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Gender, Era, and Style: A Corpus-Based Comparison of Lexical Diversity and Syntactic Complexity in Four English Translations of Rickshaw Boy

Haonan Zhen^{1,*} 
¹ School of Foreign Studies, Xi'an University of Posts and Telecommunications, Xi'an, China

* Correspondence: Haonan Zhen, School of Foreign Studies, Xi'an University of Posts and Telecommunications, Xi'an, China

Abstract: This study investigates the interplay of translator gender, historical era, and translational style through a systematic corpus-based comparison of four English translations of Lao She's seminal novel *Rickshaw Boy* (also known as *Camel Xiangzi*). A self-constructed diachronic parallel corpus was compiled encompassing translations produced by two male translators, Evan King and Howard Goldblatt, and two female translators, Jean M. James and Shi Xiaojing, spanning distinct historical periods. The analytical framework employed Coh-Metrix 3.0 for comprehensive metric extraction, supplemented by independent samples t-tests conducted via SPSS to assess statistical significance. The investigation yielded three principal findings. First, with respect to lexical diversity, female translators demonstrated significantly higher scores on global discourse-level metrics, specifically MTLT and vocD, compared to their male counterparts ($p < 0.01$), indicating consistently greater lexical richness across different eras. Second, regarding syntactic complexity, the influence of translator gender exhibited notable era heterogeneity: statistically significant differences in local complexity and global diversity were identified between the early-period translators King and James, whereas no such differences emerged between the contemporary translators Goldblatt and Shi, thereby reflecting the modulating role of evolving translational norms on syntactic choices. Third, qualitative analysis revealed that female translators exhibit higher semantic granularity and a more pronounced preference for lexical variation, particularly in psychological and emotional descriptions. Adopting a diachronic approach, this study provides cross-era empirical evidence for translation style research from a gender perspective and illuminates the complex interaction among gender, era, and translation norms.

Keywords: translation studies; corpus linguistics; gender; lexical diversity; syntactic complexity; translator style

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1. Introduction

Translator style research, a significant branch of Translation Studies, primarily focuses on the unique linguistic features manifested by literary translators or translator groups. This field has evolved from early impressionistic critiques into empirical explorations supported by corpus linguistics and computational tools [1]. Within this progression, the question of how a translator's socio-cultural identity—particularly gender—potentially influences their linguistic choices and stylistic construction has emerged as a cutting-edge issue with both theoretical value and methodological challenges.

Feminist translation theory offered a critical lens for understanding translator subjectivity by highlighting underlying power dynamics in translation practice. However, theoretical insights require empirical substantiation. There remains no academic consensus regarding whether, and how, translator gender leaves a systematic imprint on linguistic forms. While some studies suggest that female translators may exhibit higher

emotional density and contextual sensitivity [2], other scholars emphasize the complex interplay of factors such as personal habitus and era-specific norms [3].

Against this academic backdrop, Camel Xiangzi (also known as Rickshaw Boy) offers an ideal case for conducting diachronic comparative research with controlled variables, owing to its multiple significant English translations spanning several decades. Although existing studies have thoroughly investigated these translations from perspectives such as cultural adaptation and narrative shifts, most have not systematically examined translator gender as a core control variable. Furthermore, there is a distinct lack of rigorous, diachronic quantitative comparison at fundamental linguistic levels such as lexis and syntax. This research gap restricts our understanding of the specific role gender plays in shaping translator style.

Therefore, this study aims to conduct a systematic comparison of four translations by two male translators (Evan King, Howard Goldblatt) and two female translators (Jean M. James, Shi Xiaojing) from different eras, by constructing a Chinese-English parallel corpus of Camel Xiangzi and integrating computational linguistics tools with statistical analysis. The research will focus on lexical diversity and syntactic complexity as two core linguistic dimensions, aiming to reveal how gender influences the translator's linguistic choices and stylistic construction.

2. Literature Review

2.1. Research on Gender Differences in Translation

Since the latter half of the 20th century, Translation Studies has gradually shifted from pure linguistic conversion analysis toward the exploration of translator subjectivity and social identity. Gender, as a critical socio-cultural variable, has received increasing attention from the academic community. The development of feminist-informed translation theory emphasized that translation is not a value-neutral act but a cultural practice shaped by social norms and relational dynamics. This theoretical shift prompted researchers to move beyond traditional frameworks of equivalence and fidelity, focusing instead on the underlying social assumptions and relational patterns reflected in translation choices.

