

## Original Paper

# Research on the Chinese Translation of *A Rose for Emily* from the Perspective of Semantic and Communicative Translation

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### Abstract

*A Rose for Emily* is a representative short story written by William Faulkner, which tells the tragic life of Emily Grierson, an aristocratic woman in a small town during the decline of the American South. This study applies Peter Newmark's theories of semantic and communicative translation to analyze the translation strategies employed in Yang Qishen's version 《献给爱米丽的一朵玫瑰花》, with further discussion on optimizing specific translations. This study aims to analyze the translation strategies and artistic characteristics of this Chinese version, to provide references for the localization of other Western literary classics.

### Keywords

semantic translation, communicative translation, Yang Qishen's 《献给爱米丽的一朵玫瑰花》, translation strategies and methods

## 1. Introduction

*A Rose for Emily* is a representative short story by American author William Faulkner. Published in *The Forum* in April 1930, the work made a significant impact and remains widely discussed and studied today. As a canonical text for Faulkner scholarship, *A Rose for Emily* combines the cultural uniqueness of the southern historical milieu with the literary qualities of Gothic fiction, making it an important object of Chinese translation studies. However, how to translate *A Rose for Emily* into Chinese while maintaining fidelity to the original's literary essence and ensuring readability for Chinese readers remains a topic worthy of exploration. In China, Yang Qishen's 《献给爱米丽的一朵玫瑰花》 has gained widespread acclaim and deserves further scholarly attention.

Meanwhile, Peter Newmark's theories of semantic and communicative translation provide significant guidance for translation studies. Thus, this study employs Newmark's frameworks to analyze Yang

Qishen's Chinese translation of Faulkner's short story *A Rose for Emily* (titled 《献给爱米丽的一朵玫瑰花》), examining the translation strategies and methods employed in this rendition.

## 2. Literature Review

### 2.1 A Review of Semantic and Communicative Translation Theories

The theoretical prototypes of semantic and communicative translation originate in Peter Newmark's foundational work *Approaches to Translation* (Newmark, 1981). Building upon Newmark's exposition, in semantic translation, the translator stays faithful to the original author, relies on the original text, focuses on the culture of the source language, and maintains the accuracy of the original text's semantic and syntactic structure to help readers of the target language understand the text's meaning. Conversely, the core focus of communicative translation is its emphasis on the target language readership. By adapting the linguistic features of the source text to achieve comparable effects, it allows translated texts to evoke experiences akin to those of the original readers. This approach helps mitigate potential comprehension barriers during reading and facilitates smooth communication (Lin, 1987). Newmark underscored that translation strategies should be tailored according to different text types.

The discourse on semantic and communicative translation has been widely debated since its emergence. Many people mistakenly perceive these theories as mutually exclusive. However, this view is fundamentally flawed. Newmark (1991) first proposed the concept of the relevance approach to translation in his work *About Translation*. He believed that in translation practice, there is no pure semantic translation or communicative translation, and the theories of semantic and communicative translation can be unified, and the two can be used interchangeably, sometimes even combined into one.

Foreign scholars have continuously developed and refined this theoretical framework. Juliane House (1997) introduced the seminal distinction between covert translation and overt translation in *Translation Quality Assessment: A Model Revisited*, complementing Newmark's translation theory. Kwame Anthony Appiah (1993), in his paper entitled *Thick Translation*, proposed the theory of deep translation for the first time, conceptually speaking, placing the translated text in a rich source language and source culture environment. This theory corrects the cultural limitations of semantic translation. Domestic scholars have critically developed Newmark's theory of semantic and communicative translation. In *Translation and the Philosophy of Language*, Liu Miqing (1998) put forward the compensation theory in translation, in which the three principles of formal compensation, semantic compensation, and aesthetic compensation provide a transition zone between the "fidelity to the author" of semantic translation and the "fidelity to the reader" of communicative translation. Furthermore, Liu (2005) expanded the theory with a cultural compensation dimension in his subsequent work, *Contemporary Studies of Translation*, offering novel approaches to addressing cultural default in Newmark's theoretical framework. When discussing Newmark's translation theory, Yang Shizhao

(1989) acknowledged the value of semantic and communicative translation approaches. However, he keenly pointed out several controversies within Newmark's theoretical system, such as whether communicative translation grants translators excessive discretion in textual adaptation, and whether the formal correspondence required by semantic translation applies to the widely differing languages of English and Chinese.

In general, semantic and communicative translation theories have largely contributed to the research and development of contemporary translation theories and practices. Translators need to flexibly use both translation strategies according to specific contexts.

