. Expressions such as "I can't tell why." and "just fancy that.." rid the text of stiffness, making it resemble a face-to-face monologue of the author's innermost thoughts. The narrator actively participates in the text through a direct stance, forming a distinctive personal voice via exclamations, pauses, and frequent use of the first-person pronoun. Therefore, during the reading process, readers can virtually feel the fluctuations of the author's mind, which is precisely the intimacy and infectious power brought by colloquialized expressions.

3.1.4. Text Type of the ST

Memories of Beiping is a prototypical lyrical essay. Compared with functional or informative texts, the focus of a lyrical essay lies in expressing the author's inner feelings, personal stance, and aesthetic pursuits. Through memory and association, Lao She "glues" the history, scenery, and daily fragments of Beiping to his own life experiences, constructing a coherent emotional structure. It is an "I-centered" personalized narrative whose primary objective is not to convey factual knowledge, but to touch the readers, allowing them to perceive and comprehend his profound and complex love for his hometown—a love that is "beyond words."

3.1.5. Textual Function of the ST

From the perspective of Halliday's language metafunctions, *Memories of Beiping* manifests ideational, interpersonal, and textual functions, though with varying degrees of emphasis [6].

The ideational metafunction is primarily realized through the representation of Beiping's scenery and daily experiences, such as the vibrant colors of the vegetable stalls, the fresh vegetable leaves after rain, and the shadows of trees in the courtyards of small lanes. These concrete scenes carry the author's life experiences and provide a substantial descriptive basis for the text. Concurrently, the author establishes logical relationships through comparisons with cities like London and Paris, ensuring a clear thread throughout the emotional narrative.

The interpersonal metafunction is the most prominent aspect of the essay. The text abounds with emotional expressions, subjective judgments, and first-person experiences, all of which continuously shorten the distance between the author and the readers. Emotions such as love, longing, regret, and lamentation permeate the entire text, creating a pronounced emotional trajectory.

The textual metafunction is reflected in the organization of the entire essay. Taking nostalgia as the main thread, the text constructs a tight-knit structure through scenic memories, life details, and urban comparisons. The various sections are not merely juxtaposed; rather, they continuously unfold and deepen around the theme of "love for

Beiping," and finally conclude with the emotional outburst of "How I miss Peiping!," completing a seamless emotional loop.

In summary, *Memories of Beiping* is a lyrical essay dominated by the interpersonal metafunction, complemented by the ideational metafunction, and supported by a well-structured textual metafunction.

3.2. Comparative Analysis of the ST and TT

On the whole, the ST and the TT achieve a high degree of equivalence across the three register dimensions, with only a few instances of imbalance. This section provides an in-depth comparative analysis of the profile match between the ST and the TT from the perspectives of Field, Tenor, and Mode.

3.2.1. Comparison of Field

Case 1

ST: WoAiWoDeMuQin . ZenYangAi ? WoShuoBuChu .
ZaiWoXiangZuoYiJianShiTaoTaLaoRenJiaXiHuanDeShiHou ,
WoDuZiWeiWeiDiXiaoZhe ; ZaiWoXiangDaoTaDeJianKangErBuFangXinDeShiHou ,
WoYuLuoLei .

TT: I do cherish, however, a genuine love for Peiping - a love that is almost as inexpressible as my love for mother. I smile by myself when I think of something I can do to please mother; I feel like crying when I worry about mother's health.

Analysis: As demonstrated in Case 1, the core of the ST lies in expressing an unutterable yet sincere and profound love for one's mother, externalizing this emotional fluctuation through two specific inner activities: smiling and being on the verge of tears. Although the TT does not retain the ST's original paragraph breakdown, the translator cleverly embeds this segment as a conceptual benchmark within the grander context of the narrator's love for Beiping.

While this translational strategy adjusts the textual form, it achieves a high degree of profile match in both Field and emotional depth. Specifically, the ST's "WoShuoBuChu" is rendered as "inexpressible," which precisely captures the unutterable nature of this love. Meanwhile, the pivotal expressions of inner activities, "WeiXiao" and "YuLuoLei", are vividly translated using the clauses "I smile by myself" and "I feel like crying" in the TT. This rendering fully preserves the authentic emotional ripples and the concrete evocative power of the protagonist's inner world as manifested in the ST. By utilizing this private, intimate maternal love as an emotional anchor for the love of one's homeland, the translation, paradoxically, reinforces the emotional gravity and universality of the original text, thereby achieving a high-quality register alignment at the level of Field.

Case 2

ST: YuHou , JiuCaiYeShangWangWangHuanDaiZheYuShiJianQiDeNiDian .
QingCaiTanZiShangDeHongHongLvLvJiHuYouShiYiBanDeMeiLi .