International scholarly attention to gender differences in translation first emerged with the rise of feminist-informed translation theory in the 1980s. Early studies were marked by strong interpretive and cultural analytical orientations, focusing primarily on translator subjectivity, relational dimensions within translation strategies, and the recognition of female translators and female-authored texts [4]. Translators utilized strategies such as prefaces, footnotes, and textual adaptation to foreground diverse voices in target texts and engage with established discourse conventions [5]. This phase of research was predominantly characterized by theoretical reflection and qualitative analysis, laying the groundwork for introducing gender-aware perspectives into Translation Studies, though it rarely involved empirical analysis of the translator's linguistic style itself. With the development of corpus-based translation studies since the 21st century [6,7], some scholars have begun to explore gender differences at the linguistic level, investigating whether systematic stylistic differences exist in the language use of male and female translators [8,9]. However, research in this area remains exploratory, with empirical findings still inconsistent and sometimes even contradictory. Overall, international research has paved the way for empirical analysis of gender and translation style, but it also indicates that relevant conclusions still require substantial case accumulation and more rigorous variable control.

In the Chinese context, as of November 2025, a search on CNKI (China National Knowledge Infrastructure) yielded 61 articles published domestically on gender-aware translation studies, including 15 from core journals. Generally, while the introduction and development of gender-aware perspectives in Chinese translation research occurred later than in other regions, it has followed a clear path of theoretical introduction, critical reflection, and localized exploration. Domestic research began with the introduction and

translation of foundational feminist-informed translation theories [10], followed by systematic reception and critical engagement with these theoretical framework [11]. Early explorations linked gender differences to translator identity, demonstrating pioneering significance. Building on this, localized research has gradually expanded and deepened. Examples include corpus-based analyses of translations and discussions on identity representation strategies in translation practice. Furthermore, the scope of research has extended from literary texts to broader applied domains, such as business and diplomatic discourse, showing the applicability of this perspective to non-literary genres. Additionally, comparative reviews of language and translation policies across major English-speaking countries have provided valuable reference points for related studies in the Chinese context.

In summary, despite multifaceted explorations of gender and translation—providing rich perspectives for understanding translator subjectivity through theoretical reflection, historical review, and case studies—limitations persist. First, domestic research, after its initial theoretical surge, often remains at the level of theoretical commentary or impressionistic analysis, lacking systematic quantitative evidence based on large-scale corpora to support claims about linguistic formal differences. Second, existing studies on translator style often fail to integrate translator gender as a core control variable into the analytical framework, making it difficult to effectively isolate interference from other factors like era and individual style. Third, few studies have adopted a gender-aware perspective, combined with computational linguistics methods, to conduct rigorous cross-era and cross-gender comparisons of multiple translations of a specific text at fundamental linguistic levels such as lexical diversity and syntactic complexity.

2.2. Current Status of Research on the English Translations of Camel Xiangzi

As a major work by modern Chinese writer Lao She, *Camel Xiangzi* is widely recognized for its strong realistic portrayal and distinctive Beijing dialect features. Its English-language transmission has spanned several decades and includes multiple translations—from the initial version published in 1945 to later renditions completed in the early twenty-first century—each shaped by differing cultural contexts, prevailing translation conventions, and evolving reader expectations between China and English-speaking regions. These translations extend the literary life of the original text in English and also serve as indicators of how translator style and strategy have developed over time.

Current scholarship on the English translations of *Camel Xiangzi* falls into four broad categories: (1) Comparative analyses of translators and their versions, examining underlying approaches and stylistic traits, especially with regard to cultural adaptation and literary representation; (2) Application of translation theories and methodological frameworks—including translational norms and selective adaptation—to investigate phenomena such as the rendering of culture-specific expressions and shifts in narrative structure [12]; (3) Empirical linguistic analysis using corpus-based methods, combining quantitative and qualitative techniques to assess specific linguistic patterns across parallel texts [13,14]; (4) Studies of cross-cultural circulation and reception, focusing on paratextual elements, publication pathways, and international reader responses [15].

