

On Narrative Markers in the Narrator's Voice in the English Translation of *Sanyan*

Ximeng Lang, Xiao Ma^{*}

Translation and Interpreting Department, Wuhan University, Wuhan, China

Email address:

1486627668@qq.com (Xiao Ma)

^{*}Corresponding author

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Abstract: *Sanyan* is a collection of classic Chinese vernacular short stories in the Ming Dynasty, in which unique narrative markers are often used to help the development of the story as well as the discourse. In their English translation of *Sanyan*, Shuihui Yang and Yunqin Yang preserve essential points of the overt narration and overt commentary, so as to outline the storyteller's efforts to create the simulated context and clearly organize the structure of narrating process. Nonetheless, other insignificant narrative markers are deleted or replaced due to redundancy and conflicts with the English norms, as they are concerned with details of a character or inessential background information. With the usage of first person pronouns and the replacement with deixis, the translators manage to narrow the distance between the narrator and the reader. Hence, the Yangs' translation not only gives an alien sense of the Chinese vernacular story, but also makes the narrative text more concise and flexible for the target reader.

Keywords: The English Translation of *Sanyan*, Narrative Markers, Overt Narration, Overt Commentary

1. Introduction

Sanyan (lit., *Three Words*) is regarded as the hallmark of the classic Chinese vernacular story. It is referred to three collections of vernacular short stories edited and written by Feng Menglong (1574-1646), a well-known writer and advocator of vernacular literature in the Ming dynasty. The *Sanyan* collections include *Stories Old and New* (*Gujin Xiaoshuo*)¹ in 1620, *Comprehensive Words to Caution the World* (*Jingshi Tongyan*) in 1624, and *Constant Words to Awaken the World* (*Xingshi Hengyan*) in 1627. *Sanyan* sets up the standard and model of the genre for the following centuries in the Chinese literature. It can be said that the narrative markers of the storyteller are the most obvious signs in Chinese vernacular fictions, originating from the oral telling practice in the public place. Yet it is until the 21st century that Shuihui Yang and his wife Yunqin Yang cooperate to produce the whole English translation of *Sanyan* for the first time, namely *Stories Old and New* (2000), *Stories to Caution*

the World (2005), *Stories to Awaken the World* (2009). The Yangs' translation not only pays attention to characters and settings of the story, but also focuses on narrative features employed by the storyteller. Whether narrative markers become more obvious or inconspicuous deserves to be discussed. In what follows, this essay will analyze how the narrator's voice is conveyed in the English rendition.

2. Narrative Markers in the Narrator's Voice

Structuralist narratology, also named as classical narratology, highlights the inner structure of the narrative, overlooking the writer, reader or society outside the text. The basic distinction of classical narratology is between the story, "the content" of the "events" which are "actions" and "happenings", and of "the existents" containing "characters" and "items of setting", and the discourse, "the expression" by which "the content is communicated" [1]. The discourse contains narrative statements, describing a series of actions, traits of characters and settings. Since Gerald Genette has made a detailed analysis

¹It is also called *Illustrious Words to Enlighten the World* (*Yushi Mingyan*).

of Marcel Proust's novel *À la Recherche du Temps Perdu* (1913-1927) in his *Narrative Discourse: An essay in method* (1980), different angles of analyzing the discourse's time, space, point of view and voice are explored.

Commonly, voice is mentioned together with point of view, as they embody various aspects of the discourse in the narration. Voice is "the speech or other overt means through which events and existents are communicated to the audience", while point of view means "the physical place or ideological situation or practical life-orientation to which narrative events stand in relation" [1]. Compared with point of view, the concentration of voice is on the narrator's telling and showing of the discourse, regulating narrating activities. Voice discusses "who is the narrator" and lays emphasis on the expressions of the narrator [8]. Other narratologists also define voice from the interactions of all participants such as the author, narrator and reader in and outside the discourse. Liu describes voice as "the reader's perception of the writer's consciousness from the text" [11]. Nonetheless, the main concern of this essay is on the narrator's voice in conveying characters, settings and events.

