

Original Paper

A Comparative Study of Lu Gusun's and Liu Xuming's Translations of *The Death of the Moth* from the Perspective of Translator's Subjectivity

Oushiya Yang^{1*}

¹ School of Liberal Arts, Nanjing University of Information Science and Technology, Nanjing, China

* Oushiya Yang, School of Liberal Arts, Nanjing University of Information Science and Technology, Nanjing, China

Received: March 12, 2026

Accepted: March 29, 2026

Online Published: April 10, 2026

doi:10.22158/sll.v10n2p25

URL: <http://dx.doi.org/10.22158/sll.v10n2p25>

Abstract

*Given that interpretations and translation approaches can vary significantly depending on the translator, the translator's subjectivity is increasingly emphasized in contemporary translation studies. Prose, with its wide range of expressive possibilities and distinctive stylistic features, assigns a particularly important role to the translator's subjectivity in the translation process. This study focuses on Virginia Woolf's *The Death of the Moth*, a work that combines a world woven from delicate emotions with profound philosophical reflections on life and death. It examines the translations by Lu Gusun and Liu Xuming from four perspectives: lexical choice, syntactic structure, semantic transposition, and stylistic reproduction. The results indicate that Lu Gusun prioritizes accuracy, syntactic fidelity, depth of meaning, and comprehensiveness in conveying literary value, striving to reproduce the rhythm of Woolf's stream of consciousness and the philosophical depth of the work. In contrast, Liu Xuming prioritizes plain language, smoother readability, clearer meaning, and a more restrained style to enhance emotional immersion and reading comfort. These differences stem from the translators' educational backgrounds, views on translation, and aesthetic preferences, reflecting the diversity of translation.*

Keywords

*translator's subjectivity, *The Death of the Moth*, prose translation, Lu Gusun, Liu Xuming*

1. Introduction

For a long time, the traditional translation view emphasizes “faithfulness”, which leads to the translator being placed in the subordinate position of “servant” and the translator’s autonomy being ignored (Xu, 2003). It was not until 1990 when Susan Bassnett and André Lefevere co-authored *Translation, History and Culture* that the “cultural turn” of translation studies began. Before that, scholars mainly focused on the static comparison between the source text and the target text. After the cultural turn, the focus of translation studies has shifted to the various cultural factors that affect the whole translation process. Researchers have come to realize that translation is not only a process of converting words in one language into words in another language, but also a process of cultural exchange, interpretation and re-creation. The translator plays a key role in the whole translation process, serving as a bridge between the original author and the target readers. Translation is not only a mechanical reproduction, but also brings new life to the original text in different cultural environments. Hence, the translator’s personal initiative and creativity are very important. Because of this, the translator is no longer regarded as an unimportant background figure. On the contrary, they have become a major focus of academic research, and the study of translator’s subjectivity has also become an important topic in translation studies.

Virginia Woolf is a leading figure in modernist literature, known for her use of stream-of-consciousness techniques and her sensitivity to the question of life and death. Her prose has a special, smooth rhythm, vivid description and delicate metaphor, which give her works a unique texture. Through her simple and ordinary observation of daily life, she expresses deep emotions and philosophical thoughts.

Therefore, when translating such texts, translators should not only pay attention to the literal meaning. In lyrical philosophical prose like *The Death of the Moth*, the narrative follows the story of the moth’s struggle until death. By observing every detail of the last moment of the moth, the author weaves the profound information of “life is fragile and resilient, death is mysterious and inevitable” into the text, thus reflecting the dilemma of human existence. In this case, the translator should act as both a craftsman and a thinker, and choose words that resonate emotionally and sentence structures that match the rhythm to convey the meaning of the original text. In addition, translators must dig out the metaphors and philosophical background in the text; they cannot just skim over the surface. On the contrary, they must thoroughly grasp the original text and deal with it flexibly to ensure that Chinese readers understand what the author is trying to say. Translators should not only be faithful to Woolf’s unique writing style, but also combine careful observation of the outside world with profound self-reflection.

This study integrates two Chinese translations by Lu Gusun and Liu Xuming of Woolf’s famous prose *The Death of the Moth*. Through detailed text analysis and comparative research, the author deeply explores the differences in translation choices between the two translators and the impact of translator’s subjectivity on prose translation. From the theoretical level, this study expands the subjectivity theory of translators to the field of prose translation; at the practical level, it provides useful references for

translators engaged in the translation of similar literary works.

