An Analysis of Translations of "Shuidiaogetou-mingyuejishiyou" from the Perspective of Construal Theory

Chen Xueting

Hunan Normal University, Changsha, 410081, China

Abstract: *Song poetry is a kind of literature with rich imagery, often omitting details in order to present Song poetry's beauty, which makes translation more difficult. In addition, most scholars pay attention to the translation of Tang poems but few studies on the translation of Song Poetry (Ci) from the perspective of Construal Theory. Su Shi's "Shuidiaogetou-mingyuejishiyou" is a classic work in Song poetry. Different translators have different translation methods, and each has its own advantages and disadvantages. This paper selects six representative translations of "Shuidiaogetou-mingyuejishiyou", analyzes the translation from four dimensions: scope/background, perspective, salience and specificity to study the translation strategies, translation effects and explore the reasons behind them. In this way this paper can provide inspiration for domestic and foreign translators to translate Chinese classic poetry, and spread Chinese culture to foreign countries better.*

Keywords: *Construal Theory; translation strategy; translation effect*

1. Introduction

Song poetry is a kind of highly condensed language with much emotion. Thus, it is difficult for the translator to not only convey Song poetry's emotion and beauty to foreign readers but also retain the form and meaning of Song poetry. In addition, the same poetry often has multiple translation versions. Wang Yin (2008) analyzed classical Chinese poem based on "Experiential Conceptualization Theory", revealing the main manifestation of subjectivity in translation cognitive activities. Since then many scholars began to analyze classical Chinese poem translation from the perspective of Construal Theory while there are few translation studies on Song poetry.

Su Shi is a great literary writer in the southern Song dynasty, and he wrote many popular poems. Among them, "Shuidiaogetou-mingyuejishiyou" is one of his classic works. When Su Shi was frustrated in his career and left his hometown, on the Mid-Autumn Festival (the day of family reunion), he wrote this Song poetry. It is this spirit of discouragement and optimism that has made Song poetry popular. Many Chinese and foreign translators have tried to translate it into foreign languages. Additionally a lot of scholars analyze and evaluate different translators' translation. Mo Chuanxia, Ye Xiangjun (2018) analyzed three English translations of "Shuidiaogetou-mingyuejishiyou" from the equivalent translation theory, and believed that Xu Yuanchong's translation is superior to Zhang Bingxing's and John A. Turner's. In terms of the cultural translation concept, cultural transplantation and cultural substitution, Wu Yixuan (2018) thought that Lin Yutang's version in rhythm are superior to Xu Yuanchong's, but Burton Watson is more consistent with Western readers' reading habits. However, Wei Jilan and Li Jing (2019) pointed out that Xu Yuanchong's translation is more rhythmic than Lin Yutang's. Different scholars analyze the translation of "Shuidiaogetou-mingyuejishiyou" from different angles, but make different evaluation and conclusion. And the analysis of the translation only stays on the comparison of the selected words or rhythm of the translation. Moreover, it neglects the comparative study of translations by Chinese and foreign translators, not exploring the reasons of translation defects and proposing effective translation strategies.

Though there are many English translations for the poetry "Shuidiaogetou-mingyuejishiyou", this paper selects three representative translations by Chinese translators, namely Xu Yuanchong, Lin Yutang and Zhang Bingxing, and other three translations by foreign translators, namely John A. Turner, Burton Watson and Gordon Ossin. In this way it can better analyze and compare the differences between the translation strategies adopted by Chinese translators and foreign translators, bringing some inspiration to Chinese translators. From the perspective of Construal Theory, this article analyzes the

translation strategies and effects of the six translations of "Shuidiaogetou-mingyuejishiyou" from scope/background, perspective, salience and specificity to explore translation of Chinese Song poetry from a new angle, and provide translation strategies to inspire translators to translate Chinese and foreign works.

2. Construal Theory

Different scholars make various definitions about Construal Theory and propose different ways to construe language, such as Langacker, Lee, Croft & Cruse and Talmy. This paper mainly adopts Construal Theory from Langacker.

In *Foundations of Cognitive Grammar: Theoretical Prerequisites*, Langacker (1987) proposed the classification of focal adjustments for the first time, namely selection, perspective and abstraction. Selection infers choosing one of the facets of a scene you observe and intend to express in language. Perspective determines the position from which you observe the scene and accordingly generates a prominent part which is "standing out" from the ground in the eyes of the observer. Abstraction is related to the level of specificity of the description of the scene. More specifically, selection includes three factors: cognitive domain, scope and scale. Perspective contains figure/ground, viewpoint, deixis and subjectivity/objectivity. According to Langacker, focal adjustments can also be called imagery, referring to the ability of observing a scene from different angles in the purpose of expression.

