A corpus-based study of Howard Goldblatt's translation style in his English rendering of the Shanhaijing

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Abstract

The classic work, *Shanhaijing*, is a seminal work in ancient Chinese literature, celebrated for its mysticism and profound depth. Its English translation plays a pivotal role in helping the international community understand Chinese mythological culture, and an analysis of its translation style can offer valuable insights and references for the translation of similar classical texts. Therefore, this study aims to examine Howard Goldblatt's English translation of *Shanhaijing*, focusing on his translational style and its effect on the comprehension of English-speaking readers. Utilizing corpus tools such as WordSmith, AntConc, and Readability Analyzers, the study conducts a quantitative comparison of translations by Goldblatt, Anne Birrell, and Wang Hong. The analysis combines literature review and corpus-based methods to examine Goldblatt's translation style in terms of word frequency, type-token ratio, mean word and sentence length, and readability. The research reveals that Goldblatt demonstrates a rich lexical variety, employing straightforward yet precise and nuanced syntax. Overall, Howard Goldblatt successfully preserved the cultural essence of the original text while enhancing the expressiveness and richness of the translation, thereby deepening English readers' understanding and appreciation of this classic work. The findings provide significant guidance for the international communication of classical texts and offer effective approaches on how to make classic works more accessible to international readers.

Keywords: Corpus linguistics, cross-cultural communication, *Shanhaijing*, stylistic analysis, translation strategies.

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Transparency: The authors confirm that the manuscript is an honest, accurate, and transparent account of the study; that no vital features of the study have been omitted; and that any discrepancies from the study as planned have been explained. This study followed all ethical practices during writing.

1. Introduction

The translation of classics is a vital channel for making the classics enjoyable to the international world. It is a miraculous book that records most Chinese myths and serves as an encyclopedia of geographical knowledge [1]. As Yuan [2] stated, it is simply impossible to study Chinese mythology without first starting with *Shanhaijing*. As a book containing such abundant knowledge in various fields, *Shanhaijing* holds immense historical and cultural value, serving as a comprehensive collection of ancient myths and one of the most complete records of early civilization. Its English translation also holds unique value for fostering a deeper understanding of Chinese mythological culture among international readers. Since the late 1970s, the translation of the *Shanhaijing* into English has gradually taken shape, with six versions available to date. Among them, Howard Goldblatt's English translation of the *Shanhaijing*, the most recent and unique one, represents Goldblatt's first attempt at translating classical Chinese texts. This version not only offers a unique interpretation of the rich illustrations in the *Shanhaijing* but also accurately conveys the core ideas of the original text. Through concise expression and explanations of cultural contexts, it reduces the cognitive burden on readers and enhances the readability of the translation, increasing its appeal to a wider audience and facilitating broader cross-cultural engagement.

Given this, the study selects Goldblatt's translation of the *Shanhaijing* as the primary research object, with the translations by Anne Birrell and Wang Hong as references. By employing corpus analysis tools for quantitative research, the study focuses on exploring the unique stylistic features that Goldblatt demonstrates in the translation process. It also seeks to offer insights and guidance for future translation practices involving other classical texts.

2. Overview of the English Translations of *Shanhaijing*

The English translations of *Shanhaijing* began in 1978, and to date, there have been six versions, including three full translations and three abridged ones (Table 1):

Table 1.
English Translations of *Shanhaijing* and Library Holdings.

Number	Translation	Translator	Year	Type	Library Holdings
1	The Legendary Creatures of the Shanhaijing	Schiffeler [3]	1978	Abridged Translation	58
2	Shanhaijing: Legendary Geography and Wonders of Ancient China	Cheng, et al. [4]	1985	Full Translation	67
3	Shanhaijing: The Classic of Mountains and Seas	Birrell [5]	1999	Full Translation	325
4	Shanhaijing, a Chinese Bestiary: Strange Creatures from the Guideways through Mountain and Seas	Strassberg [6]	2002	Abridged Translation	1821
5	The Classic of Mountains and Seas	Wang and Zhao [7]	2010	Full Translation	19
6	Fantastic Creatures of the Mountains and Seas: A Chinese Classic	Goldblatt [8]	2021	Abridged Translation	277

Source: Liang and Wang [9].