2. Literature Review

Virginia Woolf is an important representative figure in the field of Western modernism and feminist literature. Over the years, her works have been widely studied in Chinese academic circles, most of which focus on her novel creation. Relevant researches cover multiple dimensions such as narrative skills, literary elements and ideological themes. Some scholars have also discussed the application of stream of consciousness techniques from a philosophical perspective. For example, Yu and Cai (2025) point out that Woolf connects real life with artistic creation through consciousness and sensory experience, and this connection structure has become the unique internal structure of his stream of consciousness novels. Huang (2017) and Zuo (2017) analyze the specific narrative skills in *The Mark on the Wall* and *To the Lighthouse*. In the study of the relationship between feminism and space, Liu (2022) and Fang (2021) discuss Woolf's theoretical views on the relationship between gender and space. Yu (2024) also studied how Xu Zhimo, Lin Huiyin and other Chinese writers in the early 20th century responded to Woolf's feminist thought. In recent years, the academic community's attention to auditory narrative has continued to increase. Wang (2025) and Long and Zeng (2025) have focused on analyzing the cultural connotation of sound scene and auditory structure in Woolf's works.

However, Woolf's prose receives much less attention compared with the large amount of research on her novels. Her prose is also famous for its keen observation of daily life and subtle thinking about the fundamental problems of life. In her prose works, *The Death of the Moth* is one of the most discussed works. So far, most of the research on this prose has focused on its theme, style, literary techniques and so on, but this perspective is often too narrow. Xu (2008) studies this article from the perspective of stylistics. He believes that the language of prose is not random; on the contrary, every word is carefully selected to explore the theme of life and death. He also shows how these stylistic choices make prose more meaningful. Cao (2014) focuses on the analysis of rhetorical devices such as opposites, personification, metaphor and repetition. He believes that these means not only make the prose more vivid, but also link the fate of the moth with the author's consciousness about death.

Although the above research has laid a solid foundation for the further study of *The Death of the Moth*, there are still obvious gaps in interdisciplinary research fields such as translation. Many of Woolf's works have been translated or even retranslated in China, but there are not many in-depth studies on these Chinese versions. Wang (2013) points out that in addition to deixis and syntax, there is still much room for exploration in the translation and re-creation of structural rhetoric and narrative techniques. Some scholars have studied the translation of *The Death of the Moth*, but their research perspectives are quite limited. For example, Chen (2019) uses functional equivalence theory to compare the translations of Lu Gusun and Liu Xuming, and analyzes the differences in meaning, style and reader's response. Huang (2019) studies the realization of pragmatic meaning, referential meaning and linguistic meaning

in different translations by using the method of semiotics. Taking Lu Gusun's translation as an example, Yang (2025) discusses the translation strategies of English prose from the perspectives of vocabulary, syntax and style based on the functional equivalence theory. Most of these studies compare and evaluate the translations based on equivalence and accuracy. They do not consider how the translator's own academic background, translation views or aesthetic preferences affect their work. Therefore, this study takes the translator's subjectivity as the theoretical perspective and Lu Gusun's and Liu Xuming's translations as the research object to explore the subjective factors in their translations, so as to make up for the gap in the study of Woolf's prose translation.

3. Theoretical Framework

The "cultural turn" brings translators to the forefront of academic research. Xu (2003) argues that translation studies have long been limited to linguistic analysis, ignoring translator subjectivity. He believes translator subjectivity refers to the translator's self-awareness and creativity in translation activities, and the strength of this awareness directly affects the quality of the final translation. Robinson (1991) also emphasizes the importance of translators as the central subject of the translation process, highlighting the role of emotion, intuition and cognitive experience in translation. Since then, scholars continue to explore the nature, manifestations and constraints of translator subjectivity, making it an important concept in this field.

