



A Study on the English Translation of Classical Parallel Prose Considering Cross-Cultural and Linguistic Differences

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Abstract. The English translation of classical parallel prose is a crucial area of research that necessitates the preservation and transmission of the classical cultural nuances of the East while effectively utilizing Western language expression forms. To ensure the quality of English translations of parallel prose, it is essential to balance the differences between Chinese and Western languages and cultures. This paper explores the methods of translating classical parallel prose, focusing on structural features, rhetorical techniques, and the expression of cultural nuances, aiming to contribute to related research.

Keywords: Chinese and Western languages, cultural differences, classical parallel prose, English translation

1 Introduction

Since the period of the Spring and Autumn and Warring States, classical parallel prose, including parallel sentences, was widely employed in Chinese prose and eight-legged essays. This reflects the significance of parallel prose as a prominent form of classical literary art in China, carrying immense literary value. Parallel prose emphasizes symmetry and harmony in its structure, and it incorporates the artistic charm of Chinese culture. Therefore, its translation into English is of great importance, yet it presents a challenge as it contains unique linguistic features and cultural connotations (Batchelor, 2019)¹. Translating parallel prose into English involves the dual task of preserving the classical essence of Eastern culture while adapting it to Western linguistic conventions. In this paper, we explore the translation methods of classical parallel prose, considering structural characteristics, rhetorical techniques, and the expression of cultural nuances, in order to provide valuable insights into this field.

2 The Characteristics of Ancient Chinese Prose

The stylistic characteristics refer to the distinct features presented by various literary genres in terms of phonetics, vocabulary, syntax, and discourse, which distinguish them

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from other genres (Wang, L., Chen, F., & Liu, X, 2022)⁷. Analyzing the stylistic characteristics aids translators in understanding the content to generate appropriate and idiomatic expressions. As Mr. Liu Miqing pointed out, the task of translation is not merely conveying the original meaning but also entails grasping the overall style of the source text, encompassing lexical tendencies, sentence structure peculiarities, rhetorical devices, and more. Thus, only by comprehensively understanding the source text can a faithful and idiomatic rendition be achieved."

2.1 Vocabulary Characteristics

1. Rich emotional vocabulary: Ancient Chinese prose often utilizes a diverse range of emotional vocabulary to convey the author's feelings and reflections.
2. Quotations from literary classics: Ancient Chinese prose frequently incorporates quotations from literary classics and ancient masterpieces, enriching its lexicon and infusing the text with deeper cultural connotations.
3. Vocabulary related to the natural world: Ancient Chinese prose often includes vocabulary describing elements of the natural world, reflecting the harmonious relationship between nature and humanity in Chinese culture.

2.2 Sentence Structure Characteristics

1. Straightforward and direct style: Ancient Chinese prose frequently employs straightforward and direct sentence structures to express viewpoints and emotions clearly.
2. Parallelism and parallel structure: Ancient Chinese prose frequently utilizes parallelism and parallel structures, including antithesis and parallelism, to enhance the text's phonetic qualities and rhythm.
3. Metaphor and personification: Some ancient Chinese prose employs metaphor and personification as rhetorical devices to intensify expressive power and create vivid imagery (Wang, L., Chen, F., & Liu, X, 2022)⁷.

2.3 Cultural Characteristics

1. Influence of Confucian and Daoist philosophies: Ancient Chinese prose is deeply influenced by Confucian and Daoist philosophical ideas, often exploring themes of ethics, morality, and life philosophy.
2. Historical and cultural context: Ancient Chinese prose also reflects the historical and cultural background of its time, including political, social, and religious factors, for a better understanding of the text's content.

In conclusion, ancient Chinese prose exhibits unique characteristics in terms of grammar, vocabulary, sentence structure, and cultural aspects. These characteristics endow prose works with profound literary significance and historical-cultural value.