As shown in Table 1, these six English translations are held by 2,587 libraries worldwide, with digital versions accounting for 69% [1]of the total. The number of global library holdings serves as an important indicator of a book's popularity, and the availability of digital resources is closely linked to the book's reach [10]. This suggests that *Shanhaijing* has gained considerable recognition and influence within the international academic community, highlighting its potential to contribute significantly to cross-cultural exchange.

Among the six translations, the most recent and unique is the one by Howard Goldblatt. Updike [11] referred to Goldblatt as "the midwife of Chinese literature in the English-speaking world". Goldblatt's translations have established a critical bridge for introducing Chinese classical texts to global audiences. And Lupke [12] noted that "The uncanny aspect of Howard Goldblatt's example, by contrast, is his consistent ability to play the part of the literary chameleon, not simply rendering Chinese works into English well, but exhausting his creative powers to capture the true flavor of the original". Although his translation of *Shanhaijing* is his first foray into translating classical works, it is both accurate and stylistically impressive.

To better understand Goldblatt's translation style, one effective approach is to compare his work with that of other renowned translators, as Baker [13] argues that a study of a translator's style must attempt to capture the translator's characteristic use of language, his or her individual profile of linguistic habits, compared to other translators. Among the translations of *Shanhaijing*, Anne Birrell's version is particularly noteworthy. As a British mythologist, translator, and Sinologist, Birrell possesses a deep understanding of traditional Chinese culture and is highly regarded for her contributions to the study of ancient mythology. In contrast, Wang Hong and Zhao Zheng's version is the only one translated by native Chinese speakers who specialize in the translation of Classical texts. Together, these translations offer diverse viewpoints on the *Shanhaijing*, enhancing our comprehension of this classic text.

Due to the different cultural and professional backgrounds of these three translators, *Shanhaijing* has been translated in

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[1]Data on library holdings and digital resources in this paper are sourced from the WorldCat database.

different ways. Goldblatt, a translator who has a keen sense of literary elegance and cultural nuances, aims to make the source material more accessible to readers while maintaining its cultural richness. His translations appeal to a wide range of readers as he skillfully keeps a balance between readability and faithfulness to the source material. Birrell, however, might give greater weight to the myths' cultural significance and symbolism. In an effort to capture the full scope and depth of the original text, Birrell employs a thick translation approach, which, with its annotations and its accompanying glosses, seeks to locate the text in a rich cultural and linguistic context [14]. Although this method is clearly helpful for academic readers, general readers may find it difficult to follow Birrell's numerous cross-references as *Shanhaijing* is already a large and intricate work [15]. Consequently, readers with a strong scholarly interest in mythology are more likely to find Birrell's translation appealing. Wang Hong and Zhao Zheng's translation, on the other hand, focuses more on accurately capturing the original's language and structure, which makes it better suited for readers who are interested in classical literature and wish to interact closely with the original text.

Considering the variations in the translators' cultural backgrounds and translation styles, a comprehensive study of the translators' stylistic characteristics will be of significant importance. Each translator uses different stylistic approaches and strategies, which can be identified by comparing their translations. In the context of intercultural communication, this investigation can deepen our understanding of rendering classical texts. Examining translation style is also central to the study of translation stylistics, which is a crucial area of study, especially when it comes to translating classical works.

In recent years, as information technology develops, corpus-based research methodologies enjoys growing popularity. Initially, this method was regarded as peripheral in the field of linguistics, and computer corpora were rarely used. With the increasing availability of corpora and computational analysis tools, the number of linguists making use of these facilities has grown rapidly, the quantity and range of studies have grown, and studies linked to computer corpora have earned increasing acceptability and respect [16]. By 1996, it was increasingly evident that corpora were shifting toward a central position in linguistic studies, a sentiment captured by a pioneering corpus linguist who noted, "Corpora are becoming mainstream [17]".