Despite this breadth, notable gaps persist: first, many studies rely on isolated case examinations or subjective evaluations without systematic quantitative support; second, gender is seldom integrated as a central analytical variable; third, no existing research compares the contemporary translations by Howard Goldblatt and Shi Xiaojing in terms of lexical diversity and syntactic complexity through a gender-informed lens.

To address these gaps, this study builds a Chinese–English parallel corpus of *Camel Xiangzi* and applies multiple metrics to measure lexical diversity and syntactic complexity. It conducts a comparative stylistic analysis of the Goldblatt and Shi Xiaojing translations and explores potential explanatory factors from a gender perspective. The findings aim to clarify whether translator gender correlates with observable patterns in translation behavior and to contribute an empirically grounded case for gender-related inquiry

within Chinese translation studies, supporting a transition toward data-informed analysis in this domain.

Consequently, this study addresses three questions:

1. Do translators of different genders show statistically discernible differences in lexical diversity—measured by MTLD, vocD, and lexical density—in the English translations of Camel Xiangzi?
2. Do they display consistent variations in syntactic complexity—including coordinate phrase ratio, T-unit length, and verb phrase complexity?
3. How might such variations be understood in relation to gender-informed translation strategies and stylistic preferences?

3. Research Design

3.1. Research Materials and Corpus Construction

To systematically explore the influence of translator gender on translational style while controlling for potential interference from era-specific variables, this study selects four representative English translations of Camel Xiangzi for comparative analysis against the Chinese source text. The selection balances gender and chronological distribution, encompassing two male translators—Evan King (1945) and Howard Goldblatt (2005)—and two female translators—Jean M. James (1979) and Shi Xiaojing (2010). For concision, these versions are hereafter referred to as King’s translation, Goldblatt’s translation, James’s translation, and Shi’s translation, respectively. Spanning over sixty years, these translations cover distinct historical stages of Sino-US relations and the evolution of translational norms, thereby supporting the isolation of gender-related differences within controlled historical contexts.

The empirical data derives from a self-constructed Chinese–English parallel corpus of Camel Xiangzi. The corpus includes only the main body of the text, excluding paratextual elements such as prefaces, titles, and annotations. Construction involved four primary stages: material collection, text cleaning, alignment, and annotation. Due to content adjustments and chapter omissions in the Shi and King translations, the first 21 chapters of the original work are uniformly selected for analysis to ensure comparability. Following text cleaning and paragraph alignment, the resulting parallel corpus comprises approximately 400,000 words/characters.

3.2. Research Tools and Metrics

In terms of methodology, advances in corpus linguistics and natural language processing provide powerful tools for quantifying translator style. This study employs Coh-Metrix 3.0 as the primary analytical instrument [16]. Rooted in computational linguistics and cognitive psychology, this tool enables deep quantitative deconstruction of texts across multiple dimensions, including lexical complexity, syntactic structure, discourse cohesion, and situational models. Eight metrics across two major categories are extracted: lexical diversity (Lexical Density, MTLD, vocD) and syntactic complexity (Coordinate Phrase Ratio, Mean Length of T-unit, Minimal Edit Distance, and Syntactic Structure Diversity) [17]. Lexical diversity and syntactic complexity constitute two vital linguistic dimensions for measuring translator style [18,19].

The analysis follows a systematic procedure. First, the 21 chapters from each translation are imported into Coh-Metrix 3.0 to extract specific metric values. Subsequently, the data are processed using SPSS 27.0 for independent samples t-tests, with translator gender as the grouping variable and the lexical and syntactic metrics as dependent variables. The significance level is set at $p = 0.05$. To ensure statistical validity, Levene’s test for equality of variances is performed to determine the appropriate t-test interpretation. Finally, the quantitative results are qualitatively interpreted through the lenses of gender and translation strategy to reveal how gender influences linguistic selection and stylistic construction.

3.3. Analysis of Era Variables

Translation does not occur in isolation; it is deeply influenced by the socio-cultural, political, and linguistic norms prevailing during the translator's time. The translations selected for this study span more than six decades (1945–2010), a period characterized by evolving global dynamics, changing bilateral relations, and a marked shift in how Chinese literature has been received in English-speaking contexts. Therefore, before analyzing translator style through a gendered lens, it is essential to examine the "era" variable—clarifying how historical context interacts with individual stylistic choices and potential gender-related patterns to enable a precise assessment of gender's actual role.

