

A Probe into the Interpersonal Function of a Poetic English Translation of “Thoughts in a Quiet Night”

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ABSTRACT. *Based on Halliday's interpersonal function, this paper analyzes several English translations of a poem by Li Bai, a poet of the Tang Dynasty aiming at examining the operability and applicability of systemic functional linguistics in poetry analysis.*

KEYWORDS: *Interpersonal function, Poetry translation, “Thoughts in a Quiet Night”*

1. Introduction

Halliday's views and analysis methods on metafunction provide an analytical framework for discourse analysis. The functional functions, including experience, logic, discourse, and interpersonal functions, are important components of Halliday's functional grammar.

From the literature point of view, many scholars in China have published quite insightful comments on the translation of ancient poems, but most of them mainly from the perspective of literary criticism and literary translation. We try to present our immature analysis and opinions from the perspective of Halliday's functional grammar, and at the same time test the operability and applicability of systemic functional linguistics in discourse analysis through analysis.

2. The overview of interpersonal function

Interpersonal function refers to people using language to interact with other people, establish and maintain interpersonal relationships, use language to influence others' behaviors, and use language to express their views on the world (including the real world and the inner world) and even change the world. People establish and/or maintain social relationships through language in their daily lives. In actual interactions, people constantly exchange communicative roles, but no matter how the roles are exchanged, there are only two main communicative roles, namely, “giving” and “Demanding”. It can be information, goods and services (Goods-&-

services), and the same can be information or goods and services. If you combine the communicative role with Commodity (information, goods, and labor), it constitutes three verbal functions: “declaration”, “problem”, and “command”. The three grammatical functions and specific grammatical structures often have a certain correspondence. For example, “declarations” are usually expressed by declarative sentences, “problems” are generally expressed by interrogative sentences, and “commands” are often expressed by imperative sentences.

3.The original text of “Thoughts in a Quiet Night” and several translations

Li Bai’s original poem is like this: “Before the moon in the bed” / “Doubt is the frost on the ground” / “Looking at the moon” / “Looking at the hometown”.

The four English translations of “Quiet Night Thinking” Xu Zhongjie , Xu Yuanchong, Amy Lowell and Obata are as follows:

Xu Zhongjie:/ I yearn for my bed, / I suspect it to be hoary frost on the floor. / I watch the bright moon, as I tilt back my head, / I yearn, while stooping, for my homeland more .

Xu Yuanchong : /Abed, I see a sliver light, / I wonder if it’s frost aground. / Looking up, I find the moon bright; / bowing, in homesickness I’m drowned.

Amy Lowell: / I front if my bed the moonlight is very bright. / I wonder if that can be frost on the floor? / I lift up my head and look at the full moon, the dazzling moon. / I drop my head, And think of the home of old days.

Obata: / I saw the moonlight before my couch, / and wondered if it were not the frost on the ground. / I raised my head and looked out on the mountain moon; / I bowed my head and thought of my far-off home .

4. The interpersonal function analysis of “Thoughts in a Quiet Night”

4.1 Tone

Halliday believes that the mood system is one of the manifestations of interpersonal function and one of the main means to achieve interpersonal function. The tone can be expressed by question or statement form. It consists of two parts: subject and limited components. (Finite element).

Li Bai's poems all use Declarative mood; the form of the statement includes the subject and the qualifier, the subject is in front, the qualifier is in the back, and the communicative role (narrator) and the communicative purpose of the speaker are reflected (by providing information to the reader) Readers share feelings). In the poem “Quiet Nights”, the author is Li Bai, the poet “I”, and for the reader, he is the narrator (most scholars' views). Here, as a narrator, the poet uses the stated tone to provide information to the reader.

The phrase “before the bed in the moonlight” uses a statement tone. The subject in Xu Zhongjie, Xu Yuanchong, and Obata's translation is I. Only the subject in Amy Lowell's translation is moonlight. The defining components of Xu Zhongjie, Xu Yuanchong, Amy Lowell and Obata are descry, see, is, and saw, respectively. It can be seen that it is more appropriate to use I as the subject than the moonlight as the subject. Li Bai woke up in the late autumn and saw the moonlight in front of the bed. This is more appropriate. Instead of waking up to describe the brightness of the moonlight.