And then he (1991) further defined the term imagery as "we have the ability to construe the same content" and classifies the "dimensions of imagery" into profile/base, specificity, scope, salience and perspective in his book of *Concept, Image, and Symbol*.

With the perfection of his cognitive grammar, Langacker changed the term "imagery" into "construal", since the former is also used in cognitive psychology and confusion will be generated for readers so that they fail to make a clear distinction between the two different terms. And Langacker defined the latter as "our ability to conceive and portray the same situation in alternate ways". Then Langacker (2008) redefined the dimensions of construal, including specificity, focusing, prominence and perspective. Focusing here covers three elements of scope/background, composition and scope.

Although Langacker's definition for construal has been changed a little bit over time, its core content always can be summed up in four aspects: specificity, scope&background, perspective and salience.

3. An Analysis of English Translation of "Shuidiaogetou-mingyuejishiyou" from scope/background, perspective, salience and specificity

This paper analyzes the understanding of three Chinese translators, namely Xu Yuanchong, Lin Yutang and Zhang Bingxing, and other three foreign translators, namely John A. Turner, Burton Watson and Gordon Ossin, in the translation of the source text of "Shuidiaogetou-mingyuejishiyou" to observe how they reconstruct the language to express the original scene, and compare the similarities and differences of different translators in constructing the four dimensions of Construal Theory.

3.1 Scope & Background

Scope & background refers to the relevant conceptual domains and encyclopedic knowledge activated in the expressions used by people in the process of describing things. In order to understand the expressions in the source language in the translation activities, the translator must have relevant experience and encyclopedia knowledge and activate them to successfully understand them. When a translator deconstructs and constructs a translation of the same original literary work, he will have his own cognition, so the differences in various translations of the same poetry will appear.

Example 1:

The source text: 水调歌头

Xu Yuanchong: Prelude to Water Melody

Zhang Bingxing: Thinking of My Brother on the Mid-Autumn Night

Burton Watson: Tune: "Prelude to Water Music"

John A. Turner: Remembrance in Mid-Autumn –to the tune of "Barcarole Prelude"

Gordon Ossin: To the tune of Shuidiaogetou

The title of this poetry is full of Chinese characteristics. To translate this phrase, the translator needs to activate the background knowledge related to Chinese traditional culture. "Getou" is the meaning of the first chapter, and the brand name "Shuidiaogetou" means "the first chapter of the water music". To understand the title accurately readers need to have relevant background information about Chinese literature. For these six translators, only Lin Yutang doesn't translate the title. And the translations of Xu Yuanchong and Burton Watson make sense; and Zhang Bingxing's translation, in the form of free translation and domestication strategies, is intuitive and conforms to the habit of expressing English writing so that westerners can understand his translation easily. Gordon Ossin adopts a transliteration method. Since foreign readers do not have relevant background knowledge, it is highly possible that they cannot understand the title. I think it would be better to adopt a literal translation and annotation method here. Turner's translation chooses "Remembrance", and does not point out the specific content of the memory, maintaining the vague information of the source text without too much subjective intervention, leaving the reader more room for thinking. It is also a good translation method. To take the cultural differences into consideration, the annotation about "Shuidiaogetou" is necessary so that readers can understand the beauty of this type of literature well.

3.2 Perspective

Perspective refers to the angle or direction that people choose when observing a situation or thing, showing the relative relationship between the observer and the observed object. The translation process involves the position, direction and angle of the translator when deconstructing the original text. When the angle chosen by the observer is different, the result of the recognition is also different, so different translators translates variously to reconstruct the same text.

Example 2:

The source text: 不应有恨,何事长向别时圆?

Xu Yuanchong: Why then when people part, is the oft full and bright?

Lin Yutang: Why did she, bearing us no grudge, shine upon our parting, reunion deny?

Zhang Bingxing: We should not complain and rebuke/Why the moon is not always round.

Burton Watson: Surely you bear us no ill will –why must you be so round at times when we humans are parted?

Gordon Ossin: Give up hating realities, my brother, the moon grows fuller and brighter as we feel losses.

John A. Turner: Ah, vain indeed is my complaining:/But why must she beam at the full on those that sundered sigh?