### 2.2 A Review of the Chinese Translation of *A Rose for Emily*

As the first complete Chinese translation of *A Rose for Emily* in mainland China, Yang Qishen's version has attained significant recognition and exerted considerable influence in literary circles. Domestic scholarship on Chinese translations of *A Rose for Emily* predominantly anchors its analysis in Yang Qishen's canonical version. Liu Dehua (2020) analyzed Yang's translation using the register theory and translator's theory mentioned in Basil Hatim and Ian Mason's work *Discourse and the Translation*. This approach deepens the cognitive understanding of how social contextual factors influence translation strategy selection, elucidates the role of register theory in interpreting stylistic features of literary texts, and provides actionable methodological guidance for literary translation. Miao Qunying (2002) explored the dialectical approach to translation—"Translation defies fixed rules yet obeys discernible principles", analyzing Yang's handling of vocabulary and syntax. He highlighted three key translation characteristics: "Form-Preserving Mimicry with Stylistic Resonance", "Form-Spirit Unity with Dynamic Fluency", and "Unconstrained Eloquence with Contextual Fit". Xia Guiqing and Tan Lixin (2005) employed comparative and contrastive methods, emphasizing how the original language style is creatively reconstructed in the translation, and showcasing Yang's holistic integration and unity of form and spirit. Based on the new criticism theory, Yang Xinyu (2012) deeply excavated the textual details of seven aspects, such as wording, rhetoric, structure and tension, and pointed out the shortcomings of Yang's translation under the framework of the new criticism theory through comparison, providing a new perspective for the study of this translation version.

These studies examine the Chinese translation of *A Rose for Emily* by Yang Qishen through multiple theoretical lenses, but few interpret the translation strategies and language styles of Yang's Chinese translation from the perspective of semantic and communicative translation.

### 3. Case Analysis

The source text is based on *A Rose for Emily* from *Selected Short Stories*, originally published in 1993 by Modern Library Edition (Faulkner, 1993). The target text is based on Yang Qishen's version from 《献给爱米丽的一朵玫瑰花》 published in 2001 by Nanjing Yilin Press (Faulkner, 2001).

### 3.1 Analysis of Translation Strategies under the Guidance of Semantic Translation

Source Text: That was when **people** had begun to feel really sorry for her... **We** had long thought of them as a tableau, ...

Target Text: 而这时**人们**才开始真正为她感到难过.....长久以来，**我们**把这家人一直看做一幅画中的人物.....

The Chinese translation retains the original narrative perspective of “we” and “people” in both “**人们**” and “**我们**”. In the text, both terms refer to “all residents of Jefferson Town”. The third-person perspective of “people” conveys objectivity and detachment, while the first-person perspective of “we” highlights collective memory among town dwellers. This hybrid narrative approach demonstrates Faulkner’s deliberate design, which is crucial for emphasizing the thematic focus (Sun, 2018). Therefore, the literal translation here remains appropriate, faithfully reproducing Faulkner’s distinctive narrative style.

Source Text: So when she got to be thirty and **was still single**, we were not pleased exactly, but vindicated.

Target Text: 因此当她年近三十，**尚未婚配**时，我们实在没有喜幸的心理，只是觉得先前的看法得到了证实。

The translation adheres to the principle of semantic translation, employing classical Chinese expressions with traditional literary characteristics to deliberately recreate the historical context and maintain temporal relevance. The use of “**尚未**” as a common classical Chinese negative adverb, paired with the term “**婚配**” from traditional marital contexts, evokes associations between Emily’s Gothic rigidity and the spatial constraints of Chinese women’s boudoirs. This stylistic alignment helps resonate emotionally with target language readers.

Source Text: Being left alone, and **a pauper**, she had become humanized. Now she too would know the old thrill and the old despair of a **penny** more or less.

Target Text: 单身独处，**贫苦无告**，她变得懂人情了。如今她也体会到多一**便士**就激动喜悦、少一便士便痛苦失望的那种人皆有之的心情了。

The translation maintains linguistic fidelity to the original text. For instance, translating “a pauper” as “**贫苦无告**” preserves the classical Chinese literary structure while foreshadowing the sense of utter despair and helplessness behind Emily’s perverse act of sleeping alongside Homer’s corpse. The word “penny” is rendered literally as “**便士**” rather than the more culturally appropriate monetary term “**铜板**”, which is more appropriate to the target language reader.

Source Text: The construction company came with niggers and mules and machinery, and a foreman named Homer Barron, a **Yankee** — a big, dark, ready man, with a big voice and eyes lighter than his face.

