

On the Assessment of the English Translation Quality of Yuan Zaju

Dong Wang¹, Guangtao Cao²

¹English Department, Foshan University, Foshan 528000, China

²School of International Studies, Guangdong University of Education, Guangzhou 510303, China

ABSTRACT

The translation of the metrical form of drama and opera is a difficult problem in the English translation of Chinese opera classics. Translators should try to make the translation more faithful and aesthetic in the discourse of drama poetry, pursuing the unity of meaning beauty, sound beauty, and form beauty. Yuan Zaju is distinguished from Western dramas by its morphological characteristics. Yuan Zaju has its unique discourse features. The translator should formulate translation strategies and produce different target texts according to different text types and their functions, as well as translation purposes and target readers. For text types like Yuan Zaju, where the expressive function is its main feature, it is reasonable to faithfully present its aesthetic form in translation. Yuan Zaju, as one of the earliest representatives of the mature form of Chinese drama, its excellence is first reflected in its script form. From this perspective, the micro and macro deviations of the translation from the original text in discourse meaning have a greater negative impact on the quality of the translation. Discourse function closely related to text typology is by no means an auxiliary function but an indispensable function in the quality evaluation of opera translations.

KEYWORDS

Assessment; Translated text; Yuan Zaju

To conduct research on the standards and approaches of the assessment of the translated texts is of great significance. Especially for the assessment of the translation of Yuan Zaju, it is very imperative to set clear and concrete guidelines so as to provide reference and guidance for the future translation of Yuan Zaju. The progress of systemic functional linguistics and pragmatics in translation research provides a theoretical basis for the scientific evaluation of translations of Yuan Zaju.

In the field of linguistics, systemic functional linguistics provides an "applicable" linguistic theoretical foundation for translation research, providing strong theoretical guidance for the construction of translation theory models, translation quality assessment models, and translation practice (Si, 2017, p. 1). It can be said that the theory of systemic functional linguistics provides powerful analytical tools for research on translation processes and quality assessment.

From the perspective of pragmatics, translation is not just an interlingual and intercultural communication. On the one hand, translators need to interpret what the author of the source text is communicating in the source language. On the other hand, they need to convey their understanding in the target language to the target readers (Chen, 2021, p. 237). In general, pragmatic approaches attempt to explain translation---procedures, process and product---from the

point of view of what is (potentially) done by the original author in or by the text, what is (potentially) done in the translation as a response to the original, how and why it is done in that way in that context (Hickey, 1998, p.4).

1 Evaluation of Translation Quality

English and Chinese have different language attributes, lexical and grammatical forms, and expression conventions. Based on this, translators often adopt different translation strategies and methods in translation to appropriately adjust the original text to make the translation more acceptable to the target language. This adjustment is bound to bring deviations. If a certain deviation is purely caused by objective differences such as lexical and grammar between English and Chinese, when evaluating the translation, such deviations can be regarded as acceptable deviations.

The translation of the metrical form of drama and opera is a difficult problem in the English translation of Chinese opera classics. Translators should try to make the translation more faithful and aesthetic in the discourse of drama poetry, pursuing the unity of meaning beauty, sound beauty, and form beauty. In the translation of drama and opera, on the one hand, translating poetry in the form of poetry is an important manifestation of achieving the faithfulness of the translation. On the other hand, we do not need to deliberately pursue the absolute equivalence of the word pattern, foot, stress position, and rhyme of the translation to the original song -- due to the differences in language forms between Chinese and English, this absolutization is difficult to achieve in terms of technical operability and is not very necessary. Translators translate poetry in the form of poetry, but do not absolutize the metrical form and do not necessarily adopt the same rhyme as the original text or use a certain ready-made English poetry rhyme to translate the original text. Many translators at home and abroad tend to avoid the mechanical correspondence of the metrical form in the translation of drama and opera and adopt other relatively free poetic forms. For example, using blank verse can also achieve good results (Cao, 2011: 141-151). Regarding the translation of repetitive lines, reduplicated words, and parallel and antithetical sentence patterns in the original text, due to the differences in language forms and literary traditions between English and Chinese, it is difficult to find corresponding forms in English, and translators need to make formal adjustments of the language. These two situations easily lead to deviations in the translation. Therefore, Yang Xianyi's translation not retaining the metrical form of the original drama and opera, repetitive lines, reduplicated words, and parallel and antithetical sentence patterns can all be regarded as reasonable formal adjustments. In terms of the macro-discourse meaning, the written printing form of the integration of the dialogue and the singing lyrics in the original text is influenced by the text form of storytelling literature such as storytellers' scripts. Although it has the advantage of reading continuity, the distinction of the turns is not clear enough, and the mixture of the dialogue of different roles gives people a chaotic and fuzzy feeling. The translation is changed to the form of Western drama and poetic drama, distinguishing different roles, singing lyrics, and dialogue parts, which is consistent with our modern reading habits. In this way, the revised deviated cases are as follows: The deviation at the micro-discourse level of Yang Xianyi's translation has a relatively small impact on the quality of the translation; at the macro-discourse level of Yang Xianyi's translation: After excluding the type of deviation of the integration of the dialogue, there are still 7 types of true deviations such as stock character roles, mode and song titles, confusion of the singing lyrics and rhymed lines, the connotation of "Ke", entrance and exit poems, wedges, and title and name, which have a greater impact on the discourse of the translation. Although all discourses express more than one function, the main functions played by different types of discourses used in different scenarios

