The Application of Text-Linguistic Theory in Classical Chinese Poetry Translation: A Comparative Analysis of Two Translations of *Chunwang*

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Abstract. This paper analyses the application value of text-linguistic theories in the field of translation, especially in the translation of classical Chinese poetry, and uses text-linguistic theories such as Halliday's register theory and Beaugrande and Dressler's communication occurrence theory of text to analyse specific translations. Taking the classical Chinese poem *Chunwang* as an example, the researcher selects the English versions by two translators from different linguistic and cultural backgrounds, Xu Yuanchong and Stephen Owen, and evaluates and compares them from in-text and extra-text perspectives under the theoretical framework of text linguistics. The researcher evaluates the textual cohesion of the two translations, and interprets the different characteristics of translations by translators from different linguistic and cultural backgrounds in terms of field, tenor and mode. Through the text-linguistic analysis of the two translations, the researcher verifies the application value of text-linguistic theories in the field of translation, especially in the translation of classical Chinese poetry, and concludes that the text-linguistic analysis of in-text and extra-text factors of a text is conducive to the comprehensive interpretation it, and can thus be instrumental in guiding translation research and practice.

Keywords: Text Linguistics · Classical Chinese Poetry · Translation Analysis

1 Introduction

Text linguistics is a modern linguistic concept emerging in the 1960s emphasizing text as the basic unit of linguistic research and text analysis [1]. Some researchers believe that some theoretical results in this field can be used to guide translation research and practice, and are committed to applying the research methods of text linguistics to translation research [2–4]. For example, Catford suggests that to translate is to substitute the original text in the source language with text materials of the same function, effects and value in the target language, and thus should be carried out on the dimension of the text [5]. However, in previous studies, there has been little discussion on the application of text-linguistic theory in the translation of classical Chinese poetry, which is special due to

some unique features of classical Chinese poetry [6, 7]. Based on several important theories of text linguistics, this paper tries to analyse the guiding role of text-linguistic theories in the field of Chinese classical translation through specific cases. The researcher takes two English versions of a classical Chinese poem as examples and evaluates them in terms of the differences in translation styles of the translators and the problems in their translations under a text-linguistic theoretical framework, which highlights the possibility of using text-linguistic theories to guide the translation practice of classical Chinese poetry.

2   Text Linguistics and Its Application in Translation Analysis

2.1   Text Linguistics

Text linguistics is a modern branch of linguistics that emerged after structuralist linguistics and transformational generative linguistics [1]. Based on structuralist linguistics, early modern text linguistics has two main features: its analysis unit is mainly the sentence, and its analysis perspective is mainly the analysis on the form of language [8]. For a long time, linguistics studies have been based on the sentence as the largest unit of analysis. However, in the 1960s and 1970s, linguists found that the traditional lexical and syntactic approach to linguistics could not adequately explain the meaning of the text, and thus began to look for new research methods and tools [9, 10]. In 1967, the German linguist H. Weinrich proposed the concept of "text linguistics", advocating linguistic research from the perspective of text [11].

Text linguistics advocates the study of text as a communication system, which initially focuses on the analysis of text grammar based on the tradition of structuralist linguistics. Albrecht expands this formal approach to include the study of the connections between sentences as structural patterns of text, such as the connectives, stressing the cohesion and coherence between sentences in a text [12]. Kvam suggests that in contemporary text linguistics, the scope of text-linguistic study is no longer limited to language itself, but focuses on the context of the language and its communicative function [8]. In text-linguistic theories, a text exists primarily as a sociocultural entity, and is in essence a communicative activity the expression of whose meaning is the result of a process of meaning construction in a given interactive context, closely related to human interaction in a given environment [13]. During its later development, text linguistics has continuously absorbed the results of studies in various fields and gradually formed a text-based discipline of language form and language function in spoken and written texts [14–16].

2.2   The Text-Linguistic Turn of Translation

Some researchers argue that the communicative function and contextual properties of language reflected in both text linguistics and translation make the two areas closely related [13, 17–19]. Text-linguists take text as the unit of study, which can be taken as a use of language for specific purposes, i.e., the organization of language for certain purposes (e.g., conveying information, expressing ideas, participating in communicative

activities with others, etc.), which has evident social properties [20]. Translation, on the other hand, is essentially a social communication activity as well, which consists of the communication between the translator and the original author through the translator's reading and understanding of the original text and the communication between the translator and the readers through translation [18]. In this sense, translation is in itself a process of text production of text-linguistic significance. In addition, other areas of text-linguistic concern, such as the study of the role of lexical and grammatical elements on text comprehension, are closely related to translation [19]. As a result, more and more linguists and translators try to use text-linguistic theories to guide translation research and practice, promoting the text-linguistic turn of translation [2, 13, 21].

