



**To cite this article:**

Su, Rina. "Analysis of the Chinese Translation of *Seahorse* by Bruce Pascoe from a *Skopos* Theory Perspective." *The AALITRA Review: A Journal of Literary Translation* 15 (December 2020): 36-43.

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Australian Association for Literary Translation

## Analysis of the Chinese Translation of *Seahorse* by Bruce Pascoe from a *Skopos* Theory Perspective

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### Abstract

In this article, I apply the basic rules of *Skopos* theory to develop a theoretical framework to analyze the translation of Bruce Pascoe's novel *Seahorse*. The analysis is conducted at lexical, syntactic and stylistic levels. Lexically, the applications of reduplicated words and interjections are discussed to illustrate the changes needed to address children's aesthetic interests. At the syntactic level, the translations of passive sentences and attributive clauses are handled by employing strategies of conversion and division to fit with the Chinese expressive system. In terms of style, the figurative language and onomatopoeia in translation aim at conforming to the characteristics of children's literature and meeting the cognitive ability of the target readers.

### Introduction

Children's literature is one of the earliest and most important forms of literature that connects young people with the outside world. Such literary works not only broaden their horizon, but also help them enhance their outlook on life and values. With the frequent exchange of domestic and foreign culture, China has witnessed a proliferation of children's literature in translation. However, Australian children's literature and related research into the translation of such works are still far from being fully explored in China. In order to give young readers in China a glimpse of Indigenous Australian children's literature, a series of ten Indigenous Australian fiction works have been recently translated by teachers from Inner Mongolia Normal University into both Chinese and Mongolian language and published in February 2020. In this article, I will analyze the translation of one of these works, *Seahorse* written by Bruce Pascoe, from the perspective of *Skopos* theory.

Bruce Pascoe is an award-winning Indigenous Australian author of Bunurong and Tasmanian heritage. His works include literary fiction, non-fiction, poetry, essays and children's literature. Pascoe is best known for his non-fiction work *Dark Emu: Black Seeds: Agriculture or Accident?* Pascoe is the recipient of many awards and accolades, including the 1999 Australian Literature Award (with David Foster), the 2013 Prime Minister's Literary Award for Young Adult Fiction; and the 2020 Eve Pownall Award for *Young Dark Emu: A Truer History*. Pascoe works to preserve the Wathaurong language through the Wathaurong Aboriginal Co-operative and was nominated Person of the Year at the 2018 National Dreamtime Awards.

*Seahorse*, published in 2015 by Magabala Books, is Bruce Pascoe's latest children's novel. In this accomplished and exciting adventure story set on the southern coast of Australia, Pascoe depicts a spectacular, secluded spot named Seahorse Bay where Jack's family escape whenever they can. The family spend idyllic days exploring the waters of the bay, diving, fishing and cooking up feasts on the beach. Jack, the

protagonist, is a twelve-year-old boy full of curiosity and spirit of adventure. Tanya, Jack's younger sister, is an eight-year-old courageous girl, as curious towards the sea as her brother. Vince, Jack's father, is an Indigenous man who regards difficulties as nothing but challenges. Carla, Jack's mother, is more attuned to the tranquility and warmth of fishing, rather than the coldness and adventure of snorkeling. The steady supply of everyday food relies on her extraordinary ability to catch crayfish. The story unravels as Jack and Vince prepare to take Tanya to undertake her first snorkeling adventure. It is Jack who runs into a stainless deck cleat under the sea. The cleat, as a token, unveils the mysterious life of a sunken ship that Jack later names *Seahorse*. The appearance of the ship takes a mysterious bloke spying on them at the table, and a drug ring emerges following his arrest. Fortunately, Jack's family acquires the ownership of Seahorse after a short investigation (Pascoe 2015).

In addition to the interesting storyline and vivid characters, the novel features unique stylistic elements of children's literary works, such as figurative and familiar language; and vivid and picturesque descriptions. In order to maintain the original linguistic, stylistic and content characteristic of *Seahorse*, and to avoid a rigid translation of the source text, I take into account the cognitive capabilities and reading habits of the target readers. As such, the translation strategies employed conform within the framework of *Skopos* theory.

