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## The English-Chinese Translation of Melissa Lucashenko's *Killing Darcy*

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### Abstract

The most challenging aspect of the translation of Melissa Lucashenko's novel *Killing Darcy* is the author's unique style. In this paper, I begin with an overview of the author and the storyline, followed by a brief analysis of the text from the perspective of postcolonialism. I then discuss the specific approaches adopted in the translation of the novel to transfer the messages, by endeavouring to maintain the style of the original text. Taking into consideration the differences between English and Chinese languages and cultures, as well as certain requirements concerning the translation of children's literature imposed by the National Press and Publication Administration of China, some parts are under translated, while other parts are over translated in the Chinese version. Nevertheless, the key aspect of my translation is the communication between the two cultures.

### Introduction

As translation is a means of communication, with regard to the communicative theory, perhaps a commonly acknowledged observation is that every act of communication constitutes three dimensions: Speaker (or author), Message, and Audience. The tripartite mode stresses the necessity for the translator to have a perception of the role of each party among the three, since "the more we can know about the original author, the actual message produced by that author, and the original audience, the better acquainted we will be with that particular act of communication" (Gordon). Peter Newmark also states in *Approaches to Translation* that the translator's first task is to understand the text, often to analyse, or at least make some generalisations about the text before selecting an appropriate translation method (20). A translator should figure out some practical problems, namely, the intention of the text, the intention of the translator, the reader and the setting of the text, the quality of the writing and the authority of the text. Therefore, in this article, I begin with an overview of the author and the story, and a brief analysis of the text from the perspective of postcolonialism. I then focus on the author's style and the specific approaches adopted in the translation of the novel to transfer the source text messages, while aiming to capture the style of the original text for a specific target audience.

### An overview of the author and the storyline

Melissa Lucashenko is an acclaimed Aboriginal writer of Goorie and European ancestry, a human rights activist and supporter of First Nation writing. Following her 1997 debut novel *Steam Pigs*, Lucashenko has published widely and has received numerous literary awards. In 2013, Lucashenko's fifth novel, *Mullumbimby*, won the prestigious Deloitte Fiction Book Award. The same novel won the Victorian Premier's Literary Award for Indigenous Writing in 2014, and was longlisted for the International Dublin Literary Award in 2015. *Too Much Lip* is her sixth novel which won the Miles Franklin Award in 2019 and was shortlisted for the Stella Prize in the same year. *Killing Darcy*, a novel

written for teenagers, is Lucashenko's second. The novel won the Aurora Prize of the Royal Blind Society, was a finalist for the 1998 Aurealis Award for best young-adult novel; and was longlisted for the 1998 James Tiptree Jr Memorial Award.

The story opens with Filomena (Fil) Menzies coming to Aonbar, her father's horse-riding school, to spend her summer holiday with her father Jon and her 14-year-old half-brother Cameron (Cam). Falling off the horse Angel, she discovers the ruins of an old house hidden in the bush, where she finds an old camera with the capacity to show pictures of the past, one of which displays the scene of the death of an Aboriginal kid. Fil and Cam are shocked to see the pictures and wonder whether Hew Costello, Jon's great grandfather, killed the Aboriginal kid. Meanwhile, Darcy Mango, a young Koori on parole, is looking for his mob in northern New South Wales. Darcy becomes acquainted with the Menzies family and impresses Jon with his horse training skills that land him a job at Aonbar. Darcy is the only person able to shed light on the past and it becomes his fate to solve the mystery of the Aboriginal child's death. With assistance from Granny Lil, an Aboriginal elder, Darcy returns to the past, discovering that Hew was the dead kid's father. By coincidence, Granny Lil uncovers evidence that Darcy is also a descendant of Hew Costello, which brings Darcy closer to the family and gives him a sense of belonging. The clash between the "whitefella" and "blackfella" cultures permeates the story. However, as the story evolves, the misunderstanding between the two cultures thaws and tolerance grows into acceptance.

