

A Corpus-Based Comparative Study of Explicit and Implicit in English Translations of *Kong Yiji*

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Abstract

Since Blum-Kulka (1986) proposed the “Explication Hypothesis”, explication and implicature have received widespread attention and become important topics in translation, achieving significant development. This study is based on previous theories and uses the corpus analysis software AntConc to construct a corpus comprising three English translations of *Kong Yiji*. It analyzes and compares the characteristics of its explicit and implicit strategies, providing some support for the “Explication Hypothesis” and providing some reference for literary translation practice and appreciation.

Keywords: *Kong Yiji*; Corpus; Explicit and Implicit; Translation Appreciation.

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1. INTRODUCTION

1.1. Background and Purpose

The explicit and implicit are important topics in translation studies. Since Blum-Kulka proposed the “Explication Hypothesis” in 1986 (Blum-Kulka, 1986), the phenomena of explicit and implicit have received widespread attention. Explicit refers to the translator clearly conveying the implicit information in the original text, while implicit refers to the translator retaining or enhancing the implicit expression of the original text. The choice of these two strategies not only reflects the translator's style preference, but also affects the readability and literary effect of the translation.

Lu Xun's short story *Kong Yiji* has become a classic work of Chinese literature, due to its restrained and condensed language, vivid and profound character portrayal, and profound historical and cultural connotations. Over the decades of external dissemination, multiple representative English translations have emerged, presenting different translation strategies and styles. Among them, the translations by Yang Hsien-yi and Gladys Yang (hereinafter referred to as Yang translation), William A. Lyell (hereinafter Lyell translation), and Julia Lovell (hereinafter Lovell translation) have had a more significant impact, so this study selects these three as research objects.

However, existing research on the English translation of *Kong Yiji* mostly focuses on culturally

loaded words and functional linguistics, with a general emphasis on inter-translation comparisons and less quantitative analysis using the source text as a unified reference.

Establishing a parallel corpus, this study combines quantitative and qualitative analysis to evaluate translation through data. It systematically compares the explicit and implicit strategies of the three translations, aiming to reveal the differences in strategies used by different translators when dealing with the same original text, and provide a reference for literary translation practice and translation appreciation.

1.2. Research Questions

This study will revolve around the following three questions:

- What are the differences in subject explicit among the three translations?
- What are the differences in the use of logical connectors among the three translations?
- What are the characteristics of the explicit and implicit strategies in the three translations? What overall trend is presented?

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1. Explicit and Implicit Theory

In 1958, in a comparative study of English and French literary genres, Vinay and Darbelnet first proposed the concept of explication, which refers to the process in which translators explicitly express implicit

but context-deducible information in the original text, and proposed the difference between direct translation and indirect translation (Vinay & Darbelnet, 1958). This study became the source of explicit theory. Subsequently, Blum-Kulka proposed the “Explicitation Hypothesis” in 1986, stating that translation translates text more explicit in terms of coherence than the original text, and this phenomenon is universal (Blum-Kulka, 1986). In 1998, Øverås found explicitation in the translation comparison between English and Norwegian (Øverås, 1998). In 2000, Olohan and Baker's research was based on a comparison between the Translated English Corpus (TEC) and the British National Corpus (BNC), and found that the frequency of using “that” after the verb in English translations was significantly higher than in English texts, supporting the salience hypothesis with large-scale corpora (Olohan & Baker, 2000). However, some scholars have also pointed out that the degree of salience is influenced by factors such as text type, language pair, and translator style.

Subsequently, Klaud supplemented this hypothesis by categorizing explicitation into four types: mandatory, selective, pragmatic, and inherent in translation (Klaudy, 2008). Selective explicitation refers to the translator's choice of explicitation based on different stylistic orientations to better align with the target language (Liu & Hou, 2008). This type of explicitation best reflects the translator's translation style and is the focus of this study. In 2005, Klaud and Károly proposed the “Asymmetric Hypothesis”, which suggests that explicitation is more common than implicitation (Klaudy & Károly, 2005). They found that in the bidirectional translation of most literary works between two languages (L1 and L2), when L1 is manifested in the L2 direction, L2 is not implicit in the L1 direction, which is the “asymmetry hypothesis”. They believe that the reason may be that translators prefer to use explicit rather than implicit.

