

# Pecola Breedlove's Language in Chen-Chen Tseng's Translation of *The Bluest Eye*

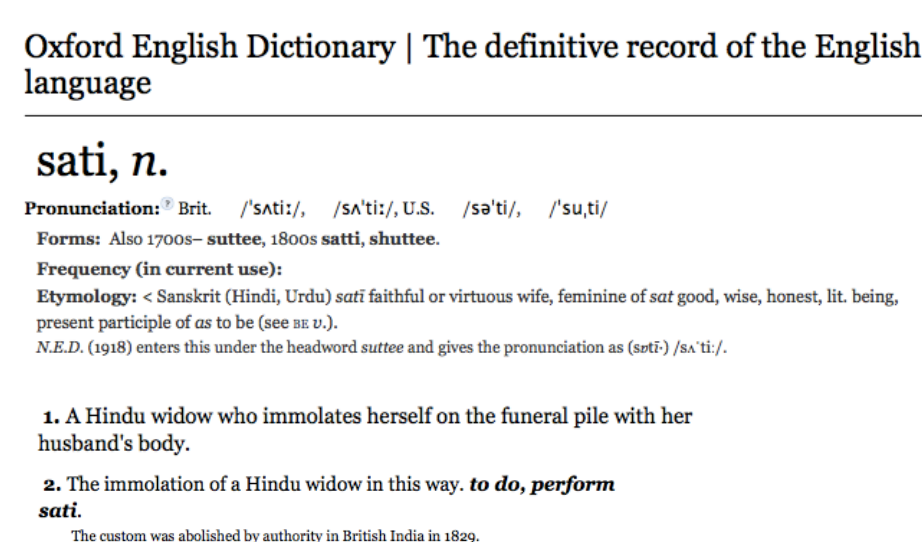
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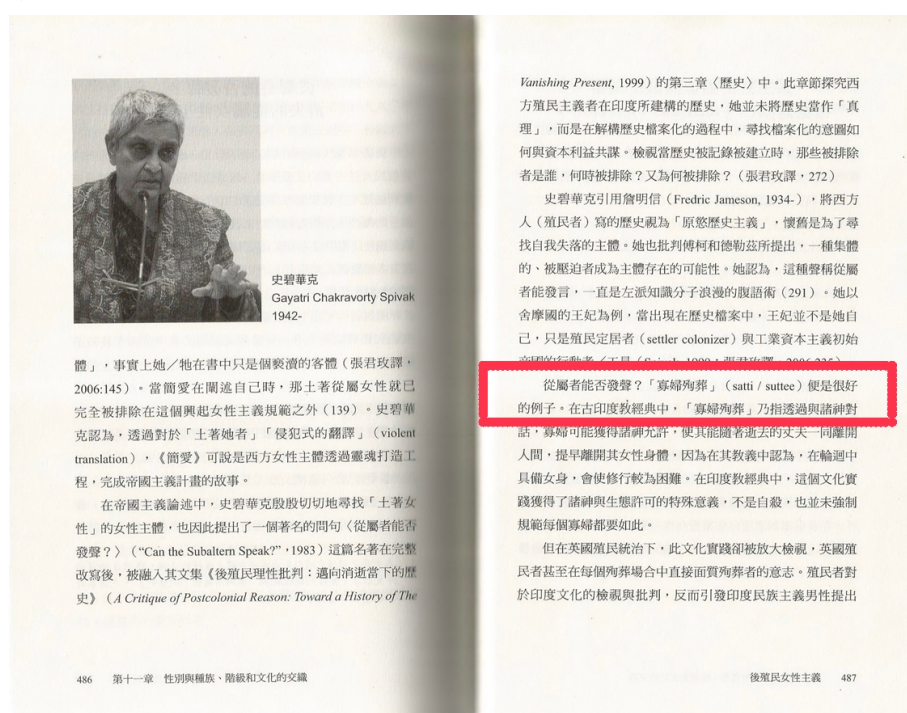
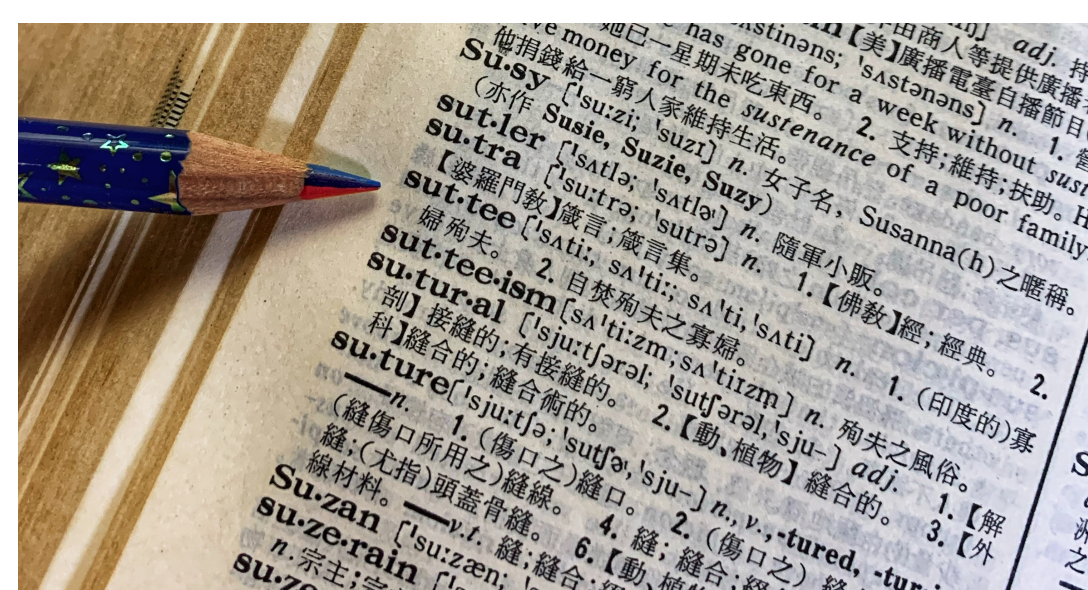
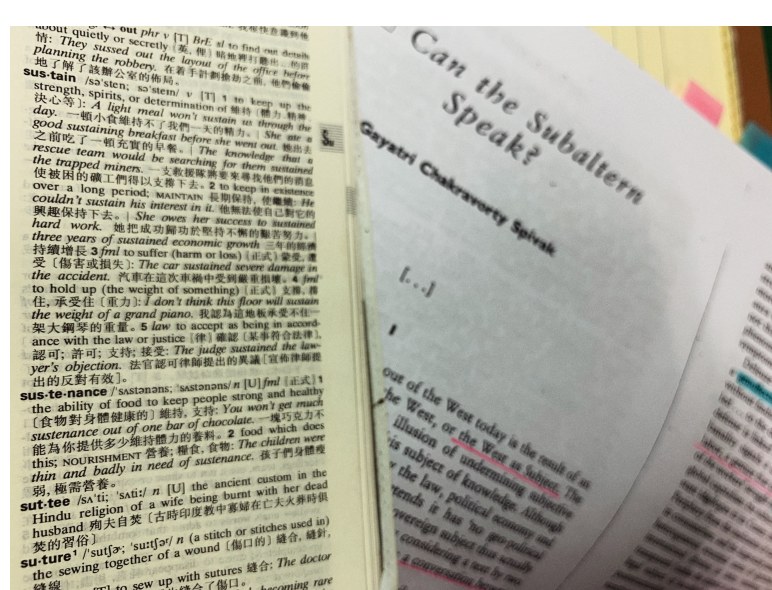
### Can the Subaltern Be Translated?

