

Original Article

Exploring the Gender Consciousness From Two Chinese Translations of *To the Lighthouse*

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Abstract - Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) considers translation as a social practice and a communicative activity that occurs within specific social contexts. This study draws upon Fairclough's three-dimensional analytical model to examine gender consciousness from the self-built parallel corpus consisting of two Chinese translations and the original text of Virginia Woolf's representative novel *To the Lighthouse*. The two Chinese translations are provided by a male translator and a female translator, respectively. The purpose of this study is to investigate whether the translators' gender consciousness will influence their translation strategies and styles. Through describing and generalizing the translations' lexical preferences, the study found that translators' gender consciousness has exerted a significant influence on their translation styles and strategies.

Keywords - Androgyny, CDA, Corpus, Gender consciousness, Translation.

1. Introduction

As a representative feminist and stream-of-consciousness novel, Virginia Woolf's *To the Lighthouse* prominently embodies the binary opposition of gender hierarchy in patriarchal society and the androgynous thought. Thus, it serves as an ideal work for exploring gender consciousness. The study of translators' gender consciousness is a new field that emerged in the wake of the cultural shift in translation studies. Here, translation acts as the venue where translators engage in discourse practice, where they are inevitably influenced by the societal culture they inhabit. Translators consciously or unconsciously perform gender roles in translations, displaying differentiated and complex gender consciousness.

Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) is dedicated to exploring the subtlety of power and ideology in texts and discourse, revealing language's role in intensifying or mitigating unequal social relationships. Therefore, in studying the impact of translators' gender consciousness on translation, the analytical framework of CDA can reveal the nature of "performing gender" within specific contexts, constructing a more effective study of gender and translation.

Hence, this research selects two Chinese translations of *To the Lighthouse* as the subject, employing the three-dimensional analytical framework under the umbrella of Critical Discourse Analysis. Based on corpus data retrieval and analysis, this study examines stylistic similarities and

differences at the lexical level between the translations, exploring the influence of translators' gender consciousness on the translation process and its styles.

Although qualitative and quantitative studies are conducted through analyzing the self-built corpora with the CDA framework, few studies synergize the self-built parallel corpus with CDA to investigate the impact of translators' gender consciousness on translating styles. This research draws upon Fairclough's three-dimensional analysis model, constructs its own bilingual parallel corpus, and combines quantitative statistics with qualitative analysis, filling in a gap in literary translation studies in this area. It offers insights into translation issues in literary works from a gender perspective, the reconstruction of gender identity in translation practice, and the impact of gender consciousness in translation styles, enriching the field of translation studies.

This research aims to explore the following two research questions:

- How does gender consciousness influence the translation strategies?
- How is the androgynous thought of the original text represented in two translations?

2. Literature Review

2.1. *To the Lighthouse* and its Two Chinese Versions

As a pioneer in feminist literature, Virginia Woolf contemplates the social status and gender roles of women in



the early 20th century. Her feminist ideologies have a far-reaching influence on later feminist theorization. *To the Lighthouse* is one of her influential works of fiction, created in 1927. *To the Lighthouse* notably embodies the dichotomy of male-female hierarchical opposition in patriarchal society and the androgynous ideology, making it an ideal work for studying gender consciousness.

Through this work, Woolf boldly practiced her feminist literary theory, breaking stereotypes of female roles. She paved a new path to explore issues of gender and social roles by revealing the discrimination and unfair treatment faced by women in the patriarchal society of the early 20th century and shaping independent and career-oriented female images in literature.

In the 1980s, *To the Lighthouse* was translated into several Chinese versions, among which the translations by male translator Qu Shijing (1988) and female translator Ma Ainong (1997) are widely acknowledged. It also coincides with the introduction of Western cultural trends through translations into China. Thus, a vast number of Western feminist works were translated and introduced into China, further promoting the awakening of Chinese women's independence and individualization, as well as fostering the contemplation of gender relationships.