### **A postcolonial analysis of the text**

Before I began working on the translation, I endeavoured to interpret the novel from the perspective of postcolonialism. Newmark asserts that a translator requires a knowledge of literary and non-literary textual criticism, since they have to assess the quality of a text before deciding how to interpret and then translate it (5). Book reviews and transcripts of interviews with the author have provided ample opportunities for the translator to gain an in-depth understanding of the author's identity, life story and writing style, which in turn helps the translator to better understand the message of the text. In a 2019 interview with Jing Han, Lucashenko explained her decision to become a writer, by stating that writing Aboriginal fiction in the pre-native title era felt like screaming out to mainstream Australia and the world "Over here! We exist! We exist!". The author noted:

"My single focus in my earlier books has been: we're a living culture, we have not died, we have not become extinct, we exist in every part of Australia. Even though we don't look or sound or think the way you think Aboriginal people should, that doesn't mean we aren't here going about Aboriginal lives, that has been my main thrust"

(Lucashenko 5)

Her characters are equally empowered by beauty, humour, land and love, "[...] because all of those things we had before the white men came to this country. We had rich and satisfying lives. That's what I want my readers to take away, to understand our humanity" (5).

Lucashenko's works are highly political. The White-Black relationship discourse permeates the narrative, moving from conflict to reconciliation, thus reinforcing the aftermath of colonization whereby contemporary people are confronted with historical challenges.

“What all post-colonialist critics emphatically state, however, is that European colonialism did occur, that the British Empire was at the center of this colonialism, that the conquerors not only dominated the physical land but also the hegemony or ideology of the colonized people, and the effects of these colonizations are many and still felt today”.

(Bressler 202)

Lucashenko attempts to convey such messages in the novel. Issues such as land disputes, the White supremacy, divergent attitudes towards history, especially the history of colonization, are explored and addressed. The author implies that in the post-colonial period, the old sins of colonization cast long shadows which to this day are still clouding the life of Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people in Australia. The novel also addresses issues such as displacement, incarceration, abuse, alcoholism, racism, poverty and marginalisation, introduced through colonization.

According to the theory of postcolonialism, a person living and writing in a colonized culture must ask three questions:

Who am I? How did I develop into the person I am? and To what country or countries or to what cultures am I forever linked? In asking the first question, the colonized author is connecting himself or herself to historical roots. By asking the second question, the author is admitting a tension between these historical roots and the new culture or hegemony imposed on the writer by the conquerors. By asking the third question, the writer confronts the fact that he or she is both an individual and a social construct created and shaped primarily by the dominant culture.

(Bressler 204)

Darcy, the protagonist of the novel, attempts to answer the questions by looking for his relations in “Federation”, the fictional town where the story is set. Ignorant about the colonial history, Cam and Fil cannot understand why Darcy does so in a town rather than in the bush. The Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal characters argue over land matters on several occasions. In Chapter Eight, when Cam and Fil question why Darcy fainted when Goddard tried to take a picture of him using the mysterious camera while nothing happened to them when they took pictures of Jon or each other. Darcy smiles and says that it’s only natural since he belongs here, “I belong here. You fellas are just bloody migloo ring-ins. I can’t work out how you got involved at all...” Fil has to keep her temper, “Whaddya mean, we don’t belong here? It’s our house, our place.” It is evident that she takes it for granted that it’s their place. She continues, “Do you reckon you’ve got more of a right to be here than us because you’ve got black skin”? (Lucashenko 112)

When Darcy states that it is true although it has nothing to do with his skin, stumped for any better response, she just says angrily, “Rubbish!” Darcy knows that “some of his ancestors still lived out there, hunting, fishing, dancing, sleeping, singing, living, fighting” (Lucashenko 110):

Darcy regarded her for a minute. He was losing patience. Living with whitefellas, whaddya expect? Ah, fuck her. “Who that gum tree?” he asked her harshly, pointing twice. “Who that mountain?” Fil screwed her face up.

What was he talking about? “Where’s your grandmother live? How you sing ‘im this country?” Darcy swung round to Cam. “Where’s the Men’s Dreamin’? But you wouldn’t know, eh, cos you just a fucken kid...” He spat the word. Silly white kids playing at Business.

