

# The Application of Cohesive Devices in Chinese-English Translation of A Slave Mother

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**Abstract:** Based on the perspective of cohesive devices, the thesis selects a Chinese essay —A Slave Mother from Selected Modern Chinese Essays 1 for analysis. This thesis aims at studying the recurrence of the covert coherence by cohesive devices. It is found that the application of cohesive devices can reproduce the original meaning and achieve textual cohesion of Chinese essay.

**Keywords:** Cohesive devices; A Slave Mother; Chinese essay

## 1. Introduction

As for Chinese essay, it is prominently featured by parataxis but the meaning is expressed between the lines. The Chinese essay A Slave Mother, concisely expresses the main idea and depicts vivid character images full of sarcasm in real life, without any complicated and exquisite decoration on language. Besides, it is loaded with heavy cultural and social background, with a purpose to reveal the cruelty and degeneration of feudal society in China. The original language is simple and indirect but simultaneously inspiring. For these reasons, how to reproduce these thought-provoking ideas in English is worth studying.

## 2. An Introduction to Cohesive Devices

In their book *Cohesion in English*, Halliday and Hasan classify cohesive devices in English into grammatical cohesion and lexical cohesion. Grammatical cohesion includes reference, substitution, and ellipsis. Conjunction is on the boundary of grammatical and lexical cohesion, which can be considered to be either grammatical cohesion or lexical cohesion<sup>[1]</sup>.

In A Text Book of Translation, Newmark states that cohesion remains a talking point in translation and it is the most useful component of analysis or linguistics in text when it is applied in translation<sup>[2]</sup>. That is to say, cohesion is important in composing a text and the knowledge of cohesion is of great use for a translator in the process of translation. It can be a guide to reproduce the implicit information and hidden logical relations in Chinese to English essay translation.

## 3. Analysis of A Slave Mother and Its English—translated Version

The following examples are selected from the bilingual version of A Slave Mother in Selected Modern Chinese Essay 1<sup>[3]</sup>. The author of A Slave Mother is Roushi and the translator is Zhang Peiji.

### 3.1 Analysis of Reference

(1)她底丈夫是一个皮匠，就是收集乡间各猎虎底兽皮和牛皮，贩到大埠上出卖的人。但有时也兼做点农作，芒种的时节，便帮人家插秧，他能够将每行插得非常直，假如有五个人同在一个水田里，他们一定叫他站在第一个做标准(Rou, 2005:224)。

He was a dealer in animal skins which he bought from hunters in the countryside and sold in town. Sometimes he also worked in the fields; early each summer he turned farm-hand, transplanting rice for other people. As he had learned to transplant the seedlings in wonderfully straight rows, the peasants always asked him to help them (Zhang, 2007:335).

In the original sentence, there are three pronouns “她底丈夫”，“他”和“他们”。The first two pronouns refer to the same person—the young woman’s husband. In contrast, there are five pronouns “he” in the translation and they are all used as subjects in each sentence. It can be seen that such processing method contributes to the cohesion and coherence of the translated text, and also, it contributes to the strengthening effect of the main character. Firstly, “她底丈夫” is not literally translated

into “her husband” but translated into “he”, which can make the following reference unanimous and make the translated text coherent because this cited example is the beginning part of the source text and the use of reference “he” can arouse foreigners’ interest to figure out who “he” is.

(2) 这样以后，她望见秀才从外面回来而旁边没有她坐着的时候，就非得急忙避开不可。即使她在身边，有时也该让开一些，但这种动作，她要做得非常自然，而且不能让旁人看出，否则，她又要向她发怒，说是她有意要在旁人的前面暴露她大娘底丑恶。而且以后，竟将家里的许多杂务都堆积在她底身上，同一个女仆那么样(Rou, 2005:232)。

After that, whenever she saw the scholar return home, she always tried to avoid him if his wife was not present. But even in the presence of his wife, the young woman considered it necessary to keep herself in the background. She had to do all this naturally so that it would not be noticed by outsiders, for otherwise the wife would get angry and blame her for purposely discrediting her in public. As time went on, the scholar’s wife even made the young woman do the work of a maidservant (Zhang, 2007:344).

In the original sentence, there are nine personal references “她”, but not all of them refer to the same person. For Chinese native speakers, they may easily make clear of what each “she” refers to according to the context, but for foreigners, if these nine “她” are all translated into “she”, it certainly causes ambiguity among them. In order to make the context logical and make the meanings clear, the personal references are made specific and concrete. Furthermore, some conjunctions whenever, if, but, so that, for, and, and as are added to make the implicit logical relations and covert coherence explicit. It can be concluded that the four types of cohesive devices are not used in isolation and they are usually used with other types of cohesive devices to achieve cohesion and coherence of the translated text.

### 3.2 Analysis of Substitution

(1) 他看她和黄妈磨过年的粉，但还没有磨了三升，就向她叫：“歇一歇罢，长工也好磨的，年糕是人人要吃的(Rou, 2005:233)。”

One day, he saw the young woman and the kitchen-maid grinding rice for the New Year Festival. They had hardly started grinding when he said to the young woman, “You’d better have a rest now. We can let the farmhand do it, since everybody is going to eat the cakes (Zhang, 2007:345).”

By applying the substituted items, different parts of the text can be linked together. A substitution “do” is used to express the third “grind”, avoiding wordy expression. Besides, “since” is added to reveal the casual relationship which is deeply hidden in the original so as to make the English translation all the more cohesive and coherent.