#### Sati

In “Can the Subaltern Speak?,” Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak argues that the subaltern are silenced with senses of representations. “Two senses of representation are being run together,” Spivak points out, “representation as ‘speaking for,’ as in politics, and representation as ‘representation’, as in art or philosophy” (275). Hence, Spivak suggests a task of “measuring silences” (286), which involves a study on archives, an institutionalization of a subject, a construction of history, etc. She takes the translation of “sati” as an example to explain how women in India are silenced. The historians and translators who take charge of editing the *Dharmasāstra* manipulate how the words about self-immolation were reorganized and interpreted in the text. On the other hand, Edward Thompson deliberately matches sati with “faithful.” Spivak criticizes the representation and argues that “[t]he task of recovering a (sexually) subaltern subject is lost in an institutional textuality at the archaic origin” (303). So far, Thompson’s translation of sati has been kept in some monolingual dictionaries.



In Taiwan, “sati” was translated into 寡婦自焚 by some lexicographers in bilingual dictionaries. However, the description of 自 (voluntary) is controversial. Later on, 自 was removed and changed into 寡婦殉夫.



### Pecola's Afterlife in Taiwan

#### Amplification

Walter Benjamin compares a work of translation with “afterlife” of a Source Language text (“The Task of the Translator” 71). The example above is worthy of discussing based on Tseng’s strategy of amplification. In the novel, Pecola doesn’t want her parents to fight with each other. Instead, she would rather die. Tseng added 妳 (you) to the translation and leads the readers to a slightly different situation which describes Pecola speaking to Mrs. Breedlove (Pecola’s mother) even though she whisperst to herself.

