

Toward a Three-Dimensional Pedagogy: Applying Discourse, Syntax, and Lexis to Poetic Translation in Moonlight over the Lotus Pond

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Abstract: Zhu Ziqing's canonical prose piece, *Moonlight over the Lotus Pond*, is celebrated for its profound artistic conception, linguistic elegance, and rich cultural-aesthetic resonance. This study explores strategies for achieving poetic transformation in its English translation by proposing a three-dimensional pedagogical framework centered on discourse, syntax, and lexis. Taking the fourth paragraph as a case study, the approach demonstrates how to guide English-major students in paratactic-to-hypotactic conversion and lexical nuance refinement. Ultimately, it aims to enhance their capacity to preserve the dual integrity of form and conception while deepening their understanding of prose stylistics and cross-cultural aesthetic transmission through a structured, process-oriented method.

1. Introduction

For English majors, literary translation, particularly of prose, presents a formidable challenge. The attributes of prose, characterized by a “scattered form but a unified spirit”, along with the distinctions between Chinese parataxis and English hypotaxis, complicate the precise transmission of the original text's lyrical essence and cultural implications. Newmark asserted in his translation theory that in translating expressive texts, there is often a conflict between the expressive and the aesthetic function (‘truth’ and ‘beauty’)—the poles of ugly literal translation and beautiful free translation ^[1]. Consequently, conducting translation instruction research grounded in the classic work *Moonlight over the Lotus Pond* holds substantial practical importance. Composed by Zhu Ziqing in 1927, *Moonlight over the Lotus Pond* is a poetic masterpiece set against the lotus pond of Tsing Hua Garden. Depicting a summer night's moonlit panorama, the text merges intricate landscape depiction with profound emotional reflection, revealing the author's appreciation of natural beauty through solitary contemplation. Its linguistic refinement and distinctive artistic vision establish it as a paradigm of modern Chinese prose.

2. Teaching Framework for the C-E Translation of Contemporary Prose *Moonlight over the Lotus Pond*

2.1 Teaching Content for the C-E Translation of *Moonlight over the Lotus Pond*

This study employs the fourth paragraph of *Moonlight over the Lotus Pond* as the instructional text and examines its translation strategies from the three dimensions of discourse, syntax, and lexis in order to establish a practical approach to the teaching of contemporary prose translation. It aims to enhance students' proficiency in language conversion and aesthetic reproduction in prose translation, foster their comprehension of the distinctions between Chinese and Western languages and cultures, and establish a foundation for their participation in a broader array of literary translation practices through comparative evaluation of translated versions and practical exercises. Translation is the process of reproducing in the receptor language the closest natural equivalent of the source-language message, first in terms of meaning and secondly in terms of style^[2], as Nida put it. This theoretical foundation is crucial for the development of the educational content in this investigation.

2.2 Three-Dimensional Objectives for the C-E Translation of *Moonlight over the Lotus Pond*

A set of three-dimensional objectives (knowledge, ability, value) has been formulated to structure the translation pedagogy of *Moonlight over the Lotus Pond*. These objectives are unpacked through discursive, syntactic, and lexical analyses, collectively designed to cultivate cultural understanding and aesthetic perception in the teaching and learning process.

2.2.1 Knowledge Objectives

At the discursive level, students are expected to comprehend the “integration of emotion and scene” of *Moonlight over the Lotus Pond*, which is the internal logic of “external lotus pond—inner monologue—philosophical sublimation”. They will also recognize the significance of explicating the discourse logic in translation, such as by utilizing appropriate conjunctions to connect “scene—emotion—reason”. Cohesion occurs where the interpretation of some element in the discourse is dependent on that of another^[3], as emphasized by Halliday and Hasan's theory of discourse cohesion. This theory offers valuable insight for teaching at the discourse level.

At the syntactic level, students will be able to master the skills of converting Chinese run-on sentences into English, such as converting expressions like “the winding lotus pond” into English main and subordinate clauses, and to employ syntactic restructuring methods, such as the use of attributive clauses to manage long sentences. Additionally, they are expected to comprehend the distinctions between Chinese parataxis and English hypotaxis. Wang Li (2015) pointed out in *The Theory of Chinese Grammar* that Chinese relies primarily on parataxis, rarely employing conjunctions, with relationships between sentences conveyed through semantic connections. In contrast, English emphasizes hypotaxis, frequently using conjunctions and morphological changes to express inter-sentential relationships^[4]. This information helps students to comprehend the nature of Sino-English syntactic differences.

