

# A Study of the English Translation Strategies of Sentence Ba in *Border Town* Translated by Jeffrey C. Kinkley

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**Abstract.** The Chinese sentence structure “Ba” presents challenges for Chinese to English translation. To provide more translation strategies, this paper establishes a Sentence Ba corpus based on *Borden Town* translated by Jeffrey C. Kinkley. The corpus is divided into two categories: disposal and double-object Sentence Ba. Translation strategies are discussed, and the results suggest that semantic and communicative translations are used to balance the reading experience of the target language readers with the reproduction of Chinese culture.

## 1 Introduction

### 1.1 Background and purpose of the study

As China’s influence grows worldwide, its culture is receiving more attention from the international community. Translation is a cross-cultural art that allows foreign readers to learn about Chinese culture and literature, but the quality of translations and acceptance by Western readers is crucial.

“Ba”(把) is a common Chinese character, and Sentence Ba presents difficulties in translation due to the differences between Chinese and English cultures. To address this challenge, this paper creates a special Chinese-English bilingual parallel corpus of Sentence Ba, extracting from *Borden Town* translated by Jeffrey C. Kinkley. The corpus is analyzed for its characteristics and translation strategies, with the aim of providing translators with more options to disseminate Chinese culture to Western readers.

Shen Congwen’s “*Bian Cheng*”, ranked second on the “Top 100 Chinese Novels of the Twentieth Century” list by Asia Week and scholars and writers worldwide, and Jeffrey C. Kinkley’s version has been well received by overseas readers. However, there are few studies on his work, especially on his rendering of the Sentence Ba, compared to sinologist Howard Goldblatt’s works. This study aims to address this gap in research.

### 1.2 Research methodology and data collection

Firstly, *Bian Cheng* and *Border Town* are collected as source text and target text respectively and then be sent to ABBYY Alinger for text clean up and aligning, after which a bilingual parallel corpus was made where both the source language and target language can present simultaneously and in alignment with each other, which

makes it easier for researchers to analyses and compare translations.

Table 1. The size of corpus

Text	Word Count
<i>Bian Cheng</i>	48904
<i>Border Town</i>	35987

Secondly, the resource text was imported into AntConc for analysis, and it was discovered that the character “Ba” appeared a total of 260 times. Next, it was assigned to the CLAW coding system developed by Lancaster University where four elements of the “Ba” character were identified in the sentences.

Table 2. Sentence classification

Element	Frequency
Preposition	225
Quantifier	17
Noun	17
Verb	1

According to the chart, there are a large number of the Ba characters in addition to the Ba Sentences. In this paper, the character Ba in the Ba Sentence is used as a preposition, such as “把/p 路人/n 渡过/v 溪/n”, and it is also equipped with the syntactic structure of “A Ba B-VP”, so it is necessary to exclude two sentences in which the character “Ba” is also used as the preposition, such as “翠/x 翠/x 既是/c 她/r 那/r 可怜/a 母亲/n 交/v 把/p 他/r 的/u”. As a result, there are 223 Ba Sentences in the text, which provides abundant studying materials.

Next, all the Ba Clauses and their corresponding translations were collected to make a special Sentence Ba corpus, based on which cases and samples can be deployed and analyzed.

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### 1.3 The rendering and the translator

*Bian Cheng*, a masterpiece of Shen Congwen's novels, holds a significant place in the history of modern Chinese literature. The story takes place in Chadong, on the border between Sichuan province and Hunan province during the 1930s, and portrays the unique customs and culture of western Hunan. The novel's fusion of modern vernacular and classical literature, combined with simple yet imaginative language, has earned it the reputation of a "small Greek temple" (K. Jeffrey C, 2010).

According to Jingchao Zhang's (2019) classification, *Bian Cheng* has been translated into over forty different languages, including four English translations. The first was *Green Jade and Green Jade* by Emily Hahn, published in Tien Hsia Monthly in 1936. Robert Payne and Ching Ti published *The Frontier City* in 1947 by George Allen and Unwin in London, England. In 1962, Gladys Yang translated *The Border Town* in Chinese Literature. Finally, in 2009, Jeffrey C. Kinkley's *Border Town* was released for the first time in a single volume translation by Harper Collins.

Jeffrey C. Kinkley, a retired professor of history at St. John's University and currently a courtesy professor in the Department of History and the Department of World Languages and Literatures at Portland State University, is a well-known expert in the field of Shen Congwen studies. He is the English translator of the largest number of novels by Shen Congwen and is regarded as the "first person to study Shen Congwen overseas".

Kinkley made several field trips to western Hunan and visited Shen Congwen over ten times to hone his renderings. His bilingual competence, mastery of the culture of western Hunan, and knowledge of modern Chinese history set his translations apart and earned him a high reputation among overseas readers.

