

METADISCOURSE IN LITERARY PROSE TRANSLATION FROM ENGLISH TO CHINESE: A PRELIMINARY STUDY

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Abstract: *Metadiscourse, defined as "discourse about the evolving discourse" (Adel, 2006), plays a crucial role in guiding readers' understanding, interpretation, and evaluation of textual content (Hyland, 2005). This study investigates the function of metadiscourse in conveying authorial intent and its contribution to preserving literary qualities during translation. Specifically, it examines the first two paragraphs of Aldo Leopold's personal essay "Great Possessions" and three Chinese translations, applying Hyland's (2005) interpersonal model of metadiscourse. The analysis reveals that the strategic interplay of interactive and interactional markers in the source text contributes significantly to its persuasive effect, a key aspect of Leopold's intended literariness. However, the three Chinese translations fail to reconstruct this coherent metadiscourse resources, resulting in a loss of the original's literary qualities. The study concludes that constructing metadiscourse coherence is essential not only for accurately interpreting the source text's intended meanings but also for preserving its literariness in the target text. This research has implications for translation practice and theory, highlighting the importance of metadiscourse analysis in literary prose translation.*

Keywords: *Metadiscourse, Translation, Prose, Literariness*

Introduction

The translation of literary prose presents a formidable challenge, demanding not only a profound comprehension of the source text but also the meticulous preservation of its artistic and stylistic integrity, the former being an indispensable prerequisite for the latter. Aldo Leopold's essay, "Great Possessions," exemplifies these demands with its distinctive literary voice, characterized by parabolic narratives and strategic rhetorical figures. Such features create layers of implied meaning and subtle contextual nuances crucial to its persuasive voice, yet studies of its Chinese translations (Chen, 2021; Cao, 2022) reveal instances where these qualities are compromised due to problematic interpretations.

To address such challenges, analytical tools that illuminate authorial guidance within the text are essential. While general discourse coherence, a vital dimension of textuality (Wang, 2024; Zhang, 2002; Pan, 2022), offers a framework for analysing textual organization (Wang, 2014; Dontcheva-Navratilova, 2017), this study employs the more specific lens of metadiscourse, defined by Adel (2006, p. 2) as "discourse about the evolving discourse." Widely recognized in contemporary discourse analysis, metadiscourse is critical for its role in shaping reader comprehension, interpretation, and evaluation of textual content (Hyland, 2005). Its persuasive function has been robustly demonstrated across genres like academic writing and political speeches (Hyland, 1998, 2005; Kashiha, 2022; Mai, 2016). Yet, despite its importance for conveying authorial intent, its role in literary translation, particularly between English and Chinese, has received scant attention. This study seeks to fill that gap. Through a close analysis of the metadiscourse in the opening paragraphs of Leopold's essay, this paper investigates the role of metadiscourse in expressing authorial intent and constituting the persuasive effect, and implications for literary prose translation.

Literature Review

Metadiscourse is conceptualized as an interpersonal resource writers employ to organize a discourse and convey their stance towards its content and audience (Hyland, 2017). As a multifaceted term, it encompasses linguistic features that guide readers in connecting, organizing, and interpreting information in line with the writer's perspective and the values of a specific discourse community (Hyland, 2017). Hyland's (2005, 2017) influential model of metadiscourse delineates two principal dimensions of interaction: the interactive dimension, which pertains to the organization of the discourse itself through devices such as transitions, frame markers, endophoric markers, evidentials, and code glosses; and the interactional dimension, which concerns the writer's explicit positioning in relation to their audience. The interactional dimension is further subdivided into features of stance (including hedges, boosters, attitude markers, and self-mentions) and engagement (comprising questions, directives, asides, appeals to shared knowledge, and reader pronouns).

Empirical research underscores the significance of metadiscourse across diverse fields, including academic and business writing, cross-disciplinary studies, linguistics, and genre analysis. Applying metadiscourse analysis to the interpretation of literary text offers significant benefits for a deeper, more nuanced understanding of the author's craft and the text's multifaceted meanings. By examining both the interactive and interactional resources, we gain insight into not only what the author says but how they construct their discourse and position themselves in relation to both the content and the reader. The interactive resources illuminate the text's structure, coherence, and logical flow, revealing how the author guides the reader through their arguments and narratives. The interactional resources, on the other hand, expose the author's stance, voice, and the implied relationship with the reader. This detailed analysis

of metadiscourse allows for a more precise identification of key themes, interpretive pathways, and the overall aesthetic effects, moving beyond a surface-level reading to appreciate the stylistic nuances and subtle manipulations of language that contribute to the "literariness" of the work. Essentially, metadiscourse serves as a crucial set of linguistic tools that shapes the reader's experience and guides their interpretation, making its analysis fundamental to a comprehensive understanding of the source text.