2.2. Current Research on the English Translation of *Kong Yiji*

Many scholars have conducted comparative studies on the English translation of *Kong Yiji* from different perspectives, mostly focusing on culturally loaded words and functional linguistics. For example, Xie Jia studied the handling of cultural loaded words in Lovell translation from the perspective of time span (Xie, 2021); Based on the discourse of functional linguistics on the essence and quality of translation, Si Xianzhu evaluated the quality of the English translation of *Kong Yiji* and constructed a translation quality evaluation model from the perspective of functional linguistics (Si, 2005); Zhang Jianzhuang explores the translation characteristics of cultural loaded words in Yang translation from the perspective of the theory of Function plus Loyalty (Zhang, 2019).

3. METHODOLOGY

3.1. Corpus Construction

This study first cleaned the original text and three translations, removing annotations, headers, and footers, and only retaining the main content. Use Tmxmall to align the original text with three translations. Subsequently, import the translated text into AntConc to create a corpus, and use its “Word” and “KWIC” functions for retrieval and data statistics.

3.2. Indicator Selection

This study analyzes the explicit and implicit strategies of translation using the following indicators:

- a) Subject Explicit Indicator: Personal pronoun “he”. In Chinese English translation, Chinese often uses sentences without a subject, while English grammar requires sentences to have a clear subject. Therefore, when translating, a subject needs to be added. The omission of the subject in the original text mainly focuses on the situation where *Kong Yiji* is the subject. “He” best reflects the difference in the translator's explicit strategy. By analyzing the frequency and proportion of the use of “he” in the translation, the differences in subject explicit among the three translations can be analyzed.
- b) Logical Explicit Indicators: Sequential, Contrastive, Causal Logic Connective Words (and, but, so/use). The original language is concise, often using flowing sentences and hiding logical relationships. The frequency and proportion of the use of these logical relationship words in the translation can reflect the tendency of the three translations towards logical manifestation.
- c) It should be pointed out that implicit is difficult to measure directly through quantitative data, as it often manifests as omission or merging, making it difficult to statistic word frequency. Therefore, this study mainly analyzes the translation implicit strategy in two ways: one is to infer through low values of explicit indicators; The second is to conduct qualitative analysis through example sentences and directly study the processing of explicit information in the original text being omitted or implied in the translation.

4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This study adopts a combination of quantitative and qualitative analysis:

4.1. Quantitative Analysis

After cleaning, the tokens of words in the original text and three translations are as follows:

Table 1: Tokens of the Original Text and Three Translations

	Original Text	Yang	Lyell	Lovell
Tokens	2599	1852	2580	1884
English-Chinese Character-to-word ratio		1:1.40	1:1.01	1:1.38

According to statistics, the average word count ratio for translating literary works from Chinese to English is 1:1.41, which means 1000 English words correspond to 1410 Chinese characters (Wang Kefei, 2003). The tokens in Lyell translation is much higher than the average, exceeding 0.28, while the Yang and Lovell translations are nearly equal to the average. It is preliminarily judged that the Lyell translation may have

used more detailed descriptions, more explanatory sentences, and a higher degree of explicitness, while the Yang translation and Lovell translation may have a more concise and condensed language compared to each other. In order to make more accurate judgments, the appearance frequency of explicit indicators in the translation is counted, and their proportion is calculated, so as to make fair comparisons under different tokens.

Table 2: Explicit Indicators of the Three Translations (Frequency and Percentage)

	Yang (1852 words)	Lyell (2580 words)	Lovell (1884 words)
he	47(2.54%)	58 (2.25%)	39 (2.07%)
and	44 (2.38%)	75 (2.91%)	23 (1.22%)
but	13 (0.70%)	25 (0.97%)	9 (0.48%)
so/because	9 (0.48%)	17 (0.66%)	8 (0.42%)

It can be seen that in terms of subject explicit, Yang translation has the highest proportion (2.54%), indicating that when dealing with subjectless sentences in the original text, it tends to explicitly supplement the subject; Lovell translation has the lowest proportion (2.07%), and may be more inclined to retain the subjectless structure of the original text, or to conceal the subject through passive voice, sentence structure adjustments, etc; The proportion of Lyell translations is in the middle (2.25%).

