

Experimental Metafunction Study of *Ode to the West Wind* and Its Chinese Translations

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Abstract

Guided by Halliday's Systemic Functional Linguistics, this paper attempts to apply functional approach to translation studies by making a contrastive analysis of Shelley's *Ode to the West Wind* and its two Chinese versions from the perspective of Experimental Metafunction. It aims to exemplify how a literary text, especially for poetry, can be interpreted properly and systematically with the assistance of linguistic theories, and also testify the applicability of Systemic Functional Linguistics to translation studies, both in English and Chinese.

Keywords: poetry translation, *Ode to the West Wind*, Chinese translations, Experimental Metafunction

1. Introduction

Translation has not stopped since human beings began their cultural and lingual exchanges. It cannot be denied that the contemporary translation theories throw much light on translation researches and translation practices. There are still many problems to be solved, and various possible approaches that can be applied to translation studies. Therefore, this paper attempts to provide Halliday's Systemic Functional Linguistics (herein after referred to as SFL) to translation studies. Based on previous researches, this paper chooses a well-known English poem titled *Ode to the West Wind* and its two Chinese translations as the corpus data for the research, the translations by Wang (1980) and Jiang (1980). This paper, firstly, gives a review of the previous application of SFL to translation studies. Then it presents the application of the detailed analysis of the *Ode to the West Wind* and its translation from the perspective of Experimental Metafunctions, which testify the practical applicability of SFL to the translation of literary texts.

2. The Application of SFL to Translation Studies

SFL theory has been widely applied to translation studies for more than thirty years. Halliday's main aim to construct the theory is to apply it to text analysis: one that would make it possible to say sensible and useful things about any text. Bell (1991) discusses how three functions in SFL are in relation to logic, grammar and rhetoric and realized by transitivity, modality and thematic structure in translation. Baker (1992, 2000) discusses some linguistic theories' enlightenment for translation studies, especially SFL. Hatim & Mason (1997) have made an attempt to apply the ideational function, interpersonal function and textual function as model for analyzing translation equivalence in source texts and target texts. In China, Hu (1989) is the first to discuss translation problems from perspective of SFL. Huang (2006) makes great contribution to applying the SFL to analyze poetry translation. Zhang (2001) concentrates on application of genre and register to deal with the problems in English-Chinese translation. Li (2006) try to investigate the expressions of the interpersonal meaning of Mood in poetry and how poetry is translated into English with equivalence. Xia & Li (2009) analyze two translated texts of *Gone with the Wind*. Actually there are many more research papers and books on the specific application of context analysis to the translation studies. As for the translation of poetry, however, it is found that the present research of applying SFL to poetry analysis and translation is limited to Chinese ancient poems' translation into English, which has gain a great achievement in our country. There are rarely any researches into analysis and Chinese translation of English poetry from SFL. Therefore, this paper chooses *Odd to the West Wind* as the target text because it has been regarded as one of worth reading poem of Percy Bysshe Shelley. Since the poem has been published, it has been analyzed from three major perspectives abroad: theme, Romanticism, rhetorical devices. According to incompletely statistics, by now, there have been more than 60

Chinese versions of the poem. The previous studies on *Ode to the West Wind* are from different perspective, such as comparative translation, rhetorical devices, stylistic features, western poetics, Romantic study and Functional Stylistics. Many researches have investigated into *Odd to the West Wind* mainly from the perspective of comparative translation, rhetorical devices, stylistic features, ect. Bearing this gap in mind, this paper tries to apply one of SFL theories- Experimental Metafunction—to study *Odd to the West Wind* and its two Chinese versions, so as to testify the feasibility of applying Hallidayan theory to the study of the translation of literary text from English to Chinese.

3. Experimental Metafunctional Study of *Ode to the West Wind* and its Two Chinese Translations

Halliday's Metafunction consists of Ideational Metafunction, Interpersonal Metafunction and Textual Metafunction. Originally, Ideational Metafunction comprises two distinct sub-functions: the experiential and the logical. In the later time, Halliday combines the two functions into one that is totally called Ideational Metafunction. This paper mainly put emphasis on the Experiential Function of language which deals with the content of speech. It is largely concerned with content or ideas, and is realized by Transitivity System which contains six Processes: Material Process, Mental Process, Relational Process, Behavioural Process, Verbal Process and Existential Process. The principle components of Transitivity System are Process and Participant, also Circumstance in most cases.