At the lexical level, students will be able to transplant reduplicated words and handle the hierarchical translation of culture-loaded words.

2.2.2 Ability Objectives

For discourse analysis and transformation ability, students are expected to analyze the implicit discourse logic of “scene—emotion—reason” in the original text and explain its structure in the translation using appropriate conjunctions (such as “yet” and “thus”) to ensure the coherence of the

discourse.

Syntactic transformation competence involves students' ability of flexibly dividing Chinese run-on sentences into complex sentences that adhere to English expression habits. For example, they can employ attributive clauses to address sentences such as "Above the winding lotus pond, what meets the eye is lush leaves".

For lexical decoding and reconstruction capabilities, students will be able to develop suitable rhythm compensation schemes for reduplicated words and translate culture-loaded words in accordance with cultural factors and context.

2.2.3 Value Objectives

Three aspects are indicative of the value objectives. Initially, the contemporary interpretation of Zhu Ziqing's philosophy of "solitude" in cross-linguistic conversion is used to convey the spiritual identity of Chinese literati. Secondly, the task of establishing ecological aesthetic discourse can be accomplished by maintaining the euphemistic image of the "lotus pond" (e.g., the ecological ethics of the lotus pond being "unstained by mud"). Thirdly, the translation of scenery descriptions should reflect the Chinese perspective on the "harmony between man and nature".

2.3 Three-Dimensional Strategies for the C-E Translation of *Moonlight over the Lotus Pond*

2.3.1 Discourse Level: Metaphorical Logic and Coherence Explication

The fourth paragraph of *Moonlight over the Lotus Pond* exemplifies a scene-emotion integration structure, progressing from *external imagery* (lotus pond) to *internal reflection* (soliloquy). Transitions between these modes operate through implicit cohesive devices. Synaesthetic rhetoric—exemplified by "fragrance resembling distant song"—enhances cross-sensory resonance and artistic unity, while superimposed imagery (e.g., layered leaves, lotus blossoms, flowing water) constructs a cohesive visual continuum.

The instructional paradigm integrates the following core strategies:

Explication of logic: In the classroom, students are instructed to recognize the internal connection between "scene" and "emotion" in the original text and to make the implicit logic explicit in the English translation by adjusting sentence patterns or adding appropriate conjunctions to prevent logical discontinuity in the translation. Baker posits that cohesion is the network of surface relations which link words and expressions to other words and expressions in a text, and coherence is the network of conceptual relations which underlie the surface text^[5], making it imperative to emphasize this concept in the classroom.

Image coherence: To guarantee the unity and coherence of images at the discourse level in the translation, it is crucial to maintain the relevance between images, such as the color association between "leaves" and "water color". For instance, in order to clarify the causal relationship while maintaining the color association, conjunctions should be employed when translating "Under the leaves is the tender flowing water, which is hidden, making it impossible to see any color".

Comparison of cases: Through the examination of translation examples that result in the loss of spatial hierarchy or logical discontinuity and the comparison with examples that effectively explicate the discourse logic, students can comprehend the significance of transformation at the discourse level.

2.3.2 Syntactic Level: Splitting and Reconstructing Run-on Sentences

Reflecting Chinese parataxis, *Moonlight over the Lotus Pond* employs serial clauses with syntactic fluidity, where inter-sentential logical relationships emerge organically through semantic cohesion—as exemplified in: "Moonlight flows like silent water, spilling its liquid glow over layers of leaves

and blossoms.”

The instructional framework synthesizes the following core components:

Dividing run-on sentences: Students are guided in the process of dividing Chinese run-on sentences into English main-subordinate clauses or coordinate clauses in accordance with semantic logic. This can be achieved by utilizing participle structures, prepositional phrases, and other methods to ensure that the translation adheres to the hypotactic norms of English. For instance, the sentence “The leaves rise high above the water, like the skirts of graceful dancers” can be deconstructed into a form that combines explicit metaphor and participle structure: “The leaves pirouette like dancers’ silk skirts as they emerge from the water”. Liu Miqing stated in *Sino-English Contrastive Study and Translation* that Chinese writing is characterized by being “loose in form but unified in spirit”, while English demands relatively rigorous structural organization. Therefore, in Chinese-English translation, one must transform “loose coherence” into “structural coherence”^[6]. This concept can be further elaborated upon during the teaching process.