Scholars have formed a systematic understanding of the connotation of translator subjectivity. Zha and Tian (2003) were the first to give an authoritative definition of this concept. In their view, translators are the subject of translation, and their subjectivity refers to their initiative in translation work—this initiative serves specific translation purposes on the premise of respecting the original text. Its essential characteristics include the translator's conscious cultural awareness, humanistic sensitivity and cultural aesthetic creativity. Later, Liao and Zhu (2005) advocate that translators should be restored to the same position as authors in cultural construction. Based on these views, Zhong and Zhou (2006) propose that translator subjectivity includes the translator's awareness in language operation, cultural nuances, artistic creation, aesthetic standards and humanistic values. They believe it has the characteristics of autonomy, initiative, intentionality and creativity. To bring similar reading experiences to target language readers, translators must use their subjective initiative to mediate between the two languages and their cultural connotations (Zhang & Liu, 2013). Recently, Lin (2026), drawing on a specific perspective of cognitive translation studies, emphasizes the integration of translator's experience interaction and cognitive processing in translation. He believes that the translator's understanding of the original text is essentially subjective, which opens up a new path for the study of translator's subjectivity.

With the deepening of research, scholars began to apply the concept of translator's subjectivity to specific text types. Zhang (2010) specializes in prose translation. He points out that the translator's

subjectivity is reflected in the balance between language transformation and style restoration. Cui and Li (2023) further explored this issue from the perspective of transknowletology. They believed that the translator's subjectivity is also reflected in the transmission of cultural knowledge of the source language and the adaptation to the target language and culture. Zha and Tian (2003) emphasized that language switching is only the surface phenomenon of literary translation, not the ultimate goal. In the process of translation, the translator first interacts with the original text through his own emotions and aesthetic feelings as a reader. At the same time, as an interpreter, they should dig into the deep meaning of the work and integrate their own opinions into the translation as the creator as well. *The Death of the Moth* skillfully combines delicate emotions with philosophical speculation, fully demonstrating the multiple dimensions of the translator's subjectivity. Therefore the translator needs to capture the emotional tone through the choice of words, reflect the rhythm of Woolf's stream of consciousness through the syntactic structure, convey her deep thinking about life and death by paying attention to semantics, and reproduce her unique observation and reflection style. This study analyzes the two translations from these four dimensions to explore the influence of translator's subjectivity on translation effect.

4. Case Analysis of the Two Translations

Lu Gusun is an outstanding professor, lexicographer and translator at Fudan University. He mainly studies English and American literature and English-Chinese bilingualism. He is rigorous in his study and follows the translation principle of "simplicity makes people closer to the essence" (Tao, 2017). He strives to be faithful to the connotation and aesthetic characteristics of the original work and find a balance between academic accuracy and literary beauty. However, Liu Xuming, an English professor and literary scholar at Southeast University, has long focused on the aesthetic interpretation and reader acceptance of literary texts. Her translation is smooth, straightforward and easy to understand (Chen, 2019). This study compares the two translation versions from the dimensions of lexical selection, syntactic processing, semantic transmission and style reproduction, and deeply analyzes the specific mechanism of translator's subjectivity.

4.1 Lexical Choice

Words are the basic units for conveying meaning. Woolf's prose is concise, philosophical, and poetic. Therefore, when translators choose vocabulary for key images, the choice of these words often reflects their own understanding and aesthetic preference. Overall, Lu Gusun's works often pursue precision, philosophical resonance, and literary conciseness, while Liu Xuming tends to favor an accessible, straightforward, and readable.

Example 1:

Original: a tiny bead of pure life

Lu: "一颗晶莹的生命之珠"

Liu: “一粒小小的纯净的生命之珠”