(Lucashenko 112-13)

Darcy is indignant with the white kids, who take it for granted that “it is my place” without thinking how the land is acquired since they are taught that Australia used to be “Terra Nullius” — “land belonging to no one”. It is just like the case of the camera. When Granny asks Fil why she picks it up, she replies that she doesn’t know. She just takes it. Under Granny’s interrogation, she feels for the first time that perhaps she has no right to take the camera at all. Then the following exchange serves as a reproach of the European colonization:

“What made you go in the house? How did you find it”? Here Filomena found herself on safer ground. “I was out riding, horse-riding, and I fell off. I took a shortcut, and I saw the house. I just wanted to look around, I suppose.” Fil didn’t mention wanting to find stuff to sell. Somehow she didn’t want to mention that. “Just wanted to look around.” Lil echoed savagely, tapping ash. “Never mind where you are. Never mind about where you might be steppin”.

(Lucashenko 116)

Fil’s discovery and appropriation of the camera resembles the process of European colonization. The European colonizers usually embarked on an expedition or a voyage, followed by the discovery of new places with things they coveted, which they subsequently “picked up.” They repeated the process of “I came, I saw, I conquered.” Then Granny Lil tells the children how the white men took over the land when they first arrived:

“When the migloos first come here, there was an old man, a wise old man. They were bringing in their cattle, and their convicts and cutting the cedar. Taking over. Fighting over land. And these blackfellas they make an –” she searched for the word “—an envoy. Went and seen ‘em, and said—you white man, you take the plains alone. Took their Business up there, too, to the cliff. See, they wanted to share. No good. White man took everything. They woulda been better off fighting from the word go”.

(Lucashenko 117)

The camera serves as a link between the past and the present, revealing the “murder” in the family, which alludes to the colonial past of Australia and the White guilt. Hew is a metonym for “White Australia,” therefore, Cam and Fil, as the descendants of Hew, represent today’s white Australians:

Cameron, shamed, was silent. He’d never thought too much about that side of the past. To him, history was goldfields, and “explorers.” Sometimes he gave some passing thought to Aboriginal languages or Central Australian tribes. And of course he knew that the continent was taken by force, but,

well, it was never stated that way, was it? Not to your face. Not about your own home. And not by an Aborigine.

(Lucashenko 123)

Confronted by an Aboriginal talking about the White guilt, Cam feels ashamed since that history of colonization is suddenly tangible and relevant to him. Cam's response can also be seen to bear traces of absolution (James 10). As for Fil, she eventually gives the camera back to Granny Lil, "ashamed that it had taken her so long to realize the camera didn't really belong to her at all" (Lucashenko 219). This gesture symbolises that the colonizers finally realise that they should hand over things that don't belong to them.

By tracing their transition from skepticism to acceptance as they come to learn about the spirit world and about ritual communication between spirits and humans, Lucashenko proposes that westerners such as Cam and Fil can, to some degree, understand Aboriginal belief-systems, provided that they are open to cultural difference and engaged in interpersonal relations with Aboriginal people.

(Bradford 8)

Apart from Cam and Fil, another non-Aboriginal figure worth mentioning is Jon, the horse trainer and self-alleged social reformer. Yet as he says, he is a minor character. The mystery of the past ought to be solved between Cam, Fil and Darcy and Granny. However, he is willing to offer assistance. He empathizes with Darcy and understands his plight. He is aware of the injustice the Aboriginals suffered in the White-dominated society: "Somewhere there had to be justice, but he was buggered if he knew where to find it" (142). When Fil fails to find her own problem of white arrogance, he needs to do some "shaking up" with her, which is also crucial to ease the tension between Fil and Darcy, which implies the tension between the non-Aboriginals and Aboriginals is eased through the agency of social reformers.

Granny Lil is a figure who endeavours to retain Indigenous tradition and culture through songs, dance, story-telling and rituals. She works together with the children to solve the mystery of the murder. However, she harbours her own bias against white people initially, believing all white people "got blood on their hands". She helps Darcy go back to the past, which also enables him to find out that Hew may not be the murderer. Later, through one form of their traditional culture, story-telling, she confirms Cam's assumption that the kid was killed by a horse rather than murdered by Hew. Granny Lil also learns to reject prejudice. When Jon finally pays off the mortgage on the property, he throws a party where he declares,

"Lord and master of all I survey. One day, kids, all this"—his hand described an arc—"will be yours." "One day it was all ours," said Granny haughtily from where she sat on a milk crate, "and maybe it will be again".