Looking at the translation of the sentence “Let’s look at the moon”, Xu Zhongjie and Xu Yuanchong not only pay attention to the language form of the original poem, but also pursue the simplicity, smoothness and neatness of the translation to preserve the original style, thus achieving “Faithfulness”, “Expressiveness” and even “Elegance”. In contrast, the translations of Amy Lowell and Obata are in vain. Just as the meaning of the drunkard is not in the wine, depending on the landscape, the focus of the original poem is not on “lifting the head” but on “looking the moon”. In the translation, Xu Zhongjie’s translation subject is I, the qualified component is Watch, Xu Yuanchong's translation subject is I, and the qualified component is Find, but Amy Lowell regards lift up and look at juxtaposition as qualified components, and Obata also takes raise and look. Out of seeing is a limited component. It can be seen that in order to pursue formal equivalence, the loss of artistic conception is not sufficient. Therefore, the translations of Xu Zhongjie and Xu Yuanchong are better. The translation structure of the two of them is similar, but Xu Yuanchong's more concise (only 7 words), in line with the characteristics of poetry, can best reflect the original poetry.

4.2 Speakers and listeners

Functional grammar believes that any discourse is a communicative behavior. During the process of communication, the speaker and the listener constantly exchange roles and reflect different interpersonal meanings. The speaker is the addresser (including the speaker and author in the conversation), the listener is the addressee (including the listener and reader in the conversation), the narrator (Reporter) belongs to an outsider. From the “deictic” meaning of the personal pronoun (that is, the “person” of the person in the communication), the first person refers to the speaker and the writer, and the second person refers to the listener (Listen) and the reader, while the third person pronoun refers to the outsider in the process of communication. First look at the speakers and listeners in the four translations of the poem “Quiet Nights”. Since ancient poetry often omits the subjective subject, and the English subject needs to be clear, the translator must determine the subject himself. It can be known from the translation that the translators are consistent in determining the speaker (subject) in the poem, and that the speaker is a poet, represented by the first person “I”, which coincides with the subject omitted by the author, so that the plot It seems more realistic. Look at the speaker and listener outside the poem of “Quiet Nights”. The narrator is both a poet and a speaker. He and the reader have established a human relationship between the

speaker and the receiver. The reader is both reading. The poet is also an invisible listener. This dual role strengthens the interpersonal interaction between poetry and poetry.

4.3 Tense

Chinese verbs do not have various tense changes in English. Chinese uses words to express time, while English uses verbs to express time and is syntactically called tense. The tense is not only a basic grammatical category, but also has the function of expressing interpersonal meaning. In the system framework of Halliday's functional grammar, people call the interpersonal function of language through tense. The original poems of "Quiet Nights" tell the story of what happened in the past, but the four translations use different tenses. Some translators use the current time, such as Xu Zhongjie, Xu Yuanchong, Amy Lowell's translation, and some translators use past tense, such as Obata. The tense as interpersonal meaning represents different functions. Xu Zhongjie, Xu Yuanchong, and Amy Lowell adopt the present tense, which has the function of promoting the interpersonal relationship between the author and the reader in the discourse, and plays the role of the conical function. It is intended to bring readers of all eras into real and vivid stories and readers. Face-to-face communication creates an interactive effect. The present tense here does not mean actual time. "The purpose of the use is to turn the personal experience of time and space into a universal, constant, unconstrained 'no-go' experience." Obata used the past tense to describe what happened at the time and told the reader about his personal experience and experience at the time. In comparison, the current tense is closer to the distance between the speaker and the listener, so Obata's translation is less appropriate.

5. Conclusion

This paper makes a preliminary discussion on Li Bai's poem "Thoughts in a Quiet Night" and its four English translations from the perspective of the interpersonal pure function of Halliday's systemic functional linguistics. The analysis of tone reflects the communicative role and communicative purpose of the speaker, and the analysis of the speaker and the listener illustrates the meaning of interpersonal interaction. The analysis of the tense shows that different tenses have the function of expressing different interpersonal meanings, and to Obata Doubt with the suitability of the past tense. The analysis of this paper also proves the operability and applicability of systemic functional linguistics in poetry analysis.

Acknowledgement

This work was sponsored by the Education Planning Regulations of Jiangxi Province in 2019: CAT translation workshop teaching model Focusing on the process orientation (No. 19YB254).

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