The rise and development of text linguistics have provided new research ideas for translation theory and practice. From the perspective of text linguistics, translation is a recontextualization of the text [22]. It advocates taking the text as the basic unit of translation and attaches importance to the overall analysis of the text and its consistency. Zhang and Huang point out that there are three main differences between traditional linguistic research methods and text-linguistic ones [21]: the focus of research is on the whole text rather than on specific words or phrases; the translation equivalence is based on the text and communication level rather than on the phrasal level; the objects of research include linguistic factors, intra-verbal factors and extra-verbal factors such as situational context and cultural context, rather than being limited to language itself. It is believed that taking the text as the translation object and basic unit in translation practice, and this way has its unique advantages [13, 21, 23]. Si suggests that taking the text as the basic unit of translation helps to convey the meaning of the text, which enables the translation to better achieve faithfulness to the meaning of the original text and promote its fluency [22]. Therefore, it is of great significance to use text-linguistic theories to guide translation research and practice.

2.3   Text Linguistics Approach to Classical Chinese Poetry Translation

Classical Chinese poetry is a special literary genre, which leads to the particularity of its translation. However, many characteristics of classical Chinese poetry and its translation have something in common with the theories and research methods advocated by text linguistics, which provides a good basis for using text-linguistic theories to guide and evaluate the translation of classical Chinese poetry. Primarily, Chinese classical poetry has unique Chinese cultural characteristics in terms of rhythm, imagery, sound and rhyme, which is quite different from English poetry, and thus Chinese classical poetry translation has strong cross-cultural communicative properties [24]. As an intersubject endeavour between different cultures, the translation of classical Chinese poetry can be considered a typical cross-cultural communication [25]. Its prominent communicative properties can be examined from the perspective of the communicative function of the text, while the classical Chinese cultural features contained in the poems can be treated with the text-linguistic theory of "cultural context [26]". Moreover, classical Chinese poetry is delicately structured with special emphasis on the organic connection of imagery, scene and emotion in the text and the logical coherence between verses, which coincides with the emphasis on cohesion and coherence of the text from the text-linguistic view of translation [27]. In conclusion, it is reasonable for classical Chinese

poetry, a special form of literature, to be guided by the theory of text linguistics in its translation.

3   Translation Analysis of Two Translations of *Chunwang*

3.1   *Chunwang* and Its Translation

Chunwang is a poem of the Tang Dynasty by Du Fu. The title of this poem literally means "the scene in spring", which depicts the desolate scene of Chang'an City, where the poet was in, after it was sacked during the An-Shi Rebellion, and reflects the poet's concern for the country and its people. As one of Du's most famous metrical poems, *Chunwang* is favoured by both Chinese and foreign translators, and there are many English versions of this poem with different textual and contextual characteristics of it [28]. In this paper, the translations by Xu Yuanchong and Stephen Owen are selected for text-linguistic comparative analysis, and the original poem and the translation are cited in Table 1:

Table 1.   The original poem and the translation [29, 30]

Version	The Original Poem	Xu Yuanchong's Translation	Stephen Owen's Translation
Title	春望	Spring View	View in Spring
Line 1	国破山河在，	On war-torn land streams flow and mountains stand;	The state broken, its mountains and rivers remain,
Line 2	城春草木深。	In towns unquiet grass and weeds run riot.	the city turns spring, deep with plants and trees.
Line 3	感时花溅泪，	Grieved over the years, flowers are moved to tears;	Stirred by the time, flowers, sprinkling tears,
Line 4	恨别鸟惊心。	Seeing us part, birds cry with broken heart.	hating parting, birds, alarm the heart.
Line 5	烽火连三月，	The beacon fire has gone higher and higher;	Beacon fires stretch through three months
Line 6	家书抵万金。	Words from household are worth their weight in gold.	a letter from family worth ten thousand in silver.
Line 7	白头搔更短，	I can not bear to scratch my grizzling hair;	I've scratched my white hair even shorter,
Line 8	浑欲不胜簪。	It grows too thin to hold a light hairpin.	pretty much to the point where it won't hold a hatpin.