Tseng added 求求你 (please) twice in this part. I argue that Pecola is even more vulnerable with the translator’s amplification in the Chinese translation, because the amplification changed the way Pecola talks. The nuance creates a parallel between Mrs. Breedlove and God. After Pecola’s parent starts to fight, she prays to God and whispers, “Please, God, [...] Please make me disappear” (33). With the amplification, Tseng continued to translate Pecola’s pray into Chinese: 「懇求祢，上帝，」她合掌呢喃。「懇求祢讓我消失」。A sequence of supplication from her mother to God was arranged by the Chinese translation.

#### Affirmation of Non-existence

According to Spivak’s definition, Pecola belongs to the members of the subaltern who are black girls. The intriguing example of amplification is conducive to reconsidering the different positions of the center and the periphery. Morrison once describes children as “the scorned people of the earth” (“Toni Morrison” 103). She also reveals a truth that the prototype of Pecola could be traced back to her classmate who desired blue eyes in her elementary school. She wrote in “Afterword” of *The Bluest Eye*, “I focused [...] on how something as grotesque as the dehumanization of an entire race could take root inside the most delicate member of society: a child; the most vulnerable member; a female” (168). In *The Bluest Eye*, Morrison not only represents black women as the subaltern in American society, but also black girls who are at the least capable of resist in the black community.

With the amplification, Pecola is over-represented by a translator who tried to make her more vulnerable. The author argues that this paradox is what Spivak calls “affirmation of non-existence,” (“Can the Subaltern Speak?” 306 ). Spivak believes that a member of the subaltern could be heard if the readers are aware of her disappearance (“Can the Subaltern Speak?” 306). Furthermore, she urges us to reconsider Bassnett’s suggestion of feminist translation theory. Spivak also suggests feminist translators “to consider language as a clue to the workings of gendered agency” (“The Politics of Translation” 179) and be careful of the feminist thoughts reinforced by capitalism. Hence, except for unveiling the cultural complicity which confines translation to a subordinate text to the original work, a feminist translator could also pay attention to how other members of the subaltern are represented and in what ways the power relation of different minority groups is exchanged by translation.

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### Feminist Translation Theory, Polysystem, and Children's Literature

#### Appropriate Penetration

Susan Bassnett borrows a tale about members of the Tupinambá devouring a Catholic priest (“Introduction” 1-2) to argue that feminist translators act like cannibals (“From Comparative Literature to Translation Studies” 153-154). From this point of view, a Source Language text no longer plays a role of authority. Also, the feminist translators challenge the idea of regarding translation as a secondary work. They absorb the Source Language text and turn it into a work of their own. This strategy is what Bassnett calls appropriate penetration. The potential of reversing hierarchy is embodied in feminist translation theory.