In terms of the explicit use of logical connectors, whether it is the sequential (and), contrastive (but), or causal (so/cause) logic, the proportion of the Lyell translation is significantly higher than the other two translations, with the Lovell translation having the lowest proportion and the Yang translation in the middle.

Among them, the proportion of “and” in the Lyell translation (2.91%) is about 2.4 times that of the Lovell translation (1.22%), the proportion of “but” (0.97%) is about twice that of the Lovell translation, and the proportion of “so/because” is about 1.6 times that of the Lovell translation.

Overall, the three translations exhibit stable gradient differences in explicit, with the Lyell translation being the strongest, followed by the Yang translation, and the Lovell translation being the weakest. This data once again proves that Lyell tends to use explicit strategies, Lovell tends to use implicit strategies, and Yang is in between the two.

4.2. Qualitative Analysis

4.2.1. Analysis of Subject Explicit and Implicit

Table 3: Examples of Subject Explicit and Implicit in Three Translations

Original Text	穿一件破夹袄，盘着两腿，下面垫一个蒲包，用草绳在肩上挂住。
Yang	He had on a ragged lined jacket, and was sitting cross-legged on a mat which was attached to his shoulders by a straw rope.
Lyell	He was wearing a raggedy old jacket and his legs were crossed under him. Beneath his legs was a grass mat that was fastened by ropes to his shoulders.
Lovell	...a thin, ragged cotton jacket over his shoulders, his legs crossed beneath him, sitting on a rush sack that he kept in place with a straw rope.

The subject “he” (*Kong Yiji*) in the original text has already appeared in the previous text and is omitted here. The Yang translation starts with “He had on...”, explicitly adds the subject “he”, and uses “and” to connect subsequent actions, with the highest degree of subject explicit; The Lyell translation also starts with “He was wearing...” and adds the subject, but in the second clause, the subject is changed to “his legs”.

Subsequent clauses continue to use noun phrases as the subject, and “he” does not appear again; The Lovell translation completely omits the subject, starting with “a thin, torn cotton jacket over his shoulders”, and subsequent “his legs crossed” and “sitting on...” are independent nominative or participial structures without any explicit subject.

4.2.2. Analysis of Sequential Logic Explicit and Implicit

Table 4: Examples of Sequential Logic Explicit and Implicit in Three Translations

Original Test	孔乙己一到店，所有喝酒的人便都看着他笑，有的叫道，“孔乙己，你脸上又添上新伤疤了！”
Yang	Whenever he came into the shop, everyone would look at him and chuckle. And someone would call out: "Kung I-chi! There are some fresh scars on your face!"
Lyell	One day he came to the wineshop and all the regulars, as usual, started to eyeball him and laugh. Somebody yelled, "Hey there, <i>Kong Yiji</i> , you've put a few new scars on that old face of yours!"
Lovell	"Another scar, <i>Kong Yiji</i> ? " the assembled company would laugh the moment he arrived in the tavern.

The original text describes the scene of everyone laughing after *Kong Yiji* arrived at the store: “.....便看着他笑，有的叫道.....” This implies a sequential logic. The Yang and Lyell translations both explicit sequential logic, while the Lovell translation completely reorganizes the original text structure, placing the ridicule of *Kong Yiji* directly in the quotation,

omitting the action descriptions of “looking” and “laughing”, and directly conveying the meaning of ridicule through the quotation, greatly concealing the sequential logic.