2.2. CDA and Translation

Fairclough (1995) claims that CDA aims to investigate how power and ideologies can be maintained and abused through language and to explore how language contributes to shaping and influencing social inequality. Meyer (2001) defined CDA as a powerful analytical framework to examine the opaque and transparent hierarchical relations in language. In other words, the CDA purports to explore language power and uncover social inequality critically. Fairclough (1995) proposed a three-dimensional analytical model, claiming that any discourse contains three dimensions: text, discursive practices, and social practices. Accordingly, three analytical steps are formed: describing the linguistic features of texts, interpreting the relationship between texts and discursive practices, and explaining the relationship between discursive practices and societal contexts.

The integration of CDA with gender issues enables researchers to “explore how power and dominance are repeatedly constructed or resisted through gendered expressions in texts and various discourse strategies” (Lazar, 2005). Meanwhile, translation is a human communicative activity that occurs within specific social contexts and is a social act carried out by translators who possess social attributes. Schäffner (2004) points out that what CDA and translations have in common is the communicative practice within sociocultural contexts, where texts and discourses are generated. Therefore, translators generate new discourses and create new communicative acts within the target language by

utilizing their background knowledge (i.e., linguistic, social, and cultural information) and negotiating meanings between the source text writers and the target text readers (Hatim & Mason, 1990).

Hence, CDA provides a new perspective for translation studies and enables researchers to disclose the reconstruction of gender ideologies in the source text by translators who are more influenced by the sociopolitical ideologies of the target language.

2.3. Androgyny and Translation

Since the 1970s, a large number of feminist scholars have begun to explore androgyny (Li & Mu, 2008). Virginia Woolf first introduced the concept of androgyny as the combination of male force and female force embodied in one individual, which can create “a richness in thought” and prompt all abilities.” It reflects Woolf's androgynous ideology, which can be best embodied in the female painter (i.e., Lily and Mrs. Ramsay) in *To the Lighthouse*.

The concept of androgyny is based on social gender theory. Gender refers to the culturally shaped traits and differences linked to being male or female; it represents the societal expectations, roles, and norms linked to different biological sexes. Studies on social gender reveal that gender traits are not entirely determined by natural biological factors; individuals can possess different gender characteristics simultaneously (Li & Mu, 2008).

Simon (1996) points out in the book *Gender in Translation* that gender issues in translation are related to both women and men; male translators can adopt feminist translation theory, and female translators can also present a successful translation of men's works. Another interesting research area is how gender identity can be disguised through translation. Liu (2004) examines translators' gender consciousness and proposes the issue of “gender imitation” and “androgyny” in translation. He believes that if a female translator can capture the strength of a male author or if a male translator can convey the tenderness of a female author, their translations will be an ideal match. Dong (2005) has also specifically mentioned how androgyny can rectify inherent flaws in feminist translation theory. It directs the development of feminist theories, prevents binary oppositions, and provides a new perspective for the entire field of translation studies, ultimately promoting diversified development.

3. Research Methods

3.1. A Self-Built Parallel Corpus

Hu (2011) claims that a parallel corpus consists of both the source texts and translated texts. In investigating gender consciousness at the lexical level, a parallel corpus can be used to display the source text and the target text simultaneously. Creating a parallel corpus can offer an

effective quantitative method for studying translators’ gender consciousness. Therefore, utilizing a corpus-based approach allows for analysis of the differences between Qu’s and Ma’s translations at the lexical level. The process of corpus building involves five main steps: Text Selection, Text Conversion, Data Cleaning (removing unnecessary spaces, digits, and special symbols), Tokenization /Lemmatization and Alignment.

First, the electronic versions of *To the Lighthouse* (ST) and its Chinese translations are selected. The two translations are from the male translator Qu Shijing (TT1), published in 1988, and the female translator Ma Ainong (TT2), published in 1997. ABBYY Aligner is used to align the two texts at the sentence level. ParaConc is utilized to can be used for parallel corpus retrieval. Typical examples at the lexical level are chosen for examining translators’ gender consciousness. The statistical tools are AntConc 3.41, SPSS 25.0 and WordSmith 8.0. The following Table 1 shows basic information about the parallel corpus.