TT: Often, leeks from rural farms after a rain still have specks of mud on their leaves. The vegetable stalls are so colourful that they present a scene of poetic charm.

Analysis: Through a close reading of Case 2, several experiential and lexicogrammatical mismatches emerge at the level of field, particularly regarding cultural taxonomy and the representation of material processes.

First, a conceptual mismatch occurs in the taxonomic translation of botanical terms. The ST's "JiuCai" refers specifically to Chinese chives (*Allium tuberosum* or garlic chives) within the Chinese culinary context, which is biologically and culturally distinct from "leeks" (*Allium ampeloprasum*), a vegetable typically larger and milder in Western cuisine. Translating "JiuCai" as "leeks" inadvertently misleads the target audience regarding the specific visual and culinary imagery of the ingredient.

Second, the ST verb phrase "JianQi" encapsulates a vivid sense of dynamism and a material process-depicting a kinetic scene where raindrops strike the earth and splash mud onto the leaves. In contrast, the TT's nominal phrase "specks of mud" shifts this dynamic process into a static description, erasing the temporal and physical source of the action ("during the rain") implied by the original text.

Finally, the ST reduplicative color term " HongHongLvLv " functions not merely as a description of variety, but as an ideophonic device carrying a distinct colloquial rhythm. It conveys a vibrant, fragmented, and visually rhythmic patchwork of market colors steeped in everyday folk life. Although the TT's "so colourful" successfully transmits the general ideational meaning of variety, it strips away the auditory rhythm and the specific visual imagery of alternating reds and greens. Consequently, these cumulative shifts result in a dimensional mismatch between the TT and the ST within the register of Field.

3.2.2. Comparison of Tenor

Case 1

ST: WoZhenAiBeiPing. ZheGeAiJiHuShiXiangShuoErShuoBuChuDe.

TT: I do cherish, however, a genuine love for Peiping - a love that is almost as inexpressible as my love for mother.

Analysis: The essence of the ST lies in the intensity of " ZhenAi " and the introversion and depth of " XiangShuoErShuoBuChu ". The translator has cleverly disassembled and reconstructed this: first, it accurately captures the strength and cherishing of " ZhenAi " through "I do cherish, however, a genuine love"; second, it accurately summarizes " XiangShuoErShuoBuChu " as "Almost as inexpressible". The most humanistic reflection is the analogy added by the translator: "as my love for mother." This sentence raises the love for a city to the level of the root of life and the supreme emotion of universality. It cleverly uses "mother's love" as the most indescribable and selfless reference of human beings, bridges cultural differences, and makes the implicit and deep love of the ST the strongest in the Western context. Strong emotional resonance. Therefore, the TT perfectly matches the ST in terms of meaning and emotional intensity.

Case 2

ST: KuaJiangZheGeGuChengDeMouYiDianShiRongYiDe,
KeShiNaJiuBaBeiPingKanDeTaiXiaoLe.

TT: I shall fail to do justice to this vast ancient city if I should do no more than extol just one certain aspect of it.

Analysis: The ST contains two meanings in expression: on the one hand, it is easy to praise a certain point of the ancient city, and on the other hand, it is emphasized that if only this is praised, the overall value of Beiping will be underestimated. The tone of the ST is relaxed, with subtle hints. At the same time, it vividly conveys the concern about the overall importance of the ancient city through the metaphor of " KanDeTaiXiaoLe ". The TT semantically corresponds to the logic of the ST, but there is a deviation from the ST in terms of tone, focus and image sense. First of all, the tone of the TT is too formal and written, replacing the understated "essay" of the ST with "I shall fail to do justice", which weakens the subtle emotions of the ST. Secondly, the TT shifts the focus to the speaker's own responsibility, rather than the overall greatness of Beiping emphasized in the ST, resulting in a shift in the center of gravity of the original intention. Finally, the vivid metaphor of the original image is " KanDeTaiXiaoLe " is abstracted by the translation into "extol just one certain aspect", losing the intuitive feeling of the original sentence. Therefore, although the translation conveys the logic of "don't just look at a part, look at the whole", the meaning matching is not high, and it fails to fully present the colloquial color and delicate emotion of the ST.

3.2.3. Comparison of Mode

Case 2

ST: WuLunRuHe, BeiPingZaiRenWeiZhiZhongXianChuZiRan, JiBuJiDeHuang,
YouBuTaiPiJing, LianZuiXiaoDeHuTongLiDeFangZiYeYouYuanZiYuShu.

TT: In Peiping, one always finds the natural in the midst of the artificial. The city as a whole is neither too crowded nor too secluded. Even houses tucked away in very small lanes have their own courtyards and trees.