Table 1: Hyland's interpersonal model of metadiscourse (2005).

Categories	Functions	Examples
<i>interactive</i>	<i>guide readers through unfolding texts</i>	
transitions	express additive, contrastive, and consequential relations	<i>in addition, and, thus, but</i>
frame markers	signal text boundaries, stages, sequences, and discourse acts	<i>to conclude, finally, my purpose is</i>
endophoric markers	refer to information in other parts of the text	<i>see Fig, noted above, in section 2</i>
evidentials	refer to information outside the text	<i>Z states, (Y, 1990), according to X</i>
code glosses	restate or supply additional information	<i>such as, namely, in other words, e.g.</i>
<i>interactional</i>	<i>present authorial voices and involve readers</i>	
hedges	withhold authorial full commitment to a position	<i>might, possible, perhaps, about</i>
boosters	stress propositional force and express authorial certainty	<i>in fact, it is clear that, definitely</i>
attitude markers	indicate authorial attitude to a position	<i>surprisingly, unfortunately, I agree</i>
engagement markers	address readers to focus their attention or include them	<i>note that, consider, you can see that</i>
self-mentions	explicitly refer to authorial presence	<i>I, my, we, our</i>

Literary works strategically employ a range of literary devices to actively engage the reader in the co-creation of meaning, moving beyond the denotative to encompass implied interpretations. The successful navigation of literary reading, therefore, necessitates the generation of inferences, encompassing both a literal, surface-level understanding and the more nuanced, interpretive meanings that transcend the explicit wording of the text (McCarthy et al., 2021). These interpretive inferences are not arbitrary constructs but are shaped by the interplay of affordances and constraints presented by the text, its socio-historical and cultural context, and the reader's own interpretive framework. This process of literary interpretation is inherently dynamic and multifaceted, with meaning actively constructed rather than passively received through the intricate interaction of textual features, contextual factors, and the reader's individual perspective.

Given that the poetic function is considered the dominant function of literature (Jakobson, 1987), the primary objective of literary translation should be the preservation and reproduction of this poetic function and its attendant effects (Wang, 2020; Sun, 2022). The literary translator, therefore, faces the complex challenge of conveying not only the semantic content of the source text but also transmitting its literary qualities. This endeavour requires a subtle approach, aiming to generate an equivalent effect for the target-language reader that faithfully carries the literary force of the original. As Seago (2022) articulates, this process demands a keen sensitivity to the multiple layers and features within the text and a comprehensive understanding of the intended effects and their potential realization within a different linguistic, cultural, and literary system. The translator, in essence, must act as a sophisticated interpreter, mediating between two distinct semiotic landscapes to recreate the dynamic interplay of text, context, and reader experienced by the original audience.

Metadiscourse analysis is crucial for literary translation because it equips translators to preserve not just the literal meaning, but also the full effect of the original text. By understanding how metadiscourse functions in the source text, translators can make informed choices to achieve equivalent effects in the target text. This includes adapting to different linguistic and cultural

conventions for using metadiscourse, potentially substituting, omitting, or adding markers as needed. The goal is to maintain the original author's voice, style, and the text's overall coherence and reader engagement in the translation. Therefore, analysing metadiscourse enables a more nuanced and effective translation that captures the "literariness" of the original work.

The critical role of metadiscourse in persuasive discourse across various genres is well-documented. Crismore and Farnsworth (1989), for instance, demonstrated how Darwin used metadiscourse, particularly hedges and emphatics, to establish ethos and persuade readers. In corporate and governmental contexts, Hyland (1998a;1998b) and Ho (2016) showed that metadiscourse is employed to appeal to logos, ethos, and pathos in policy documents, with the frequency of use reflecting the writer's perceived need for persuasion. Furthermore, research has revealed cross-cultural and cross-modal differences: Mai (2016) identified different rhetorical priorities in Chinese and American political speeches, while Kashiha (2022) found that academic lectures utilize more engagement-focused metadiscourse than political speeches, reflecting their more dialogic nature. In summary, these studies reveal the significance of metadiscourse markers in persuading readers across different contexts.