This sentence is a key metaphor for the nature of life in *The Death of the Moth*. Woolf uses “tiny bead” to represent life and “pure” to clearly emphasize the essential quality of life. The image is delicate and ethereal, which not only shows the fragility but also the sacredness of life. It is a typical example of Woolf’s poetic writing, carrying the philosophical meaning of her thinking about existence (Xu, 2008). Lu Gusun’s choice of words fully demonstrates the accuracy of a scholar translator. As a person who has been engaged in literary translation and dictionary compilation for a long time, he is very sensitive to the selection of words, aesthetics and the philosophical thoughts behind it. Lu’s choice of “晶莹” is not only a capture of the purity of life, but it also adds a sense of light. This restores the sacredness of the original image, endows the “生命之珠” with a deeper philosophical meaning, and also brings out a profound thinking on the essence of life. This is consistent with Lu Gusun’s translation principles. He respects the poetry of the original text, doesn’t oversimplify or weaken the original text, and always adheres to the complete presentation of the original image, so as to retain its deep meaning (Tao, 2017). Liu Xuming yet pays more attention to the reading experience of ordinary readers, and makes the text easier to understand with simpler and easier to understand language. By choosing the simple and vivid words “小小的” and “纯净的”, she demonstrates that she attaches great importance to the readability of the text (Chen, 2019). These words can more intuitively reflect the smallness and fragility of life, so that readers can quickly have sympathy for the moth. Liu Xuming adjusts her own language style, adapt to the public’s reading habits, and make abstract images so that readers can really feel. In short, Lu Gusun focuses on restoring the beauty of the original, while Liu Xuming focuses on making readers resonate.

Example 2:

Original: oncoming doom

Lu: “渐渐接近的毁灭伟力”

Liu: “即将到来的厄运”

In the original work, “oncoming doom”, as a symbolic expression of the power of death, carries a sense of threat, sublime and philosophical weight. This is not a simple misfortune, but an irresistible force of the universe, closely aligned with the central theme of this article: the small life in the face of the great life (Cao, 2014).

Lu’s long lexicographical career made him have an accurate understanding of context, style and symbolic meaning. He chooses the word “伟力” to highlight the supreme power of death over all things, and accurately captured the repressing rhythm in the process of death with “渐渐接近”. This choice of vocabulary also echoes the image of death that later flooded the whole city. The translation retains the philosophical depth of the original text. It can be seen that translator Lu pays special attention to the appropriateness of the context, and at the same time restores the magnificent momentum and solemn atmosphere contained in the original text. In contrast, Liu Xuming focuses

more on concise and easy-to-understand language, and directly hits the core message of the original text through common words such as “厄运” and “即将到来” to show that “the crisis is approaching”. This choice not only dissolves the sense of obscurity brought by the abstract philosophical intonation of the original text, but also highlights its pursuit of language clarity. Through Liu’s translation, readers can quickly understand the crisis faced by moths without having to try to understand the deep meaning. It can be seen that Lu’s translation is closer to the philosophical depth of the original text, while Liu’s translation is more in line with the daily reading habits of modern Chinese readers.

4.2 Syntactic Handling

Woolf is a representative writer in the field of stream-of-consciousness prose, and her unique sentence structure is highly recognizable. She often uses long and coherent sentences to simulate the rhythm of consciousness flow, which can not only expand the image space, but also create a deep artistic atmosphere. At the same time, she cleverly intersperses short sentences to strengthen the emotional rhythm, freeze the moment of action, and progressive tension layer by layer, thus enhancing the sense of urgency and infectiousness of the text. In addition, she often uses long sentences and short sentences intertwined structures to create a unique sense of breathing and musicality (Ren, 2015; Zuo, 2017). In the face of such stylized syntax, the translator’s subjectivity is reflected in how they interpret the rhythm of the original text. This analysis shows that Lu respects the original sentence structure and retains the consciousness flow, while Liu gives priority to the naturalness in Chinese expression, splitting long sentences and clarifying logical connections.

Example 3:

Original: Yet, because he was so small, and so simple a form of the energy that was rolling in at the open window and driving its way through so many narrow and intricate corridors in my own brain and in those of other human beings, there was something marvellous as well as pathetic about him.

Lu: “然而，正因为它微不足道，正因为它以简单的形式体现了从打开的窗户滚滚涌进并在我和其他人脑错综复杂的狭缝中冲击而过的一种活力，飞蛾不但引人唏嘘，还同样令人惊叹。”

Liu: “然而，正因为他弱小，以如此简单的形式呈现的能量，从那敞开的窗户涌进来，进入我的和芸芸众生那纷繁曲折的大脑神经，故而，他就越发有些既可怜又神奇了。”

Woolf’s style of stream of consciousness is evident in this sentence. She turns from a brief description of moths to the surging life energy outside the window, and connects the grand energy with the human heart. This sentence clearly shows that her thinking has shifted from subtle things to personal feelings, and then extended to the universe. Words such as “rolling in” and “driving its way” point to the power of energy penetrating the window. The “Narrow and intricate corridors” refers to the neural channel on the surface, but it actually implies the complexity of consciousness activities, and cleverly connects moths, energy and human thinking. The sentence is smooth and the thinking is clear. Readers can flow with her consciousness and understand the deep connection between micro-life and the universe.