Among the various branches of corpus linguistics, one key branch is corpus stylistics, which necessitates a focus on linguistic style and the use of stylistic theories and analytical frameworks [18]. Notably, the study of translation style through corpus analysis was pioneered by Baker. Since Baker introduced corpus to the study of the translator's style, the study of the translator's style has become a popular topic. Baker pays much attention to translators' subconscious language habits, rather than superficial language features, and she suggests that a translator's style refers to the translator's choice of the type of material to translate, and his or her consistent use of specific strategies, including the use of prefaces or after words, footnotes, glossing in the body of the text [13]. Thus, the corpus-based approach has made it possible to conduct new kinds of investigations into language use and to expand the scope of earlier investigations. These advantages apply to the study of individual linguistic features as well as the characterization of language varieties [19].

3. Literature Review and Research Methodology

3.1. Current Research on Howard Goldblatt's Translation Style

Research on Howard Goldblatt in the field of international translation studies remains limited. Only a few articles mention Howard Goldblatt's works, with minimal comprehensive analysis of his translation techniques or his impact on the global reception of Chinese literature. For instance, McDougall [20] discusses the role of translated Chinese literature in global markets, particularly in the English-speaking world, and briefly mentions Goldblatt's translation of Wolf Totem, which won the 2007 Man Asian Literary Prize. However, her study focuses on broader cultural exchanges rather than an in-depth analysis of Goldblatt's translation works or his translation style.

In contrast, the Chinese translation studies community has shown a much greater interest in Howard Goldblatt, with a more active research landscape.

A search of the CNKI (China National Knowledge Infrastructure) full-text database using the keyword "Howard Goldblatt" yielded 1,246 results (as of September 8, 2024), including 114 core journal articles, 500 master's theses, and 7 doctoral dissertations. Overall, domestic research on Goldblatt's English translations exhibits two main characteristics: (1) In terms of topic selection, most studies are confined to the analysis of specific works and their translations; (2) Methodologically, the majority of research adopts a qualitative approach, focusing on how Goldblatt handles linguistic and cultural elements of the source text, while quantitative analysis remains limited [21]. Of the articles identified, only seven use a corpus-based approach to investigate Goldblatt's translation style (Table 2). The earliest of these studies, titled A Corpus-based Study of Translators' Style: With Howard Goldblatt's Translations of Modern and Contemporary Chinese Novels as an Example, was published by Huang Libo and Zhu Zhiyu in the fifth issue of Foreign Language Research in 2012. While most of these studies concentrate on Goldblatt's translation of specific novels, often limiting their scope to a single genre. This narrow focus presents a significant gap in the exploration of his overall translation style. This is one reason why this paper chooses *Shanhaijing*, the classical text, as its subject, applying a corpus-based approach to examine Goldblatt's unique translation style in a broader and more comprehensive context.

Table 2.
A Corpus-Based Study on Howard Goldblatt's Translation Style.

Title	Author	Journal Name	Publication Date	Citation	Download
A Corpus-Based Study on the Translation Style of Howard Goldblatt: A Case Study of the English Translations of Mo Yan's Novels	Li Huanhui	Journal of Heilongjiang Institute of Education	2019-04-25	1	760
A Corpus-Based Analysis of the Collaborative Translation Style of Howard Goldblatt and His Wife: The Case of the English Translations of Liu Zhenyu's Novels	Hou Yu; Hu Kaibao	Journal of Yanshan University (Philosophy and Social Sciences)	2019-01-16	23	1557
Corpus-Based Study on the Translation Style of Howard Goldblatt	Niu Jiang; Li Yingyu	Chongqing Jiaotong University (Social Sciences)	2018-02-15	11	755
Corpus-Based Study on Stylistic Features in Translation: A Case Study of Howard Goldblatt's English Translation of Tales of Hulan River	Ni Xue); Zhang Hongyan	Journal of Huaibei Normal University (Philosophy and Social Sciences)	2017-02-25	9	780
Corpus-Based Comparative Study of Ken Liu's and Howard Goldblatt's Translation Style	Song Gairong; Gong Yulong	Journal of Huaihua University	2016-07-28	16	985
Corpus-Based Analysis of Howard Goldblatt's Translation Style: A Case Study of the English Translations of Mo Yan's Novels	Hou Yu; Liu Zequan; Liu Dingjia	Foreign Languages and Their Teaching	2014-04-15	127	5619
A Corpus-Based Study of Translators' Styles: Howard Goldblatt's English Translations of Modern and Contemporary Chinese Novels	Huang Libo; Zhu Zhiyu	Foreign Languages Research	2012-10-15	240	8276