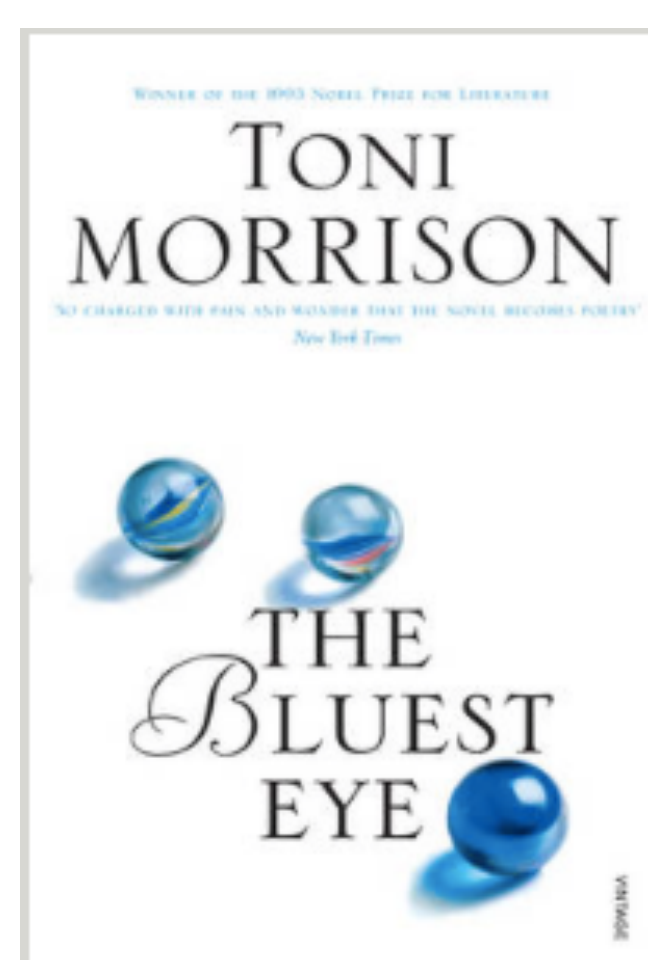
#### Polysystem and Conversion

However, the appropriate penetration of a target language text is not necessarily a resistance against a dominant power. Sometimes, it appears in a work of translation by passively representing other subjects of the subaltern, especially when a translator has a specific purpose of making a translation in the new system of literature. Through translation, a target language text is not regarded as peripheral either. Itamar Even-Zohar describes this process as “conversion,” (“Polysystem Theory” 293) and he emphasizes that opportunities of conversion was created:

- (a) when a polysystem has not yet been crystallized, that is to say, when a literature is “young,” in the process of being established;
- (b) when a literature is either “peripheral” (within a large group of correlated literatures) or “weak,” or both; and
- (c) when there are turning points, crises, or literary vacuums in a literature (“The Position of Translated Literature within the Literary Polysystem” 47)

As a result, the power relation between a target language text and its source language text is interchangeable and need to be contextualized in different systems of literature.

#### Chen-Chen Tseng's Translation of Toni Morrison's *The Bluest Eye*



Tseng chose to translate vernacular Black English dialect in *The Bluest Eye* into Taiwan Southern Min and claimed her aim is “to find a voice in the contexts of local culture and integrate [the translation] into reading of the Taiwan and Sinophone literature” (與台灣文學以至華文文學的經驗匯流，在在地的文化脈絡裡發聲) (x). From this perspective, the translator’s aim at translating *The Bluest Eye* in Taiwan is to share Morrison’s experience of writing bilingually. The author examines how Pecola is represented in the context of children’s literature in Tseng’s translation. Some scholars categorized *The Bluest Eye* into children’s literature, whereas other scholars argue that whether the novel is children’s or adolescent literature. For example, Susmita Roye indicates that “Morrison simultaneously uses and rejects, revises and problematizes a genre the coordinates of which do not accommodate the growing up of many young black girls” (214). Nevertheless, Paul Douglass Mahaffey believes “*The Bluest Eye* is the most qualified as a work of adolescent literature that discusses how race, gender and class affects the young, black female despite its “adult” content (155). Mahaffey also argues that “it is still important to remember that Morrison’s emphasis is on the voices of adolescent black girls growing up in a hostile adult environment (157).

Mahaffey quotes Nancy Backes’s words and says that “[Pecola] is unable to understand, yet alone articulate, what it meant to be all three, black, female and poor. In *The Bluest Eye*, Pecola does not have a voice because she has not been taught the language of resistance (Mahaffey 163). In Tseng’s translation, Pecola’s voice is even weaker. Let’s look at this example:

Source Language text	Target Language text
[...] She struggled between an overwhelming desire that one would kill the other, and a profound wish that she herself could die. Now she was whispering, “Don’t, Mrs. Breedlove, don’t.” Pecola, like Sammy and Chololy, always called her mother Mrs. Breedlove. “Don’t, Mrs. Breedlove, don’t.” (32)	[...] 她掙扎在一種銳不可當的期望——期望他們有一方將對方殺掉——和深切希望自己乾脆死了算了之間。這當兒，她低聲喃著：「不要，求求妳，哺愛太太，不要。」 琵可拉，如同三米和菲理一樣，總是稱呼母親「哺愛太太」。「不要，求求妳，哺愛太太，不要。」 (38)

### Poster Presenter



Yuan-yang WANG is an adjunct lecturer in the Center for English Education at National Tsing Hua University in Taiwan. He has translated English subtitles of documentaries, including *Alice Walker: Beauty in Truth*, *Regarding Susan Sontag*, *Ed Hardy: Tattoo the World*, *The Emperor's New Clothes*, *CODE: Debugging the Gender Gap*, and *Falciani's Tax Bomb*, *The Emperor's New Clothes*, et cetera into Chinese. His works of translation also include Adelle Waldman’s *The Love Affairs of Nathaniel P.*, Zora Neale Hurston’s *Their Eyes Were Watching God*, and Scott Tsui’s *Lonely No More: 8 Steps to Find Your Gay Husband* (forthcoming). His current research interests include translation studies, polysystem theory and translation, and feminist translation theory. In addition to regularly offering courses on Chinese-English translation, he undertakes workshops of literary translation, creative writing and American writers, and analyzing popular culture in the university.

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