Because of the different translation concepts and focuses, Lu Gusun and Liu Xuming adopted different strategies in dealing with this long sentence of stream of consciousness. Lu Gusun's translation tries to maintain the continuous feeling of the original text, so that the readers can directly feel the flow of consciousness. He translated "narrow and intricate corridors" as "错综复杂的狭缝", retaining the abstract meaning of metaphor without simply dealing with it as a physiological structure. With the words "滚滚涌进" and "冲击而过", the translator accurately grasps the power and speed of energy transfer. The overall translation is restrained and measured, which shows his emphasis on the beauty and deep thought of the original text. Liu Xuming is more concerned with fluency and readability. She divides the long sentences of the original text into shorter units to make the rhythm of the paragraphs clearer and more comfortable to read. She directly translated "corridors" as "大脑神经", turned abstract concepts into concrete things, added the daily expression of "既可怜又神奇" to convey emotions, and translated "other human beings" as "芸芸众生" to narrow the distance. Such translation is light and clear in logic, so that readers can intuitively feel the great and fragile beauty of moths. These two different ways of processing reflect two different considerations in translation: some are more committed to restoring the depth of the original text, and some are more concerned about whether the reader can easily understand it.

Example 4:

Original: He could no longer raise himself; his legs struggled vainly.

Lu: "它的细腿一阵乱蹬, 却全无结果, 它再也无法把身体挺直。"

Liu: "他的腿徒劳地挣扎着。他再也飞不起来了。"

Here, Woolf uses concise, powerful and clear pauses to focus on describing the action and state of the moth before it dies, showing its dynamic change from struggle to stillness. Her words are very precise. "Could no longer" highlights the sense of powerlessness and destiny that life energy is slowly depleted; and the word "vainly" directly points out that the moth's struggle has no result, giving a sense of sudden stop. The whole sentence has no complex emotional rendering, showing Woolf's consistent calm and restrained style.

When translating, Lu Gusun adjusts the order of the two clauses in the original text, which reflects his emphasis on accurately conveying the meaning and making the sentence read smoothly and logically. Tao (2017) says that Lu Gusun advocates that translation should carefully consider and repeatedly deliberate the original text. Therefore, when he adjusts the order, he considers the habitual expression of Chinese: first speak the process and then present the result. In terms of content, the phrase "细腿一阵乱蹬" is very graphic, showing its tense and fragile struggle vividly; "再也无法把身体挺直" suggests that moths fight desperately to maintain dignity and highlights its despair. At the end, he uses the concise and clear four-character phrase "全无结果" to make the translation more solemn and complete. Liu Xuming, however, doesn't change the order of the original text, splits the sentence into two short sentences with his own understanding, and ends each sentence with a period. This treatment

not only highlights the helplessness of moths, but also gives readers the space to imagine. She translated “struggled vainly” into “徒劳地挣扎着”, directly pointing out the vulnerability of moths. And “再也飞不起来了” simply shows that the life of the moth is over. This kind of translation makes the emotion of the original text stronger, and the helplessness and tragedy of the moth come to the surface. Liu Xuming accurately grasped the rhythm of the original short sentences, and her translation is more natural and smooth.

4.3 Semantic Transmission

Woolf is good at embedding philosophical thinking in images and narratives, making her language both concrete and profound. *The Death of the Moth* is full of abstract metaphors, multi-layer meaning and philosophical speculation. Its deeper value lies in seeing the big from the small, illuminating the essence of life in the universe with tiny life. When translating the prose, the core task of semantic transmission lies in the translator’s ability to grasp and choose the literal meaning, metaphorical meaning and philosophical meaning. Lu Gusun is known for his academic rigor, emphasizing the transmission of profound philosophical insights without simplification. In contrast, Liu Xuming gives priority to readers’ understanding, striving for semantic clarity and direct emotional expression, while moderately reducing abstraction.

