

A Study of English Translation of Traditional Chinese Poetry from the Perspective of Image Schema - Take Two Translations of The Everlasting Regret (selection) as Examples

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Abstract: The study analyzes two translations of Bai Juyi's *The Everlasting Regret (selection)* and discusses methods of translating traditional Chinese poetry. The study discusses translation of traditional Chinese poetry from the perspective of image schema and found that as an activity of using human cognition, translating traditional poetry relates to analyzing, understanding and transferring image schemas, by which translators need to use proper methods to express image schemas in original texts.

Keywords: Image Schema, Traditional Chinese Poetry, Poetry Translation

1. Introduction

Poetry is a special genre of literature, which needs to obey the rule of alliteration, rhyme and rhythm in terms of form but can express deep meanings due to its essence of lyricism in terms of content. Forms of poetry may be different because of differences among various of language systems and cultural backgrounds, but contents and emotions poetry expresses could be transferred by translation. Due to importance of literary communication, the topic of how to translate traditional Chinese poetry into English is worth discussing.

From 20th to 21st century, one of the earliest discussions about English translation of traditional Chinese poetry was the theory of "spiritual resemblance". In 1921, Mao Dun first proposed concepts of "formal resemblance" and "spiritual resemblance" (Luo, 1984). In 1929, Chen Xijing proposed concepts of "formal, semantical and spiritual resemblance" and maintained that in order to achieve "spiritual resemblance", translators should "unite with original texts" and express their "charm" (Xu, 2003). In 1980s, Xu Yuanchong proposed that translators need to achieve beauties of "meanings, sounds and forms" as far as possible when

translating traditional Chinese poetry (Xu, 1983). These theories were based on translation experience of proposers and provided directions of English translations of traditional Chinese poetry, but explanatory power of them is declining because of multiple reasons, such as being with proposers' subjectivity. So, it could be hard for new translators to handle proper methods by understanding main contents of these theories. For these reasons, explaining English translations of traditional Chinese poetry by new linguistic and translation theories, which is image schema in this paper, is now necessary.

2. Theoretical Framework

2.1 Image Schema

Image schema is a concept in the field of cognitive linguistics, which is a primitive level of cognition and establishes links between experience and advanced cognitive domain (Johnson, cited from Saeed, 2009). It is a schematic structure which is from image domains that occur repeatedly and consist of body experience such as container, path and link (Lakoff & Johnson, cited from Croft & Cruse, 2022), and can be used by abstract thoughts and inferential processes (Yang & Zhang, 2022). Image schemas could be categorized into seven kinds: Space Schema, Scale Schema, Container Schema, Force Schema, Unity/Multiplicity Schema, Identity Schema and Existence Schema (Croft & Cruse, 2022).

2.2 Image Schema and English Translation of Traditional Chinese Poetry

The two features of poetry are form and image, which are two ideal perspectives of studying poetry (Li, 2008). In terms of form, traditional Chinese poetry could be categorized into Jueju, lüshi (poems with 4 lines or 8 lines) and so on, and western poetry could be sorted into sonnet, blank verse and so on. They obey their own rules

of rhyme and rhythm. In terms of image, it could be usually found in both Chinese and western poetry that mountains, rivers and other objects may consist of various of images to stimulate specific emotive experience. Because authors of poems could not directly express abstract emotions only by languages, stimulating emotions by creating images becomes a good way to create poems. When translating Chinese traditional poetry, translators need to express emotions to target language readers properly and precisely as far as possible, but this could be challengeable due to big differences between Chinese and English language systems.

The theory of cognitive linguistics is a new way of analyzing poetry translation. It maintains a basic assumption that language is a general cognition of human race (Croft & Cruise, 2022), and it could be inferred that as a form of language, poetry and its translation are not separated from other cognitive activities. Emotions and images relate to human cognition, and translating Chinese poetry is also an activity of using language symbols to reappear images of original verses (Yang, 2011). For these reasons, analyzing English translation of Chinese traditional poetry from the perspective of image schema is feasible.

3. Case Study

The poem named “Chang Hen Ge”, which means “The Everlasting Regret”, was written by Bai Juyi, a famous Chinese poet in Tang Dynasty. It narrates a love tragedy between the emperor Xuanzong and the queen, Yang Guifei by creating romantic images and plots. The study chooses verses from the 79th verse to the last verse and its two translations by Xu Yuanchong and Yang Xianyi and Gladys Yang, and found that translators could meet three circumstances when translating traditional Chinese poetry:

To express the same meanings or images, both original verses and its translations share the same way;

Original verses and its translations need to be partly different when expressing same meanings or images;

There is no same method to express the same meanings or images between original verses and its potential translations.

The following texts will state details of these three circumstances, ways of how to analyze verses and adopt proper methods of translating them from the perspective of the theory of image schema.

3.1 Original Verses and Translations Share the Same Ways

Occasionally, methods of expressing one meaning or image could be the same or close to each other. These verses are commonly simple in terms of meaning. For example:

Yang Xianyi and Gladys Yang: “One was named Taizhen” (Yang & Yang, 2005)

Xu Yuanchong: “Among them was a queen whose name was Ever True” (Xu, 2014)

It means “there is a character whose name is ‘Tai Zhen’ (Yang Guifei’s name of Taoism)”, and constructed by one PART-WHOLE schema, which is a kind of SPACE schema—the “part” is Yang Guifei, and the “whole” indicates “a group of fairies” in the previous verse of the poem. The two translations used direct methods to express this schema.