Table 1. Basic information of the parallel corpus

Text	Size (in tokens)	STTR
ST	69,814	43%
TT1	80,490	50%
TT2	70,901	51.6%

3.2. Fairclough’s Three-Dimension Model

Fairclough’s three-dimensional model consists of three analytical levels (i.e., description, interpretation and explanation). The stage of description focuses on “attending to the formal properties of texts”, concentrating on

describing formal and structural features, including vocabulary, grammar, coherence, and textual structure; the second stage of interpretation elucidates the relationship between texts and communicative processes, viewing “text as a product of production processes and resources in interpretation”; the third stage of explanation explores the “relationship between communication and social contexts”, discussing discourse within social and historical backgrounds. The three-dimensional analytical model can unveil how ideologies and power intervene in discourse and how discourse supports, questions, and reconstructs ideologies (Fairclough, 1995). It provides insights into the second research question, discerning how the androgyny is embodied in translation and whether it can convey the feminine characteristics from feminist fiction.

4. Results

4.1. Gendered Words

Masculine pronouns or nouns tend to be used as generic terms for both males and females. For instance, although both “he” and “she” are sex-specific pronouns, “he” can function as a generic pronoun to refer to a human being. Similarly, the noun “man” exhibits this duality: it can refer to mankind/humans or specifically to an adult male. In Chinese, *nán* (means male) and *nǚ* (means female) are gender-specific words that only have a single meaning. This section explores the differences in the use of gender words, specifically “man (men),” in the parallel corpus of *To the Lighthouse* and its equivalent translations by Ma and Qu, examining how translators’ gender consciousness affects translators’ use of gendered nouns (detail see Table 2 and Table 3).

Table 2. “Man” and its translations in Qu’s Version

ST		TT1				
Gender word	Freq.	Translations	Freq.	%	Referential Classification	Translation Strategies
man (men)	130	<i>xiǎohuǒzi, nánzi, nánrén, nánzihàn, nánde, yúfū</i>	63	48.46%	Masculine Reference	Explicit Translation
		<i>rén, rén wù, xuézi, xuézhě, qīngnián, chùshī, shǒuwàngzhe, gōngrén</i>	59	51.53%	Neutral Reference	Fuzzy Translation
		Omission	8		/	

Table 3. “Man” and its translations in Ma’s Version

ST		TT2				
Gender word	Freq.	Translations	Freq.	%	Referential Classification	Translation Strategies
man (men)	130	<i>xiǎohuǒzi, nánrén, nánzǐ, nánde, lǎohàn</i>	55	42.31%	Masculine Reference	Explicit Translation
		<i>niánqīng rén, rén, rénwù, zhe, Rénlèi, gōngrén, yúmín, Shouweizhe, Chúzǐ</i>	67	57.69%	Neutral Reference	Fuzzy Translation
		Omission	8		/	

Tables 2 and 3 indicate that the word “man” in *To the Lighthouse* appeared 130 times. Regarding the translation approach for “man”, Ma’s version adopted more fuzzy translations by utilizing neutral references, e.g., *niánqīngrén* (means young people), *rén* (means human), whereas Qu’s version leans towards explicit translation, with a higher frequency of using masculine references.

Example 1

ST: All the great men she had ever known, she thought, deciding that a rabbit must have got in, were like that, and it was good for young men (though the atmosphere of lecture-rooms was stuffy and depressing to her beyond endurance almost) simply to hear him, simply to look at him.

