

Translation strategies of Du Fu's poetry from a cross-cultural perspective

Zihan JIANG

Tianjin Foreign Studies University, Tianjin 300204, China

Abstract: Cross-cultural communication involves linguistic aspect, and the most closely related to language use in cross-cultural communication activities is translation. Ancient Chinese poetry includes four elements: rhyme (*yun* 韵), parallelism (*dui* 对), word count (*yan* 言), and tone (*sheng* 声). However, these elements have lower existence in English culture. In order to successfully achieve cross-cultural communication, translators need to consider these elements when translating ancient Chinese poetry. The paper focuses on the English translation of Du Fu's poetry by Xu Yuanchong, analyzing what translation strategies can be used by the translator in the dissemination of ancient Chinese poetry.

Key words: cross-cultural communication; ancient Chinese poetry; translation study

1 Introduction

In the history of Chinese poetry, Du Fu occupies a significant position. His poetry deserves high artistic values, covering a wide range of subjects and excelling in diverse forms. Ancient Chinese literature comprises four essential elements: *yun*, *dui*, *yan*, and *sheng*, which do not totally exist in English. Intercultural communication refers to the communication between people from two different cultures, which inevitably involves the language aspect [1]. Hence, cross-cultural communication in translating ancient Chinese poetry necessitates dissemination of those elements. The paper analyzes translator Xu Yuanchong's translation of Du Fu's poems in an attempt to explore the translator's selection of translation strategies to achieve cross-cultural communication.

2 The research method

This paper employs a case study approach, focusing on Xu Yuanchong's translation of Du Fu's poems. It views the translation process as cross-cultural communication and analyzes the translator's choices to spread Chinese culture. Four strategies are applied including transforming rhyme schemes, substituting tonal patterns, reproducing elegance symmetry, and adjusting poetic forms.

3 Findings

3.1 The transformation of rhyme scheme

Tang poems are rhymed verses. In the translation of Tang poetry, *yun* (韵; rhyme) is a marked feature, so the translation of Du Fu's poetry should also possess rhyming characteristics [2]. Du Fu's poetry usually adopts a continuous rhyme scheme (The entire poem uses the same rhyme). By comparing the original poetry with its English translation, it can be found that Xu Yuanchong's translation of Du Fu's poetry also has rhyming characteristics by converting the rhyme

scheme of the original poem into a "rhyme in double lines" or "interlaced rhyming".

3.1.1 To convert a continuous rhyme into a rhyme in double lines

ST: 绝句（二首其一）

迟日江山丽，
春风花草香。
泥融飞燕子，
沙暖睡鸳鸯。

TT: Quatrains (I)

Over a beautiful scene the sun is lingering,
Alive with birds and sweet with breath of early spring.
To pick the thawing sod a pair of swallows fly;
Basking on the warm sand, two by two lovebirds lie [3].

The poem's rhyming words are "香 (*xiang*)" and "鸯 (*yang*)", following quatrain rules where even-numbered sentences rhyme with the same syllable. The translation version changes the rhyme, with "lingering" and "spring" and "fly" and "lie" rhyming in couplets. Xu Yuanchong's translation, though different in rhyming style from the original poem, reproduces the original poetry's musical beauty, which can facilitate cross-cultural communication in poetry communication.

3.1.2 To convert a continuous rhyme into an interlaced rhyme

ST: 望岳

岱宗夫如何？
齐鲁青未了。
造化钟神秀，
阴阳割昏晓。
荡胸生层云，
决眦入归鸟。
会当凌绝顶，
一览众山小。

TT: Gazing on Mount Tai

O peak of peaks, how high it stands!
One boundless green o'erspreads two states.
A marvel done by Nature's hands.
O'er light and shade it dominates.
Clouds rise therefrom and lave my breast;
My eyes are strained to see birds fleet.
Try to ascend the mountain's crest:
It dwarfs all peaks under our feet.

Du Fu's poem features seamless flow with terminal rhymes "*liao*", "*xiao*", "*niao*", "*xiao*", enhancing rhythmic beauty. The translator employs rhymes "stands/hands", "states/dominates", "breast/crest", "fleet/feet", following an

"ABABCDCD" pattern, perhaps inspired by Western sonnet rhyme schemes. That reproduces the original's melodic beauty to some extent, which can help bridge Chinese and English rhythmic differences and achieve effective and intercultural communication as well as help write traditional Chinese culture in the context of foreign cultures.

3.2 The substitution of tonal patterns

"*Sheng* (声)" refers to the opposition and distribution of level and oblique tones in Chinese poetry. In translation, English linguistic features can convey the original's characteristic form. Chinese poetry emphasizes tonal harmony, while English poetry values stress. Thus, English "stress patterns" can facilitate cross-cultural dissemination of ancient Chinese poetry.

ST:江南逢李龟年

岐王宅里寻常见，
崔九堂前几度闻。
正是江南好风景，
落花时节又逢君。

TT: Coming across a Disfavored Court Musician

On the Southern Shore of the Yangtze River
How oft in princely mansions did we meet!
As oft in lordly halls I heard you sing.
Now the Southern scenery is most sweet,
But I meet you again in parting spring.

The original poem is a seven-character quatrain couplet adhering to a specific rhyme scheme "平平仄仄平平仄-仄仄平平仄仄平-仄仄平平平仄仄-平平仄仄仄平平". Its rhythm flows gently like a tranquil stream. However, English poetry lacks such an equivalent linguistic device, necessitating the use of metrical stress for cross-cultural dissemination of Chinese poetry. Luckily, the common English poetic form consists of ten syllables divided into five metrical steps per line, imparting rhythm and melody to the translation.