Given on the varying degree of narrator's voice, the most outstanding one is the overt narrator, "presenting situations and events with more than a minimum of narratorial mediation" [13]. In a less audible or even invisible way, a covert or an absent narrator portrays a minimum degree or nearly no sign of his regulation. More clearly, the overt narrator employs "more narratorial mediation and a less detailed rendering of situations and events", and the distance between the character and reader is enlarged with a concise and generalized mode [13]. Hence, the overt narrator increases the distance of the narrator to reader in the narrative. In this way can he express his moral instances to the narratee and even control the structure of discourse. The overt narrator's voice stresses on the discourse about characters' thoughts and talks, settings and events.

The least audible kind of overt narrator's voice is "overt narration", containing the description of setting, the affirmation of the character's identity in detail [1]. More obviously, the generalization of time and space as well as the summary of characters' traits is included in the overt narration. Then, a more visible overt narrator makes "implicit" or "explicit" commentary on the story, even on the discourse itself [1]. The implicit voice of a narrator can be either sarcastic or ironic, so as to ridicule characters or put in unreliable expressions of the story. Explicit commentary, also named as "overt commentary" is regarded as the most obvious voice of an overt narrator [1]. He launches his comments in the way of "interpretation, judgment, generalization and 'self-conscious narration'" [1]. Apart from explaining key elements, he also judges characters' social values or moral qualities. He draws evidences from the universal truth to make his expressions more convincing. The most intrusive way is to make comments on the narrating process itself, to show the narrator's authoritative role or reflect the production of the fiction.

The overt narration or overt commentary is introduced by

the narrative marker to make a depiction of the story or comment on the discourse. Wang has defined the narrative marker as the "overt means of voice from a story-teller-narrator" [14]. The narrative marker refers to a term or sentence employed as the introductory sign for descriptions and comments in the narrative discourse, as a convention. It is used as the lead-in to the overt narration, with the thorough depiction of a character's physical appearance or personal traits. Moreover, the formulaic term or sentence also plays a part in the temporal or spatial summary of the discourse. When it comes to the implicit or explicit commentary, the narrative marker functions not only as the indirect explanation of the event or character, but also as the direct account or comment on the story or even the discourse itself. With the repetitive usage of narrative markers, the storyteller's role in the overt narration or overt commentary is not easily overlooked by the narratee. Narrative markers outline the overt narrator's role in the narrating process.

3. Narrative Markers in the Narrator's Voice of *Sanyan* Collections

Narrative markers attach more importance to the storyteller-narrator's presence in *Sanyan*, making the overt narration and overt commentary much easily to be identified by readers. As the omniscient narrator, the storyteller's description and commentary of characters, settings as well as the plot is usually authoritative and convincing. The storyteller is a heterodiegetic narrator, "absent from the story he tells" [8]. The storyteller is also seen as an extradiegetic narrator, "external to" the story he narrates [13]. He applies a wide array of formulaic terms or sentences to begin with his narrating process, proceed to different characters in the middle, or conclude with the narration. Hence, it would strengthen the prominence of the narrator's authoritative and even intrusive voice.

It is commonly believed that there exists a "contract" between the narrator and the narratee, on which "the very existence of the narrative" is dependent [13]. In *Sanyan*, there is the "simulated context" in which the storyteller "claims to be transmitted", and it can be referred to a "simulacrum" in which the real storyteller is "addressing his audience", and also "a pretense in which the author and reader happily acquiesce" for the common understanding of stories [10]. As the signal of storyteller's presence, narrative markers contribute to the construction of the simulated text to a great extent. It even shows its unfailing attempt to remind the reader of successive episodes.

When narrative markers are fused into the overt narration in *Sanyan*, they will make the story structure more visible. In terms of the whole discourse, narrative markers strengthen "the whole episodic structure of Chinese vernacular fiction" [14]. For example, the narrator's voice includes the phrase "话说" (The story tells), as the starting sign of the story proper, describing the main character in a certain place of a certain dynasty. In *Sanyan*, there are other formulaic terms, like "再说"

(Let us come back to) or “却说” (Let us rather tell). When the storyteller switches his talk to a different character, he will employ these terms to advance his narrating. The reader takes this as an apparent reminder that the narrator will change his talking targets.

Several other formulaic terms are rendered into the overt narration in *Sanyan* to make the details more convincing and vivid, as the vernacular story is distinctive for being “exhaustive” [9]. As an obvious clue, the narrator would pay attention to the detailed description of a character’s appearance, such as his attire and figure. The storyteller frequently imparts the term “只见” (only to see) to narrate what a character sees in the story, which follows his view of other individuals or the surroundings. Thus, narrative markers in the overt narration fall into the overall structure and thorough elements of the discourse.