3 Current Status of Phonetic Translations of Classical Parallel Prose

Parallel prose first appeared in texts like the "Shujing" and "Yijing," and it matured during the late Warring States period. During the Wei, Jin, Northern and Southern Dynasties, parallel prose, with its distinctive style of allusions and parallels, became prominent. Throughout its development, parallel prose maintained its presence in classical Chinese literature, with renowned masters such as Han Yu, Su Shi, and Ouyang Xiu. This enduring influence has made parallel prose a focus of translation, and also a challenging one. The difficulty of translating parallel prose lies in the fact that the readers of English translations tend to approach the text with a Western perspective and may not be familiar with the classical cultural references used in the original Chinese text. Therefore, certain elements within the parallel prose need to be replaced to facilitate foreign readers' understanding, even at the cost of diminishing the elegance of parallel prose. Domestic scholars have also attempted to create English translations that resemble the original in terms of rhythm and sentence structure, as seen in translations using phrases like "the eighth moon" for "八月" to emphasize the imagery of the moon. However, this approach may be challenging for foreign readers to comprehend.

4 English Translation Considering the Differences Between Chinese and Western Languages and Cultures

4.1 Translation of Parallel Prose Structural Features

The fundamental characteristic of parallel prose is its symmetric structure, where the upper and lower sentences mirror each other in structure, content, word meanings, and grammatical elements (Cheetham, 2016)². Parallel prose can take various forms such as "four-four," "six-six," "four-four-four-four," "four-six-four-six," and "six-four-six-four," with corresponding sentence lengths and matching structures that create a rhythmic and balanced pattern. This dynamic structure and static parallelism present the diverse semantics within parallel prose, reflecting the author's changing emotions. This feature is indispensable in classical prose art and is a key focus in English translation.

For example, taking Ouyang Xiu's masterpiece "Autumn Sounds" as a case in point, it follows a "four-four" parallel structure with concise and lively expressions (Yan, 2019)⁸. To convey its simplicity and depth of meaning in the English translation, it is necessary to maintain a well-structured style. However, the differences in the rhythmic patterns and syllable counts between English and Chinese pose a challenge. In the translation process, the translator can only attempt to maintain a resemblance in terms of word count and sentence length to achieve a similar structure (Kang, 2018)³. A translation by Xie Baikui illustrates this approach: "To the best of my knowledge, autumn, in its concrete form, is thinly paled in color after the dissipation of mists and clouds, is serene in countenance with the high firmament and the brilliant sun, is freezing in breath with its biting cold; and it gives one a feeling of desolation for the solitude and barren-

ness of nature." This translation consists of four sub-sentences with a relatively balanced structure, smooth language, and simple word choices, closely approximating the original text's meaning. Additionally, the translation slightly modifies the sentence structure in the fourth sub-sentence to make it more in line with English language conventions, avoiding issues of repetitive word usage. This approach effectively conveys the rhythmic and aesthetic qualities of alternating sentence lengths, achieving similarity in form and essence.

4.2 Translation of Rhetorical Devices in Parallel Prose

Rhetorical devices are a vital expression of artistic effects in parallel prose (Roberto, 2018)⁶. Various forms of metaphor, hyperbole, parallelism, and other techniques are commonly employed, some of which also have unique Eastern characteristics. In parallel prose, prominent and emphasized rhetorical devices include parallelism, allusions, and intertextuality. In the process of translating rhetorical devices, it is essential to balance expression and address the cross-cultural differences.

Translation of Parallelism: Parallelism is a rhetorical device that involves structural symmetry, grammatical parallelism, and semantic correspondence. English employs similar rhetorical devices, but they are often used in partial forms rather than in direct structural and semantic correspondence, making it challenging to match Chinese parallelism directly. Therefore, the translation of parallelism requires replicating the sentence structure to achieve neatness and elegance. For example, in the phrase "落霞与孤鹜齐飞, 秋水共长天一色," a classical translation might be, "--A solitary wild duck flies alongside the multi-colored sunset clouds, --and the autumn water is merged with the boundless sky into one hue." This translation reproduces the parallel features of the original text while slightly adjusting the word order to align with the logic of English readers (Lin, X, 2019)⁴. Typically, to ensure the effective expression of meaning, the length disparity between the two sentences should be controlled within 20% to 40%, resulting in well-balanced parallelism. This can be achieved by modifying parts of speech and adjusting the word order to ensure the structure and meaning are preserved.