3.3 The reproduction of antithesis in elegance

"*dui* (对)" refers to the fact that poetry frequently necessitates attention to symmetry in specific sections during translation. Xu Yuanhong's English translations of Du Fu's poetry can replicate the grammatical structures or convey equivalent content of the originals, thereby enhancing cross-cultural dissemination of ancient Chinese poetry.

3.3.1 The English structure mirrors that of the original poem

ST:登高

无边落木萧萧下，
不尽长江滚滚来。

TT: On the Height

The boundless forest sheds its leaves shower by shower;
The endless river rolls its waves hour after hour.

These two lines exemplify Du Fu's use of antithesis. "无边" and "不尽" are both adjectives; "落木" and "长江" are antithetical structures, both nouns; "萧萧" and "滚滚" are antithetical structures, both reduplicated words; "下" and "来" are both verbs, forming a contrast in terms of action. Both lines adopt the structure of "adjective + noun + reduplicated

words + verb", making the antithesis neat. "The boundless" and "The endless" are antithetical structures; "forest sheds its leaves" and "river rolls its waves" are antithetical structures; "shower by shower" and "hour after hour" are similar in their antithetical structure, adopting the structure of "adjective + noun + verb phrase + reduplicated words", integrating the actions "下" and "来" into the antithesis.

3.3.2 The content is identical to the original poem

ST: 登高

万里悲秋常作客，
百年多病独登台。

TT: On the Height

A thousand miles from home, I'm grieved at autumn's plight;
Ill now and then for years, alone I'm on this height.

In these verses, "万里" and "百年" quantify vast distance and duration. "多病" echoes "悲秋", indicating physical and emotional states. "常作客" opposes "独登台", depicting wandering and solitude. The translation conveys similar sentiments, also emphasizing distance, time, and isolation.

3.4 Adjustment of poetic form

"yan (言)" refers to word number in traditional Chinese poetry, with each word being a single character or a syllable. It is pivotal in Chinese articles. Poetry verses are classified as either uniform or diverse ones based on sentence length. Uniform verses are characterized by sentences of equal length, akin to quatrains, while diverse verses have varied sentence lengths, like free verse poetry. Briefly, sentences with ≤ 4 yan (characters) are short, and those with ≥ 6 yan (characters) are long. In translation, adjusting the form to reflect the original poem's characteristics aids in disseminating Chinese culture globally.

3.4.1 Emphasizing the distinction between quatrains and free verse poetry

Du Fu's poetry often switches between short lines and long ones within its lines. For instance, the following excerpt from *Song of the Conscripts* contains both three-character verses as well as seven-character and five-character ones. Evidently, the translation of *Song of the Conscripts* by Xu Yuanchong manifests the disparity in syllable number between English verses, thereby recapturing the "free verse" characteristic of the original poem. Its translation strategy can promote the cross-cultural dissemination of Du Fu's poetry.

ST:兵车行 (selected)

TT: Song of the Conscripts

君不闻，

Have you not heard

汉家山东二百州，

Two hundred districts east of the Hua Mountains lie,

.....

.....

被驱不异犬与鸡。

Our men are driven just like dogs or fowls in flight.

.....

.....

且如今年冬，

In winter of this year

夫休关西卒。

Conscription goes on here.

In *Song of the Conscripts*, verses exist in lengths of three, five, and seven characters. The translator renders three-character verses into four-syllable English lines, seven-character verses into twelve-syllable lines, and five-character verses into six-syllable lines. This variation in syllable number emphasizes the poem's "free verse" nature. Conversely, Du Fu's other poems, like his quatrains, are typically translated with eight or twelve syllables per line, maintaining uniformity.

3.4.2 Emphasizing the distinction between long and short stanzas in poetry

In Mandarin Chinese, each character comprises a single syllable, the number of syllables is strongly felt when reading Chinese. In contrast, English words are often multi-syllabic. Thus, translating Chinese poetry into English necessitates attention to syllable differences: seven-character poems should generally have more syllables than five-character poems in translation.

Du Fu's *Dim Prospect*, a five-character poem, is translated into English with each line approximated to eight syllables. While Xu Yuanchong's translation of *Strolling Alone among Flowers by Riverside*, a seven-character poem, features twelve syllables per line, exhibiting a rhythmic pattern distinct from five-character poems due to its increased syllable count. In that way, the distinct characteristics of "seven syllable" and "five syllable" lines in Chinese poetry were discerned.

4 Conclusion

This paper analyzes Xu Yuanchong's translations of Du Fu's poems, focusing on the translation strategies to achieve cross-cultural communication. The four key elements of ancient Chinese poetry including *yun* (rhyme), *dui* (antithesis), *yan* (word count), and *sheng* (tone) are features of Chinese ancient literature, which are less prevalent in English and necessitate deep consideration to effectively convey the aesthetic beauty of Chinese poems, thus promoting cross-cultural communication in language aspect. It can be found that the translator employs strategies such as rhyme scheme transformation, tone substitution, antithesis reproduction, and poetic form adjustment. However, this study only involves limited texts, the scope of research needs to be expanded, and the application space of the theory needs to be explored.

Conflicts of interest

The author declares no conflicts of interest regarding the publication of this paper.

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About the author

Zihan Jiang, born in Dec. 2000, male, majoring in English literature, is currently pursuing a Master's degree in Tianjin Foreign Studies University. His primary research focus is on English translation theory and practice.