(2) “儿子，”她有一次在厨房里对黄妈说，“谁没有养过呀？我也曾怀过十个月的孕，不相信有这么的难受。而且，此刻的儿子，还在‘阎罗王’的簿里，谁保的定生出来不是一只癞蛤蟆呢？也等到真的‘鸟儿’，从洞里钻出来看见了，才可在我底面前显威风，摆架子，此刻，不过是一块血的猫头鹰，就那么的装腔，也显得太早了一些(Rou, 2005:234)。”

“Why so much fuss about having a baby?” said the scholar’s wife one night to the kitchen-maid. “I myself was once with child for ten months. I just can’t believe she’s really feeling so bad. Who knows what she’s going to have? It may be just a little toad! She’d better not try to bluff me, throwing her weight around before the little thing is born. It’s still nothing but a clot of blood! It’s really a bit too early for her to make such a fuss (Zhang, 2007:346)!”

Although Chinese enjoys repetition, but it doesn’t indicate that it never uses substitution. Sometimes, substitution is used rhetorically to achieve some kind of effect or purpose. The scholar’s wife spew out a string of malicious words to describe the young woman’s unborn baby in the source text, which reveals her jealousy and on the opposite side, it also reflects the misery of the pawned wife’s life. “儿子” is not literally rendered into “the son” but into “a baby” because it implies that so-called “儿子” has not been born yet and thus the gender is still unknown. Moreover, “儿子” is originally a lively individual, but the scholar’s wife describes him as “鸟儿” as substitute, and is translated into “a little thing” which is inanimate and lifeless so as to intensely reveal the wicked image of the scholar’s wife. Furthermore, for the last two clauses of the source text, there is no logical connective but these two sentences imply that the scholar’s wife is dissatisfied with the state of the pawned wife’s pregnancy and that is why she is so irritated. Therefore, the conjunction “too...to...” is used to explicitly reveal the scholar’s wife’s irritation and dissatisfaction.

### 3.3 Analysis of Ellipsis

(1) 这个少妇给他哺着奶，邻舍的妇人围着他们瞧，有的称赞婴儿底鼻子好，有的称赞婴儿底口子好，有的称赞婴儿底两耳好(Rou, 2005:236)。

While the young woman was breast-feeding him, womenfolk from the neighborhood gathered around to feast their eyes upon the boy. Some liked his nose; other, his mouth; still others, his ears (Zhang, 2007:348).

In the source sentence, “称赞” is repeated to be used for three times, but in its translation, it is omitted and just being used for a time. Ellipsis is a way frequently used to avoid repetition. English often omit the same word from a sentence while Chinese usually repeat the same word.

(2)她可以听见房外的大娘底声音在高声地骂着什么, 她一时听不出在骂谁, 骂烧饭的女仆, 又好像骂她自己 (Rou, 2005:231) .....

Though she could not make out just who was being scolded, it seemed to be either the kitchen-maid or herself (Zhang, 2007:344).

As it is mentioned in the analysis of substitution, repetition of words or meanings is much more frequently used in Chinese than in English. In the original sentence, there are four “骂”, but just one corresponding word “scold” can be seen.

### 3.4 Analysis of Conjunction

(1)春将完了, 夏将到了, 可是她, 连孩子冬天用的破烂棉袄都拿出来, 移交给他的父亲---实在, 他已经在床上睡去了 (Rou, 2005:228)。

Although it was late spring and summer was near, she took out the baby’s shabby cotton-padded winter jacket and wanted to give it to her husband, but he was fast asleep (Zhang, 2007:340).

In the cited part, the young woman is going to leave her son and to be a pawned wife in another family. But as a mother, she is so grieved and unwilling to part from her son. In the translated sentence, a connective “although” is added to show that winter is still far away but the young woman takes out the winter jacket to give it to her husband for fear that if she leaves, her son cannot be taken good care of. However, her husband does not care about her leaving and the son and he falls asleep quickly and soundly. Therefore, the adversative connective “but” is added to explicitly convey the adversative logical relation to emphasize her husband’s indifference and selfishness.

(2)奔跑了一下午, 哀求了一上午, 又到城里买礼物, 走得乏了, 饿了, 也迟了 (Rou, 2005:240)。

I spent the whole morning begging for a loan and then I had to go to town to buy the gift. I was tired and hungry. That’s why I came late (Zhang, 2007:354).

Chinese language mainly relies on covert coherence and context, focusing on temporal or logical sequences to express meanings. In the source example, it relies on temporal sequence to explain why the woman’s husband is so late for Qiu Bao’s birthday. Thus, “and”, “then”, “why”, are added to make the implicit temporal and casual logical relation explicit, which contributes to cohesion and coherence of the translated text.

### 3.5 Analysis of Lexical Cohesion

(1)又因他底大妻不允许, 只准他典一个, 典个三年或五年, 叫我物色相当的女人 (Rou, 2005:225)。

But his wife objects and will only allow him to hire somebody else’s wife for a few years. I’ve been asked to find them a woman (Zhang, 2007:336).

In the source text, “典一个”, and “物色女人” are verb-object collocations, and correspondingly, they are translated in the form of verb-object structure. Moreover, “典一个” is not literally rendered into “pawn a wife”, for the collocation with the subject is taken into consideration. If “典” is translated into “pawn”, then the subject should be the skin dealer, because he can get money from pawning his wife. But, the indirect subject is the scholar who pays money to get a temporary wife. In order to precisely express the intention of the source text and make the context coherent, it is better to choose “hire” as the verb. It inspires us that cohesion and coherence of the text involves the collocation of subjects and predicates, verbs and nouns.

## 4. Conclusion

After analysis, it can be seen that the application of cohesive devices in translation of Chinese essay can help reproduce the hidden meanings and the essence and beauty of the source essay are able to recur by means of the cohesive devices.

## References

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