are different. There are multiple versions of the eight plays in "Selected Zaju of Guan Hanqing", and the main existing versions include the "Thirty Kinds of Yuan Edition Zaju", the "Copied and Revised Ancient and Modern Zaju from Maiwangguan", and the "Unique Yuan and Ming Zaju" compiled by Wang Jilie of the Qing Dynasty. These versions have their own characteristics. The "Thirty Kinds of Yuan Edition Zaju" is the earliest version and the most authoritative, with only singing lyrics and no dialogue. The "Maiwangguan" version is from the Ming Dynasty, with both singing lyrics and dialogue. Although it is authoritative, there are traces of adaptation by people of the Ming Dynasty. The original base text adopted by Yang's translation is the Maiwangguan version. However, regardless of which version, the script system of Yuan Zaju has always been coherent. Yuan Zaju, as one of the earliest representatives of the mature form of Chinese drama, its excellence is first reflected in its script form. From this perspective, the micro and macro deviations of the translation from the original text in discourse meaning have a greater negative impact on the quality of the translation. Yang's translation of "Selected Zaju of Guan Hanqing" as a whole is no longer a simple English translation of the original text but an adaptive translation with excessive deletion and adaptation. Yang's translation adopts excessive domestication strategies for Yuan Zaju in terms of discourse types, eliminating the ethnic identity of the opera discourse and not conforming to the spirit of the protection and inheritance of intangible cultural heritage.

2 Reservation of Explicit Discourse Markers and National Characteristics of Yuan Zaju

Yuan Zaju is a remarkable peak and milestone in the history of the development of Chinese opera and has high aesthetic value. To evaluate the literary and artistic achievements of an era and its historical status, the main considerations are the depth and breadth of social life it reflects, the vitality of the artistic archetypes it creates, the new contributions of its artistic form, and its influence on the development of later literary and artistic works. Yuan Zaju has its distinct characteristics, and its artistic form is a huge breakthrough and innovation in the history of opera. Yuan Zaju uses means such as singing, dialogue, and performance to artistically reproduce a complete realistic or historical story on the stage and develops into a mature comprehensive opera art, making significant contributions to Chinese literature and opera art. It is called the golden age in the history of Chinese opera by drama historians at home and abroad. The script system of Yuan Zaju involves the issue of the dramatic structure, which is a crucial part of dramatic aesthetics. Yuan Zaju is distinguished from Western dramas by its morphological characteristics such as one script with four acts, one wedge in four acts, solo singing by one person, stock character roles, song title system, title and name, and entrance and exit poems. Taking the characteristic of modes and song titles as an example, the names of the song titles are elegant and unique, with unique beauty in sound, form, and meaning, and have high aesthetic value. They are indispensable discourse type markers of Yuan Zaju. It is obviously inappropriate for Yang Xianyi's translation to basically discard the unique discourse features of Yuan Zaju and make domesticated treatment in the style of Western dramas. A discourse is not an arbitrary accumulation of speech clauses. It must also be organized from the perspective of discourse type or genre, in terms of the schematic structure and manifestation style that embodies a discourse type or genre, among which there is a set of corresponding different steps and structures that are recognized and shared by everyone in the native cultural environment (Martin, 1984, p.25). Different genres have different schematic structures. Yuan Zaju and Western dramas belong to very different schematic structures. The textual form of Yuan Zaju that is truly "eliminated" by the translator is the most national aspect. The translation changes from being faithful to the original text to being a "creative translation" and "false translation" with a misaligned identity and difficulty in