3.2   In-Text Analysis

The text linguists Beaugrande and Dressler defined text as a communicative occurrence that meets seven criteria: cohesion, coherence, intentionality, acceptability, situationally, informativity and intertextuality [1]. Among them, cohesion and coherence are the most important and basic features of a text. Cohesion refers to the connections between different components of a text, which are established through lexical, grammatical, and other means, and coherence refers to the semantic connections in the text, emphasizing its logical consistency of it [31]. In short, in-text text-linguistic analysis of a translation focuses on the consistency of the translation text, which can be reflected in the surface structure of the text or the deep logical connections in it.

According to this theory, on the whole, the two translations both hold satisfactory text consistency, which is mainly reflected in the surface structure of the texts, namely their cohesion. To begin with, both translators use the grammatical device of substitution to achieve cohesion. For example, in the last verse, both translators use "it" to replace "grizzling hair" or "white hair" which has already appeared in the previous text, which reflects the close connections within the context. Additionally, both of them are consistent with the original text in formal symmetry, using the rhetorical technique of antithesis to maintain cohesion between verses. For instance, in the translation of the first four lines of the poem, both translations have achieved a strict match in word meaning, sentence structure and rhetorical techniques between verses, so that the context is more closely linked in form, which contributes to the cohesion of the text.

3.3   Extra-Text Analysis

The register theory proposed by Halliday in 1964 is an important text-linguistic theory that could be applied in translation research and practice [32]. A register is a kind of language variety related to language use, the choice of which is determined by different linguistic contexts. According to Halliday, register analysis can highlight the structural and stylistic features of a text, help to determine the type of text, and then contributes to the interpretation of its meaning [32]. Therefore, this theory has a significant guiding significance for translation criticism.

3.3.1   Halliday's Theoretical Framework of Field, Tenor and Mode

According to Halliday and Hasan, the meaning of a text is restricted by three factors: field, tenor and mode [33]. The two linguistics argue that these three factors (collectively called register variables) are important components of situational contexts and influence our language use. This paper will evaluate and compare the two translations from the three perspectives.

Field is the whole event reflected in the text, which refers to the nature and features of the social activity happening and what the text describes [33]. If the translator has a clear understanding of the field of the text (i.e., the topic or events that the text deals with), then he or she can more accurately interpret the content of it. Therefore, an accurate grasp of the field is a premise for a great translation.

Tenor refers to the characteristics of the participators of communicative activity (including the addresser and the addressee) and the connections between them [33].

The content and style of a text are the concentrated expressions of the communicative characteristics of the speaker, while the characters in a text are often the embodiment of part of the author's own personality [34]. Therefore, the tenor of a text can to some extent be reflected through its characterization of it.

Mode refers to the role played by language in communication, including the communicative channels and modifications. Initially, Halliday and Hasan defined mode as the language medium used by the participants in the process of communication, which is mainly divided into two categories: spoken language and written language [33]. In later studies and applications, the analysis of mode was gradually expanded to include the analysis of the overall language style of the text, including the analysis of the style of wording, the structural features of syntax, and the use of rhetorical devices in the text [21, 35].

3.3.2 Field

In the two translations used in this study, the role of the field is mainly reflected in its influence on the meaning of words. A word has different meanings in different fields, and it depends on the field in which the word appears to determine its meaning of it [33]. In their translations, Xu and Owen show their different understandings of the meanings of some words and phrases, which reflects their different understanding of the text field. A typical example is the different translations of the word "国" in Line 1. The meaning of this word needs to be taken in the context of the entire poem. The poem was written after the poet was captured during the An-Shi Rebellion and escorted to the fallen capital, Chang'an City, where he saw the once prosperous Chang'an now in heartbreaking desolation. Therefore, it is widely accepted that the correct meaning of "国' is the national capital, namely the fallen Chang'an City where the poet was at that time. Xu translates it as "land", which is closer to the original meaning. It refers to the land under the poet's feet and expresses the poet's attachment to his homeland at a time when his country was defeated and his home got lost. Owen, on the other hand, translates it as "state", which differs from the meaning of "国" in the original field. Researchers speculate that there are two possible reasons for Owen's translation: The first one is that Owen, as a non-native Chinese speaker, lacks sufficient understanding of the linguistic connotation or cultural background of the original poem, and his unfamiliarity with the ancient Chinese cultural context leads to an intentional mistranslation. Another possibility is that Owen purposely creates a scene more familiar to international readers, especially contemporary international readers, so as to cater to their cultural mentality and increase their acceptance. However, in any case, it can be concluded that Owen creates a different field from the original text by processing the meaning of the words in a different way, which can bring different scenes to the readers' imagination and affect their understanding of the meaning of the poem.