The poet here asks the moon in a complaining tone—"The moon should have no regrets but why is it always round when people are separated". In this sentence, "不应有恨,何事长向别时圆" the word "别" has two meanings, referring to the separation between brother and the poet, and the separation from the court. All translations only reflect the first level of meaning while the second meaning is significant to express the poet's depression. It is recommended to adopt annotated translation methods to supplement the meaning of poet's staying away from the court, so that readers can understand the poet's political ambitions. In this way can readers get the sense of melancholy and hankering in this poetry when the poet is relegated and leave the political center and his family. The subject of "恨" is not clear. There are three possibilities, one is the poet himself; the second is a class of people who have the same experience as the poet; and the third is everyone. Xu Yuanchong adopts omission translation method about "不应有恨" from the perspective of "people", which shows that "何事长向别时圆" is a fact that everyone agrees with and thus objective. From the perspective of "the separation of people", it highlights the pain and helplessness of the poet's separation from his brother, family or everyone in the world, closer to the source text. Lin Yutang's translation is from the perspective of "moon", which explains "Where does my hate come from, and why shouldn't there be hate". It provides clear meaning so that readers can understand it easily. Zhang Bingxing's translation perspective shifts from "I" to "we". From the angle of "we", with the subject of "恨" has expanded, it seems to appeal people acknowledge the fact "何事长向别时圆", expressing the poet's helplessness and comfort to people. The perspective of

Burton's translation is "you", which refers to the moon. It can immediately bring the picture of the dialogue between the poet and the moon in the reader's mind. From the angle of "my brother", Ossin's translation gives people a feeling that the poet is talking to his brother here and now, expressing the poet's missing his family. But the subject of "hate" is "my brother", it does not match the source text. As for Turner's translation "vain indeed is my complaining", the perspective is "I". So it seems that I am talking to myself and self-comfort, highlighting the poet's loneliness and open-mindedness. But after reading Turner's translation, readers will doubt "where does my hate come from, and why shouldn't there be hated". Such a connection simply cannot reach the contextual effect of the poet's lyrical expression. So different translators adopt different perspectives, cause various translation effects and express different emotions.

3.3 Salience

When people observe specific things or situations, they are dominated by cognitive abilities, so as to determine the direction of attention and focus on the whole or a part. From the perspective of cognitive linguistics, the highlighted part is displayed as figure, and the other components are eliminated as ground. When the same thing or situation is highlighted in different aspects and contents, the corresponding language representation and the meaning of communication will also be different.

Example 3:

The source text: 明月几时有? 把酒问青天.

Xu Yuanchong: How long will the full moon appear?/Wine cup in hand, I ask the sky.

Lin Yutang: How rare the moon, so round and clear! /with cup in hand, I ask of the blue sky,

Zhang Bingxing: When will there be bright moonlight?/Let me with wine ask the blue sky.

Burton Watson: Bright moon, when did you appear?/Lifting my wine, I question the blue sky.

Gordon Ossin: When was the moon ever so bright? /I ask the blue-black empyrean.

John A. Turner: "When did this glorious moon begin to be?"/Cup in hand, I asked of the azure sky:

In translating "明月几时有" there are two understandings of this sentence: (1) When have the moon appeared; (2) When will the moon appear. Since it is impossible to investigate whether the moon had already appeared when the poet said this sentence at that time, I believe that both explanations are acceptable. So the translations of past tense or present tense are reasonable. In addition, Xu Yuanchong's, Zhang Bingxing's, Gordon Ossin's and Turner's translations pay attention to the time of the appearance of the moon, expressing sigh about short time of the appearance of the moon and conveying the poet's inner depression and melancholy. But Burton Watson and Lin Yuantang emphasize the moon's brightness, making people feel the poet's expectation and yearning for the moon. When translating"把酒问青天" Xu Yuanchong, Lin Yutang, Burton Watson and Turner all put the wine cup at the beginning of the sentence, emphasizing behavior of holding the wine cup so as to make the reader immediately associate the scene of drinking under the moon. But Zhang Bingxing and Gordon Ossin put "I" at the beginning of the sentence, focusing on the characters. They adopt the form of "question and answer", in line with the daily communication scene in the west countries. In this poetry, I think emphasizing the action is consistent with the source text since it can show the depression of the poet through holding the wine cup in Chinese culture.

3.4 Specificity

People's perception of the same thing has different levels of detail and accuracy. Since things can be construed in different scales, language performance can be both concrete and clear, or vague and abstract. When different translators construe the same things or phenomena, their descriptions will always have different levels of detail. Reflected in the language is the conceptual connotation and extension of the word expression, and the scope is not exactly the same.

Example 4:

The source text: 人有悲欢离合,月有阴晴圆缺,此事古难全.

Xu Yuanchong: Men have sorrow and joy; they part or meet again;/The moon is bright or dim and she may wax or wane./There has been nothing perfect since the olden days.

Lin Yutang: But rare is perfect happiness--/the moon does wax, the moon does wane,/and so men meet and say goodbye.

Zhang Bingxing: As people experience union and separation, joy and pain,/So the moon tends to wax and wane. /From ancient times this is the way.

Burton Watson: People have their griefs and joys, their joining and separations,/the moon its dark and clear times, its roundings and wanings./As ever in such matters, things are hardly the way we wish.