As a matter of fact, in the Process of analyzing the experiential meaning in a text, embedded clauses not only have their own transitivity structure but also function as elements in the transitivity structure of the clause which they are embedded. Due to the limited space, the paper just analyzes the last stanza of the poem in the aspect of Experimental Metafunction.

Table 1. Transitivity analysis of Stanza V in the ST

Line	Actor	Process: Material	Goal	Circumstance
57 & 58	(West Wind)	make	me thy lyre	even as...
	my leaves	are falling		what if; like its own
59&60&61	The tumult of thy mighty harmonies	will take		from both deep, autumnal tone; Sweet though in sadness
63&64	(West Wind)	drive	my dead thought	over the universe; like...
	withered leaves	quicken	a new birth	
65&66 & 67	(West Wind)	Scatter	my words	by the incantation of this verse, among mankind ;as Ashes and sparks; from an unextinguished hearth
70	Winter	comes		if
Line	Carrier	Process: Relational	Attribute	Beneficiary
57	forest	is	(thy voice)	
61	you Spirit fierce	be	my spirit	
62	thou	be	me /impetuous one	
68&69	the trumpet of a prophecy	be	through my lips	to unawakened earth
Line	Identified	Process: Relational	Identifier	
70	spring	can be	far behind	

The last stanza (line 57-70) is about the poet requests the wind to “drive his dead thoughts over the universe” and awaken the earth from wintry slumber. The results show that Material and Relational Processes occupy the main place in this stanza. Since the Relational Process has two different types: Attributive Relational Process and Identifying Relational Process, there have different types of participant involved in Table 1. Stanza V contains seven clause complexes, with 7 Material Processes, 4 Attributive Relational Processes and 1 Identifying Relational Process.

Table 2. Transitivity analysis of Stanza V in TTs

Texts	Line	Actor	Process: Material	Goal	Circumstance
W's	57&58	我 我们	做 落	你的竖琴 叶	就同森林一般 纷纷,纵然
J's	57&58	你 叶片	演奏/以 凋谢	森林/我为琴 象森林的一样	
W's	59&60 &61	秋色斑斓	添上	深沉的回响	好给你那狂飚(Recipient); 曲甜美而带苍凉
J's	59& 60&61	你那非凡和谐的慷慨激 越之情	定能奏出	深沉的秋乐	从深林和我, 悲怆却又甘冽
W's	61 62& 63& 64	(你) 豪迈的精灵 豪迈的精灵	给 化成/借 扫出 扫走了	我你迅猛的劲头 我/你的光芒 腐朽思想 枯叶	宇宙
W's	65& 66& 67	(西风) 从未灭的炉头 (你)	激来 凭着 散布 吹出 把...播送	新生 诗韵 我的话 火花 思绪	做符咒 犹如, 在人群之中 宇宙,象
J's	63&64 65&66 &67	你 落叶 我的话语 (你)	驱遣 催促 传遍 凭借	落叶 新生命 天地间万户千家 韵文写就的符咒	就象
W's	68&69	从未灭的余烬 (你) (我)	扬起 拿 吹响	炉灰和火星 我的嘴当喇叭 一个预言	对那沉睡的大地
J's	68&69	通过我的嘴唇	奏鸣	号角	向沉睡未醒的人境
W's	70	冬天	到 等	春天	已 难道, 久等
J's	70	冬天	来了		
Texts	Line	Carrier	Process: Relational	Attribute	
J's	61&62	凶猛的精灵 我	是 能成为	我的灵魂 彪悍的你	

As is made clear in Table 2, there are 14 Material Processes in Wang's translation. Jiang applies 10 Material Processes and 2 Relational Processes into his version. In the ST, there are 7 Material Processes and 5 Relational Processes. The following part will analyze this phenomenon.

Line 57 and 58 are a clause complex in which the dependent clause is a hypotactic enhancing clause. The dependent clause consists of 2 Processes, the one is Material Process and the other is Relational Process, which serve as the Manner Circumstance for the clause complex as a whole. In the primary clause is a Material Process with the verb "make" and the omitted Actor "West Wind", the Goal "thy lyre" and the Beneficiary "me". All the versions share the same Processes with the ST in the translation of primary clause. In the ST, the line 57 contains a Comparison Circumstance which is a Relational Process with the verb "is" and the Carrier "forest". The difference lies in this line translation, for Wang translates the line into Circumstance without Transitivity, and Jiang applies the Material Processes into his translation. As to the other dependent clause in line 58, all the TTs reproduce the original meaning of the ST. Line 59 to 61 employs a Material Process with the Actor "The tumult of thy mighty harmonies", the verb "will take" and Circumstances. TTs are realized their translations by the Material Process with the verbs "添上" and "定能奏出". And Wang adds a Recipient to his translation, which is inconsistent with the ST, but the translation of the Circumstance "Sweet though in sadness" as "甜美而带苍凉" is more accurate than Jiang's version. As for Jiang's version, the translations of Actor and Process in these lines are consistent with the ST.