(Lucashenko 216)

There is no denying that land disputes will endure if they are not properly addressed. Realising that, Jon the social reformer admits that the land used to belong to the Aboriginal people and offers to change its name into an Aboriginal one:

“You’re right, Granny,” Jon said instantly, with dignity. “We should change the name, eh? To a Yanbali one?” No one could spell Aonbar’s Rest anyway—he kept getting oddly addressed mail for Antlers Nest and the like. The price of whimsy.

“Oh, that’s all right.” Granny waved his idea away. “Just make sure the door’s always open for blackfellas, eh.” She sipped carefully at her can of Bundy and Cola”.

(Lucashenko 216)

The dialogue indicates that it does not matter now what name is given to the land as long as it is always open to all people, white or black. Another scene also conveys a similar message. When Fil hands over the camera to her, Granny Lil just puts it down unceremoniously beside her stash of UDLs and closes the subject. The gesture signifies that she does not care who owns it as long as Fil confesses her mistake and admits that the camera does not belong to her.

At last, we come to Darcy. The author endows Darcy with a quality of hybridity. Biologically, he is a descendant of Hew Costello and his Aboriginal wife. Culturally, he drifts among and lives with non-Aboriginal people, hence becoming acquainted with the White culture, while maintaining his own cultural background. The development of his relationship with Cam and Fil suggests, despite the occasional quarrels and fights, the possibility of harmonious coexistence of different races. With better acquaintance and mutual understanding, their relationship has undergone a process of transformation and hybridity, which is explicitly demonstrated at the novel’s *dénouement* when Granny Lil announces her discovery of the truth of the child’s identity and death. It turns out that he was one of the twins born to Hew Costello and his Aboriginal wife, and he was killed by a horse which Hew Costello then shot. The sorrowful mother and her remaining son returned to her people. Moreover, Darcy was a descendant of the Agadja nation, and therefore related to the Menzies family through Hew Costello. Traced through the descendants’ joint efforts, a relationship between a white man and a black woman in the colonial era is consequently transformed into new relationships based on respect and understanding in contemporary Australia. At the close of the novel, in the early morning, Jon, Fil, Cam and Darcy ride their horses to the beach.

Through dialogue and especially through the exchange of English and Aboriginal words, cultural exchange is achieved and manifested. Cam tells Darcy that Picasso, Jon’s horse, is just like Aonbar, a magic horse in an Irish myth that could gallop over land or sea, which is also the name of his father’s farm whereas Darcy gives Cam an Aboriginal word “Yarraman”, meaning “horse”. Another exchange occurs when Fil answers Cam’s question “You OK?”, which means if she recovers from her argument with their father. She said, “Yea. As OK as a bloody migloo ring-in’ ll ever be,” looking straight at Darcy (Lucashenko 227). As Bradford notes, her glance and her ironic self-description acknowledge the primacy of Aboriginal culture and her sense of herself as living “on Aboriginal land” (Lucashenko 10).

Lucashenko proposes that if Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people are to break free from the weight of the colonial past and its lingering influence, they need to explore new modes of engagement based on the recognition and valuing of difference and on relationships of reciprocity so that the balance of social and spiritual ecology can be restored. The author solves all the conflicts in the novel by creating a Utopia-like farm which covers an area of forty acres nestling in the hills between Federation and the coast. It is “the home of the brave and the land of the free” (Lucashenko 81), where

Aboriginal people and non-Aboriginal people rely on each other and live in harmony like a family.

### **Translation approaches and examples**

Lucashenko's identity enables her to create a hybrid text, "incorporating an interplay of Aboriginal and western concepts, forms and narrative strategies" (Bradford 4). The integration of cultures is also revealed through Lucashenko's use of language in the novel. The use of English has always been an issue with writers and "the choice of language goes hand in hand with indigenous attitudes to the role and the function of literature itself in the society" (Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin 116). The fact that she floats between two cultures endows her with a unique voice. After interviewing Lucashenko, Susan Cheshire noted that she has "taken the risk of alienating the reader with a dialogue that is slang, rough, partly indigenous, deceptively unsophisticated, rather than formal English". Lucashenko said that what may sound different to others is quite natural to her:

"It is the voice I talk to myself in. It is my internal voice. To me it is written in very light Aboriginal English. I have been surprised when people have said that the language is really different for them because to me it is almost mainstream English."

