

# Research on Translation of Hyperbole Based on Effects Studies

## -- Taking Selected Poems of Li Bai in Library of Chinese Classics as an Example

Jia Ni, Chao Wang

School of Applied English, Mudanjiang Normal University, Mudanjiang, China

### Abstract

**Hyperbole in Selected Poems of Li Bai in Library of Chinese Classics is romantic and distinctive in cultural personality, which is praised by readers. Based on the framework of effects theory in communication, Dr. Xu Yuanchong's translation can meet the reading and appreciation needs of target language readers and achieve strong communication effect. Therefore, summarizing the communication principles from the three dimensions of word selection, syntax and rhythm, and analyzing Xu's translation methods are of benefit to promote the effectiveness of the translation of romantic poetry.**

### Keywords

**Communication; Effects theory; English translation of poetry; Hyperbole; Translation methods.**

## 1. Introduction

Li Bai(701-762) represents one of the greatest romantic poets in Tang Dynasty(618-907). The Library of Chinese Classics is the first published bibliography for spreading Chinese culture in a systematic way. As one of the typical symbols of poetry in Tang Dynasty recorded in this project, Selected Poems of Li Bai skillfully uses exaggeration and stands out in Chinese culture and romanticism, which has won the favor of many foreign scholars and people. Cultural translation is a kind of behavior that employs translation as a tool to spread cultural knowledge to target language audiences, in order to leave a cognitive and psychological impact effectively on them and achieve the expected publicity effect (Chen, 2015: 76). At present, the researches on the translation of Selected Poems of Li Bai focus on solving the language problems on the surface of the translation. Few scholars have paid attention to the influence of the communication audience on the translation, and regarded the its translation as a dynamic behavior of communication between two language environments. Westerners are good at starting with analysis when thinking about things, for they are tend to establish an abstract conceptual system based on their individual experience and logical operation, to express their emotions. Accordingly, western artistic expression is more realistic. Chinese art emphasizes the unity of nature and humanity, and poets convey their feelings in en exaggerated way. In view of the different techniques used to show exaggeration in Chinese and Western poetry, the study on the communication effect of exaggeration translation in Selected Poems of Li Bai has value in academic and application study.

## 2. Effects Theory and Poetry Translation

Communication is the process of flowing information. Ke Xie and Xueru Liao (2016: 14) believe that "the essence of translation is communication", and both translation and communication pay attention to "effect". Therefore, it is reasonable to study translation from the perspective of effects theory in communication studies. Translation from the perspective of effects theory

requires translators to pay attention to various reactions caused by the dissemination of information, and to the audience's reading, understanding and appreciation of information, which may have an impact on the audience's cognition and psychological attitude. Translation studies can take in nutrition from the study of effects theory, explore the process of information transmission in different language scenes, and form a new reference for translation research.

### **2.1. Effects Theory**

In his book *The Structure and Function of Communication in Society*, Harold Lasswell (2015), a pioneer of communication, put forward the famous five elements of communication, namely, communication subject, object, channel, audience and effect. This paper is based on the effects theory of communication.

The "effect" in communication refers to the reaction of the communication audience at the cognitive and emotional levels, and the effect research aims to study the reception effect of the communication audience. Schramm and Porter (2010) discussed seven classical effect theories and models. Among them, the Use and Satisfaction Theory(UST) has been widely used to explain the reason why the communication audience actively seeks content in the media, that is, to meet their needs of enjoying entertainment, socializing and understanding information. In the framework of UST, the translator should consider the satisfaction extent of the audience in the translation of hyperbole in Chinese poetry, so as to make the translation smoothly achieve the expected communication effect. Therefore, the translator should deliberately form the communication principles of English translation of hyperbole in Chinese poetry and translate according to them, which will help to provide a new reference in choosing translation methods in order to obtain better communication effects.

### **2.2. Application of Effects Theory to Poetry Translation**

In recent years, translation scholars have realized that the study of translations' communication has exceeded the language level and began to pay attention to the measurement of communication effect and so forth. Some scholars have explored the English translation of ancient poetry from the perspective of communication effect, and achieved fruitful results. For example, Wang Fang (2009: 130) proposed that the significance of English translation of ancient poetry lies in enabling foreign readers to appreciate poetry and resonate with the emotion, rhythm, phonology and national culture in poetry. Therefore, foreign cultural communication should fully consider the differences in culture, language and aesthetic habits between the two sides, form audience awareness, and strengthen the attention of the audience in cognitive psychology, aesthetic interest, language habits and cultural psychology. After searching and analyzing the relevant works, this paper finds that although many scholars have studied the communication and acceptance of the English translation of ancient poetry, few scholars have combined the communication effect theory with the English translation of ancient poetry, which leads to the lack of systematic researches on the English translation of ancient poetry from the perspective of communication. Therefore, under the framework of the effects theory of communication, this paper takes the hyperbole in Selected Poems of Li Bai as the research object to explore the translation methods adopted by Xu Yuanchong's translation to realize the principle of communication.