TT1: 她所认识的任何一个伟大的人物, 她想 (她肯定是一只兔子而不是鼯鼠钻进了沙丘), 都是像他那个样子。只要听听他发表的高谈阔论, 看看他的堂堂仪表, 对小伙子们就大有裨益 (虽然对她来说, 讲堂里的气氛几乎沉闷压抑到难以忍受的地步)。

(Explicit Translation)

TT2: 她断定是一只兔子钻进了沙丘。她想, 她认识的伟人都是一样的, 年轻人只要听他的谈话、看他的形象就会受益匪浅 (尽管她觉得讲堂里的气氛沉闷、压抑, 简直让人无法忍受)。

(Fuzzy Translation)

The first occurrence of “man” in ST is a generic noun for “people” in the source language context. Both translators chose to use neutral references such as *rén* (means human) and *rénwù* (means human), which align closely with the original meaning. However, in the second instance of “man”, Ma translated it into a neutral reference, *niánqīngrén* (which means young people), aiming to illustrate that regardless of gender, individuals could benefit significantly from Mr. Ramsay’s lecture, reflecting Mrs. Ramsay’s perspective of

her husband as a respected philosopher. The phrase *niánqīngrén* is interpreted from Mrs. Ramsay’s female perspective. However, Qu translated it as *xiǎohuǒzi* (which means young boys), portraying the patriarchal male perspective represented by Mr. Ramsay, where men are associated with careers and society. At the same time, women lack careers and belong solely to the household. This reveals how the two translators, when dealing with gender words, are influenced by their own gender consciousness, resulting in different translation expressions.

4.2. Modality Words

Modality refers to the grammaticalization of the articulator’s attitudes and opinions. Halliday (1985) proposed that modality defines the magnitude of meaning that lies between the positive and negative polarity, and modality can be classified into three degrees: high, medium, and low values. High-value modal words include must, ought to, need and has/had/have to; medium-value modal words include will, would, shall and should; low-value modal verbs include can, may, might, could and dare. Thus, each modal expression can be located within a strong-weak semantic continuum. Modal verbs can manifest the possibility of the proposition’s value and can also indicate the articulator’s imposition on the listener. The higher the value, the stronger the imposition and the less space for negotiation; conversely, the lower the value, the weaker the imposition and the more space for discussion.

Thus, the choice of modal words can reflect unequal relationships between discourse participants. Generally, individuals of lower status tend to use lower modal values. In comparison, those of higher status often use higher-value modals, sometimes employing affirmative or negative statements without modal space to indicate severity (Zheng, 2009). Linguistic choices in literature works are often influenced by the author’s ideology and social status. For

instance, in feminist literature, authors might use modal words to challenge or reflect on traditional gender roles and stereotypes, aiming for diversity and women’s empowerment and independence (Zhang, 2018).

It is crucial to analyse the impact of translators’ gender consciousness on the use of modal words. Based on

Halliday’s modality value classification (1985), Table 4 shows the proportion of modal operators in *To the Lighthouse*. According to Xu’s (2018) modal word classification and valuation table, the usage and distribution of modal operators in TT1 and TT2 are presented in Table 5.

Table 4 . Model operators in ST

Modality Value	Modal Operators	Freq.	%
High Value	must, ought to, need, has/had/have to	193	18.07
Median Value	will, would, shall, should	508	47.57
Low Value	can, may, might, could	367	34.36
Total		1068	100

Table 5. Model operators in TT1 and TT2

Modality Value	Modal Operators	TT1		TT2	
		Freq.	%	Freq.	%
High Value	kěndìng, yídìng, bìxū, bìdìng, zhù dīng, qiānwàn yào, fēiděi, bù dé bù), jìn zhǐ...	704	39.7	747	44.21
Median Value	yīnggāi, běngāi, jiùgāi, xūyào, děi, nénggòu, huì, yào, néng, xū...	716	40.38	667	39.45
Low Value	kěyì, yěxǔ, kěnéng, nénggòu, wànyī...	354	19.91	276	16.34
Total		1774	100	1690	100

This example demonstrates Mr. Ramsay’s perspective on the division of labour between males and females in society. The psychological description in this passage is rife with gender discrimination, highlighting the “noble status” and “enormous contributions” of men. The medium-value modal operator “should” essentially represents Mr. Ramsay’s subjective desire. In TT2, “should” is omitted, reflecting the female translator’s feminist stance and the disapproval of gender discrimination. TT2 retains the word “should” and translates “man” as *nánihàn* (indicates the positive

description of “man”), imbuing the text with a distinctly male perspective, vividly portraying Mr. Ramsay’s discriminatory and domineering male traits. It exaggerates the unequal status between men and women described in the original text, intensifying the sarcastic tone. Consequently, in the translation of *To the Lighthouse*, translators’ gender consciousness influences the use of modal words. Translators consciously select modal words to convey information about gender roles and societal expectations, thereby reproducing, reinforcing, or weakening the modal information present in the source language.