### **Overview of *Skopos* theory**

*Skopos* theory drew a shift in the translation paradigm from linguistically oriented concepts to a functionally and socio-culturally oriented framework. Christiane Nord notes "functionalist means focusing on function or functions of the text and translation" (1). In the theoretical framework of *Skopos*, translation means making a text in the target context for the target purpose and target recipient in the target language. The task of the translator is to select appropriate translation strategies based on the original text to create a translation that meets the expectations of the target audience. The theory shakes the central position of the original text and frees the translator from the shackles of traditional theories, thus opening up an alternative perspective for translation research and practice.

According to *Skopos* theory, translation is guided by three principles. First, the *Skopos* rule, which states that when expressing the connotation of literary works, translators should take into account the intention of the original author and the context of the target language. Second, the coherence rule proposes that the target text "must be interpretable as coherent with the target text receiver's situation" (Reiss and Vermeer 113). In addition:

Translators should fully consider the cultural background and social environment of the target text receiver and create a text that is meaningful to the receivers, that is, to maximize the semantic coherence, readability and acceptability of the target text, so that the receiver can understand its meaning, and only in this way can information exchange be successful.

(Bian 91)

Third, the fidelity rule refers to the inter-lingual coherence between the target and the source text, that is, the translation should be faithful to the original text. However, the degree and form of faithfulness are determined by the purpose of the translation and the translator's understanding of the original text. Among the three rules

of *Skopos* theory, coherence rule and fidelity rule are subordinate to the *Skopos* rule, and the coherence between inter-lingual and intra-lingual should serve the purpose of translation. Therefore, based on *Skopos* theory, my translation strategies place the target reader at the center of the translation process.

*Skopos* is considered one of the most useful approaches to the translation practice. It provides a useful framework for the translation of children's literature. Since the target audience consists of young readers, translators need to recognize that "children's reading ability is greatly different from adult readers because of their special age, psychology and personality" (Tong 126) and adjust their translation strategies accordingly. Translation of children's literature should achieve two aims: ensure the readability of the text in the cultural environment of the target language; and convey the characteristics of the source culture. As such, the translator should decide how much to retain and to what extent to change the original text according to *Skopos* theory. For example, the use of reiterative, onomatopoeic words, interjections, and figurative language in translation will cater for young readers' aesthetic and cognitive levels. Strategies of conversion and division are applied, in accordance with both coherence and fidelity rules. In addition, passive voice and attributive sentences are adjusted to conform to the reading habits of young readers in China.

### **The application of *Skopos* theory to the translation of *Seahorse***

The vocabulary of the source text is vivid and simple. I therefore attempted to replicate it by adopting the principle of faithfulness in order to meet the needs of the target readers, namely children. My translation aims to express the general idea of the fiction faithfully and smoothly in order to capture the true intention of the original text.

At the syntactic level, the source text features dialogue and simple sentences, which I endeavour to reproduce, through the principle of coherence, to capture the fluency of the original text. The strategies of conversion and division help me tackle the translation of English passive voices and attributive clauses, to ensure my translation suits the reading habits of the target readers. At the stylistic level, I adopt the *Skopos* principle to deliver the figurative language and onomatopoeia that would effectively spark children's reading interests.

### **The application of reduplicated words**

The examples below illustrate my strategy to translate by using reduplicated words to imitate the tone that young people may use to make them feel intimate.

#### *Example 1*

He was looking into small caves for crayfish when he saw these two great bulging eyes and these creepy tentacles - the thing started sidling out of the cave with the weirdest walk you've ever seen.