3.3.3 Tenor

The difference in tenor between the two translations is mainly in the image of the addresser. In the original poem, there appears a typical character, namely the poet, in the last two lines (Line 7 and Line8). The different portrayal of this character in

the translation reflects the translators' different understanding of the original tenor. Xu translates the seventh line "白头搔更短" as "I can not bear to scratch my grizzling hair", and the expression "can not bear" reflects the poet's grief. It can be seen that Xu is more deeply involved in the poet's thoughts and feelings, and is more concerned with the psychological and emotional characteristics of the poet as a person facing the country that perished. In Owen's translation, however, the poet's emotions are expressed more implicitly. Influenced by the deconstruction ideas of Western sinology, Owen is committed to interpreting Du Fu and his characters from a more complex perspective, focusing on the difference between Du Fu himself and the image of "Du Fu" in his works [36]. In his view, Du Fu is a complex man with a combination of self-deprecating humour and self-important arrogance, and driven by such a personality he often creates a self-image that is slightly distant from his true nature, i.e., viewing himself from the perspective of the other [37]. The other's view of one's emotions and thoughts is often filtered before being expressed, and their emotional impact is thus diminished, making it difficult for Du Fu to express his true emotions in his poems. Therefore, Owen translates the verse as "I've scratched my white hair even shorter", simply stating the objective fact that the poet's hair has been scratched shorter. In contrast to Xu's translation with obvious emotional colour, Owen's translation seems to be more in line with his perception of the poet's image, and reflects his distinctive understanding of the tenor from the former.

3.3.4 Mode

In Xu and Owen's translations, an important role of mode is reflected in its influence of the use of rhetorical devices on the expression effect. The original poem employs a variety of rhetorical devices, and whether or not these devices are preserved in translation will have an impact on the expression effect of it. Xu and Owen have different attitudes on this question. For example, in the original poem, the sixth line "家书抵万金" uses the rhetorical technique of exaggeration. The phrase "万金" is an imaginary account meaning "a lot of money", which means that a letter home received during the war is valuable, thus highlighting the poet's concerns about his family's safety, rather than specifically referring to "ten thousand in silver". Xu and Owen use different translation methods for this verse. Xu uses liberal translation to translate it as "worth their weight in gold", which directly points out the preciousness of the family letter and focuses on conveying the emotion expressed in the original poem. Owen, however, translates it directly as "worth ten thousand in silver". Although this translation has been considered by some critics as a mistranslation caused by a lack of understanding of the meaning of the original expression, it is undeniable that it objectively retains the rhetorical colour of exaggeration of the original poem and presents its formal characteristics. Therefore, from the perspective of mode, Xu's translation differs slightly from the original text in the style of some words and expressions, which is in line with his view on translation that emphasizes the subjective initiative and creativeness of the translator [38]. Owen's translation, however, is more closely aligned with the original text in terms of word choice and retains its expressiveness, which is also consistent with Owen's view on translation—according to him, the main readers of his translations of Du Fu's poems are those whose Chinese skills are not adequate to read Du's original works, so the more original style is retained in the translation, the better they can understand what the

original poem is [37]. In his translation, therefore, Owen strives to preserve the language characteristics of Du Fu's original poem, namely to remain the mode consistent with that of the original text.

4 Conclusion

This paper analyses the role of text-linguistic theories in the translation of classical Chinese poetry, taking two translations of the classical Chinese poem *Chunwang* as examples. Using text-linguistic theories as a guide, it can be found that both translations maintain a good cohesion within the text, while in terms of extra-text features related to specific registers, the translations by Xu Yuanchong and Stephen Owen, who are from different language environments and cultural backgrounds, show some different characteristics. Xu Yuanchong, a native Chinese speaker, has a strong knowledge of classical Chinese culture and a focus on the aesthetic concept of "spirit" and meaning of works, which is reflected in his translation. This leads to a faithful connection of the original text in terms of field, an emphasis on emotional expression in terms of tenor, and a free language style in mode. Stephen Owen, on the other hand, as a native English speaker who grew up in a foreign cultural environment, is influenced by Western ideas such as deconstructive Sinology, and his translations are mainly targeted at overseas readers whose cultural background differs greatly from the original, so his translation owns the characteristics of modernizing and westernizing in terms of field, emphasizing the distinction between the author himself and the characters he creates in terms of tenor, and preserving the formal style of the original text as much as possible in terms of mode. Based on this example, the researcher concludes that the analysis of the in-text and extra-text factors of a text from the perspective of text linguistics is conducive to a comprehensive interpretation of it, which provides a broader perspective for translation research and practice.

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