Such a style helps to convey the message in the story. One of the historical processes represented in *Killing Darcy* is the violence of colonialism and the destruction of language competency. Confronted with hostility and facing a sea of troubles, Darcy's first impulse is to wave his fists rather than express his ideas about the issue. After staying with the Menzies family for some time, he realizes that "some things you just couldn't fist away with brownish-yellow knuckles that read L-O-V-E and H-A-T-E in prison ink; some things needed them whitefella's words, but their words were what ya never had" (Lucashenko 95). However, the language used by Lucashenko to describe the world that her characters inhabit is very much alive. Lucashenko breathes life into the language belonging to this place by means of adding phonetic spellings, Aboriginal English and Bundjalung words to the novel. The lexical spectrum in the story is wide—from learned terms, allusions, standard English words used by Jon to mixture of standard English and the youth slang of Cam and Fil to Aboriginal English by Granny Fil and Darcy. The translation of the lexicon of Jon, Cam and Fil is not that challenging, yet the translation of Aboriginal English requires much deliberation.

A guiding principle for the translator is that they should aim to retain as much as possible the central messages and the style of the source text. Darcy and Granny Lil's language is interspersed with Bundjalung, which, for Lucashenko herself, is a tangible link to country and to her own Goori history and culture. In postcolonial writing, the abrogation of authenticity and essence often takes place when "the postcolonial writing abrogates the privileged centrality of 'English' by using language to signify difference while employing a sameness which allows it to be understood" (Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin 50). Although a glossary of Aboriginal terms is attached to the novel, some terms fail to enter the list. Moreover, some words in Standard Australian English sound the same in Aboriginal English dialects, but the meaning can be very different, for example business, elder and law. In addition, it is rather difficult for the translator to find the exact equivalence in the target language (TL) due to the uniqueness of the source language and culture. Such a style poses challenges not only to readers, but also to the

translator. Confronted with such challenging issues, the translator managed to accomplish the translation by adopting various approaches. The following are several approaches to translating such words.

### **Omission**

The TL readers constitute a key factor that the translator cannot afford to overlook. Since *Killing Darcy* is a young adult novel, its Chinese translation is aimed at children under 14 years old. The National Press and Publication Administration of China requires that no obscenity appear in the target texts. As such, offensive words in the source text should be omitted in the process of translation. Furthermore, scenes with sexual associations should be either entirely omitted or dealt with vaguely.

The example below is an excerpt from my translation of chapter four, in which Jon is accidentally wounded by a horse. He tells the kids what happened and curses:

“Bloody green arsehole of a stripper at Hendre let a rein go when I was putting a copper on. The horse was frightened and kicked. That didn’t get me, ’cos I rolled out of the way, but then the fucking thing stood on my leg...”

(Lucashenko 54)

In the original version, I translated this section as:

在亨德拉，当时我在系牵鞍兜带，他妈的一个新手混蛋松开了缰绳。那匹马惊了，开始乱踢。那倒没伤着我，因为我滚开了。但是那匹马他妈的踩在了我腿上...

The final version reads:

在亨德拉，我当时在系牵鞍兜带，一个新手松开了缰绳，那匹马惊了，开始乱踢，那倒没伤着我，因为我滚开了，但是那匹马踩在了我腿上...

Words such as “bloody”, “arsehole” and “f\*\*king” (underlined sections in my original translation) are omitted in my final translation to avoid obscenities and vulgarity in literary works aimed for children.

### **Softening**

The use of particular swear words may enhance the style and tone of writing. Omitting such words may change the way the target reader perceives the text. The translator needs to carefully negotiate the terms to avoid altering too much the style and tone of the text. For example, in chapter one, after a fight with his schoolmate, Cam decides to go home instead of attending the woodwork class, “Fuck the year’s last woodwork class.” Here the swear word is used as a verb, expressing Cam’s impatience and anger. Originally, I translated the sentence into: “还有今年最后一节木工课，去他妈的吧！” In the published version, it was softened to “还有今年最后一节木工课，去他的吧！” By taking this approach, I softened the offensive term while preserving the original sense.