There are also quite a few formulaic expressions to introduce commentaries in *Sanyan*. Taking “原来” (as a matter of fact) for instance, it is followed by a sentence to explain former messages or add extra information. Besides, “正是” (truly) introduces a more elegant form of Chinese language, containing idioms, couplets and poems. The usage of conventional language is quite common to launch comments in *Sanyan* and other well-known vernacular novels, such as *Shuihu Zhuan* (*Outlaws of the Marsh*). As a convention, *Sanyan* also begins with and concludes with a poem or verse, followed by the narrative marker “诗云” (The poem says). Their function is to advocate moral stances of main characters or comment on the central plot of the whole story.

Narrative markers perform an essential function in controlling the discourse, so as to “reorient the space of the story” [14]. If the story is centered on two main characters, the storyteller would employ the formulaic sentence “话分两头” (The story will follow the other line), in the middle of discourse. Generally, it means that actions or happenings fall on two characters at the same story-time, but not in the same story-place. According to Chatman, in the story-space, “it is the entities that perform or are affected by them that are spatial” [1]. Thus, we have a better understanding of each character’s story before they would eventually meet with each other in the same story-space.

When narrative markers, attached to the overt narration and overt commentary, are translated in the Yangs’ English version of *Sanyan*, they reveal how the storyteller organizes the story structure and the detailed description in the target text. Besides, narrative markers associated with the overt commentary also influence the conveyance of narrator’s narrating of the story and discourse in the Yangs’ rendition. Thus in the Yangs’ translation, how the storyteller’s position is rendered to the English reader deserves a closer discussion.

4. Narrative Markers in the Yangs’ English Translation of *Sanyan*

For the Yangs’ English rendition, the narrative marker is

quite essential to deal with, as it constantly reminds the reader of the simulated context. The narrator’s voice in the overt narration and overt commentary is the most typical sign of *Sanyan*. They would be audible and visible to the reader, if they are also highlighted in the English translation of *Sanyan*. Whether the Yangs tend to hold, delete or change narrative markers, it would affect the reader’s acceptability of the storyteller’s narration and commentary.

4.1. Narrative Markers in the English Translation of Overt Narration

If formulaic expressions are reserved, they will make the storyteller’s voice heard in varying degrees in the English rendition. Along with the narrative marker, a “narrator’s overt presence is marked by explicit description, direct communications to a narratee about the setting he needs to know” [1]. The “set description” is the weakest voice of an overt narrator [1]. Furthermore, the storyteller’s overt narration contains the main character’s physical appearance, social position and relevant activities. The Yangs’ translation aim is embodied in narrative markers in different levels of overt narration.

The setting creates the story’s basic background, building the atmosphere for following events. The narrative marker, “话说” (The story tells) is the initial mark of over narration about the historical background. In the Story 3 of *Stories to Awaken the World*, namely “The Oil-Peddler Wins the Queen of Flowers”, the story proper initiates with the description of the grand historical setting. “话说” (The story tells), employed repeatedly by many stories, is a typical expression for the storyteller to commence his overt narration, forming an essential role in the structure of the story.

Example 1:

话说大宋自太祖开基，太宗嗣位，历传真、仁、英、神、哲，共是七代帝王，都则偃武修文，民安国泰 [5].

Our story takes place in the Song dynasty. Emperor Taizu [r. 960-75], who founded the great Song dynasty, and the six succeeding emperors — Emperor Taizong [r. 976-97], Emperor Zhenzong [r. 998-1022], Emperor Renzong [r. 1023-63], Emperor Yingzong [r. 1064-67], Emperor Shenzong [r. 1068-85], and Emperor Zhezong [r. 1086-1100] — all favored culture and the arts over military activities. The empire and its people enjoyed peace and prosperity [7].

With the narrative marker “话说” (The story tells), the storyteller introduces a sequential presentation of the first seven emperors of Song dynasty, and during their reign, the whole empire is peaceful and prosperous. The Yangs translate “话说” (The story tells) into the declarative form, “our story takes place”, taking the pronoun of the first person. They have preserved the simulated context, in which the storyteller addresses to the audience. The declarative sentence not only maintains the presence of the storyteller to describe historical information, but also makes the narrator come closer to the narratee with the usage of “our story”. With the “definite deictic reference” of “our”, this first person pronoun “exerts itself to the utmost to declare the closeness of an extradiegetic narrator to the reader” [14]. The Yangs’ translation sustains the

convention to start with the story proper with formulaic words. They also stress their role in forming the main structure of the story proper.