Example 5:

Original: It seemed as if a fibre, very thin, but pure, of the enormous energy of the world had been thrust into his frail and diminutive body.

Lu: “我觉得在它羸弱的小身体里, 仿佛塞进了一缕纤细然而洗炼的世间奇伟的活力。”

Liu: “就好像天地间那巨大的能量被变成一根细丝, 纤细而又纯净, 掷进他那柔弱渺小的身体。”

In this sentence, the author integrates specific descriptions with philosophical thinking, clearly showing the core concept pursued by Woolf’s literature—to explore the universal meaning in concrete things. She concentrated the vast energy of the world into thin and pure fibers and injected it into the fragile body of moths. This treatment method not only highlights the sharp contrast between the tiny life of moths and the vast energy of the universe, but also implies that even if the moth is small, it still contains strong vitality.

Lu Gusun is very particular about the choice of vocabulary when translating. He chooses “一缕” to translate “fibre”, which perfectly retains the soft and flexible texture in the original. The word “洗炼” accurately conveys the meaning of “pure” and adds a sense of sophistication. Translating “the enormous energy of the world” as “世间奇伟的活力”, creates a vast artistic mood. Lu Gusun also adjusted the sentence order and placed “奇伟” at the end of the sentence to strengthen the magnificence of energy. The word “塞进” further highlights the translator’s objective and calm tone, which is integrated with the tone of the original narrative. These details reflect his translation concept that focuses on accuracy, conciseness and depth of connotation. Liu Xuming is good at transforming abstract concepts into concrete images, and vividly outlining the visual picture. “纤细而又纯净”

retains the parallel structure of the original text, making the semantic context clearer and easier to follow. And the use of “掷进” draws a powerful and dynamic scene. Based on her understanding of the noble aesthetics of prose, Liu Xuming uses concise and emotional language to let readers intuitively feel the life energy through the translation version and generate emotional resonance. When dealing with profound connotations, Lu Gusun tends to give vocabulary ideological weight, while Liu Xuming prefers to present the core meaning straightforwardly and clearly.

4.4 Stylistic Reproduction

Woolf's prose is full of lyrical and profound philosophy and she often conveys solemn thoughts on life in a subtle way. Her language perfectly integrates poetic style and philosophical restraint, easily creating a lasting resonance. In general, on the basis of faithfulness, Lu Gusun strives to improve the literary, poetic and solemn atmosphere of the translation, while enhancing the beauty and expressiveness of the language. Liu Xuming tends to be plain, colloquial, simple, and uses natural and simple language to shorten the distance from readers and convey emotions directly. These two translation methods clearly reflect the translators' distinct aesthetic preferences and translation positions.

Example 6:

Original: The possibilities of pleasure seemed that morning so enormous and so various.

Lu: “这天早晨，生命的乐趣表现得淋漓尽致又丰富多样。”

Liu: “那天早晨的乐趣如此丰富多彩。”

This sentence is a transition from the description of nature to the philosophical reflection of life. The author aims to describe the infinite vitality and joy contained in the morning world, so as to reflect the nature of the moth's life. And the “Possibilities of pleasure” have multiple meanings here, it refers to all the happiness and possibilities that life can contain. Although the author uses simple language like “enormous and so various”, she conveys profound praise for the value of life. At the same time, this pleasant atmosphere laid the tone for the later expression of sympathy and reflection. Formally, this sentence is short and unhurried, without any intense emotional catharsis, quietly passing on the vitality of nature.

In terms of stylistic reproduction, there are obvious differences between the two translators' aesthetic orientation and subjective initiative. Lu actively adds the modifier “生命的” to directly clarify the core theme of the text, and narrows the broad concept of “pleasure” to “the pleasure of life”, so that the meaning is more in line with the main purpose of the article. In addition, he uses “淋漓尽致” to strengthen the degree and expressiveness, and chooses “丰富多样” to render “various”. While being faithful to the original work, he gave Chinese expression a broader literariness. By using two easily remembered four-character phrases, he strives not only to make his translation conform to Chinese reading habits, but to accurately restores Woolf's implicit poetic prose style. Liu has always insisted on giving priority to the plainness, naturalness and readability of translation. She uses “丰富多彩” to

simply correspond to “enormous and various”, without adding any additional modifications. Her language is smooth and direct, focusing on clearly conveying the image of the original text, so that readers can intuitively grasp the morning’s vitality rather than immersed in the abstract beauty of the language itself. Liu adheres to the simple and easy-to-understand writing style, and uses the most concise language to accurately convey the connotation and style of the original text. Although this treatment weakens the poetic charm of the original work, it makes the text more readable and appealing, and perfectly presents the introverted characteristics of the essay.