Era Background and Translational Tendencies: To systematically trace stylistic evolution over time, this study applies the "History-Theory Integration" periodization approach widely used in translation historiography, grouping the four translations into two representative chronological phases.

The Early Stage (1940s–1970s) includes the translations by Evan King (1945) and Jean M. James (1979). King's 1945 version appeared during a period of heightened international engagement and broad public interest in China, prompting a highly adaptive domesticating strategy—modifying plot elements and the conclusion to meet prevailing expectations in publishing and readership. In contrast, James's 1979 translation reflects the growing scholarly attention to Chinese literature amid early stages of bilateral engagement. Prioritizing fidelity and textual completeness, this version signals a turn toward academic rigor, with linguistic choices closely aligned with the source text's formal structure.

The Contemporary Stage (21st Century) encompasses the translations by Howard Goldblatt (2005) and Shi Xiaojing (2010). These were produced when Chinese literature gained increasing international recognition. During this phase, translational norms emphasized equilibrium between accessibility and literary integrity, affording translators greater interpretive latitude. Goldblatt's translation exemplifies a mature, professional model of literary translation in a globally connected environment, while Shi Xiaojing's version exhibits a pronounced commitment to retaining cultural specificity and stylistic diversity—consistent with broader efforts to enhance cross-cultural representation and uphold source-text authenticity.

In conclusion, era-specific factors exert a foundational influence on translation strategies. From mid-century adaptability to late-century scholarly precision and contemporary literary balance, shifting translational norms have clearly delineated the parameters within which translators operate. Any investigation of individual stylistic features or gender-related tendencies must be grounded in this macro-historical framework, as temporal context can either accentuate or attenuate observable linguistic distinctions. This analysis thus provides an indispensable historical anchor for interpreting the complex origins of linguistic variation.

4. Results and Discussion

4.1. Comparative Gender Analysis of Lexical Diversity

Based on the results of the independent samples t-test (see Table 1), the four translators exhibit statistically significant gender differences across multiple lexical diversity metrics.

Table 1. Summary of Independent Samples T-test Results for Lexical Diversity Metrics

Period	Indicator	Group	Levene's Test		T-Test			Significant (p<0.05)
			SD	Sig.	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	
Contemporary (GE vs Shi)	TTRa	M	0.01	0.07	-1.156	40	0.254	No
		FM	0.03					
	TTRc	M	0.02	0.114	0.267	40	0.791	No
		FM	0.04					
	MTLD	M	7.06	0.84	-3.449	40	0.001	Yes
		FM	7.54					

Early (King vs James)	VOCD	M	8.95	0.559	-2.786	40	0.008	Yes
		FM	8.32					
	TTRa	M	0.02	0.99	-3.171	40	0.003	Yes
		FM	0.02					
	TTRc	M	0.03	0.798	-1.134	40	0.264	No
		FM	0.03					
	MTLD	M	5.87	0.99	-3.416	40	0.001	Yes
		FM	5.57					
	VOCD	M	5.73	0.847	-6.562	40	<0.001	Yes
		FM	5.9					

Note: M = Mean, SD = Standard Deviation, df = degrees of freedom. For Levene's Test Sig. > 0.05, the "Equal variances assumed" row for the T-test is read. TTRa/TTRc are Type-Token Ratio metrics.

The analysis begins with basic lexical variation rates (TTRa and TTRc), where the two groups of translators exhibit differing patterns. For Howard Goldblatt and Shi Xiaojing, the differences in both TTRa and TTRc fail to reach statistical significance ($p > 0.05$). However, in the early translations by Evan King and Jean M. James, the female translator, James, exhibits a TTRa value significantly higher than that of her male counterpart, King ($t(40) = -3.171$, $p = 0.003$), while their TTRc values remain statistically similar. This suggests that while translators may adopt similar strategies regarding the basic variation of content words, female translators may possess an advantage in overall lexical variability, particularly in earlier translations. More critical and consistent findings emerge from the overall lexical diversity metrics that are insensitive to text length. Regardless of the era—whether contemporary or early—female translators consistently and systematically outperform male translators on these two core indices.