3.2. Corpus-Based Stylistic Research in Translation

The rapid advancement of computational technology and corpus linguistics has led to a boom in interdisciplinary humanities research. At its core, corpus linguistics is a research approach that facilitates empirical descriptions of language use based on a large and principled collection of texts stored on the computer. It makes extensive use of computers for analysis, using both automatic and interactive techniques [22]. This approach makes it possible to study patterns that are not limited to what an individual can perceive or remember, and offer new ways of studying the material base of many of society's activities [23]. Additionally, this empirical method offers trustworthy support for linguistic feature analysis, which can improve objectivity while expanding our comprehension of language phenomena. And this method also makes it easier to more accurately identify and analyze important stylistic elements and artistic principles.

In recent years, many scholars have employed corpus techniques to perform stylistic analyses, resulting in the emergence of corpus stylistics. And the stylistic analysis concentrates more on particular textual details and how character and characterization can be inferred from the textual detail [24]. As for this, corpora can provide a comprehensive and objective basis for such analysis. Naturally, corpus methods can also be used to examine the stylistic features of translated texts.

The linguistic preferences and patterns of translators can be determined with quantitative analysis of the translated texts. Baker [13] offers the first attempt to outline a methodological framework for investigating the translator's style in literary translation based on corpus research. The strength of this approach lies in its capacity to use methodical quantitative analysis to identify minute variations and patterns in translations, which allows for a more objective description and evaluation of a translator's stylistic inclinations.

To provide an in-depth analysis of Howard Goldblatt's stylistic decisions in his English translation of *Shanhaijing*, this study built a specialized corpus. The text of Goldblatt's translation was included for comparison with translations by Birrell and Wang Hong in order to ensure a thorough and impartial analysis. Through a comparative analysis of these translations, the study intends to draw attention to the unique stylistic elements of Goldblatt's work. The study takes a quantitative approach, concentrating on important metrics like readability, mean word length, sentence length, type-token ratio, and word frequency. A better grasp of the stylistic elements of the translations is provided by these quantitative metrics, which are displayed as charts and visual data.

4. Results

4.1. Word Frequency Statistics

Word frequency, which is closely tied to the text's style and the author's writing habits, refers to the rate at which all word forms appear in a given corpus. This information can aid researchers in developing a preliminary understanding of the entire text. All of the frequently occurring word groups, including idioms, fixed phrases, and specialized terms, can be found using word frequency lists, a popular tool with monolingual corpora. Therefore, the styles of various authors and works can be discovered by referring to high-frequency words as well [25]. As the word frequency can provide a comprehensive view of the text's linguistic landscape, shedding light on the author's stylistic fingerprints, Sinclair [26] noted, "anyone studying a text is likely to need to know how often each different word-form occurs in it. The simplest operation is to turn it into a list of the word-forms in the order of their first occurrence, noting the frequency of each", so does the study of the translated texts. The word frequency statistics for the three English translations of *Shanhaijing* are presented in the table below:

Table 3.
Word Frequency.

Number	The Classic of Mountains and Seas (Howard Goldblatt)			The Classic of Mountains and Seas (Birrell)			The Classic of Mountains and Seas (Wang)		
	Word	Count	Frequency	Word	Count	Frequency	Word	Count	Frequency
2	of	712	4.24	and	1978	4.00	of	2088	4.49
3	a	603	3.59	is	1867	3.77	a	1976	4.25
4	and	459	2.73	a	1744	3.52	and	1815	3.90
5	to	321	1.91	of	1443	2.92	is	1687	3.63
6	was	287	1.71	its	972	1.96	there	1336	2.87
7	in	264	1.57	it	959	1.94	its	898	1.93
8	it	242	1.44	on	896	1.81	mountain	872	1.88
9	its	206	1.23	there	885	1.79	are	868	1.87
10	with	164	0.98	are	847	1.71	called	848	1.82
11	that	153	0.91	to	760	1.54	it	837	1.80
12	for	148	0.89	mount	759	1.53	to	638	1.37
13	on	147	0.88	mountain	746	1.51	river	632	1.36
14	Shan	142	0.85	river	735	1.48	which	514	1.11
15	as	119	0.71	leagues	495	1.00	li	494	1.06
16	were	98	0.58	called	476	0.96	on	492	1.06
17	had	94	0.56	in	475	0.96	in	458	0.98
18	from	93	0.55	here	463	0.94	like	382	0.82
19	an	92	0.55	further	400	0.81	further	379	0.82
20	by	77	0.46	has	389	0.79	this	344	0.74