While the persuasive function of metadiscourse is well-established in academic and political genres, its contribution to conveying authorial intent and shaping the thematic core of literary prose remains underexplored. This research, therefore, investigates the role of metadiscourse in expressing authorial intent and constructing persuasive effect and examines the implications of these metadiscourse markers for the preservation of literariness across linguistic boundaries in translation.

Methodology

This study employed a qualitative, comparative approach to investigate the use and translation of metadiscourse in literary prose. The initial two paragraphs of Aldo Leopold's "Great Possessions" were selected as the source text because they blend factual description of his land with his personal opinions and values, establishing the essay's core themes and authorial stance. This strategic deployment of language, rich in metadiscourse resources, aims not merely to inform but to persuade the reader of Leopold's land ethic. The concentrated presence of both informational and persuasive elements within a compact textual unit provides an ideal sample for analysing the interplay of metadiscourse, authorial intent, and the challenges of preserving these persuasive nuances in translation.

The target texts for this comparative analysis are three influential and widely available Chinese translations of *A Sand County Almanac*: Hou Wenhui (2016), Li Jiyuan (2016), and Cao Minglun (2022). The rationale for selecting these specific versions is as follows: Hou Wenhui's translation, first published in the 1990s, is a landmark work that formally introduced Leopold's ecological philosophy to a broad Chinese readership. Its enduring influence is demonstrated by its numerous reprints and its adoption (one of the essays) into the national curriculum in China. Cao's version was published by the prestigious People's Literature Publishing House. Cao has explicitly stated that his translation was motivated by a desire to capture the literary and aesthetic qualities of Leopold's prose, which he felt were underrepresented in previous translations that focused more on the ecological ideas. Li Jiyuan's translation, represents another contemporary version available to Chinese readers. Its inclusion allows for a broader analysis of current translation practices regarding Leopold's work, providing a third perspective to determine if patterns in metadiscourse translation are consistent across different modern renderings.

The analytical framework for this study was Hyland's (2005) model of metadiscourse (see Table 1). The metadiscourse markers from the source text was collected and analysed manually. Each potential marker was carefully examined to confirm its function as metadiscourse, ensuring that it served to organize the discourse or express the author's stance, rather than solely contributing to the propositional content. Subsequently, each of the three Chinese translations was analysed in the same manner, identifying the corresponding metadiscourse markers. This analysis examines the divergent interpretations of the source text's metadiscourse markers across the tree translation, highlighting the significance of constructing coherent metadiscourse and its implications for effectively transferring these metadiscursive functions into the target text.

Results and Discussion

ST: One hundred and twenty acres, according to the County Clerk, is the extent of my worldly domain. But the County Clerk is a sleepy fellow, who never looks at his record books before nine o'clock. What they would show at daybreak is the question here at issue.

Books or no books, it is a fact, patent both to my dog and myself, that at daybreak I am the sole owner of all the acres I can walk over. It is not only boundaries that disappear, but also the thought of being bounded. Expanses unknown to deed or map are known to every dawn, and solitude, supposed no longer to exist in my county, extends on every hand as far as the dew can reach. (Leopold, 1949)

TT1: 120 英亩, 据县政府书记员的记录, 就是我在这世间的领地范围。但那位书记员是个懒家伙, 上午 9 点前从不会查看土地登记簿。而登记簿在拂晓时分能说明些什么, 是个值得在此讨论的问题。

不管看不看登记簿, 这都是个事实, 一个对我和我的狗都很明显的事实: 在拂晓时分, 我就是我能漫步于其上的这整片土地的唯一主人。此时不仅地界线会消失, 思想的樊篱也会荡然无存。这种地契不知、地图不晓的寥廓, 却为每一个黎明所洞悉; 人们以为在本县已不复存在的荒野, 却朝露珠能触到的每一个方向延伸。(Cao, 2022)

TT2: 120 英亩, 根据郡书记官的说法, 这是我全部领地的疆域面积。不过那个郡书记官总是睡不醒的样子, 从不会在上午 9 点以前查看他的登记簿。它们在拂晓时分会说明什么, 是我们这里要面对的问题。

不管有没有登记簿, 我和我的狗都明白这一事实: 在拂晓时, 我是那些我能走过的所有土地的唯一拥有者。此时, 消失的不仅是疆界, 还有身受疆界限制的感觉。契约和地图所不了解的广阔区域, 每个黎明都会了解。而被认为已从此地消失的幽寂, 一直可以延伸到露珠所至的每个地方。(Li, 2016)