Synthetically, the data presents a clear and diachronically consistent pattern: female translators (Shi Xiaojing and Jean M. James) demonstrate a significant tendency to score higher on key metrics of global textual lexical diversity (MTLD and vocD) compared to their male contemporaries (Howard Goldblatt and Evan King). Lexical diversity, defined as the quantity of distinct words utilized within a text, serves as a vital indicator in linguistic research. This discovery strongly indicates that gender is an indispensable variable in shaping a translator's style of lexical selection. Female translators generally manifest higher lexical innovation, richness, and meticulous attention to subtle semantic layers, whereas male translators tend toward a linguistic style characterized by relatively less lexical variation and a preference for conciseness and directness. Notably, the gender disparity in the early group (King vs. James) is numerically more pronounced, potentially reflecting the interaction between era-specific translational norms and individual translator style, yet the fundamental direction of gender difference remains consistent across time.

4.2. Gender Differences in Syntactic Complexity Features

In sharp contrast to the significant differences observed at the lexical level, the analysis of syntactic complexity across different eras reveals a more nuanced and complex picture. The results of the independent samples t-test (see Table 2) indicate that the influence of translator gender on syntactic complexity varies significantly across historical periods.

Table 2. Summary of Independent Samples T-test Results for Syntactic Complexity Metrics

Period	Indicator	Group	Levene's Test		T-Test		Sig. (2-tailed)	Significant ($p < 0.05$)
			SD	Sig.	t	df		
Contemporary (GE vs Shi)	SYNLE	M	0.54	0.236	-1.221	40	0.229	No
		FM	0.44					
	SYNNP	M	0.05	0.621	-0.827	40	0.413	No
		FM	0.05					
	SYNMEDlem	M	0.01	0.39	0.391	40	0.698	No
		FM	0.01					

Early (King vs James)	SYNSTRUTa	M	0.01	0.779	-0.689	40	0.495	No
		FM	0.01					
	SYNLE	M	0.74	0.002	9.076	40	<0.001	Yes
		FM	0.36					
	SYNNP	M	0.04	0.294	4.163	40	<0.001	Yes
		FM	0.04					
	SYNMEDlem	M	0.01	0.457	-2.69	40	0.01	Yes
		FM	0.01					
	SYNSTRUTa	M	0.01	0.242	-9.316	40	<0.001	Yes
		FM	0.01					

Note: M = Mean, SD = Standard Deviation, df = degrees of freedom. For Levene's Test Sig. > 0.05, the "Equal variances assumed" row for the T-test is read. TTRa/TTRc are Type-Token Ratio metrics.

In the early translations, the male translator Evan King scored significantly higher than the female translator Jean M. James in terms of local syntactic complexity. This suggests that King more frequently utilized sentence structures with complex left-branching modifications—such as multiple pre-posed adverbials, relative clauses, and lengthier noun phrases—thereby increasing internal sentence complexity. Conversely, James exhibited significantly higher global syntactic diversity than King, demonstrating a richer variation in sentence structures that effectively avoided monotonous repetition. Such disparities indicate that within the translational context of that period, individual stylistic traits, including those potentially associated with gender, could be expressed with relative freedom.

In the contemporary translations, however, the syntactic styles of Howard Goldblatt and Shi Xiaojing exhibit a clear convergence. Neither translator showed statistically significant differences across any of the four syntactic complexity metrics (all $p > 0.05$), presenting a stark contrast to the pronounced divergence found in the early versions. This phenomenon of convergence reflects the constraining effect of prevailing translational norms. From the perspective of translational behavior outcomes, these norms represent widely held concepts and value orientations regarding translation within a specific socio-cultural context and period. As defined in norm-based translation theory, such norms constitute shared expectations within a professional community concerning the appropriateness of translation practices [20], eventually manifesting as observable regularities. Under contemporary norms, both male and female translators adopt highly similar strategies in handling syntactic structures, adhering closely to the shared goal of fluency and readability in modern English literary translation. Consequently, by restricting and modulating syntactic selection, contemporary norms have effectively minimized potential gender-related variation, resulting in a high degree of "intergenerational convergence" at the syntactic level. This underscores that translator style emerges from the interaction among individual factors, historical context, and industry-wide conventions.

