DESCRIPTIVE PASSAGES IN TRANSLATION: CLASSIFIED BY TOPICS

(ABSTRACT)

This honours thesis observes how an awareness of the description techniques and their effects in the English original text can help ensure a more effective Chinese translation. The research is conducted through a comparative study of groups of modern English literary passages classified by topics. Such a comparison aims at discovering the different characteristics of descriptions and their significance. The English passages are then compared with their Chinese translations to assess their literary quality with respect to the accuracy and vividness of the conveyance of the original texts' messages. Relevant translation techniques are discussed.

The passages chosen are extracts from modern literary texts in English. To ensure a fair and valid discussion, abridged versions or English translations from other languages are not included in the original texts. These passages are classified under two major topics: character description and environment description, each of which has its sub-topics. Each sub-topic deals with more specific aspects of the literary significance of the type of description concerned.

From the study, it is found that a successful description can perform many functions such as manifestation of the theme, implication of the emotions and dispositions...
of characters, and indication of the development of the character(s) concerned. Such functions render a descriptive passage literarily significant in the text as a whole.

The study points to the need of a literary awareness in translating descriptive passages, which would alert a translator to issues such as the meaning of details in descriptions and the interaction between characteristic portrayal and scene-setting description in literary writing. This would put the translator in a better position to preserve the original’s tone, rhythm and imagery created through the choice of words and syntactic patterns in a translation with a matching effect.