From the data, it can be observed that the top ten high-frequency words in all three translations are primarily function words, mostly comprising of articles and prepositions a, and, in, of, to, on and linking verbs (is, was). According to a 1998 study of the Bank of English corpus, the five most frequent words in English are also function words: the, of, to, and, and a [27]. This consistency reflects a shared tendency in the use of high-frequency words across translated English texts.

One notable difference, however, lies in the frequent use of the linking verbs "was" and "were" in Goldblatt's translation, whereas Birrell and Wang Hong rely more on the present tense verb "is". The past tense drives the unfolding of narrative or plot by establishing a clear temporal and causal framework [28]. Therefore, when a translator employs the past tense, it not only situates the events within a temporal context but also subtly reinforces a sense of causality, allowing readers to more easily follow the narrative progression. This tendency implies that Goldblatt's translation places greater emphasis on the historical nature of events, while Birrell and Wang Hong aim to capture a sense of immediacy and contemporary significance.

Another key difference lies in the use of conjunctions. Eugene Nida [29], a renowned American translation theorist, has highlighted the contrast between hypotaxis and parataxis as one of the most significant differences between Chinese and English languages in his work. He stated that "Perhaps the most important single difference between Chinese and English is the contrast between hypotaxis and parataxis... [29]". Therefore, Chinese, with its paratactic structure, often connects ideas without explicit conjunctions, whereas English, which favors hypotaxis, uses conjunctions to link clauses and sentences. According to the data, Goldblatt's translation uses the conjunction "that" and the preposition "with" more frequently than the other two translations. This implies that Goldblatt places an emphasis on more elaborate sentence construction and explicit logical relationships. His use of conjunctions and prepositions improves the text's readability and internal coherence. For example [30] (p.61).

Original:
(There is a bird called Qinyuan that resembles a wasp in appearance, but its size is comparable to that of a mandarin duck. Its sting is deadly to both animals and plants; it can kill birds and beasts and wither trees.)

Goldblatt's translation:
Another of Kunlun Shan's denizens was a bird that injected poison into its prey. The size of a mandarin duck, but with an articulated body like a wasp, the Qinyuan had large wings that projected the illusion of a far greater size [8] (p.25).

In this example, Goldblatt uses the preposition "with" to introduce the phrase "an articulated body like a wasp," adding more detailed imagery about the bird's physical characteristics. The relative clause "that projected the illusion of far greater size" further elaborates on the bird's wings, enhancing the description. This syntactic structure not only enriches the imagery but also improves the logical flow and vividness of the translation, allowing readers to better grasp the intended meaning.

Moreover, Goldblatt adopts a distinctive strategy when translating place names and units of measurement. In his translation, the word "Shan" (0.85%) is rendered directly in pinyin, preserving the original cultural significance of the text. This approach maintains the authenticity of the source material while also enhancing the cultural specificity of the target text. For units of measurement, Goldblatt also uses transliterations like "li," though the frequency of "li" is lower due to his translation being an abridged version. Like Goldblatt, Wang Hong also employs transliteration by retaining the unit "li" (1.06%), staying closer to the source text. In contrast, Birrell frequently uses "leagues" (1.00%) to denote distance, reflecting a domestication strategy aimed at making the translation more accessible to readers by using familiar terms. While this may improve ease of understanding for target readers, it risks diminishing some of the original cultural nuances.