Example 7:

Original: The body relaxed, and instantly grew stiff.

Lu: “蛾体先是松弛下来，旋即变得僵硬。”

Liu: “他的身体松软下来，又立即变得僵硬。”

This sentence is not only the presentation of the deep emotion of the article, but also a typical example of Woolf’s restrained and alienated writing style. The author deliberately avoids sensational language, but depicts the death scene of the moth with the most refined strokes. She uses simple words such as “relaxed” and “stiff” to depict the physiological changes at the end of life, while vividly showing the solemnity of death.

Lu consciously uses his own aesthetic judgment and language control to keep consistent with Woolf’s minimalist, introverted and objective narrative style. Through precise selection of temporal connectors, he successfully recreates the stylistic essence of the original text. His use of “先是……旋即……” is formal and literary, making the transition from relaxation to rigidity a controlled narrative rhythm, restoring Woolf’s detached and calm tone. He chooses two precise and concise words, “松弛” and “僵硬”, to capture the transition from life to death. He faithfully reproduces the calm and simple narrative style of the original work with restrained language. This method is not just semantic correspondence, but an aesthetic choice made on the basis of a deep understanding of the original style. Liu views translation from the perspective of readers’ experience, and actively transforms the rigid narration in the original text into a more direct expression that conforms to Chinese language habits. She abandons the formal time structure and used the simple connective “又” to create a more straightforward rhythm. Her choice of “松软”, rather than a more literary “松弛”, makes the language more colloquial and natural. Thus, the scene of the end of life becomes more vivid in her translation. However, Liu did not simplify the translation at will, but truly understood the connotation of the original text and the reader’s understanding mechanism, which enabled her to properly transform the original text into a form that was easier to understand and accept.

5. Conclusion

This study compares the translation of Virginia Woolf’s *The Death of the Moth* by Lu Gusun and Liu Xuming from the perspective of translator’s subjectivity. It focuses on four aspects: lexical selection,

syntactic processing, semantic transmission and stylistic reproduction. Woolf's prose is known for being concise, poetic, stream-of-consciousness in rhythm and profound in philosophy. The study finds that the two translators adopted different approaches to this kind of prose. Guided by a scholar-translator orientation, Lu Gusun emphasizes accurate word choice, faithful syntax, profound meaning and a consistent tone. His translation tries to restore the stream-of-consciousness rhythm, hierarchical metaphors and philosophical connotations of Woolf's prose. He believes translation is not just a language conversion; it also conveys the original text's deep meaning and literary value. In contrast, Liu Xuming centers her approach on reader acceptance. She prioritizes easy-to-understand language, smooth sentences, clear meaning and a more straightforward style. And she uses plain expressions to enhance emotional connection and reading comfort, creating a more accessible translation that lowers the reading threshold for ordinary readers. These differences do not mean one method is better than the other. Instead, they come from the translators' different academic backgrounds, translation views and aesthetic preferences. Their approaches show how translator's subjectivity works in prose translation. They balance loyalty to the original text and creativity, as well as the depth of the text and how easy it is for readers to understand.

In short, translator's subjectivity runs through the entire prose translation process from language and form to meaning and style. It directly affects the aesthetic quality, ideological depth and communication effect in their translation. Both Lu Gusun and Liu Xuming have contributed to the translation study of Woolf's prose, providing readers with two distinct but equally valuable versions. This study confirms that translator's subjectivity is a suitable framework for the analysis of modernist prose translation, and also provides a reference for future comparative studies and translation work involving similar texts.