This cross-era comparative finding is paramount. It demonstrates that the influence of translator gender on syntactic complexity is not invariant but interacts dynamically with the translational norms and degrees of individual agency characteristic of specific historical periods. In the relatively open and individualized translation environment of the early period, aesthetic inclinations—including those potentially linked to gender—were fully expressed at the syntactic level, leading to significant stylistic differentiation. In contrast, within the highly professionalized and standardized contemporary translation system, shared industry standards and reader expectations have, to an extent, attenuated gender-associated syntactic preferences, prompting translators toward syntactic convergence.

4.3. Integrated Discussion: Interpreting Translator Style from a Gender Perspective

The quantitative analysis revealed significant gender differences in lexical diversity, yet no such differences were observed in syntactic complexity. To examine how this pattern manifests in specific contexts, a qualitative analysis of the corpus was conducted to visualize stylistic divergence at the lexical level.

4.3.1. Example 1: Semantic Granularity and Repetition Differences in Psychological Portrayal

The superiority of female translators in lexical diversity is first demonstrated in their portrayal of characters' internal states and psychological activities, where they tend to use a richer variety of lexical tokens and high-density modifiers. For instance, in Chapter 3, describing Xiangzi's complex state of mind after escaping the military camp—where he wanted to pick up even a piece of hemp rope: “就是地上的一根麻绳，他也乐意拾起来，即使没用，还能稍微安慰他一下，至少他手中有条麻绳，不完全是空的。”

In rendering Xiangzi's psychological state when picking up the rope, the two female translators employed terms with higher emotional granularity: one rendered it as "If there had been a bit of rope on the ground, he would have picked it up with pleasure; it could still comfort him a little...", while the other used "He would gladly have picked up a useless hempen rope from the ground, for it would comfort him to feel that his hands were not entirely empty." The former incorporated emotionally valenced terms such as "pleasure" and "comfort", increasing variation in emotional state vocabulary; the latter embedded adverbs like "gladly" and "entirely" to sharpen specificity and intensity. In contrast, the two male translators opted for more neutral or general expressions, such as "happy" or "sense of well-being." This preference for differentiated emotional and state-related vocabulary among female translators aligns with their higher MTLD and vocD scores.

4.3.2. Example 2: Lexical Intensity Variants in Emotional and Action Descriptions

The high lexical diversity of female translators is also reflected in their rendering of intense emotions and precise actions in the source text. Consider the sentence from Chapter 1, depicting Xiangzi's elated state after acquiring his new rickshaw following three years of arduous labor: “祥子的手哆嗦得更厉害了，揣起保单，拉起车，几乎要哭出来。”

In translating the core emotional phrase “几乎要哭出来” (nearly in tears), female translators generally selected lexical variants with heightened imagery and expressive force. One version renders it as "Hsiang Tzu's hands shook even harder. Almost weeping, he took the warranty and the rickshaw," where the intensified verb phrase and participial construction convey nuanced affective resonance. Another employs more forceful diction: "Xiangzi's hands were shaking even more violently as he tucked the guarantee away and pulled his rickshaw out, feeling ready to burst into tears." The adverb "violently" and the clause "feeling ready to burst into tears" collectively enhance visual vividness and emotional intensity at the lexical level. Such strategic lexical variation contributes significantly to overall lexical diversity. By contrast, alternative renderings—such as "nearly in tears" and "feeling as if he wanted to cry"—are comparatively restrained in both density and affective amplitude.

4.3.3. Example 3: Semantic Granularity and Lexical Density in Scenery and Sensory Descriptions

The pursuit of lexical diversity by female translators extends beyond psychological characterization to the sensory reconstruction of the physical environment. In Chapter 4 of the original work, a passage describes the sunset scenery Xiangzi observes outside Beijing after recovering from illness. Lao She employed highly visual language: “夕阳快要落山，那堤上的老柳长得歪歪斜斜，顶部却抹上了一层金光。河水不大，可是长满了绿草，像一条绿油油的绸带，窄而深，带着点湿气。”

Two female translators constructed a literary space rich in sensory detail through high-density modifiers and precise color term variation:

James-T wrote: "...old willow branches bending above the canal had tiny glints of gold on their tips. There wasn't much water in the canal, but there was a lot of trailing waterweed like an oily belt, narrow, long, and deep green, which gave off a slight rank smell of damp." Shi-T: "...old willows grew crookedly, their tops tipped with gold. There was little water in the river, but a profusion of water-weeds gave it the appearance of a long greasy green belt, narrow and dark, exuding a faint dank smell."