With the narrative marker, the storyteller gradually proceeds to the next phase of a character. In the Story 28 of *Stories to Caution the World*, "Madam White Is Kept Forever under Thunder Peak Tower", Xu Xuan was arrested and accused of crimes once more in Suzhou, as he had worn fancy clothes stolen by Madam White. Because he was ignorant of Madam White's theft, he was slightly sentenced to do hard labor in the Zhenjiang Prefecture. The storyteller exploits the narrative marker "且说" (Let us turn to) to narrate that after leaving Suzhou, Xu Xuan and his guards start their way to Zhenjiang. It signifies that the former episode of Xu Xuan's life in Suzhou has come to an end, and he begins leaving for Zhenjiang.

Example 2:

且说许宣在路，饥餐渴饮，夜住晓行，不则一日，来到镇江 [4].

On the road, Xu Xuan and the guards ate and drank when necessary, traveling by day and resting at night. In a matter of days, they arrived in Zhenjiang [6].

In the Yangs' translation, the narrative marker "且说" (Let us turn to) is deleted. Then the storyteller's role that pronounces the change of Xu Xuan's living place, is greatly diminished. "且说" (Let us turn to) is frequently placed after "an explanation or a poem", to introduce a new episode [9]. It aims to "remind and stress the change of plot" by the storyteller, and also plays an essential role in "bringing in new clues of the plot" [12]. The translation retains the overt narration of Xu Xuan's journey to Zhenjiang, but deletes the narrative marker's presence. Consequently, the Yangs' translation is more concerned with Xu Xuan's actions, transferring to a new setting. The Yangs pay more attention to the description of details and leave modern target readers undisturbed by the removal of the storyteller's intrusion. They attempt to "be faithful to the original style" and "pay attention to the anticipated target reader" as well [16]. Compared with the original text, the narrating process of the English rendition is more flexible and fluent.

In *Sanyan*, the storyteller prefers to employ the narrative marker to unfold the overt narration of a new character. In the Story 12 of *Stories to Caution the World*, "A Double Mirror Brings Fan the Loach and His Wife Together Again", an official, Lü Zhongyi was on his way to take his position in Fuzhou. He took his family along with him, including his charming and tender daughter, Shunge. With the narrative marker "再说" (Let us come back to), the storyteller briefs the basic information of Shunge, such as her age, looks and personality. It is customary to turn to the description of the main character, with a formulaic expression.

Example 3:

再说吕忠翊有个女儿，小名顺哥，年方二八。生得容颜清丽，性情温柔.....[4].

Now, Lü Zhongyi had a daughter whose pet name was Shunge. At sixteen years of age, she was as pretty as she was sweet and gentle in temperament [6].

In the Yangs' translation, the narrative marker "再说" (Let us come back to) is replaced with "now" in the discourse level. This deixis, "now" can adjust "the narration tempo" and handle "the distance between the reader, narratee and narrative itself" [14]. It draws the English reader nearer to the text. But the storyteller's presence in describing Shunge's basic information is omitted, leaving behind the story itself. Thus, the distance between the narrator and reader is narrowed, while the unique sign of vernacular stories becomes less obvious. It displays that the Yangs stress on the flow of the discourse within the episode, while they may remove narrative markers in inessential points.

The overt narrator generally depicts that a character perceives another individual, an object or the surrounding. In *Sanyan*, the explicit description of the setting is usually followed by the narrative marker "只见" (only to see). It is regarded as a sign leading the detailed description of the background. The character's perception of another person or some objects is explained together with this formulaic expression. In the Story 8 of *Stories Old and New*, namely "Wu Bao'an Abandons His Family to Ransom His Friend", the Governor General Li Meng led his troops to pursue southern barbarians, who had assaulted the commoners under Li's jurisdiction. When Li and his troops entered deeper into the mountainous zones, they saw mountain ranges upon ranges and lost their track.

Example 4:

次日，拔寨都起。行了数日，直到乌蛮界上。只见万山叠翠，草木蒙茸，正不知那一条是去路 [3].

The following day, they broke camp. After marching for several days, they reached the territory of the Wuman tribes, where all that met their eyes were vast stretches of green wooded mountains, with no indication of a road [2].