In line 61 and 62, there are two simple clauses with only one type of Process—Relational. Jiang's translation rents the same Processes and two Participants, while Wang translates the two clauses into 2 Material Processes. So Jiang's version is more equivalent to the ST. Line 63 and 64 together form a clause complex, and it includes 2 Material Processes. The primary clause is a Material Process which is achieved by the verb "drive", and the dependent clause is also Material Process that acts as the Comparison Circumstance in this line as a whole. The dependent clause is achieved by the verb "quicken", the Actor "withered leaves" and the Goal "a new birth". In

the TTs, the translators translate the clause into 3 Material Processes by adding the verbs “扫走了” in Wang’s version and “驱散” in Jiang’s version. This is because the adjective “withered” is variant of the verb “wither”. In line 65, 66 and 67, the clause employs a Material Process in the ST with the verb “scatter”, the omitted Actor “West Wind” and the Goal “my words”. There are four Circumstances in the clause, they are Means Circumstance “by the incantation of this verse”, Location Circumstance “among mankind” and “from an unextinguished hearth”, Comparison Circumstance “as Ashes and sparks”. In the TTs, the Process is also Material Process reflected by the verbs “散布” and “把...播送”, the Actor “你” and “西风”. All of these are consistent with the ST, so does the Goal. Due to the different characteristic of word between two languages, however, the translators translate the Circumstance “by the incantation of this verse” and “as Ashes and sparks” into Material Process.

In the ST, line 68 and 69 contains a Relational Process, while the two translators apply the Material Processes into their versions. For the last clause complex in the ST, there are two types of Process: Material and Relational. The primary clause is Relational Process which is realized by the verb “can be”, the Identified “spring” and the Identifier “far behind”. The dependent clause is a hypotactic enhancing clause, and it is a Material Process with the verb “comes” and the Actor “Winter”. In Wang’s version, he translates the clause complex into 2 Material Processes, with the verbs “到” and “等” which are inconsistent with the Process in the ST. As to the Actors “冬天” and “春天” are the same to the ST. In the ST, “Be through” means “通过” in Chinese, so Jiang’s translation is equivalent to the ST. He reproduces the original meaning and clause structure of the ST as well as the translation of the last line. To compare the TTs, the comparative results show that Jiang’s translation is more equivalent to the ST, both in the types of Processes and Participants.

4. Implications and Conclusion

The comparative and contrastive study of the Transitivity in the ST and TTs discloses the similarities and differences between the poet and the translators in expressing experiences in the world. From the analysis, the paper finds that stanza V contains seven clause complexes, with 7 Material Processes, 4 Attributive Relational Processes and 1 Identifying Relational Process. The most frequent types of Process is Material outnumbered other Process types as the dominant Process type in the ST. The data shows that the two translators tend to choose Material Process in their translations, which are equivalent to that in the ST. Besides the most frequent Material Processes, there are Relational Processes in the TTs. Although not all lines of ST share the same Processes with the ones of TTs, but what is most important is that one line can be translated into different Processes which express the original meaning of ST. By contrast, Jiang’s translation is more identical to the types of Process in the ST in the perspective of Transitivity system. For transferring the experimental function, a translator should first try to create a formal equivalence with all the corresponding Processes, Participants and Circumstances in TT, which will help to get to a functional equivalence. But it cannot draw a hasty conclusion that the translated text that failed in obeying totally to the Processes, Participants and Circumstances used in TTs are considered unqualified or bad, because in translation it is often necessary to have some adjustments of the functional components between the two languages, such as, for the arrangement of the structure or in order to rhyme or ever for the transferring of meanings. All these are reasonable and acceptable, for a mechanical imitation of the ST will only lead to unnatural translation. Moreover, in the Process of translating, the translators would analyze the ST according to own understand and way, with their native cultural factors permeated into the translated texts. As a result, different analysis and understanding of the ST will produce various TTs. However, these changes should not be made in sacrificing the original meaning of the ST. Since SFL is a theory of meaning of choice, so it is necessary to make some adjustments of functional components in the Process of translation, so as to avoid some unnatural translation due to the mechanical imitation of the original pattern.

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