In this description, James employed delicate modifier structures such as "tiny glints of gold" and "trailing waterweed", and conveyed subtle olfactory layers with "slight rank smell of damp". Shi's translation demonstrated high lexical precision and spatial descriptive capacity through "grew crookedly", "tipped with gold", and "profusion of water-weeds". In contrast, traditional male translations tend to use general color terms or shorter modifier chains when rendering such landscape descriptions.

This heightened specification of environmental details and lexical elaboration of sensory experiences directly increased the MTLD and vocD values of the female translations. This reflects that, in the translation process, female translators do not merely convey literal information but draw upon rich lexical resources (such as variations like oily, greasy, rank, dank) to evoke readers' sensory responses, demonstrating stronger contextual awareness and artistic expressiveness in textual construction.

In summary, the two female translators consistently exhibited a systematic preference for lexical variants and high-density modifiers in emotional descriptions. While pursuing the shared stylistic objective of "high lexical diversity", their specific approaches showed complementary differentiation: James-T emphasized formal verbs and restrained phrasing to achieve "stylistic level variation" in vocabulary; Shi-T favored intensifying adverbs and concrete nominal phrases to enhance "depictive variation" in vocabulary. This shared orientation toward semantic richness—achieved through distinct pathways—provides a robust explanation for their consistent advantage over male translators in the MTLD and vocD metrics.

5. Discussion

The patterns of disparity discovered in this study regarding lexical diversity and syntactic complexity provide an excellent opportunity for theory–history reciprocal verification. This paradigm enables researchers to grasp historical developments holistically, thereby summarizing underlying regularities to guide and anticipate future trends [21].

The finding that female translators exhibit cross-era stability at the lexical level resonates with observations on affective engagement in translation studies. The tendency toward more nuanced lexical articulation of emotional content remains consistent across distinct historical periods spanning sixty years. This suggests that linguistic habits formed at the micro-lexical level possess strong continuity, capable of persisting across shifting sociocultural contexts. Such longitudinal consistency supports the view that diachronic research reveals enduring features of translational behavior, reflecting attributes that remain stable despite broader social transformations.

Simultaneously, the historical evolution from early differentiation to contemporary convergence at the syntactic level provides empirical support for the influence of shared professional standards on individual expression. In this study, such holistic perception is reflected in the observed modulating role of translational norms. The purpose and function of translation evolve alongside societal development. During earlier periods, the absence of standardized professional frameworks allowed greater variation in syntactic realization across individuals. In contrast, the contemporary period—characterized by increasing professionalization—shows marked convergence in syntactic metrics between translators of different backgrounds. This trend aligns with expectations derived from norm-based models of translation practice, indicating a growing integration of professional paradigms. Under mature industry conditions, the shared emphasis on fluency and readability functions as a unifying factor, reducing syntactic variation that might otherwise arise from individual differences.

This logic of history–theory interaction elevates the analysis of translator-related factors from static description to dynamic historical narrative. The degree to which individual characteristics manifest varies across linguistic levels: lexis, as a more spontaneous unit of expression, retains stronger traces of individual patterning, offering empirical grounding for theory-informed historical interpretation; syntax, as the structural framework of discourse, proves more responsive to prevailing professional and

institutional frameworks, revealing how historical conditions shape observable patterns. This discovery not only depicts a panoramic view of the evolution of the English translation style of Camel Xiangzi but also aligns with methodological principles advocated in translation history studies—namely, constructing empirically grounded research systems by clarifying the fluid, context-sensitive nature of translation practice over time.

6. Conclusion and Implications

6.1. Conclusion

Based on the corpus-based quantitative analysis, this study reveals the following main conclusions:

Firstly, at the lexical diversity level, a clear cross-era pattern of gender difference emerged. Female translators scored significantly higher than their male counterparts on core metrics (MTLD, vocD) measuring the complexity and richness of overall discourse vocabulary. This finding confirms that gender is a critical variable influencing lexical selection style, with female translators generally exhibiting higher lexical innovativeness and semantic granularity.