References

- Cao, X. L. (2014). An analysis of rhetorical devices in Virginia Woolf's *The Death of the Moth*. *Journal of Eastern Liaoning University (Social Sciences)*, 16(3), 120-123.
- Chen, R. Y. (2019). An analysis of the Chinese translations of *The Death of the Moth* from the perspective of textual translation theory. *Literature Education*, (10), 135-137.
- Cui, L. X., & Li, S. H. (2023). An interpretation of translator's subjectivity from the perspective of transknowledgeology. *Technology Enhanced Foreign Language Education*, (2), 78-81+94+116.
- Fang, Y. (2021). Opposition, transgression and reconstruction: Gender and space in *To the Lighthouse*. *Shandong Foreign Language Teaching*, 42(3), 76-86.
- Huang, H. (2017). An analysis of the artistic features of *The Mark on the Wall*. *Chinese Language Construction*, (33), 30-31.
- Huang, J. P. (2019). The manifestation of semiotic meaning in translation: A case study of three translations of *The Death of the Moth*. *Modern Communication*, (18), 103+102.

- Liao, J., & Zhu, X. L. (2005). On the identity of the translator: From the evolution of translation concepts. *Chinese Translators Journal*, (3), 14-19.
- Lin, K. Q. (2026). Translator's subjectivity from the perspective of embodied-cognitive translation studies. *Foreign Language and Literature*, 42(1), 156-167.
- Liu, X. M. (2006). The sublime beauty in Virginia Woolf's *The Death of the Moth*. *Masterpieces Review*, (15), 97-101.
- Liu, Y. (2022). European and American feminist literary criticism after the "spatial turn". *Social Sciences in Guangdong*, (3), 189-196.
- Long, D., & Zeng, Q. (2025). The modern auditory subject in the auditory community: Re-listening to Mrs. Dalloway. *Foreign Languages Bimonthly*, 48(1), 131-139+161.
- Ren, Y. (2015). A review of the poetic language in Virginia Woolf's works. *Chinese Language Construction*, (20), 52-53.
- Robinson, D. (2006). *The Translator's Turn*. Beijing: Foreign Language Teaching and Research Press.
- Tao, Y. L. (2017). A study of Lu Gusun's translation philosophy. *Chinese Translators Journal*, 38(5), 72-76.
- Wang, L. (2013). A review of the translation studies of Virginia Woolf's novels in China. *Foreign Language and Literature*, 29(2), 128-131.
- Wang, X. C. (2025). The individual in public culture: The cultural shaping of soundscapes in Woolf's novels. *Foreign Literature Studies*, 47(6), 38-50.
- Xu, J. (2003). "Creative treason" and the establishment of translator's subjectivity. *Chinese Translators Journal*, (1), 8-13.
- Xu, Z. H. (2008). A stylistic interpretation of *The Death of the Moth*. *Journal of Fujian Agriculture and Forestry University (Philosophy and Social Sciences)*, 11(6), 114-118.
- Yang, J. Y. (2025). A study on the translation strategies for English prose from the perspective of functional equivalence theory: A case study of *The Death of the Moth* (Lu Gusun's translation). *English Language Teaching and Linguistics Studies*, 7(3), 45-52.
- Yu, Q., & Cai, F. (2025). "A semi-transparent envelope": An exploration of Woolf's view of reality from the perspective of George Moore's philosophy. *Huaxia Culture Forum*, (2), 287-295.
- Yu, X. X. (2024). Gender negotiation in a cross-cultural perspective: Chinese modern writers and Woolf's feminism. *Academic Monthly*, 56(5), 179-187.
- Zha, M. J., & Tian, Y. (2003). On translator's subjectivity: From the marginalization of the translator's cultural status. *Chinese Translators Journal*, (1), 21-26.
- Zhang, J., & Liu, B. (2013). A study on Lin Wusun's translation of *The Art of War* from the perspective of George Steiner's hermeneutic translation theory. *Chinese Language Construction*, (27), 43-44.

- Zhang, Y. F. (2010). Translator's subjectivity and essay translation: A case study of two translations of *A Country Life in England*. *Journal of Shanxi University (Philosophy and Social Science Edition)*, 33(2), 88-92.
- Zhong, W. H., & Zhou, J. (2006). The translator's limits and bottom line: On translator's subjectivity and the translator's mission. *Foreign Languages and Their Teaching*, (7), 42-46.
- Zuo, L. (2017). The expression of stream of consciousness in *To the Lighthouse*. *Chinese Language Construction*, (6), 23-25.