The formulaic expression, "只见" (only to see) is translated into "all that met their eyes", which is used to reveal the sight of Li Meng and his troops. In the Yangs' translation, the role of "只见" (only to see), followed by the description of the scenery, is retained. The "normal" or even "principal function of setting" lies in forming "the mood of the narrative" [1]. Based on the view of mountainous scenery in the Wuman's tribe, the Yangs' translation also presupposes the following tragedy that would happen on Li Meng and his troops. It concludes that the Yangs have kept some narrative markers associated with detailed messages. They endeavor to have a flexible way of revealing the overt narration in the English rendition.

As discussed above, the Yangs have kept significant narrative markers, as they reveal the structure of the story and switch from one character to another one. Yet they erase inessential narrative makers, discussing about the details of a character or the same event. Hence, the Yangs are able to remain narrative features of essential narrative markers and keep the overall discourse concise and neat. They make efforts to find a middle way, to maintain the narrative technique of the original text and consider the modern reader's preference to the smooth reading experience.

4.2. Narrative Markers in the English Translation of Overt Commentary

Narrative markers in *Sanyan* are connected to explicit comments on the story or even the discourse itself. As the “transition to the mode of commentary is marked”, formulaic terms make further comments more salient [9]. The storyteller employs formulaic expressions to explain vital events, judge the morals and values of characters and make statements more persuasive linked with the real world. Besides, the storyteller avails narrative markers to comment on the discourse. He has discussed the aim of narrative and controled the speed of discourse time, which is “the time it takes to peruse the discourse” [1]. Hence, in the Yangs’ translation, narrative markers can make the overt commentary more or less intrusive.

The narrative maker functions as the starting point of explaining critical information in *Sanyan*. In the Story 10 of *Stories Old and New*, namely “Magistrate Teng Settles the Case of Inheritance with Ghostly Cleverness”, fourteen years elapsed after the death of Mei-shi’s husband. The storyteller chooses “原来” (as a matter of fact) to express that the young widow has been cautious to tell past events to her son, Shanshu. However, after the conveyance of summary that is “the narration in a few paragraphs or a few pages of several days, months, or years of existence, without details of action or speech”, it is not necessary to include the narrative marker to explain Mei-shi’s caution [8]. A direct narration of Mei-shi’s behavior and personal character will suffice.

Example 5:

光阴似箭，善述不觉长成一十四岁。原来梅氏平生谨慎，从前之事，在儿子面前，一字也不题 [3]。

Time shot by like an arrow. Quite unnoticeably, Shanshu had grown to be fourteen years old. Being discreet by nature, Mei-shi had never told the boy a word about the past.... [2].

In the Yangs’ translation, the narrative marker “原来” (as a matter of fact) is deleted. As the preceding sentence briefs the change of time, the reader can realize that nine years has passed and Shanshu has become 14 years old. Then the overt commentary interprets Mei-shi’s cautious attitude, not mentioning a word about the will of her husband and other former events. Because it is not necessary to make extra explanations of Mei-shi’s caution, indicating the reason for Shanshu’s ignorance which ends up in being ridiculed. It is more proper to treat the description of Mei-shi as the overt narration. For this reason, the Yangs have chosen to disregard “原来” (as a matter of fact). It also shows the Yangs’ flexible ways to translate narrative markers considering their specific usages in proper layers of discourse.

With the narrative marker, the overt commentary explains information after a poem or a letter. In the Story 10 of *Stories Old and New*, namely “Magistrate Teng Settles the Case of Inheritance with Ghostly Cleverness”, Magistrate Teng managed to find the will hidden in the portrait of late Prefect Ni, as the magistrate had been asked for help by the widow Mei-shi and her son. From the details listed in the will, Magistrate Teng began to realize Prefect Ni’s intention. With

the narrative marker, “原来” (as a matter of fact), the storyteller explains that Prefect Ni writes this will at the age of eighty-one, as his younger son is just one years old.

Example 6:

原来这行乐图，是倪太守八十一岁上，与小孩子做周岁时，预先做下的 [3]。

As a matter of fact, this portrait had been done during the celebration of the baby’s first birthday, when Prefect Ni was eighty-one years old [2].