Target Text: 建筑公司带着一批黑人、骡子和机器来了，工头是个**北方佬**，名叫荷默·伯隆，个子高大，皮肤黝黑，精明强干，声音宏亮，双眼比脸色浅淡。

The term “北方佬” carries stronger negative connotations compared to “北方人”, effectively highlighting the regional antagonism during the Civil War period—The self-proclaimed Southern pride manifests resistance and hostility toward the “invaders” of their culture, while preserving the original text’s Gothic narrative elements from the South. This approach adheres to the principles of semantic translation.

Source Text: As they recrossed the lawn, a window that had been dark was lighted and Miss Emily sat in it, the light behind her, and her upright torso motionless as that of an **idol**.

Target Text: 等到他们回头又穿过草坪时，原来暗黑的一扇窗户亮起了灯：爱米丽小姐坐在那里，灯在她身后，她那挺直的身躯一动不动像是一尊**偶像**一样。

The literal translation approach used here translates “idol” as “偶像”, which in the target culture typically refers to internet celebrities in modern entertainment. This association disconnects contemporary readers from the 19<sup>th</sup> century historical context, potentially causing cultural dissonance. Given the novel’s Southern Gothic style, however, a more nuanced adaptation is recommended: translating it as “神像”. This choice not only captures the eerie atmosphere of religious veneration but also subtly suggests that Southern aristocratic landowners like Emily have become spiritual symbols for the town’s old residents.

### 3.2 Analysis of Translation Strategies under the Guidance of Communicative Translation

Source Text: We believed she **had to** do that.

Target Text: 我们相信她这样做是**控制不了自己**。

If the translation adopts a literal approach, “had to” would typically be rendered as “不得不” in Chinese, conveying an objective obligation. However, this interpretation leads readers to perceive Emily’s actions as being compelled by external pressure—a misalignment with the original message. By opting for a free translation approach, the text introduces psychological motivations behind Emily’s behavior. The phrase “控制不了自己” emphasizes her emotional impulsiveness and loss of self-control, effectively applying the emotional equivalence mechanism commonly used in literary translation. This not only enhances comprehensibility but also creates empathy for the reader.

Source Text: The little boys would follow in groups to hear him cuss the **niggers**, and the niggers singing in time to the rise and fall of picks.

Target Text: 一群群孩子跟在他身后听他用不堪入耳的话责骂**黑人**，而黑人则随着铁镐的上下起落有节奏地哼着**劳动号子**。

The translation process transforms culture-loaded terms. The racially charged term “niggers” in the original text is rendered with a neutral approach, effectively mitigating the sharp social tension. Additionally, the translation employs amplification. “劳动号子” is a kind of folk song with distinct pauses and strong rhythm that is hummed during labor in traditional China. This cultural adaptation enhances readers’ understanding of Homer’s agricultural labor scenes through contextual supplementation.

Source Text: But there were still others, older people, who said that even grief could not cause a real lady to forget *noblesse oblige*—without calling it *noblesse oblige*.

Target Text: 不过也有别人，一些年纪大的人说就是悲伤也不会叫一个真正高贵的妇女忘记“贵人举止”，尽管口头上不把它叫作“贵人举止”。

This translation employs a transliteration approach to better align with the target culture. The French term “*noblesse oblige*” in the source text emphasizes moral obligations imposed on women, while the Chinese equivalent “贵人举止” focuses more on regulating women’s outward demeanor, appearing somewhat superficial and deviating from the original cultural emphasis. Therefore, it is proposed here to replace “本分” with “举止”. In the target culture, there exists the expression “妇道人家守本分”. The word “本分” echoes the translation of “妇道人家” in the previous text, and also carries the connotation of moral shackles on women by the fixed class in the original text, creating stronger ironic tension.

#### 4. Conclusion

The study reveals that Yang Qishen’s translation adheres to semantic translation principles, preserving the historical context and cultural nuances of the original work. Meanwhile, it demonstrates a strategic adoption of communicative translation approaches when handling sensitive terms like ethnic designations and culturally loaded expressions. Guided by semantic translation, the translator maintains fidelity to the author’s intent while respecting source culture, predominantly employing literal translation methods that preserve cultural imagery integrity and metaphorical depth. Simultaneously, the translation faithfully reproduces Faulkner’s narrative style, maintaining his nonlinear temporal structure, multi-perspective storytelling, and Gothic literary elements. Under the guidance of communicative translation, the translator focuses on the target language readers to accurately convey the original text’s communicative information. They predominantly employ methods such as free translation and transliteration, transform culture-loaded words, simplify rhetorical expressions, and appropriately adjust certain sentence structures to better align with Chinese expression habits.

Overall, Yang Qishen’s version 《献给爱米丽的一朵玫瑰花》 achieves a well-balanced equilibrium between the dual perspectives of “author-centeredness” and “reader-centeredness”.

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