4.2.3. Analysis of Contrastive Logic Explicit and Implicit

Table 5: Examples of Contrastive Logic Explicit and Implicit in Three Translations

Original Test	穿的虽然是长衫，可是又脏又破，似乎十多年没有补，也没有洗。
Yang	Although he wore a long gown, it was dirty and tattered, and looked as if it had not been washed or mended for over ten years.
Lyell	Kong wore a long gown just like the gentry, but it was so raggedy and dirty you'd swear it hadn't been patched or washed in at least ten years.
Lovell	His gown was filthy and torn, as if it hadn't been mended or washed for over a decade.

The original text uses the phrase “虽然.....可是.....” to clearly indicate the contrastive logic. The Lyell translation retains the inflection conjunction “but” and highlights the logic of inflection; Yang translation uses “Although” to guide concession adverbial clauses, which also highlights the turning point; The Lovell translation completely omits transitional conjunctions,

directly coordinately stating “长衫” and “又脏又破”, and the transitional relationship is hidden in the sentence structure.

4.2.4. Analysis of Causal Logic Explicit and Implicit

Table 6: Examples of Causal Logic Explicit and Implicit in Three Translations

Original Test	幸亏荐头的情面大，辞退不得，便改为专管温酒的一种无聊职务了。
Yang	Fortunately, I had been recommended by someone influential, so he could not dismiss me, and I was transferred to the dull work of warming wine.
Lyell	the boss couldn't just up and fire me even if he'd wanted to. And so he made me into a specialist. From then on I would tend to nothing but the boring business of warming the wine.
Lovell	Fortunately, the connection who had wangled me the position was too powerful for the manager to sack me outright; all the same, he kept my duties as tediously simple as possible – warming the wine.

“幸亏荐头的情面大(reason)，辞退不得(result)，便改为专管温酒的一种无聊职务了(result)” The original text contains a strong causal logic. The Yang translation uses “so” to manifest the first layer of causality and “and” to connect the second layer of results; The Lyell translation is divided into two sentences. The first sentence uses “so” to manifest causality, and the second sentence uses “And so” to manifest it again; The Lovell translation uses semicolons to connect cause and effect, and introduces the final result with “all the same”, without using explicit causal markers such as “so” or “because”.

4.3. Discussion

4.3.1. Causes of Explicit Gradients

The three translations exhibit significant gradient differences, which may be influenced by different translator styles and concepts, target readers, and historical backgrounds. Yang and Gladys are known for their fidelity to the original text, seeking a balance between the two. Lyell is an American sinologist who emphasizes the readability of translations and tends to use explicit strategies to make logic clearer. Julia Lovell emphasizes the preservation of the literary and concise style of the original text, tending towards concealment.

Yang's translation was completed in the 1950s, when translation matters were mainly controlled by state institutions, emphasizing fidelity to the original text; Lyell and the Lovell translation were completed in the 1990s and beyond, giving translators greater freedom, but they chose opposite strategies, indicating that the influence of the translator's personal style is more significant.

4.3.2. Support for the Explicitation Hypothesis

This study provides partial support for Blum-Kulka's "Explicitation Hypothesis" and also proposes supplements (Blum-Kulka, 1986). On the one hand, all three translations add subjects and use conjunctions, which to some extent supports the hypothesis that translated texts are more explicit. On the other hand, the degree of manifestation varies depending on the translator, and even the blue translation shows a clear tendency towards concealment. This indicates that manifestation is not a universal feature of translation, but rather a selective strategy employed by translators beyond grammatical constraints (Klaudy, 2008). Explicit and implicit are not binary phenomena, but a continuous system. Translators need to balance between the two as needed.

5. CONCLUSION

This study compared the explicit and implicit strategies of three English translations of *Kong Yiji* (Yang, Lyell, Lovell) by establishing a corpus and combining quantitative and qualitative analysis. It was found that the three translations showed stable gradient differences in the degree of explicit translation, with Lyell having the strongest explicit tendency and Lovell having the strongest implicit tendency. Yang's explicit strategy was relatively balanced. This study provides empirical support for the "Explicitation Hypothesis". At the same time, it showed that the translator's style influenced the explicit translation and was a selective strategy of the translator rather than a universal feature of translation. It also provided reference for literary translation practice and translation appreciation.

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