Gordon Ossin: What else is it but sorrows, joys, partings and reunions, /As the moon is clouded or brilliant, empty or brimming./The arrangement is ancient, hardest to those seeking perfection.

John A. Turner: As men have their weal and woe, their parting and meeting,/ it seems the moon has her dark and light, her phases of fulness and waning./Never is seen perfection things that die.

In this sentence the shape and brightness of the moon is used as an analogy to the joys and sorrows of people. It is a classic sentence with the philosophy that life cannot be perfect everywhere, showing the poet's optimistic and open mind. When translating the four-character symmetrical structure of "悲欢离合" and "阴晴圆缺", Lin Yutang adopts the domestication translation method and only translates "离合" and "圆缺" without translating "悲欢" and "离合". His translation is relatively abstract, in line with English writing habits, which can bring readers to think and imagine: when people reunite, should the moon be round? Zhang Bingxing translates people's sorrow, joy and separation, reunion, but only translates the shape of the moon, omitting the moon's brightness, making the analogy asymmetry. The other four translators use foreignization translation to symmetrically translate all the vocabulary, which is more elaborate, more closely combining the moon with people. In this way it expresses the topic meaning more prominently that the poet uses the cosmopolitan laws of change to explain the fact that people often separate more than reunion from ancient times. Both translations are possible, each with its own advantages.

When translating "此事古难全", Lin Yutang adopts free translation and it only concentrates on the negative side so that it is difficult for readers to grasp the open-mindedness of the poet. Likewise, in Ossin's translation, it can make readers hard to get the sense of optimism. The other four translations can convey the poet's helplessness and relief about the moon's imperfection. Compared with the other five translators, Lin Yutang's translation has subtle details, creating a hazy beauty of poetry.

4. Conclusion

Based on Construal Theory this paper has analyzed the specific translation examples of "Shuidiaogetou-mingyuejishiyou" and explains the differences in different translations of the same text, exploring the translator's translation strategy and the effect achieved by the translation. And the six translators don't add any annotation to the translation of the title "水调歌头", which could not make the readers better understand the history and meaning about it. Through the above analysis, Zhang Bingxing's translation is more in line with the reading habits of foreign readers. Lin Yutang's translation omits the details and gives the readers imagination, which can also reflect the hazy beauty of the poetry. Turner's translation perspectives are more converted, from I-she (the moon)-men-I-we, while Burton Watson and Gordon Ossin adopt more "I" perspective, which is relatively straightforward and easy for readers to understand. This paper attempts to provide a new perspective for the study of Song poetry (Ci) translation, guide Song poetry translation, and also promotes cross-cultural language communication.

References

[1] Camille Liu. https://www.linkedin.com/pulse//pulse/. su-shi-prelude-water-melody-camille-liu, 2016-9-6.
[2] Langacker, R. W. 1987. Foundations of Cognitive Grammar (Vol. 1): Theoretical Prerequisites[M]. Stanford, California: Stanford University Press.
[3] Langacker, R. W. 1991. Concept, Image, and Symbol: the Cognitive Basis of Grammar[M]. Berlin/New York: Mouton de Gruyter.
[4] Langacker, R. W. 2008. Cognitive Grammar: A Basic Introduction[M]. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
[5] Watson Burton. 1965. Selections from a Sung Dynasty Poet, SuTungp'o[M]. Columbia: Columbia University Press.

[6] Lin Yutang, 2002, Selections of Dongpo Poems [M]. Tianjin: Baihua Literature and Art Press.

[7] Mo Chuanxia and Ye Xiangjun, 2018, An Analysis of Three English Translations of "Shuidiaogetou-mingyuejishiyou" Based on Equivalent Translation Theory[J], Overseas English (02): 137-138.

[8] Yin Wang, 2008, "Experiential Conceptualization" of Cognitive Linguistics' Explanatory Power for the Subjectivity and Objectivity of Translation——a study based on 40 English translations of ancient poem "Fengqiaoyebo"[J], Foreign Language Teaching and Research (03): 211-217+241.

[9] Wu Yixuan, 2018, Considerations on the English Translation of "Shuidiaogetou-mingyuejishiyou" from the perspective of cultural translation[J], Journal of Kaifeng Institute of Education (11): 31-33.

[10] Wei Jilan, Li Jing, 2019, On the Poetic Features of Su Shi's English Translation of Poems——Taking " Shuidiaogetou-mingyuejishiyou" as an example[J], Journal of Changzhou Institute of Technology (Social Science Edition) (03): 69 -75.

[11] Xu Yuanchong, 2012, 1000 Classic English Poems Translated by Xu Yuanchong[M]. Beijing: Dolphin Press, 28-31.

[12] Zhang Bingxing, 2001, English Translation of 100 Classic Chinese Poems[M]. Beijing: Beijing Zhonghua Book Company Press.