(Pascoe 16)

他正在小洞穴里寻找龙虾时，突然看到两只巨大的鼓鼓的眼睛和令人毛骨悚然的触须，然后这只章鱼从洞里踩着杰克见过的最诡异的步伐鬼鬼祟祟地从洞里踱步出来。

Here, I render “siding out of the cave” as “鬼鬼祟祟地从洞里踱步出来”. By reduplicating the words “鬼鬼祟祟” with the literary meaning of sneaky, I aim to vividly depict the image of the octopus hiding in the small cave and Jack’s astonishment and excitement when he sees the little creature for the first time in the sea.

#### *Example 2*

He was relieved to see it still there, looking back at him in the pop-eyed way of seahorse – as if it had had a terrible fright.

(Pascoe 42)

当看到海马还在那里时，他松了一口气。那只海马也用海马特有的圆鼓鼓的眼睛盯着杰克，像是受到了惊吓。

In this example, I aim to accurately convey the emotional information in the source text by rendering “pop-eyed” as “圆鼓鼓的”. My translation embodies the beauty of the rhythm of children’s literature by duplicating the Chinese word 鼓 to capture Jack’s fondness of the little seahorse.

#### *Example 3*

He nearly laughed into his snorkel watching her wrestling with the knife, the abalone and the curling seaweed while struggling to stay below the surface.

(Pascoe 20)

当坦尼娅再水下挣扎着与小刀、鲍鱼、和弯弯曲曲的海藻斗争时，杰克在一旁看着，在水下强忍笑意，差一点就要在呼吸器里笑出声来。

In the example above, my translation features many reduplicated words to enhance both the sense of rhythm and the readability of the work to children. As such, I render “curling” as “弯弯曲曲” instead of “弯曲” to emphasize the shape of the seaweed and visualize the scene where little Tanya struggles with the seaweed.

### **The application of interjections**

Children are easily fascinated by things that are novel and unique to them. The use of interjections in translation serves the purpose of conveying the protagonists’ emotions in the source text, as exemplified below.

#### *Example 4*

Jack could smell the garlic and lemon juice and he picked pieces straight out of the pan with his fingers. Delicious.

(Pascoe 24)

很快，大蒜和柠檬汁的香味儿就飘进了杰克的鼻子里，他用手直接从锅里拿起鲍鱼片就往嘴里塞。啊！真是太美味了！

In this example, the use of the interjection “啊！真是太美味了！” in the target text not only produces the same phonetic effect as the source text, but also expresses Jack’s happiness and satisfaction of enjoying delicious seafood, which resonate with readers’ emotions.

#### *Example 5*

“And you just left it.”  
“I was drowning,” Tanya shrieked.

(Pascoe 23)

“可是你把它丢在那里不管了啊”  
“因为我当时呛水了啊！”坦尼娅尖叫道。

The coherence rule states that the content of the target text should be easy for readers to understand and accept. Interjection has the function of strengthening the tone and enhancing the momentum of language. I added the interjection “啊” at the end of this sentence to echo Tanya’s anxiety when Jack complains about losing his knife.

#### **The translation of passive sentences**

The passive voice is commonly used in the source text, while in Chinese preference is given to the active voice. As such, I convert passive sentences into various patterns to conform to the Chinese syntax. The passive “the way I’d been taught” becomes “也有人这样教我”. In the example below, I follow the *Skopos* rule to convert the passive voice into active voice through the use of the verb “教” which means “teach”.

#### *Example 6*

I just wish that was the way I’d been taught but it wasn’t.

(Pascoe 51)

真希望小时候也有人这样教我啊。

#### **The translation of attributive clauses**

In English, attributive clauses are usually introduced by relative pronouns to explain or modify the antecedents. A comparative study of English and Chinese attributive structures indicates that an English sentence may be followed by an unlimited number of attributive clauses following the word being modified, while a Chinese sentence allows for a limited amount of words preceding the word being modified. Hence, when translating the English attributive clauses, I use combination, division and mixture as my translation strategies.

*Example 7*

They took it in turns to breathe from the air tank and soon they were in the area where Jack thought he'd seen something.

(Pascoe 34)

他俩轮流从氧气罐里吸氧，很快就到了杰克口中的“案发地”。

Guided by Skopos to achieve the goal of the target text, in this particular example I translate “the area where Jack thought he'd seen something” as “杰克口中的‘案发地’”, a phrase that is more accessible to young readers.