Even though Yang Xianyi and Gladys Yang did not use “among” or other words to directly point out the PART-WHOLE schema, the word “one” still indicates it according to the context. It is worth noting that Xu Yuanchong’s translation of this sentence tends to close to target language readers by using “Ever True” to explain the meaning of “Taizhen” in English and add the word “queen” to help target language readers understand who “Tai Zhen” is, while Yang Xianyi and Gladys Yang’s translation phoneticizes these two characters with Latin alphabets. The two translations use different methods when translating details and shows different understandings of the translators, but in general, they both tends to use literal translation methods to translate the structure of the UNITY/MULTIPLICITY schema that express a part-whole relationship.

3.2 Original Verses and Translations Use Partly Different Ways

In original texts, a number of verses with words, such as nouns, verbs or adjectives that contain actual meanings exist, and translating them would be a challenge because some of them contain meanings and images which cannot be found in English. Under this circumstance, image schemas these notional words contain should be found and analyzed. For example:

Yang Xianyi and Gladys Yang: “The wind blew her fairy skirt, lifting it.....” (Yang & Yang, 2005)

Xu Yuanchong: “The wind blew up her fairy sleeves and made them float” (Xu, 2014)

This verse contains a FORCE schema and a SCALE schema composed of two verbs which

are “blow.....(and then) lift”, stand for two actions of moving things and indicate a sequential order of their appearances. However, there is no English expression to directly correspond nouns which express the concepts of “fairy’s sleeves in fantasies” and “the sense of fluttering, using to describe the elegance of fairies”. This difficulty requires translators to adopt appropriate methods and skills. Translators need to analyze the two image schemas first and use liberal translation method to express them.

Yang Xianyi and Gladys Yang’s translation uses “blew....., lifting.....” to express the force launched by “wind” and sequential order of the two actions; Xu Yuanchong’s translations uses “blew up.....and made them float” to achieve the same goal. Although the two translations are not perfect, for example, “skirt” cannot be stood for “sleeves”, and “float” could only partly express the meanings of “the sense of fluttering”, both of the two translations explain the original texts and express images schemas it contains. The same goes for another example:

Yang Xianyi and Gladys Yang: “She presented old mementos, to express her deep feeling” (Yang & Yang, 2005)

Xu Yuanchong: “To show her love was deep, she took out keepsakes old” (Xu, 2014)

This verse contains a special sentence pattern, which uses Chinese character which pronounced as “ba” or “jiang” to express active sentences. This pattern in the verse is also contains a FORCE schema, but there is no similar pattern to directly transfer the schema in English. The whole verse means that “in order to express her deep feelings, the queen presented the thing she kept for a long time”, and translators could explain it by using liberal translation method. The two translations use “presented.....to.....” and “to show.....took out.....” to reappear the image schema in original verse.

3.3 Original Verses and Translations Use Totally Different Ways

When translating a whole discourse, translators could usually meet this kind of circumstances. In most cases, translating traditional Chinese poetry needs translators to focus on the entire context but not each detail. If translators use direct ways or simply explain them, translations could be meaningless or lack of beauty that appears in the original verses. Therefore, translators need to analyze the whole context in terms of cognition, find out all image schemas the verses contain and

use symbols of target language to reappear them creatively.

In the previous part, the study mentions similarities between details of Chinese original verses and English translations. Translating the verse would not be difficult when words are considered separately, and words in original verses which represent meanings like “there is/have”, “be in” and “among” could be easily understood. However, translating words and contexts which represent images as “a state of existence which is close to ‘void’”, “traditional Chinese buildings”, “adjectives that describe delicate, exquisite and beautiful objects” or “clouds with five colors that stand for auspiciousness” and combining their translations with other parts could be a challenge. The whole text describes multiple images and makes them appear from far to near and from great to small. By using several conjunctions and adjectives, original texts contains EXISTENCE, CONTAINER or SPACE and FORCE schemas as well as a SCALE schema that indicates the path shaped by sequential order of appearances of images. In order to reappear these schemas creatively, methods of imitation, variation translation and recreation could be adopted. The two selected translations are typical examples:

Yang Xianyi and Gladys Yang:

“Till he heard of a fairy mountain

In the ocean of a never-never land.

Ornate pavilions rose through coloured clouds,
Wherein dwelt lovely fairy folk.” (Yang & Yang, 2005)

This translation reappears CONTAINER schema by using “in” and “wherein”, EXISTENCE schema by “ocean of a never-never land” and FORCE schema by “rose through”. Narration sequence of images in this translation also obeys that in original verse, and therefore reappear SCALE schema.

Xu Yuanchong:

“He learned that on the sea were fairy mountains proud

That now appeared, now disappeared amid the cloud

Of rainbow colours where rose magnificent bowers

And dwelt so many fairies as graceful as flowers.” (Xu, 2014)

This translation uses “on”, “amid”, “rose” and “dwelt” to reappear SPACE, CONTAINER and FORCE schemas, and reappear EXISTENCE schema with a pair of antonyms

“appear-disappear” to express a sense of mystery. EXISTENCE schemas in the two translations are actually different: the first translation composes an OBJECT schema, while the second translation composes an EREMOVAL schema, but both of them use recreation method, which are proper. Analyses of image schemas do not dominate or stipulate adoptions of translation methods, because each translator’s ways of construal are different.

4. Conclusion

The study maintains that translators need to analyze image schemas in original verses and choose proper methods in different circumstances. When original verses and its translations can share the same way of expressing a meaning or an image, direct methods, such as literal translation method could be used; when original verses and its translations need to use partly or totally different ways to express a meaning or an image, translators could analyze all image schemas in the verses, and adopt liberal or other creative methods, such as imitation, variation and recreation.

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