Syntactic reconstruction: Students are instructed to employ adverbial clauses and attributive clauses to manage lengthy sentences, thereby improving their sense of structure and logic. In order to enhance the rhetorical level and sense of picture of the translation, students can master the skills of syntactic reconstruction by contrasting “problematic translations” (such as “The leaves are high above the water, like the skirts of slim dancers”.) with “optimized translations”.

2.3.3 Lexical Level: Transplanting Rhythm of Reduplicated Words and Culture-Loaded Words

The phonological elegance and imagery of the language are accentuated by the use of a significant number of reduplicated words. Additionally, the text contains words with specific cultural connotations.

The methodology synthesizes three constitutive dimensions:

Replacing the cadence of duplicated words: Students will be instructed to consider the phonological elegance and expressive effect of reduplicated words in addition to their meaning. Alliteration, repetition structures, and other methods can be employed to compensate. **Translation of culturally loaded terms in a hierarchical manner:** The gradient translation strategy of “transliteration-literal translation-compensatory annotation” will be introduced to teach culture-loaded words. This strategy enables students to select the most appropriate translation methods based on the specific context and translation purpose, as well as to comprehend the advantages and disadvantages of various translation methods.

2.4 Teaching Practice Design for the C-E Translation of *Moonlight over the Lotus Pond*

2.4.1 Analysis of Learning Environment and Teaching Materials

Second-year English majors form the primary cohort for this course. While demonstrating foundational competence in non-literary text conversion, they exhibit significant gaps in literary translation—particularly regarding contemporary prose—manifested in the following areas:

Limited understanding of genres: They are acclimated to utilizing the principle of “functional equivalence” in translation and lack the ability to conduct a thorough analysis of the discourse logic of prose, which is “scattered in form but focused in spirit”.

Inadequate sensitivity to language: They encounter challenges in reconciling the paratactic tension between Chinese run-on sentences and English hypotactic norms, which can result in an overly Europeanized translation or a lack of decent structure.

Deviation in cultural image decoding: They lack a comprehensive comprehension of the symbolic significance of specific images in Chinese literature, such as “lotus pond”, and often simplify them

to a literal translation during the translation process, resulting in the loss of the images' connotation.

2.4.2 Instructional Strategies and Procedures

The following teaching connections are designed in this course, adhering to the cognitive logic of “perception—analysis—practice—internalization” and utilizing the three-dimensional translation strategy as the main framework:

Literary Textuality: Cognitive Engagement

This course employs authentic multimedia resources—such as historical photographs of the lotus pond in Tsinghua University—to immerse students in the text's artistic atmosphere. Through this approach, learners activate literary associations evoked by the “lotus pond” imagery while building essential cultural foundations for translation practice.

In this phase, students also quickly skim the fourth paragraph of *Moonlight over the Lotus Pond* to locate key scenic descriptions while noting distinctive language features and emotional tones.

Three-Dimensional Translation: Strategy Exemplars

This pedagogical framework trains students to deconstruct translation challenges through tripartite textual analysis—examining the discursive, syntactic, and lexical dimensions of source texts. Discursive analysis focuses on contextual coherence, rhetorical purpose, and genre conventions; syntactic analysis addresses sentence structures, grammatical relationships, and information flow; lexical analysis scrutinizes word choice, collocation patterns, and semantic nuances.

Case studies of authentic translation challenges—such as cultural idioms, syntactic ambiguities, or untranslatable concepts—are paired with canonical translations (e.g., acclaimed literary works or professional translations) to illustrate practical resolutions. Through these exemplars, students learn to:

- (1) Identify critical source-text features requiring strategic intervention,
- (2) Diagnose potential pitfalls in cross-linguistic transfer,
- (3) Formulate targeted transformation strategies (e.g., transcreation, compensation, or syntactic restructuring).

The pedagogy further emphasizes comparative analysis of “problem-solution pairings”: Students contrast multiple translation approaches to the same source-text challenge, evaluating the efficacy, creativity, and cultural fidelity. This iterative process cultivates strategic competence in cross-linguistic mediation—enabling learners to justify decisions, adapt techniques to diverse contexts, and navigate the negotiated space between linguistic accuracy and functional equivalence.

Ultimately, this multidimensional approach transforms theoretical insights into actionable skills, equipping students to resolve complex translation problems with systematic, theoretically grounded methodologies.