Example 2

ST: He liked that men should labor and sweat on the windy beach at night; pitting muscle and brain against the waves and the wind; he liked men to work like that, and women to keep house, and sit beside sleeping children indoors, while men were drowned, out there in a storm.

TT1: 他就喜欢那样: 在夜晚, 男子汉应该在大风呼啸的海滩上奋斗流汗, 用他们的血肉之躯与聪明才智去和狂风暴雨、惊涛骇浪对抗; 他喜欢男子汉像那样工作, 让妇女们管理家务, 在屋里守着熟睡的孩子, 而男子汉就在外面的风暴中葬身海底。

TT2: 他欣赏男人们在夜间起风的海滩上吃苦卖命, 大汗淋漓; 利用智慧和膂力与狂风巨浪搏斗; 他欣赏男人那样干活, 女人操持家务, 当男人在暴风雨中葬身海底时, 她们在屋里守着熟睡的孩子。

4.3. Sentence-Final Particles

From previous studies on women's language, researchers generally believe that women are more inclined to use sentence-final particles compared to men (Zhang 2014). This preference is aligned with the feminine nature of these particles, allowing women to enhance the subtlety of their language. Women are accustomed to using these particles to express their opinions, emotions, and attitudes, as it contributes to a certain degree of indirectness in their expression. Sentence-ending particles in Chinese fulfil diverse semantic and pragmatic roles, including expressing mood or attitude (Sun, 2012).

Zhang (2014) conducted a study based on an analysis of seven contemporary literary works to investigate the gender differences in using these particles in modern Chinese. The findings suggest that women are more adept than men in using these particles to express their rich and nuanced tones and emotional nuances. Therefore, appropriately adding sentence-final particles in the translation can consolidate the portrayal of female characters in the text. Thus, two translators tend to add sentence-final particles in their translations appropriately. Particularly, Qu In TT1 added additional sentence-final particles which do not exist in the ST.

Table 6. Sentence-Final Particles in TT1 and TT2

Text	<i>a</i>	<i>ba</i>	<i>ne</i>	<i>ya</i>	<i>ma</i>	<i>la</i>	<i>le</i>	Total
TT1	43	78	106	7	0	74	446	754
TT2	32	66	66	17	1	29	323	534

Both of these sentences are portrayed from Mrs. Ramsay's perspective. In *To the Lighthouse*, Mrs. Ramsay assumes a traditional role of being other-cantered (i.e., wife and mother). She does not lament the injustice of fate, nor does she exhibit the rebelliousness and resistance often seen in feminist depictions of women. She is gentle, kind, dignified, elegant, and silently devoted—a model of a good wife and mother.

Example 3

ST: But how extraordinarily his note had changed!

TT1: 然而, 那声调已经起了多么奇妙的变化啊!

TT2: 多么奇特, 他的口气居然变了!

Example 4

“Another touch and they will snap” —when Mrs Ramsay said all this...

TT1: “只要再碰一下, 它们就要断裂啦” 当拉姆齐夫人说出这些话……

TT2: “轻轻一碰就会断裂” ——当拉姆齐夫人说着这些话……

In the marital relationship, Mrs. Ramsay holds very traditional views, even willing to diminish herself to elevate her husband. In TT1, especially when describing Mrs. Ramsay's mental activities or dialogue, the male translator deliberately adds sentence-final particles like *a*, *ne*, *la*, etc., highlighting the language feature of femininity, successfully shaping the gentle and kind female image portrayed in the original work.