## **3. Hyperbole in Selected Poems of Li Bai**

In Chinese figures, hyperbole refers to a deliberate exaggeration, including expanding or narrowing the items. The hyperbole selected in this paper is all used to expand items. Hyperbole integrates "emotion, scene, object and men" to add humor and irony to the text, so as to highlight some characteristics of things and clearly express the author's thoughts and feelings. This is not only the main factor for Libai's romantic poems to be recited from

generation to generation, but also the core content of poetry classics or national culture to convey the wisdom of poetry in Tang Dynasty to readers. The hyperbole in Selected Poems of Li Bai can be mainly divided into hyperbole in space and time, emotions, as well as images.

### 3.1. Hyperbole of Space and Time

Hyperbole in space and time is exaggerating the description of time and space. The former speaks the length of height and the latter speaks the speed of action in an exaggerated tone. For example, in *The Waterfall in Mount Lu Viewed from Afar*, the "Its torrent dashes down three thousand feet from high" uses hyperbole to describe the height of the waterfall gushing out very vividly. It can be seen that the water flow is urgent in front of us.

### 3.2. Hyperbole of Emotions

The hyperbole of human feelings refers to the amplification of people's feelings in an excessive way. Chinese culture has long respected farming culture, which has shaped the Chinese people's concern of nature and adherence to the concept of the unity of heaven and man. Therefore, ancient poetry often uses natural phenomena to express the poets' emotional exaggeration.

### 3.3. Hyperbole of Images

The images are exaggerated to speak their strong nature excessively. For example, "the road to Shu is harder than to climb the sky" in *Hard Is the Road to Shu*. The poet exaggerates the difficulty of passing through the road to Shu and characterizes it as more difficult than climbing to the sky, which more vividly illustrates the difficulty of the road.

## 4. Case Analysis

In view of the large differences in methods used in the expression of exaggeration between Chinese and Western poetry, translators should take consideration to the reading habits of the target language readers for the exaggeration in poetry, to summarize communication principles of word selection, style and form, and flexibly choose the translation methods at lexical, sentence and rhythm levels.

### 4.1. Communication Principles of Hyperbole Translation from the Perspective of Effects Theory

Western readers' conceptual thinking mode will leave an impact on their understanding of hyperboles in poetry, which causes them to reject ones that may not meet their expectations because of their differences in thinking and writing. Therefore, under the framework of the effects theory, translators should help the audience understand and accept the content that needs to be popularized with a gradually recognized and willing attitude, so as to change their psychological attitude or promote them to take certain action, including to read more poetry, and that is how the communication effect and the purpose of foreign translation can be achieved. The hyperbole in ancient Chinese poetry always boast refined words, regular form and catchy rhyme at the end of the sentence. Mr. Xu Yuanchong adjusts the characteristics of the translation of the poetry according to his audience consciousness and the habits of Western readers.

#### 4.1.1. Simple in Word

The poet Li Bai mostly writes quatrains of five and seven characters, and the number of words in a single line of poetry is fixed. In the process of communication, the translated poetry can retain the regular form of Chinese poetry as much as possible, and use simple expressions for translation, rather than detailed words. In terms of rhythm, the number of single syllable in poetry is limited. The translator should be concise and straightforward in refining words, and

can generalize words when necessary, so as to ensure the length and avoid increasing the reading burden of readers, so as to better spread the style of ancient poetry.

#### 4.1.2. Faithful in Form

In translation, faithfulness is the most feasible communication principle. Faithfulness in literary translation not only includes the one in word semantics, but also in figuration usage, syntactic logic, writing style, artistic image, etc., which is reflected in "understanding of the original text and reproduction of style". For example, as one of the representatives of ancient Chinese Romantic poets, Li Bai's description of mountains and rivers is a major feature of his poetry, which is also the remarkable feature of his poetry in hyperbole. Li Bai adheres to the concept of "unity of heaven and man". In the process of revealing the connection between nature and human nature, he can express his lofty aspirations and ambition, which can be resonated by readers. Xu Yuanchong strives to be faithful to the original poetry in form and spread the writing characteristics of ancient poetry.

#### 4.1.3. Creative in Rhyme

The rhymes of translated poetry mainly include five types: loose type, poetic non rhyme type, synergetic rhyme type, borrowing type and self metrical type (Jun Wen, Mei Chen, 2016: 92). The Selected Poems of Li Bai translated by Xu Yuanchong mostly use the translation of synergetic rhyme, which is embodied in that it not only retains the content and form, but also offers the translation a new rhythm form. The number of syllables in a single line of most poems is fixed, the translated poems are divided into sections, and the two lines rhyme at the end of the poem.

### 4.2. Translation Methods of Hyperbole from the Perspective of Effects Theory

From the perspective of effects theory, this section will sort out the translation methods adopted by the translator to satisfy the different principles of word, form and rhyme respectively.

#### 4.2.1. Generalization

The generalization method means that the translator can use more generalized words to express the nouns written in ancient Chinese poetry, in other words, translate the subordinate words with the superordinate words. This method is of help to overcome the reading barriers of western readers and solve the problem that the deep meaning in culture-loaded expressions is not understood smoothly by foreign readers.