Layered Competency Tasks: Strategic Implementation Framework

The fundamental goal of basic tasks is to emphasize discourse logic, which entails giving students original sentences and asking them to utilize conjunctions to specify logical linkages while retaining substantial picture associations.

Advanced assignments involve competition for syntactic transformation. In the context of original texts with run-on sentences, students must use attributive clauses or participle structures to promote transformation and integrate rhetoric that improves the overall impression. The challenge of lexical repair is to improve the first translation of culture-loaded or reduplicated terms.

Higher-order tasks include creating a “literal translation and in-text explanation” approach for specific terms to better explain cultural implications. To improve the efficacy of plan execution, quick feedback mechanisms are used, such as classroom voting and teacher comments.

To develop a transferable methodology for prose translation, essential translation tactics must be

organized at the three levels of discourse, syntax, and lexis.

3. Instructional Evaluation Design

In instructional evaluation design, a combination of procedural and summative assessments is used.

Students' success in completing layered tasks (basic, advanced, and higher-order tasks) as well as their classroom participation (such as contributions to debates and reflections on strategy application) are all part of the process evaluation.

Summative evaluation entails assigning translation practice homework in which students must translate certain paragraphs, note the translation tactics they used, attach a brief translation explanation, and analyze the processing approaches for key pictures. In her integrated approach to translation studies, Bell, a translation instruction expert, emphasized that translation evaluation should prioritize the application of students' translation strategies and processes, rather than solely the final translation outcome^[7].

4. Reflection and Teaching Impact

4.1 Successful Experiences

This teaching framework, based on the three-dimensional approach (lexis, syntax, discourse) to teaching poetic transformation in C-E Prose Translation, produces two demonstrated outcomes:

(1) Multimodal settings improve comprehension. The creation of multimedia situations allows pupils to quickly engage with the artistic notion of the book. The majority of students can identify with the literary imagery of the text in conversations, which establishes the cognitive foundation for cultural translation processing.

(2) Case comparison helps to develop strategy mastery. The approach of "problematic translation diagnosis-analysis of famous translations-strategy induction" allows students to more accurately detect common translation issues and to proactively apply the acquired techniques for improvement. The majority of students' translations adequately reflect the information and elegance of the original text while also exhibiting a clear use of technique.

4.2 Deficiencies and Directions for Improvement

However, certain inadequacies remain, indicating considerable room for improvement.

(1) The use of complicated strategies in higher-order activities necessitates that certain students enhance their strategic and linguistic competency. Many learners exhibit cognitive overload when required to simultaneously manage rhetorical effect, syntactic adjustment, and lexical nuance. To reduce such strain, it is vital to provide structured scaffolding—such as additional annotated examples and guided opportunities for strategy selection during classroom instruction. Step-by-step training in prioritizing translation problems would enable students to apply complex techniques more confidently and systematically.

(2) Inadequate depth in cross-cultural interpretation represents another challenge: students' analyses of cultural images often remain superficial, lacking awareness of historical or symbolic connotations. Introducing more comparative assessments of similar imagery in Western and Chinese literary works may help expand students' cross-cultural perspectives and refine their ability to decode embedded cultural meanings. Through systematic contrastive reading and guided interpretation, learners can cultivate a more nuanced sense of cultural transposition, moving beyond literal translation toward more resonant cultural representation. Such refinements will better equip them to produce translations that are both faithful and evocative.

5. Conclusion

Zhu Ziqing's *Moonlight over the Lotus Pond*, a canonical work of contemporary Chinese writing, has substantial teaching value for developing literary translation skills among English majors. The educational methodology, which incorporates layered practice, targeted feedback, and a three-dimensional strategic framework (discourse, syntax, lexis), prepares students to bridge the gap between applied and literary translation. Through repeated exercises and guided revisions, students learn to handle rhythm, imagery, and tone—key elements that define literary texture. This technique develops their ability to reconcile linguistic form with textual aesthetics during cross-language transfer, demonstrating that translation teaching includes not only linguistic abilities but also the recreation of cultural meaning and aesthetic resonance. Future instruction may include more modern prose and literary texts, strengthening the approach framework and deepening theory-practice integration. Comparative studies of different translated versions could further enhance students' critical discernment and stylistic flexibility. Finally, this develops translators with tripartite literacy (linguistic, aesthetic, and intercultural), which promotes Sino-foreign literary and cultural interchange, fostering a deeper global appreciation of Chinese literary artistry.

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