## 2 The structural and semantic features of Ba

Researchers and scholars have conducted numerous investigations on the Sentence Ba. From a syntactic perspective, linguist Jinxi Li proposed that it serves to bring the object to the forefront of the sentence, as the object typically follows the verb in Chinese syntax. Xiliang Cui (1995) formulated the structure of the Ba Clause as "A Ba B-VP" (VP being a predicate structure or a predicate structure containing a complementary structure). This type of clause can be divided into four categories: A Ba B-VR (e.g., 我把作业写完了); A Ba B-DV (verb overlapping, e.g., 你把衣服洗洗/你把衣服洗一洗); A Ba B-V ("一" + the verb, e.g., 把头一甩); A Ba B-V-NM (verb + quantity, e.g., 把他批评了一顿).

From a semantic perspective, Li Wang (1944) proposed the concept of the "Disposal Statement", and Yuzhi Shi (2006) argued that the most common structure of the causative form indicates the movement of the object. Fengsheng Xue and Haoyi Dai also proposed the concept of the "Causative Statement" for the Sentence Ba pattern, which can result in complements and degree complements

indicating that the subject's action causes a certain result in the subject-object (Jianzhen He, 2007).

In addition, He also proposes the Ba Clause that takes A as B and the Ba Clause with double objects. However, due to the Ba Clause that takes A as B in the text, their translation strategies lack representativeness. Therefore, this paper only discusses the disposal and double-object Ba Clauses.

## 3 Deployment of cases and analysis of translation strategies

### 3.1 Jeffrey C. Kinkley's Translation Style and Translation Strategies

According to Jeffrey C. Kinkley himself, his translations aim to balance both the reader's needs and the reproduction of Chinese culture. This approach aligns with Newmark's theory of communicative and semantic translation, where communicative translation prioritizes fluency and idiomaticity, while semantic translation focuses on retaining the author's thinking process, linguistic characteristics, and expression forms.

Kinkley has been described as a scholarly translator (X. Minhui, 2010) who focuses on reproducing various features of the original text. He recognizes the importance of extra-textual commentary as a direct demonstration of his research skills, which he incorporates in his translations through forewords, prefaces, and endnotes. This approach, known as "thick translation", is a characteristic of his translation style and is exemplified in his work, *Border Town*, where he added 32 endnotes covering history, literature, culture, local customs, and information on the source language.

Lu and Zhang (2016) summarized four strategies of Kinkley's translation style: choosing alienation to preserve the original flavor of Chinese colloquialisms and speech; maintaining a balance with the source language in terms of content and form; adopting both "thin translation" and "thick translation" to make implicit information explicit and adding various annotations to the translation; simplifying the translation to make it more concise and easier for readers to apprehend.

The following translation strategies of Sentence Ba all reflect these features summarized above.

### 3.2 The translation strategies of the disposal

#### 3.2.1 The adoption of SV、SVO、SVOC structure

Most of the structures of the disposal in Chinese texts are relatively simple, which can be manifested as "subject + Ba + object + verb + complement", so its corresponding English translation can adopt the most basic form, "subject + verb + object + complement". Such translation strategy is used the most frequently and is more compatible with the original text in terms of syntactic form.

- 1) 翠翠把事弄明白后，哭了一个夜晚。

Once Cuicui understood, she cried the whole night long.

2) 虽老船夫言词之间，无一句话不在说明“这事有边”，但那畏畏缩缩的说明，极不得体，二老想起他的哥哥，便把这件事曲解了。

Although the old ferryman was constantly intimating that Nuosong “had a chance for success in this,” the old man’s hesitant explanations were very inept; they made No. 2 think of his elder brother, and he misinterpreted them.

3) 桨手每人持一支短桨，随了鼓声缓促为节拍，把船向前划去。

The oarsmen’s short paddles rowed the boat forward to the rhythm of the drumbeats—first unhurried, then urgent.

### 3.2.2 Sentence omission

Omission allows for a more concise sentence structure and presents the most crucial content to the reader.

1) 大约上午十一点钟左右，全茶峒人就吃了午饭，把饭吃过后，在城里住家的，莫不倒锁了门，全家出城到河边看划船。

By eleven o’clock in the morning, all Chadong was sitting down to lunch, after which those who lived in town locked their doors and went down to the riverside to see the dragon boats race.

In the translation, the word “which” already condensed the meaning “把饭吃过” above, making the sentences seem to be interlocked.

2) 马兵把话说完后，就问作祖父的意见怎么样。

When the visitor finished, he asked Grandpa what he thought about it.

The rendering is succinct, and the word “finished” has implied the semantic meaning of “把话说完” in the original text.

### 3.2.3 Sentence reorganization

1) 二老父子方面皆明白他的意思，但那个死去的人，却用一个凄凉的印象，镶嵌到父子心中，两人便对于老船夫的意思，俨然全不明白似的，一同把日子打发下去。

No. 2 and his father knew what he was up to, but the departed son, to use a cold expression, was chiseled into their hearts. They went about their business as the days passed by, acting as if they didn’t know what the old ferryman was about.

The rendering is expanded by the addition of the adverbial clause of time guided by “as”, which expands the sentence structure in the original.