ST1: 天姥连天向天横，势拔五岳掩赤城。

TT1: Mount Skyland threatens heaven, massed against the sky,

Surpassing the Five Peaks and dwarfing Mount Red Town[11].

For example, in Li Bai's Mountain Skyland Ascended in a Dream--A Song of Farewell, the poet exaggerates the height of Mountain Skyland as even more than the "five yue (岳, meaning peaks)", which belongs to hyperbole of space. The poet's writing method of expressing his lofty feelings and aspirations through natural scenery fully highlights the characteristics of the unity of heaven and man in ancient poetry. Although the word "five yue", which means five great peaks in China, appears in the original poem, if it is specifically translated, the translation will appear too long and destroy the form and rhythm of the poem. Therefore, the translator adopts generalization method to translate "five yue" into "Five Peaks", to achieve the principle of being concise and simple in word. In doing so, the translator reduces readers' reading obstacles on the premise of ensuring faithfulness to the original text, and actively publicizes Chinese ancient poetry culture, so as to meet the reading and appreciation needs of the communication audience.

#### 4.2.2. Literal Translation and Free Translation

The purpose of hyperbole is to emphasize and highlight. In fact, there are many points in common in the form and content of hyperbole in English and Chinese poetry, which makes literal translation possible. If the expression in the original text belongs to the culture-loaded of the source language, such as the word "renyan" in *Hard Is the Road to Shu*, the translator can flexibly use the free translation method by considering the interests, needs, reading and habits of the audience.

ST2: 低头向暗壁，千唤不一回。

TT2: Hanging my head, I'd look towards the wall,  
A thousand times I'd not answer your call.

Example 2 means "even if a man calls a thousand times, the woman in the poem is too shy to look back". The poet uses hyperbole of emotions to describe how shy a 14-year-old woman feels at her first marriage. When Li Bai expresses hyperbole in Chinese poetry, he often uses numerals such as "qian(千, meaning a thousand)" and "wan(万, meaning ten thousand)" to exaggerate the repetition times of a certain behavior. Mr. Xu Yuanchong's direct translation of "qian" into "a thousand" is a literal translation. The "thousand" in the translation retains the image of the hyperbole used in the original poetry. While realizing linguistic equivalence, it better highlights the informational principle of communication, which helps western readers understand the habit of hyperbole in ancient Chinese poetry and realize the purpose of poetry translation.

#### 4.2.3. Imitation

Imitation refers to the retention and imitation of the form of the original poem in the translation, which is often used in the English translation of ancient Chinese poetry. The loose imitation method adopted by Mr. Xu Yuanchong borrows the rhythm and characteristics of western poetry in form, on the basis of keeping the content faithful. Xu fully embodies the translator's audience awareness in the way of discourse construction, especially in the careful text composition, mainly adopts several methods such as logical reorganization to realize the re-rhyme, and touches the audience with the expressions which are familiar and recognized by the western audience.

ST3: 危楼高百尺，手可摘星辰。不敢高声语，恐惊天上人。

TT3: Hundred feet high the Summit Temple stands,  
Where I could pluck the stars with my own hands.  
At dead of night I dare not speak aloud  
For fear of waking dwellers in the cloud.

In example 3, the poet used the expressions of "bai chi(百尺, meaning a hundred feet)" and "kong jing tian shang ren(恐惊天上人, meaning be afraid of astounding people living in heaven)" to exaggerate the precipitous, straight and towering of the temple building. Syllable is the main tool of English poetry rhythm, and the law of syllable number can reflect the overall characteristics of the translation in rhythm. According to the statistics of the online poetry syllable counting tool Syllable Counter, each line in Xu's translation has 10 syllables, which is in line with the law of a fixed number of single syllable in English poetry. In addition, Mr. Xu uses the selection of words, the inversion of word order and the transformation of sentence patterns to realize the rhyme of "stand" and "hand", as well as "aloud" and "cloud". Especially, the two vowels "aloud" and "cloud" not only are catchy, but also makes people feel that the image of broad vision and magnificent peaks are ready to come out. Under the framework of the effects theory of communication, Mr. Xu can make the translation re-rhyme, help the communication audience to understand and appreciate the hyperbole in romantic poetry, and realize the purpose of Chinese culture translation.



## 5. Conclusion

This paper holds that under the guidance of the effects theory of communication, Mr. Xu Yuanchong's translation can meet the reading and appreciation needs of the communication audiences, make them understand the ancient poetry culture with a positive attitude, and realize the role of Chinese culture translation. Xu adopts the generalization, the combination of literal translation and free translation as well as the imitation, to meet the communication principles of word selection, form and rhyme. This paper is expected to create translation studies a new reference which can help the audience to correctly understand Chinese culture, stimulate their interest in Chinese culture and realize the purpose of Chinese cultural translation.

## Acknowledgments

Mudanjiang Normal University 2021 Postgraduate Science and Technology Innovation Project "A Study on the Translation and Dissemination of Chinese Cultural Classics" (kjc2021-099mdjnu).

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