*Example 8*

They were streamlined chrome-coloured fish that whisked away in a flight pattern like fighter planes.

(Pascoe 15)

这种鱼形似流线，色如铬黄，像战斗机一般在水中飞疾而过。

In this case, the English restrictive attributive clause is divided into a simple sentence. Through combination, the complex sentence in the source text is converted into a Chinese simple sentence. The attributive clause here is translated into “像战斗机一般在水中飞疾而过”，which fully explains the meaning of the original sentence.

**The translation of simile**

The corresponding Chinese words for the English “like” or “as” are “好像” or “宛如”. The use of simile in children’s literature can effectively help to increase the readability of the text. The source text also contains many instances of simile that provide vivid images to young readers. When translating this rhetorical device, I retain those sentences in order to achieve equivalence with the source text.

*Example 9*

Seahorse Bay is protected from the open sea by a protective reef and skirted by a crescent of golden sand. Like a photo from a travel brochure.

(Pascoe 1)

海马湾，一个被珊瑚礁守护着，被一片新月形金色沙滩环抱着的美丽海湾。景色处处都像旅游手册里的照片。

The fidelity rule requires that the target text be faithful to the source text in terms of syntactic structure, rhetorical devices and style. In the example above, the author compares the beautiful scenery of the Seahorse Bay to “a photo from a travel brochure”, which not only directly translates the original simile, but also makes it easier for young readers to understand the text.

### Example 10

Giant ribbons of kelp stream out like long flags with every wave and then go limp before rising up in the stream of water as the wave recedes.

(Pascoe 11)

巨大的褐藻像长长的旗子，随着波浪的起伏时升时落，时高时低。

In this sentence, the author compares the giant kelp to long flags, which vividly depicts the size and movement of the kelp. The principle of fidelity allows me to retain the simile in the original text. To capture cultural differences, translators are able to choose appropriate translation strategies to render realistic and appealing texts that are well received by readers.

### The translation of onomatopoeia

Onomatopoeia achieves rhetorical effects through pronunciation. Onomatopoeic words can stimulate the imagination of young readers and create immersive experiences for them. My strategy of adding onomatopoeic words improves the quality of the translation, as exemplified below.

### Example 11

The pot was boiling away on the fire and Vince plopped two good-sized crays into the boiling water.

(Pascoe 24)

锅里的水在火上咕嘟咕嘟地冒着热气，文斯把两只个头超大的龙虾扑通扑通地放进锅里。

In this example, I translated “boiling away on the fire” as “在火上咕嘟咕嘟地冒着热气”; and “plopped two good-sized crays into the boiling water” as “扑通扑通地放进锅里”. My translation, which vividly describes the sound and image in the source text, captures a more intuitive feeling that allows children to better understand the meaning of the source text.

### Example 12

Jack heard a ping and realized that Carla’s phone had just received reception.

(Pascoe 90)

正在这时，杰克听到“嘟”的一声，他知道卡拉的手机终于有信号了。

In the process of translation, I follow the coherence rule to translate the word “ping” as “嘟”，which simulates the sound of a phone that receives reception. The use of onomatopoeia distinctly reproduces the sound and image of the source text and gives the reader the impression of being on the scene.



## Conclusion

Through the practice of translating *Seahorse* and the analysis of the translation from lexical, syntactical and stylistic perspectives, I conclude that *Skopos* theory has a certain guiding significance for the translation of children's literature. Translators should pay attention to the features of children's literature and ensure the vividness and visualization of the storytelling. It is also imperative for translators to maintain the style of the original language, while taking target readers' cognitive capability and reading habits into account to avoid a rigid translation. Despite the fact that Australian and Chinese cultures are different, young readers in both cultures share similar characteristics and understanding of literature. It is hoped that other Australian children's works could be translated, read and enjoyed by young readers in China; and studied by Chinese scholars.

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