TT3: 按照县管理员的说法, 一百二十英亩是我的领地范围。不过, 这位县管理员是个贪睡的家伙, 在九点以前, 他是从来不去查他的记录簿的。这些记录簿在拂晓时会证明些什么, 在这儿还真是一个值得争论的问题呢。

不管记录簿不记录簿, 拂晓时, 对我的狗和我本人来说, 我就是所有我可以走过的地方的唯一事实上的主人。这不仅是指边界的消失, 而且还有思想限制的消失。不为人知的扩张对每个黎明来说都是很熟悉的, 而僻静——在我国被认为是不存在了, 也一直扩张到露水能洒到的所有地方。(Hou, 2016)

TT4: 一百二十英亩，按县书记员的说法，就是我在这世上的全部领地面积。但书记员这家伙很贪睡，九点之前从不查看登记簿，这就很有问题——拂晓时分登记簿上记着的会是多少？

管它什么登记簿，拂晓时分，所有我能踏上的土地都只属于我一人，这对我和我的狗来说是再清楚不过的事实。此时，消失的不仅是地界，身心也没了束缚。地契不知、地图不晓的辽阔，每个黎明都一清二楚；而人们以为在本县无处可觅的独处的自在，此刻四处弥漫，遍及露水所及的每一寸土地。

Table 2: Metadiscourse markers from the source text and its translations

Categories	Source text	Translation 1	Translation 2	Translation 3	Translation 4
Evidentials	according to; Books or no books	据...记录; 不管看不看登记簿	根据...说法 不管有没有登记簿	按照...说法 不管记录簿不记录簿	按...说法 管它什么记录簿
Transitions	But; not only... but also	但 不仅...也	不过 不仅...还有	不过 不仅...而且	但 不仅...也
Attitude Markers	at issue	议论	面对	争论	很有问题
Self-Mentions	my; I; myself	我的; 我; 我	我的; 我; 我	我的; 我; 我本人	我的; 我; 我
Frame Markers	here	在此	这里	这儿	这就
Boosters	it is a fact; patent	事实; 很明显	事实; 明白	事实上	事实; 再清楚不过
Hedges	supposed	以为	被认为	被认为	以为

In the opening paragraphs of "Great Possessions", Aldo Leopold masterfully employs metadiscourse (see table 2) to construct a persuasive argument that subtly challenges conventional notions of land ownership. The first paragraph strategically utilizes evidential markers ("according to") to establish an initial, seemingly objective premise, which is immediately juxtaposed with a contrasting perspective introduced by a transition ("But"), while a crucial frame marker ("the question here at issue") explicitly defines the central theme, directing the reader's interpretation. The assertive booster ("it is a fact, patent") reinforces the validity of Leopold's experiential claim to ownership. Repeated self-mentions ("I", "my") emphasize personal experience as the defining factor of ownership, shifting from legal boundaries to the limits of his physical exploration. Transitions and attitude markers like ("It is not only... but also...") introduce a more abstract, philosophical dimension, extending the concept of ownership beyond the purely physical. A hedge ("supposed") acknowledges a common perception while simultaneously questioning it. Through this strategic deployment of metadiscourse, Leopold effectively persuades the reader to reconsider the meaning of "possession", prioritizing direct experience and connection with nature over legalistic definitions, masterfully achieving a persuasive effect through the artful use of language, reminiscent of academic discourse that subtly guides reader interpretation. The metadiscourse is not merely decorative; it's integral to how Leopold constructs his argument and persuades the reader to accept his alternative view of "great possessions". The metadiscourse is the mechanism by which Leopold establishes his ethos, shapes his logos, and evokes pathos to convey his attitude towards land and nature.