This overt commentary is employed after showing late Prefect Ni’s will in detail. The Yangs retain this narrative marker, “原来” (as a matter of fact) in the English rendition, so as to explain when the will is written by Prefect Ni. “Interpretation” is about the “open explanation of the gist, relevance or significance of a story element” [1]. Its function is to provide more information about the cause of the will. This marker in the English translation indicates how the details are employed to convey elaborate information. As a conventional sign, its repetitive presence reminds the English reader of its explaining function. From their handling of “原来” (as a matter of fact), it can be concluded that the Yangs aim to keep its role in the overt commentary, in a more suitable situation.

The storyteller sums up the discourse with the assistance of the narrative marker. It is referred to the “self-conscious” narration, concerning “comments on the discourse rather than the story” [1]. The storyteller would shorten the discourse or switch to another line of the plot. In the Story 14 of *Stories to Caution the World*, “A Mangy Priest Exorcises a Den of Ghosts”, after marriage, Schoolmaster Wu happened to see his wife’s maid Jin’er showing the image of a deceased one. Though he was apprehensive, he could not make sure until the Clear and Bright Festival came around. It was the vocation for people to sweep their ancestor’s tombs and enjoy the scenery of spring, when Wu and his friend were frightened to meet a bunch of ghosts, including his wife and the maid Jin’er. The storyteller employs “话休烦絮” (let us not fill the story with trivial details) to stop telling about his marriage life and commence with following events, happening on the Clear and Bright Festival.

Example 7:

话休絮烦，时遇清明节假，学生子却都不来 [4]。

Not to encumber our story with unnecessary details, let us tell of what happened on the day of the Clear and Bright Festival. It being a holiday, there was no school [6].

The Yangs have translated “话休烦絮” (let us not fill the story with trivial details) into a verbal phrase “not to encumber our story with unnecessary details”, hence the storyteller stresses his aim to finish telling about Schoolmaster Wu’s marriage. Then, the Yangs add the main sentence with “let us tell of”, blending in the imperative sentences to outline the following event that will occur to Schoolmaster Wu in the holiday of the Clear and Bright Festival. Thus, the narrative marker performs a more salient function of commenting the discourse in the Yangs’ translation.

It is common that the transition from the discourse of a character to another one is marked by formulaic expressions. In the Story 3 of *Stories to Awaken the World*, namely “The

Oil-Peddler Wins the Queen of Flowers”, the story proper began with the female character Xin Yaoqin, who separated with her parents in the age of 12, helplessly ending up as a courtesan. Then with the narrative marker, “话分两头” (The story will follow the other line), the main male character, Qin Zhong’s current living place, hometown and adopted father are all included in the narration. “话分两头” (The story will follow the other line) signifies “the turning point in the plot development of the story” and “transferring to another line of plot” [12]. With regard to different story-spaces, it means different events fall on two main characters in the same time.

Example 8:

话分两头。再说临安城清波门里，有个开油店的朱十老，三年前过继一个小厮，也是汴京逃难来的，姓秦名重 [5]。

Our story forks at this point. By Clear Waves Gate of the city of Lin'an, there lived a Zhu the Tenth, owner of an oil shop. Three years earlier, he had adopted a boy, also a refugee from Bianliang, named Qin Zhong [7].

The Yangs translate “话分两头” (The story will follow the other line) into “our story forks at this point”. From the determiner “our”, it can be acknowledged that the storyteller’s simulated context is preserved, feeling as if the storyteller is addressing to the real audiences in the public. The original distance between the narrator and the narratee is shortened with the deictic referent. Besides, the verb “fork” means another line of the story, occurring in the same story-time, will be transferred, though the discourse-time is different. In the Yangs’ translation, this narrative marker is retained so as to perform an essential function in handling and controlling the pace of discourse.

Therefore, narrative markers in the overt commentary are preserved if they affect the interpretation of former sentences and the structure of narration. While several narrative markers are not closely related with commenting on elements of the story, they are deleted to make the story less tedious. But all narrative markers about making comments on the discourse itself are preserved. From various approaches to render narrative markers in the overt commentary, we find the Yangs’ goal is to strike the balance between the original text and the reader.