5. Discussion

Generalizing the lexical characteristics in translations allows for a glimpse into the translators' strategies and methods. Both translators demonstrate the awareness to modify, omit, or adjust gendered words and modal words or add sentence-final particles in their translations of *To the Lighthouse*. These alterations mitigate the denigration of female images and status that are originally depicted from a male perspective. The differences in using gendered expressions in the translations manifest the impact of translators' gender consciousness on the reconstruction of the femininity and gender identity of the ST.

5.1. Translators' Gender Consciousness

Both translators adopt the gender perspective of Virginia Woolf's writing and select corresponding translation methods to convey the original work's essence and enhance the acceptability of the translation in China. Female translator Ma Ainong tends to highlight the positive image of female characters and proactively adjust female character images. As a renowned scholar in Woolf's literary studies in China, the male translator Qu Shijing claimed: “Everyone has male and female traits, but these two traits are not balanced.” (Qu, 1989, p149) Thus, Qu's male sex and his comprehensive understanding and acquisition of the androgyny concept embedded in Woolf's works allow him to complete the translation without showing biased or favourable attitudes to either gender of ST.

5.2. The Rising Influence of Feminist Thought

Inspired by the Western feminist movement, individuals in China have progressively heightened their awareness regarding gender equality and placed greater place emphasis

on female groups. The late 1990s witnessed many forums and conferences to explore how to promote gender equality. Importantly, the Beijing Fourth World Women Conference in 1995 marked a milestone in shaping the global agenda for gender equality. It was not only a successful gathering but also had a profound impact on the protection of women's rights in China.

This impact encompassed initiatives such as prioritizing gender equality as a fundamental national policy, the development of women's NGOs (Non-Governmental Organizations) in China, and the implementation of relevant laws such as those against domestic violence. These efforts have greatly fostered gender equality awareness, aided in eliminating gender discrimination, and propelled women's empowerment.

As an important channel to introduce Western thought, translation studies also began to be significantly influenced by Western feminist/gender sociology and the global feminist movement (Wang, 2018). Compared to male translator Qu Shijing, the more pronounced gender consciousness and female self-awareness in female translator Ma's version can be attributed to the rising influence of feminist thought in contemporary China.

6. Conclusion

Conclusion can be drawn after examining two translations of *To the Lighthouse* written by Virginia Woolf, provided by a male translator and a female translator. First, the male translator Qu tends to choose words that are closer to the original text, leaning towards literal translation. Moreover, Qu uses sentence-final particles more frequently, accentuating the elegant and implicit style of femininity.

Also, Qu's translation is more faithful to the source text at the vocabulary level, although he occasionally displays a slight male-gender perspective in the translated text. This reflects the androgynous stand of Qu, his understanding of

feminist thoughts in Woolf's works, and the limited empathy for the female characters.

Second, the female translator, Ma, pays more attention to semantic distinctions in vocabulary and detail-oriented processing, especially evident in the use of modal words and gendered words. Ma deliberately highlights feminist consciousness in female characters through rich and expressive translation, promoting the positive and active female image and identity. Ma resists traditional gender consciousness by employing discourse that can promote gender equality, thus changing any potential male-centric ideologies and discrimination against women that might exist in the original text. This adjustment showcases Ma's strong feminist consciousness.

Given that a scarcity of corpus-based translation studies are conducted from a gender perspective, this study aims to bridge this gap. It expands the scope of the translation study by exploring the significant perspective of the androgynous translation theory. Yet, the self-constructed corpus database remains relatively small, potentially restricting the broad applicability of the research findings. Future studies can pay more attention to exploring gender consciousness in translation, combining more innovative and advanced theoretical perspectives. More advanced corpus research and discourse analysis methods can be adopted to form more complete, comprehensive, and objective research findings. This will further advance the systematization and comprehensiveness of translation theory while also promoting a more objective and equal societal gender consciousness and contributing to the formation of healthier gender relationships.

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