## Transliteration

This method is employed to translate some distinctive Aboriginal terms such as bora and womba. In the “Glossary of Terms” accompanying the novel, bora is defined as a sacred Aboriginal meeting place where Business is conducted. Since there is no exact equivalent in the Chinese culture, the translator rendered this word as 博拉(bo la) , which sounds approximately like bora in Chinese. For further clarification, a footnote is added: 博拉 (bora) , 原住民举办宗教仪式的圣地. When the word womba is used for the first time by Granny Lil, Fil does not understand it; as such, I transliterated it as 乌木巴 (wu mu ba), and I attached an explanatory footnote: 原住民语言音译, 意为“疯狂, 发疯了” . Fil asks Darcy, “who twirled his index finger beside his head. Crazy. Womba meant crazy. Crazy for money, Granny must mean” (175). I translated the quoted part into “达西用食指在头部转了转: 疯了, ‘乌木巴’ 的意思是疯了, 奶奶一定想说, 他为金钱而疯狂”。

The technique of selective lexical fidelity which leaves some words untranslated in the text is a more widely used device for conveying the sense of cultural distinctiveness (Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin 63). Rather than leaving words untranslated, I opted for transliteration for the purpose of maintaining the distinctiveness of the source culture. This way, TL readers may understand the Aboriginal cultures better by getting acquainted with such terms.

## Dynamic equivalence

As mentioned above, some words in Standard Australian English sound the same in Aboriginal English dialects, but the meaning can be very different. Thus, I apply the strategy of dynamic equivalence to my translation, as exemplified below. The word Business is first used by Darcy when he talks with Cam about the history when the Murris left for the hills:

Darcy ignored her. “When the Murris took off to the hills, them old ones, they took their Business up there with them” ...  
“I don’t understand what you mean,” said Cameron. “What business?” He had absurd image of Aborigines dressed in top hats, serving behind counters. “Ceremonies, dances, Corroboree.” Darcy explained impatiently. “Men’s Business. Women’s Business. Religion”.

(Lucashenko 122)

In the text, the letter “b” in Cam’s “business” is in lower case while Darcy’s “Business” is capitalized since they mean different things. Darcy’s “Business” denotes religion, yet it is used together with the word “religion”. In order to distinguish it from religion, I translated it into “事务” with a footnote (i.e. “①” in the textual example below): 生意, (business) , 也有事务的意思。这里指原住民的各种宗教仪式等. This section is translated as follows:

达西没理她, 继续说道: “当穆瑞人上山时, 那些老人, 把他们的宗教事务也带去了。……  
我不懂你的意思, ”凯姆说, “什么生意①? ”他脑海中出现的是原住民们戴着高帽, 在柜台后面招揽生意的场景。

“仪式、舞蹈、夜间狂欢祭祀。”达西不耐烦地解释道，“男人的事务、女人的事务、宗教。”

In this case, the word business appears several times with mainly two meanings, yet I translated them into “宗教事务”，“生意”，“事务” to uncover the misunderstanding and obstacles between the Aboriginal boy and the white boy. The dynamic equivalence is sought so that the translations remain true to the original message but do not strictly adhere to a word-for-word rendition, which could create confusion in the target language. Meanwhile, this approach also highlights the cultural differences between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people.

### Conclusion

For the translator, a preliminary interpretation of the source text combined with an understanding of the author's work and the target readership are of paramount importance. To remain faithful to the source text, the translator adopts various methods to transfer the central messages and the author's style, especially the unique lexical features to the TL text. However, due to the differences in languages and cultures as well as certain restrictions around the translation of children's literature in China, various sections of the source text are approached differently. Nevertheless, what counts most is how the translator achieves the communication between cultures. The selection and translation of Lucashenko's book gives young readers in China a glimpse into the lives of Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people in Australia. The translator is confident that Chinese readers will be fascinated with the story set in Australia where various cultures clash and converge at the same time.

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