self-verification. Such unfaithful texts can hardly be called translations. This kind of domesticated translation strips away the specific form of the original work, leaving only the content of the original work. After an integration that conforms to the aesthetic standards of the readers, although Yuan Zaju is "translated", the explicit external markers of the original work disappear without a trace. What aspects of the original work should the translator focus on to keep unchanged? The translator should formulate translation strategies and produce different target texts according to different text types and their functions, as well as translation purposes and target readers (Zhang, 2013, pp. 5-10). For text types like Yuan Zaju, where the expressive function is its main feature, it is reasonable to faithfully present its aesthetic form in translation. It is indeed inappropriate for Yang's translation to delete all the discourse form markers of Yuan Zaju and domesticate and translate them into Western dramatic forms without explanation. One of the social functions of translation is to introduce differences, including language differences, cultural differences, etc. If we deceive readers in the name of readers, betray the original work, and distort the cultural identity of others, it will inevitably lose cultural connotations, cause a misalignment of cultural identity, and blur the original appearance of Yuan Zaju.

3 The Content of Discourse Schema at the Macro Level Is Indispensable for the Evaluation of Yuan Zaju Translation Quality

Discourse meaning is the organizational meaning of the conceptual and interpersonal meanings expressed by language, a meaning based on the internal language and the organization of language information (Halliday, 1994, pp. 33-36). Some scholars thus believe that the role of discourse meaning is to assist in the realization of the first two meanings, and that to judge the quality of the translation, it is only necessary to see whether the conceptual meaning and interpersonal meaning of the translation discourse are equivalent to the original text, and there is no need to examine whether they are equivalent in discourse meaning (Si, 2004, pp. 52-54). However, it is completely unfeasible to evaluate Yang Xianyi's translation of *Selected Zaju of Guan Hanqing* based on this view. The translator has made some adjustments, renovations, and simplifications to the original text, turning it into a modern costume drama based on the Yuan Dynasty. The original series of song titles have been arranged into non-literary and non-white paragraphs in poetic form. If Yang Xianyi's translation is faithfully retranslated into Chinese, we no longer get the Yuan Zaju. The overall feeling after reading the translation is: the play is still there, but the songs have perished. To faithfully present the original discourse form and system, for the translator of Guan's plays, it is not that they cannot do it, but that they don't do it. The reason for such a huge discourse deviation is entirely due to the translator's concept of domesticated translation. Without examination from the two different levels of discourse, especially the macro-discourse genre, and the lack of explicit discourse evaluation, even if the original text and the translation are both dramas, it is difficult for us to see the above-mentioned schematic structure (Typology) deviation in the translation. Some scholars start with the evaluation of the English translation of the short story "Kong Yiji", and the discourse form studied is far less complex than that of opera. Therefore, the improper conclusion that "discourse meaning plays an auxiliary role in translation quality evaluation" is drawn. Through the description and analysis of the deviation of discourse meaning at the macro and micro levels between the translation and the original text, it can be found that the discourse function closely related to text typology is by no means an auxiliary function but an indispensable function in the quality evaluation of opera translations.

4 Theoretical Foundation of the Assessment of the English Translation Quality of Yuan Za-ju

Systemic functional linguistics holds that every language has three metafunctions, namely conceptual function, interpersonal function, and discourse function. Hu Zhuanglin conducted in-depth exploration and analysis of the connotation of "equivalence", and thus discussed the essence and standards of translation: "Translation generally seeks equivalence in meaning between the source text and the translated text... Translation should seek that the discourses of the two languages have the same meaning and function in the same overall contextual context." "The equivalence of translation cannot be based solely on the equivalence of one meaning (usually conceptual meaning); while seeking equivalence in the conceptual meaning of discourse between two languages, it is also necessary to seek equivalence in the interpersonal meaning of the speaker's attitude, motivation, judgment, role, as well as the discourse meaning of the medium, channel, rhetorical device, etc. Generally, a good translated text needs to be equivalent to the source text in all three meaning." (Hu, 1989, pp.188-189)

Professor He Ziran proposes the following strategies to secure pragmatic equivalence, both in general and in particular:

Strategy A: render the expression literally, if it is possible to feel or recognize that, in the context, the intended meaning or force of the message is the same as in the source text.