Overall, Goldblatt's approach highlights his commitment to preserving the cultural integrity of the original, using pinyin and untranslated place names to emphasize the text's cultural roots. This strategy not only shows respect for the source material but also enriches the reader's cultural experience, fostering deeper cross-cultural understanding.

By comparing the word frequency data across the three English translations of *Shanhaijing*, we can observe shared patterns in the use of high-frequency words, yet Goldblatt's translation exhibits distinctive stylistic traits, particularly in his choice of tense and syntactic structures. These choices affect the narrative style of the translation, ultimately providing readers with different reading experiences.

4.2. Type-Token Ratio (TTR)

TTR is an important indicator in translation studies, and it is the ratio of unique words (types) that occur in a text to the total number of words (tokens). However, the TTR is sensitive to text length, which can skew the results. To address this, Scott and his colleagues proposed the standardized type-token ratio (STTR), which is an assessment of the diversity of languages used in a particular corpus [13] and calculates the TTR for every 1,000 words, then averages the values. According to Baker [31], a lower TTR means a text uses a less varied or narrower range of vocabulary, indicating that the text is lexically easier and simpler to process. The lower lexical density is much closer to the structure of spoken conversation, while a comparatively high lexical density is typical of formal written production. And relative lexical density can be used as a further means of distinguishing between close and distant texts [32]. The following chart illustrates that Goldblatt's translation of *the Shanhaijing* shows significant differences in TTR compared to the other versions.

Table 4.
Type-Token Ratio (TTR).

	The Classic of Mountains and Seas (Howard Goldblatt)	**The Classic of Mountains and Seas (Birrell)**	**The Classic of Mountains and Seas (Wang)**
Types	3667	4124	3924
Tokens	16790	50598	49449
TTR	21.84	8.15	7.94
STTR	48.01	30.53	29.89

As Table 4 shows, Goldblatt's translation is an abridged version, and it contains fewer types (3,667) and tokens (16,790) than the translations by Birrell and Wang Hong. Despite this, the TTR of Goldblatt's translation is higher than that of the other two translators. What's more, Goldblatt's STTR value is 48.01, also higher than Birrell's and Wang Hong's. This suggests that Goldblatt's translation excels in lexical diversity and variety, reflecting a stronger ability to create varied expressions. The TTR and STTR not only highlight the distinctive features of Goldblatt's translation but also provide empirical evidence of his skillful handling of language. Undoubtedly, Goldblatt's translation gains depth and complexity from this rich vocabulary, which makes it more dynamic and attractive for readers.

4.3. Mean Word and Sentence Length

Mean word length refers to the average number of letters in words within a given corpus. From the perspective of individual stylistic features, the research of mean word length may equally well be applied to the study of syllables of words in sentences, and in various other ways...and it might reveal characteristics which a writer would make no attempt to conceal, being himself unaware of their existence [33]. The table below provides information on the mean word and sentence lengths in Goldblatt's translation of the *Shanhaijing*.

Table 5.
Mean Word/Sentence Length.

	The Classic of Mountains and Seas (Howard Goldblatt)	The Classic of Mountains and Seas (Birrell)	The Classic of Mountains and Seas (Wang)
Mean word length	4.50	4.60	4.54
Mean sentence length	14.87	15.53	16.15

As we can see, both the average word length and sentence length in Goldblatt's translation are lower than those in the translations by Birrell and Wang Hong. This discovery reveals a stylistic tendency toward simplicity and concision in Goldblatt's writing. Goldblatt frequently chooses shorter words and more condensed sentence structures, which is consistent with the translation simplification technique commonly observed in translation research. According to Leech and Short, longer words are more difficult to understand than shorter words [24]. Goldblatt, by opting for shorter words, successfully conveys the main ideas of the original text while lowering the cognitive load on readers. This simplified approach is further justified by his frequent use of shorter sentences, which facilitates reading and comprehension of his translation. For example:

Original:

[30] (p.90)...... (Two hundred li further to the north lies Mount Danxun......)

Goldblatt's translation:

Two hundred li farther north stood Danxun shan [8] (p.38).

Birrell's translation:

Two hundred leagues further north is a mountain called Mount Cinnabarincense [5] (p.37).

Wang Hong's translation: 200 li further north is a mountain called Danxun [7] (p.71).