The Yangs take control of narrative markers according to their degree of salience. With regard to their role in narrating and commenting the main structure of the story, or handling the discourse, they tend to preserve narrative markers. In order not to disturb the reader, they remove narrative markers in the overt narration and overt commentary on minor events. As discussed before, the Yangs intend to take care of the storyteller’s rhetoric to show the narrative method of vernacular stories. Meanwhile, they also make efforts to consider the reader’s response. It indicates that they prefer to take a middle way between keeping all narrative markers and deleting the whole of them. They achieve the goal of rendering “readable modern American English, with the right shades of meaning and feeling” [15]. From the Yangs’ translation of narrative markers in the overt narration and overt commentary, they have retained the essential ones for the broader level, but deleted the insignificant ones in the narrower layer.

5. Distinctive Features of Narrative Markers in the Yangs’ English Translation of *Sanyan*

Having discussed narrative markers in the English translation of *Sanyan*, concerning the overt narration and overt commentary, the translators apply flexible approaches so as to conform to the target text and appeal to the reader. The Yangs’ translation methods are quite flexible, attempting to seek the balance between Feng Menglong and the target reader. It can be offered as an example of the translations of vernacular fictions and novels.

From the Yangs’ rendition of narrative markers concerning the overt narration, it can be found that they focus on the core structure and endeavor to retain the unique style of storyteller’s presence. They stress on narrative markers, for instance “话说” (The story tells), so as to consider the original narrative methods. In the meantime, when narrative markers are explored as lead-in for details, the translators may change or even delete them. There are a large number of narrative markers associated with exhaustive information of characters, settings and events, such as “只见” (only to see). It might be tedious and obtrusive to the modern English readers, as they have accustomed to the fluent and smooth narration of fictions. As for “再说” (Let us come back to), it sometimes is replaced with deixis “now”, shortening the distance between the narrator and reader. Still, the storyteller’s presence is greatly reduced. Therefore, the Yangs maintain narrative markers affecting the key story structure; yet they delete other narrative markers concerning the details, which endeavors to appeal to the English reader’s needs.

When it comes to narrative markers linked to the overt commentary, the Yangs also adopt various methods to translate them. If they explain key elements of the former story, the storyteller’s interpretation is preserved in the English translation of *Sanyan*, for example “原来” (as a matter of fact). But when the sentence led by the same narrative marker can not be regarded as the reason for the former discourse, the Yangs would choose to remove the definite narrative marker. It seems that the overall percentage of narrator’s comments on the story is lowered. Thus the translated sentences actually fall into the category of overt narration. The English translation of *Sanyan* is more concise and readable for the modern reader. The English reader will not be affected by the storyteller’s unfailing presence with narrative markers.

There are more narrative markers related with the overt commentary on the discourse itself, taking “话分两头” (The story will follow the other line) for example. The Yangs reserve key narrative markers to highlight the control of the discourse. The Yangs keep all narrative markers of this kind. They have attempted to achieve “stylistic faithfulness to the original texts”, bearing in mind to avoid overstressing or overlooking the narrator’s narrating on the discourse [15]. It can be inferred that they intend to reproduce the storyteller’s comments on how to construct the discourse and switch to various parts within the discourse. With the definite deictic

referent, such as “we” and “our”, the distance between the narrator and the narratee is narrowed in the overt commentary.

The Yangs’ translation of *Sanyan* has conveyed narrative markers differently, describing on the structure of the story or remarking on the whole discourse. This reveals the translators’ efforts to preserve narrative features of the story structure in the vital point. They sustain the overt commentary on the discourse itself as well. Hence, the common understanding of the simulated context between the storyteller and listener will be outlined. While the Yangs also take the English reader’s stance and delete narrative markers in the detailed description and commentary on the story, some of them tend to be unnatural for the smooth narration of events about one certain character. They have found out their own “middle way” between the “poet-translator” and the “scholar-translator” [15]. Concerned with narrative markers, the translators make the narrator’s voice lower, owing to the effort of replacement and removal, while they help the narrator come closer to the reader, for the usage of first person pronouns and time deixis.

6. Conclusion

Based on the discussion of narrative markers in the narrator’s voice, this essay has focused on the overt narration and overt commentary in *Sanyan*. In the Yangs’ English rendition, they have maintained these key narrative elements, regarding the storyteller’s concern of the main structure and handling of the whole discourse. Their purpose is to comply with the storyteller’s rhetoric. For narrative markers in relation to the characters, events and settings in detail, their repetitive occurrence seems to be tedious and obtrusive. The Yangs overlook them, for they might affect the reading process of the modern reader. Having adopted a flexible way of controlling narrative markers, the translators provide a typical solution to benefit both the original text and the target reader.

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