Translation of Allusions: Drawing upon historical figures and significant events is a common technique in parallel prose, and it further emphasizes the author's emotions. These references contain elements of traditional Chinese culture, including national spirit and cultural symbolism, which may be unfamiliar to foreign readers. For example, in Chinese literature, the story of the Cowherd and the Weaver Girl is used to represent a romantic couple, whereas in Western culture, the story of Cinderella and the Prince is employed. However, the outcomes of these stories are different, highlighting the disparity between Chinese and Western cultures. The translation of allusions needs to balance domestication and foreignization. For instance, in "滕王阁序," the phrase "徐孺下陈蕃之榻" introduces an allusion to reflect the virtue of respecting and humbling oneself before the wise. The translation "This was the place where Xu Ru spent the night on his visit to Chen Fa" does not explicitly mention "下榻," instead providing

an explanation of their roles(Lin, 2019)⁴. This approach enhances reader comprehension and interpretation. The translation must occasionally domesticate allusions while retaining their characteristic expressions and maintaining simplicity.

Translation of Intertextuality: Intertextuality is a significant feature of parallel prose, a literary device unique to Chinese literature. It relies on the complementation of words in corresponding positions within the text to convey complete semantic meaning. The challenge in translating intertextuality lies in expressing the original text's content and meaning while avoiding issues of length imbalance or monotony. To address this, the entire text should be thoroughly reviewed to grasp the context and main ideas, and the sentence structure must be adjusted appropriately to ensure precise word usage. In the classic passage "不以物喜, 不以己悲," if translated as "natural beauty was not enough to make them happy, nor their own situation enough to make them sad," it is evident that the true essence of the original text has not been fully comprehended, and it merely simplifies the meaning to the objects in nature(Lin, 2019)⁴. This translation results in a misinterpretation of the emotional tone, giving the readers a sense of heaviness, thus deviating from the original text's intended nuances. In the process of translating intertextuality in parallel prose, considerations must be made regarding structure, semantics, sentence patterns, and emotional content. These aspects necessitate correct treatment to facilitate reader comprehension and emotional resonance.

4.3 Translation of Cultural Imagery in Parallel Prose

The soul of Chinese classical literary art lies in the use of imagery, which embodies and reflects the richness of traditional Chinese culture. Authors often express their personal viewpoints and emotions subtly through the creation of images, making emotions and attitudes vivid and concrete. The cultural differences between Chinese and Western cultures make translating imagery in English a challenging task. Due to the inherent features of parallelism in parallel prose, imagery typically appears in pairs or groups, and it often takes the form of single words. The logical relationships are not always evident, which adds to the complexity of translating imagery(Zhang, 2018)⁹. In Chinese classical literature, descriptions of various scenes are used to construct imagery groups, conveying the author's emotions and attitudes. The challenge in translating imagery groups into English is to maintain precision in word choice while faithfully preserving emotional nuances. Even slight differences in vocabulary can create distinct atmospheres within the entire text, potentially leading to deviations in emotional tone. For example, the use of "空" in the phrase "长烟一空" in Fan Zhongyan's "岳阳楼记" might be translated as "vanis." This translation fails to capture the nuanced meaning of the original text and gives an impression of gravity, resulting in a misinterpretation of the emotional tone in the translated text. When translating cultural imagery in parallel prose, it is essential to consider structure, semantics, sentence patterns, and emotional content, ensuring that the logical relationships and emotional nuances are handled correctly, thus enabling readers to better understand and connect with the text.

5 Conclusion

In summary, the inherent differences between Chinese and Western languages and cultures present significant challenges for the English translation of parallel prose(Phillips, 2015)⁵. To balance language and cultural expression effectively, translators need to leverage their expertise, deeply understand the underlying cultural connotations, grasp the features of parallel prose, and present cultural imagery in a reader-friendly format. This approach serves to enhance the quality and value of English translations of parallel prose.

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