Strategy B: render the culture-specific expression into a synonymous one that is accepted by the reader of the translated text, which ensures that the message retains an equivalent effect in both the source text and the translated text.

Strategy C: translate a culture-specific expression into one of general adaptation in the translated text, relinquishing the specific description of the source text, and retaining only the pragmatic equivalent effect of the message.

Strategy D: translate a culture-specific expression literally, but replenish it with brief interpretations to reveal the intended meaning.

Strategy E: render the intended meaning or pragmatic implicit force of the message in the source text regardless of the functions that it performs on the surface. (He, 2003, pp.230-233)

The standard for translation is also the standard for assessing translation quality. From the perspective of systemic functional linguistics, the assessment of translation quality is to examine whether or to what extent the translated text is equivalent to the source text in the foregoing three functions or meanings. Yet what should be mentioned is that in assessing the English translation quality of Yuan Za-ju, one should be clear that the equivalence of translation should be based on the equivalence of the foregoing three functions or meanings. In assessing the English translation quality of Yuan Za-ju, the equivalence to the source text in the discourse meaning shouldn't be belittled. House holds that the quality of translation mainly depends on whether the translated text is equivalent to the source text in terms of conceptual meaning/function and interpersonal meaning/function (House, 1977, p.37), not thinking it equally important for the translated text to be equivalent to the source text in terms of the discourse meaning. This is a biased view. When translating such literary works as dramas or operas in specific cultures, translators shouldn't neglect whether the translated text is equivalent to the source text in the discourse meaning/function.

When reconstructing the translation, the translator should base on the differences in cognition, values, and other aspects between the target readers and the original readers, based on the equivalence of the overall meaning/function of the translated text to the original text. Necessary adjustments should be made to some small sentences in the original text in terms of conceptual meaning and interpersonal meaning, such as expansion, contraction, and change. These micro-level deviations not only have no negative impact on the quality of the translation, but may also have a

positive effect. Therefore, when evaluating the quality of the translated text, it is necessary to sort out and classify the deviation cases at the micro level from a macro perspective, and make value judgments. (Si, 2017, p.257)

Si Xianzhu proposes an assessment model that includes three basic steps. Firstly, conduct a micro-level analysis of the source text and the translated text from the perspective of the interaction between context, function, and form (language). From the perspective of systemic functional linguistics, translation assessment mainly examines the deviation of the translated text from the source text in terms of conceptual meaning and interpersonal meaning. Secondly, from the perspective of the interaction between context, function, and form (language), a macro-level analysis of the source text and translated text should be conducted from the perspective of the entire discourse. Classify and sort out the various deviations found from the target language features, socio-cultural environment, discourse types and functions that reflect the translation scenario, and make value judgments, excluding cases that have not affected the quality of the translation. At the same time, from the perspective of discourse typology, determine the impact of different types of semantic deviations on the translation quality of different types of discourse. Finally, based on the first two steps, starting from the adjusted deviation cases, determine to what extent the translated text is equivalent to the source text. When making an overall assessment of the quality of a translated text, it is also necessary to consider the type of discourse, and determine the different impacts of different types of semantic (conceptual or interpersonal) deviations on the quality of the translated text according to different discourse types, in order to achieve a comprehensive and fair assessment. In addition to considering the factor of being faithful to the source text, translators must also consider such factors as the target-language culture, translation motivation, translation purpose, and target-language readers. (Si, 2017, pp.242-245)

5 Conclusion

Systemic functional linguistics and pragmatics provide a more scientific approach for translating Chinese into English, which has enlightening and guiding significance for the translation of Yuan Zaju into English. Under the guidance of the theories of both systemic functional linguistics and pragmatics, we find that it is indeed inappropriate for Yang Xianyi's translated texts to delete all the discourse form markers of Yuan Za-ju. For text types like Yuan Zaju, where the expressive function is its main feature, it is reasonable to faithfully present its aesthetic form in translation. In Yuan Za-ju translations, the discourse function closely related to text typology is by no means an auxiliary function but an indispensable function in the quality evaluation.

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About the author

Dong Wang, Master, Lecturer, Research direction: British and american literature and english language.

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