But the translation (TT1) demonstrates a significant failure to adequately convey the nuanced metadiscourse of Leopold's original text, thereby diminishing its persuasive power and literary effect. The translator's inability to construct a coherent understanding of the source text's metadiscourse not only reduces the poetic effect but also results in substantive

misinterpretations. One critical issue is the misinterpretation of the evidential marker "according to the County Clerk", which TT1 shifts to focus on the "记录(records)" rather than the Clerk's opinion. This seemingly small change has cascading consequences, disrupting the carefully constructed contrast between official documentation and personal experience that underpins Leopold's argument. It undermines his ethos by weakening the subtle challenge to authority, and disrupts the logos by rendering the subsequent, personal comment about the "sleepy fellow" illogical. Furthermore, "the question here at issue" as "值得在此议论的问题 (a question worth discussing here)" fails to capture the crucial function of the original "here" as a frame marker that presents his doubt about the sleepy Clerk, suggesting his possession is great rather than only 120 acres. "Here" used to refer to a particular point or aspect reached in an argument, situation, or activity, rather than "this place" as in the three translations. The question "What they would show at daybreak" is not a genuine inquiry but a deliberate quibble to doubt the Clerk "who never look at the record books before nine o'clock". The phrase "Books or no books" at the beginning of the second paragraph function as a dismissive evidential marker, setting aside the legalistic record-keeping as irrelevant to the deeper, experiential truth he is about to reveal. The translation in TT1, "不管看不看登记簿 (no matter look at the record books or not)," misses this dismissive function, as does TT2, "不管有没有登记簿 (no matter there exist the record books or not)". Both fail to convey the shift in authority from the document to the "I" of the narrator. In contrast, TT3, "不管记录簿不记录簿" more faithfully captures the intended meaning and fits coherently within the overarching metadiscourse. Another error involves the misinterpretation of "solitude", a failure rooted in overlooking the parallel structure established by metadiscourse marker "not only...but also...", which highlights a crucial textual connection. The second paragraph creates a clear parallel structure: (Physical) "boundaries that disappear" corresponds to "Expanses unknown to deed or map" and (Mental) "the thought of being bounded" disappears corresponds to "solitude... extends on every hand". This structure demands that solitude be interpreted an internal, psychological state resulting from the dissolution of mental boundaries. Translating it as an external condition like "wilderness (荒野, TT1)", "serenely quiet (幽寂, TT2)", or "remote and quiet (僻静, TT3)" breaks this semantic and psychological parallel. These translations substitute an internal feeling with an external place, disrupting the reader's ability to make the correct inference about the narrator's inner experience. This becomes an obstacle for constructing the ultimate interpretive inference: viewing land not as a commodity we own, but as a community to which we belong. Consequently, misinterpretations of metadiscursive elements yield a target text that is less coherent and persuasive, failing to capture the intricate interplay of ethos, logos, and pathos that characterizes Leopold's original prose.

The comparative analysis of the three Chinese translations of the opening paragraphs of Leopold's "Great Possessions" reveals a consistent pattern of challenges in translating metadiscourse. Across all three translations, there was a discernible tendency to either literalize or neutralize the subtle metadiscourse resources that contribute significantly to the poetic effect of the original prose. While some translations demonstrated a greater awareness of individual metadiscursive markers than others, a comprehensive understanding of how these markers function collectively to create the literariness was generally lacking. The mistranslations in TT1, TT2, and TT3 stem primarily from a lack of understanding of the metadiscourse coherence of the source text. This lack of understanding of metadiscourse coherence is the one of the major reasons for the misinterpretations and the overall failure to preserve the literariness of the source text. The improved translation (TT4), by understanding the metadiscourse coherence—how all these elements work together, moves beyond mere linguistic transfer to deliver a target text that

is not only interpretively accurate but also retains the persuasive power and literariness that define the original prose.

Conclusion

This study set out to investigate the crucial role of metadiscourse in conveying authorial intent and shaping literariness in Aldo Leopold's "Great Possessions". Through a comparative analysis of the original text and three Chinese translations, this research has demonstrated that metadiscourse is not merely a decorative feature of prose but is integral to the construction of meaning and the literariness of a text, and thus a nuanced understanding of metadiscourse coherence is fundamental to the successful preservation of a literary work's persuasive power and stylistic integrity in translation.

The findings reveal a consistent pattern of challenge across the selected translations in rendering the full function of Leopold's metadiscursive strategies. The analysis indicated that translators often identified and translated individual markers but failed to grasp that they function as complex assemblages, where the overall interpretive effect is guided by a series of nudges working in concert. The lack of what can be termed "metadiscourse coherence"—an understanding of how metadiscourse markers work together to build a consistent authorial ethos, logos, and pathos—is a primary reason for the identified shortcomings in the translations.

The limitations of this study naturally suggest avenues for future research. As a qualitative case study focused on a very small textual sample—two paragraphs of a single essay—its findings are illustrative rather than generalizable. Future research could expand this analytical framework to a larger corpus, including other works by Leopold, or literary prose from different authors and periods.

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