Analysis: First of all, the ST presents the natural and comfortable sense of Beiping urban space in a progressive and delicate way, and the sentence style has the unique sense of flow and narrative rhythm of prose. The TT maintains the sense of hierarchy described

in the ST by splitting the ST into three sentences, corresponding to "natural appearance", "urban overall layout" and "house details in the smallest hutong". Secondly, the image of "XianChuZiRan" "JiBuJiDeHuang, YouBuTaiPiJing" in the ST through "In Peiping, one always finds the natural in the midst of the artificial" and "The city as a whole is neither too crowded nor too secluded" are faithfully reproduced, which not only retains the contrasting rhetoric of Chinese, but also conveys the author's appreciation for the comfortable space of Beiping. Finally, the TT retains the characteristics of prose in terms of speech processing. The descriptive sense of the ST is reflected in English through the juxta and logical progression of short sentences.

Case 2

ST: ShiDe, BeiPingYeYouReNaoDeDiFang, DanShiTaHeTaiJiQuanXiangSi, DongZhongYouJing.

TT: There are also bustling places in Peiping, to be sure, but like the traditional Chinese shadow boxing Tai Ji Quan, the city retains its stillness in the midst of motion.

Analysis: The ST naturally integrates the movement and stillness, complexity and quiet of Beiping into the prose narrative through the metaphor of "XiangTaiJiQuanYiYang", forming a visual and imaginal expression, so that readers can intuitively feel the unique rhythm of the urban rhythm. Although the TT literally retains the information of "TaiJiQuan" and "DongZhongYouJing", there are obvious differences in speech. First of all, the TT converts the vivid metaphor of the ST into analytical by inserting explanatory expressions such as "to be sure" and "the city retains its stillness in the midst of motion". Narrative makes the sentences with a sense of picture and prose rhythm become logical and organized. Secondly, the Chinese rhythm of the ST has a natural pause and a sense of rhyme, and the English sentence pattern of the TT is split and conjunctions are added, which weakens the original light and figurative tone, and the flow of the prose also decreases. Therefore, the TT fails to fully reproduce the image expression and prose rhythm of the ST in terms of language.

3.3. Text Analysis of the Translation

The translation of *Memories of Beiping* can be used to a large extent in terms of interpersonal element function, conceptual element function and discourse element function. It is consistent with the original text, and can convey the message and style of the original text relatively unmistakably. Therefore, the translation of *Memories of Beiping* belongs to the category of explicit translation.

Translation Quality Statement: Through the comparison of the ST and the TT, the author found that the two maintain a high degree of consistency in the overall sense, but there are still local deviations in some details. From the perspective of the field, the translator's grasp of the emotional core is relatively accurate, such as accurately translating "WoShuoBuChu" as "inexpressible", and appropriately reproducing the emotional fluctuations of "WeiWeiDiXiaoZhe" and "YuLuoLei"; but when dealing with specific cultural objects, there are still such as translating "JiuCai" as "leek". Conceptual deviations such as s weaken the details of the ST rich in life. In terms of tenor, in most cases, the translation can continue the implicit and progressive expression logic of the original text, such as establishing a connection between "true love Beiping" and "mother's love", and successfully reconstructing the deep emotions of the original work. However, there are also some sentences that weaken the intention of the ST due to the shift of the focus of expression, such as treating "KanDeTaiXiaoLe" as biased towards the translator himself. The sentence pattern of position. In terms of mode, the translation performs well in the reproduction of the overall prose style. For example, the processing of sentences such as "RenWeiZhiZhongXianChuZiRan" is more appropriate. However, when presenting metaphorical images, individual translation sentences tend to rationalize the light rhetoric of the ST by adding explanatory expressions. Generally speaking, the TT maintains a high degree of correspondence in terms of field, tenor and mode, and the translator's respect for the original style and emotional texture is more obvious. Based on

these performances, the author believes that the overall quality of Zhang Peiji's English translation of *Memories of Beiping* is relatively high.

4. Summary

Based on House's translation quality evaluation model, this article conducts a comparative analysis of Zhang Peiji's English translation of *Memories of Beiping* at three levels: field, tenor and mode. Research shows that the translator not only faithfully conveys the original message when processing the text, but also retains the narrative rhythm and emotional texture of the original work as a whole, and better reproduces the unique cultural atmosphere of Beiping. Although the cultural image is weakened or the expression is slightly interpreted in individual details of the TT, these deviations do not affect the overall meaning matching of the translation. Judging from House's model, the correspondence of the three major discourse dimensions of the TT is relatively high, and the overall quality is worthy of affirmation. It has certain reference value for understanding and disseminating Chinese prose culture.

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