2) 卖肉的明白他那种性情，到他称肉时总选取最好的一处，且把分量故意加多。

The butcher, knowing how he would react beforehand, would give Grandpa the choicest portion and make sure it was overweight.

The usage of subject-link verb-predicative structure enables the renderings to be static, which conforms to the language characteristic of English.

## 3.3 The translation strategies of the double-objects

This type of clause has a verb-object phrase placed after the noun, and there are two nouns acting as objects, expressing collateral relations, acceptance relations, results, etc. (F. Xue, 2016).

### 3.3.1 The adoption of prepositional phrases

This translation strategy is relatively novel, reflecting the logical relationship in the source language, and making the translation concise, orderly, and integrated.

1) 第二天那人来了，吃了饭，把职务委托那人以后，翠翠等便进了城。

The next day arrived; with the meal finished and the ferry duty handed over to the other man, Cuicui and her family entered the town.

2) 平时在渡船上遇陌生人对她有所注意时，便把光光的眼睛瞅着那陌生人，作成随时皆可举步逃入深山的神气，但明白了人无机心后，就又从从容容的在水边玩耍了。

When a stranger on the ferry cast a look at her, she would shoot him a glance with those brilliant eyes, as if ready to flee into the hills at any instant; but once she saw that he meant her no harm, she would go back to playing by the waterside as if nothing had happened.

3) 落日向上游翠翠家中那一方落去，黄昏把河面装饰了一层薄雾。

The sun was setting, in the direction of Cuicui’s home upstream. Dusk draped the river in a thin coat of mist.

Although the translation of these three sample sentences has adjusted the order of the elements of the Sentence Ba according to the English grammatical structure, it retains the thinking process and the logical relations of the original text, and its functions as well.

### 3.3.2 The adoption of SVOO structure

Such translation strategy shifts the two objects behind the verbs, slightly modifying the order of the components of the Ba Clause, but it still maintains original structure to the large extent.

1) 祖父气吁吁的赶来了，把钱强迫塞到那人手心里，且搭了一大束草烟到那商人担子上去，搓着两手笑着说：“走呀！你们上路走！”那些人于是全笑着走了。

Grandpa came up in an angry huff, forced the money back into the man’s hand, and even stuck a big wad of tobacco leaves into the merchant’s load. He rubbed his hands together and beamed: “Go on, now! Hit the road, all of you!” And at that, they all went on their way, chuckling.

2) 有时从神气上估计那远路人对于身边草烟引起了相当的注意时，便把一小束草烟扎到那人包袱

上去，一面说，不吸这个吗，这好的，这妙的，味道蛮好，送人也合式！

When he surmised from the look of a traveler from afar that he was interested in those tobacco leaves, the ferryman would stuff a few into the man's load, saying, "Elder Brother, won't you try these? Fine goods here, truly excellent; these giant leaves don't look it, but their taste is wonderful—just the thing to give as a gift!"

### 3.3.3 The omission of object

It attaches importance to the conciseness and fluency of the translation, deleting and modifying the elements of the original sentence pattern.

1) 祖父把手攀引着横缆，注目溪面的薄雾，仿佛看到了什么东西，轻轻的吁了一口气。

As he pulled the boat along the cable, his eyes trained on the mist that had suddenly come up from the stream, Grandpa acted as if he'd seen something and softly sighed.

2) 一个不能接受所给的钱，一个却非把钱送给老人不可。

The one refused to accept money proffered and the other insisted on paying.

In Sample 1, the word "pull" has already condensed the semantic meaning of "把手攀引", so the indirect object "手" is omitted in the rendering; The information implied in Sample 2 can also support the omission of the two objects "钱" and "老人" in the translation.

## 4. Conclusion

This paper examines the translations of Sentence Ba from Jeffrey C. Kinkley's version of *Bian Cheng* and forms a parallel corpus for analysis. Sentence Ba is divided into two types based on its semantic meaning: disposal and double objects. Six translation strategies are summarized for these two types of sentences, with three being semantic and three being communicative, each accounting for half.

For the disposal type, the translator used the SVO form to maintain the original style. For the double objects type, the translator used the prepositional phrase "with/in" and the SVOO form. While it is impossible to fully correspond the source language with the target language literally due to cultural differences, the translator remains faithful to the logic of the original sentence, preserves the characteristics and forms of the source language to the best, and achieves functional equivalence.

In terms of communicative translation, both types of the Sentence Ba use omission, employing expressions with condensed meanings and indicative pronouns, simplifying sentence forms, and deleting components, as well as adjusting and reorganizing sentence types to make the translations fluent, concise, and authentic for readers.

These findings confirm Jeffrey C. Kinkley's approach to translation, which considers both readers and the reproduction of Chinese culture. The paper showcases the translator's flexible adoption and coordination of various strategies and theories in translation practice.

However, the paper does not adequately demonstrate the translator's characteristic of thick translation. It

focuses primarily on syntactic expressions and diction, with less attention given to Chinese colloquialisms and local culture.

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