In these examples, the translators offer different approaches to translation. Goldblatt translates it as "Danxun shan," using a straightforward transliteration combined with a literal translation. This approach is brief and retains the original's rhythm, with a short, low-density phrase. Wang Hong, meanwhile, translates the phrase as "the mountain called Danxun," a more verbose rendering that, while retaining the transliteration, adds unnecessary complexity. Birrell's translation, "Mount Cinnabarincense," is even more complex, combining the meaning of "cinnabar" with the imagery of "incense." This tactic creates a longer, more complex phrase even though it adds more cultural context. This example shows Goldblatt's preference for clarity and brevity. By sticking to this simple style and using brief words and concise sentence structures, Goldblatt makes the original text's main points clearer and the target text easier to read and understand.

In a word, the simplicity and efficiency of Goldblatt's use of shorter words and sentences align with the previous examination of word frequency, type-token ratio, and other linguistic characteristics. By closely exploring these characteristics, we can better understand how Goldblatt translated the *Shanhaijing* while maintaining linguistic clarity and cultural richness.

4.4. Readability

The readability of a translation is closely linked to its acceptability among target readers. Therefore, the analysis of readability offers valuable insight into how well a translation connects with its target audience. Klare [34] argues that the size of a writer's audience depends to a large extent upon the readability of his writing. If he is interested only in a small, specialized, highly educated audience, the principles of readability presented here may not be of great concern. But if he is trying to reach a large, unselected, and less literate audience successfully, readability principles are of major importance. There are two aspects of readability: formal and content. The former includes some characteristics of translations like lexical richness, sentence structure, paragraph length, and vocabulary. At a deeper level, the latter encompasses elements such as narrative and literary qualities, linguistic tension, and appeal to readers, all of which are referred to as readability [35]. For the convenience of comparing and evaluating the read ability of the English translations of the *Shanhaijing* by Howard Goldblatt, Anne Birrell, and Wang Hong, the Readability Analyzer 1.0 is used in this study. The results are as follows:

Table 6.
Readability.

	The Classic of Mountains and Seas (Howard Goldblatt)	The Classic of Mountains and Seas (Birrell)	The Classic of Mountains and Seas (Wang)
Reading Ease (Flesch)	76.03	81.39	80.03
Text Difficulty (Percentage of Difficulty)	4.82	5.6	6.22

Based on the Readability Analyzer 1.0, a score between 75 and 80 indicates that a text is reasonably easy to read. According to the Flesch Reading Ease scores, Goldblatt's translation scored 76.03, slightly lower than Birrell's and Wang Hong's versions. Goldblatt's translation shows lower overall text difficulty, which also verifies the conclusion that his work is easier to read and caters to a broader audience.

Goldblatt has repeatedly emphasized that a translation is not for the author, nor for the translator, but for the reader, and their needs must come first. In an interview with Lingenfelter [36] in Seattle, he stressed that a translator's approach should be "reader first, author second," and that the translator's English should be "authentic and modern without being overwrought". Reader comprehension is always given top priority in Goldblatt's choices of texts and translation techniques.

This is also evident in his translation of *the Shanhaijing*, where he uses simple language and a wide variety of vocabulary to help readers understand the text's deeper meaning and cultural context. On the whole, Goldblatt's translation demonstrates distinct strength in terms of readability and text difficulty.

5. Conclusion

Through the comparative corpus analysis of the three English translations of the *Shanhaijing*, Howard Goldblatt's translation stands out for its distinctive style. Regarding the use of high-frequency words, Goldblatt's translation emphasizes function words, which enhance the fluency and expressiveness of the translation. Furthermore, the lexical diversity and richness in his work add depth to the target text, improving its overall quality. In terms of word and sentence length, Goldblatt adopts a concise approach to put readers first, making the text more accessible and easier to read. This fits perfectly with his reader-oriented philosophy and has notably boosted the visibility and understanding of the *Shanhaijing* among English-speaking readers. The findings gained from analyzing Goldblatt's translation style can provide valuable insights for the international communication of classical texts and offer an innovative perspective on how to make classic works more accessible to international readers.

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