Secondly, at the syntactic complexity level, a more complex era-norm modulation pattern was observed. The influence of translator gender on syntactic structure is not constant: in the early translations, significant divergence appeared between the two translators in syntactic left-embedding, noun phrase complexity, syntactic structure diversity, and similarity. This manifested as one translator favoring local syntactic complexity, while the other pursued global syntactic diversity. However, in the contemporary translations, the syntactic strategies of the two translators were highly convergent, showing no significant difference. This indicates that historical context and era-specific translational norms profoundly regulate the degree to which gender influences syntactic choices.

In conclusion, the core finding is that gender plays a systematic role in shaping translator style, but its manner and intensity of influence vary depending on the linguistic level and the era background. Gender differences exhibit strong cross-era stability at the lexical level, whereas their influence at the syntactic level is significantly moderated by era-specific translational norms. This reveals that translator style arises from the complex interaction among the translator's individual identity, historical context, and professional norms.

6.2. Implications for Translation Teaching and Practice

The findings of this research offer empirical insights for translation teaching and practice, helping to establish a closer link between theoretical understanding and practical training.

At the translation teaching level, this study suggests:

Strengthening systematic lexical resource development and style awareness training.

The results show that female translators exhibit higher lexical richness. This suggests that, beyond basic equivalence translation, instruction should consciously guide students to expand synonym and near-synonym networks and learn to convey subtle semantic distinctions and stylistic nuances through precise lexical variation. Specialized exercises can be designed, particularly for male students or translators who tend to rely on high-frequency words.

Introducing a reflective module on "Social Identity and Translator Style."

Instructors should guide students to recognize that translation decisions are influenced not only by linguistic competence but also by sociocultural identities such as gender and historical context. By comparatively analyzing texts produced by translators of different genders, students can more intuitively grasp the composition of translator subjectivity and reflect on their own potential stylistic tendencies, thus evolving into more self-aware and stylistically flexible practitioners.

Promoting the instrumental application of corpus methods.

This research validates the effectiveness of computational tools in style analysis. In teaching, tools such as Coh-Metrix can be introduced, allowing students to quantitatively evaluate dimensions such as "lexical diversity" or "syntactic complexity" in their own translations and compare these metrics with reference translations. This data-driven approach to stylistic self-assessment helps concretize abstract stylistic concepts, enabling students to objectively perceive and adjust their translation strategies.

At the translation practice level, this study offers the following suggestions:

1. Translators should enhance metacognitive awareness of their own stylistic tendencies. Recognizing that gender may subtly influence lexical choice preferences, male translators can consciously pursue greater lexical variety and semantic precision. In contrast, female translators can build upon their lexical advantage while attending to overall textual rhythm and concision, thereby achieving dynamic balance and intentional stylistic control aligned with text type and translation purpose.

Serving as a reference for translation criticism and evaluation standards.

This study shows that translation quality cannot be assessed solely on subjective impression. In evaluating translations, critics may draw upon objective dimensions such as lexical diversity and syntactic complexity, integrating them with considerations of the translator's social identity and historical context for comprehensive judgment. This approach avoids reliance on a single evaluative standard, supporting a fairer and more nuanced understanding of stylistic choices.

In conclusion, this research suggests that translation is not merely a craft but a cognitive activity embedded in social context. Integrating gender-informed perspectives with quantitative analysis into teaching and practice will help cultivate translation professionals with stronger self-reflection, data literacy, and stylistic adaptability—capacities increasingly essential for effective cross-cultural communication.

6.3. Limitations and Future Directions

This study has several limitations. First, although the era variable was controlled, the number of translations included remains limited; expanding the sample to include more translators would strengthen the generalizability of the findings. Second, the analysis focused primarily on lexical and syntactic features; future work could integrate narratological frameworks and sentiment analysis to examine how gender perspectives manifest in deeper textual dimensions, such as narrative structure and affective expression. Third, the discussion of era-specific translational norms relied largely on scholarly interpretation; complementary approaches—such as socio-historical contextualization and direct engagement with translator perspectives—would yield more robust insights into the interplay between normative constraints and individual stylistic choices.

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