An Exploration of the English Translation of Book of Poetry from the Perspective of Onomatopoeia Iconicity: A Case Study of Xu Yuanchong's Translation

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Abstract

The principle of iconicity is ubiquitous in human language, especially in literature work. As the origin of Chinese poetry, there exist a number of typical examples of iconicity in Book of Poetry. In poetry, iconicity could enhance the authenticity, naturalness and vividness of language expression. Applying the principle of iconicity to poetry translation can make the translation version closer to the original poetry and demonstrate the rhetorical and aesthetic effect of the original poetry. Therefore, translators will use certain translation means such as category transformation in translation to restore iconicity. To explore the embodiment of the principle of iconicity in poetry translation is to explore and summarize the translator's translation skills and the inspiration and hints it brings to poetry translation. Thus, it's very necessary to explore the features of the English translation of Book of Poetry from the perspective of onomatopoeia iconicity. As one of the branches of image iconicity, the onomatopoeia iconicity includes three kinds of onomatopoeia---basic onomatopoeia, secondary onomatopoeia, and repetition onomatopoeia. This thesis will mainly analyze how the translator deals with the issues of onomatopoeia iconicity in translation from the above three aspects.

Keywords

Iconicity; Onomatopoeia; Poetry translation.

1. Introduction

The concept of iconicity is put forward as opposed to arbitrariness. The arbitrariness of language means that there is no internal or logical connection between the signifier and the signified of language signs, that is to say, the combination of the signifier and the signified of language signs is immotivated [1]. However, with the development of cognitive linguistics, it is recognized that the relation between the signifier and the signified of language signs is not always arbitrary, and in many cases it is motivated. The concept of iconicity arises on this basis. Iconicity is the expression of human experience and cognition at the linguistic level, so the iconicity of language is the psychological experience and expression of language subject [2]. Iconicity in language can not only be reflected in perception, but also has some iconicity in association. Therefore, it has a certain cognitive rhetorical effect, that is to say, language form and structure can generate the force of appeal, allusion and expression through the psychological cognition of the subject [2].

There are a large number of linguistic iconicity cases in poetry, in order to achieve the function to express the emotion and meaning that the poet wants to transmit to the readers. The purpose of the existence of iconicity in poetry is to help the author to integrate formal, meaningful, emotional and aesthetic feelings, so as to help his works present different charm and

characteristics and produce effects different from the language itself [3]. Therefore, putting more attention on the iconicity in poetry translation is of great significance.

In his preface to 150 Chinese-English Poems of the Tang Dynasty [4], Xu Yuanchong put forward the three beauties of poetry translation, that is, the beauty of meaning, sound and form, and held that the three beauties are an organic whole and none of them can be ignored. That is to say, in the aspects of meaning, rhyme and structure, the translator should reproduce the form and verve of the original poem with the corresponding and appropriate linguistic means in the target language. From the cognitive point of view, the principle of these three beauties is similar with the iconic features of poetry, because poetry transmits meanings through imitating the external voice, form and structure by art means. Readers can further obtain extraordinary aesthetic experience by exploring the hidden image or meaning between lines.

The author searched two key words iconicity and poetry translation on CNKI, and 84 articles appeared. Most of these papers discuss iconicity at the level of syntax or discourse, and not very many papers study iconicity in poetry from the aspect of sound. The researches on onomatopoeia iconicity and poetry translation are even less. Therefore, in this aspect, this paper can provide some references.

2. Onomatopoeia Iconicity and Poetry Translation

2.1. Onomatopoeia Iconicity

The iconicity of language is very common and varied, and mainly divided into the image iconicity, diagrammatic iconicity and metaphorical iconicity. Image iconicity refers to the similarity between a single language symbol and the object it refers to. It is the relationship between language and human's perception in vision and hearing. Therefore, image iconicity can be divided into image iconicity and onomatopoeia iconicity.

Onomatopoeia iconicity refers to the use of phonetic effects to make people associate with objective things in the real world, so poets can directly or indirectly imitate the sounds of the real world by the pronunciation form of language. Because of the different degrees of sound imitation, onomatopoeia iconicity is divided into three categories in detail: basic onomatopoeia, secondary onomatopoeia, repeated onomatopoeia [1]. Basic onomatopoeia refers to the direct iconicity between the pronunciation of a language and the sound produced by objective things and actions, such as onomatopoeia words. Secondary onomatopoeia refers to the sound of a language that allows the reader to associate a particular meaning, such as reduplication; Repeated onomatopoeia refers to the repetition of an identical or similar sound in a sentence or text, which makes people naturally associate with the sound of a thing or action. In poetry, it is mainly reflected in the tone, stress, rhyme, the repeated use of a rhyme and other arrangements. The use of onomatopoeia iconicity in poetry seems to make the content of poetry no longer illusory, but real feeling. In addition, the content of the poem has become rich and colorful, and has achieved the effect of using sound iconicity to express meaning.

2.2. Poetry Translation

Poetry possesses the unique artistic character, and is a kind of special literary genre. Thus, poetry translation is generally considered as the most difficult in translation. As for translation, the ideal pursuit and standard is to achieve the unity of "form similarity" and "spirit similarity" [5]. The three beauties standards of poetry translation by Xu Yuanchong are similar to the principle of iconicity, which are the beauty of meaning, sound and form [6]. He also held that the three beauties are an organic whole and none of them can be ignored. That is to say, in the aspects of meaning, rhyme and structure, the translator should make reproduce the form and verve of the original poem with the corresponding and appropriate linguistic means in the target language. Although Xu's theory of sound beauty is aimed at poetry translation, it can also

be used to guide us to appreciate poetry, and it highlights the independent literary value of the original poem and the translated poem. Besides, the standard of "three beauties" is also similar to "form similarity" and "spirit similarity". The beauties of sound and form resembles "form similarity", while the beauty of meaning resembles "spirit similarity". In this paper, we argue that taking the perspective of iconicity in the translation process is conducive to the realization of the ideal translation effect through formal translation, especially the transmission of formal additional meaning or expressive effect.

3. Onomatopoeia Iconicity in the English Translation of Book of Poetry

Onomatopoeia iconicity provides a new perspective for us to understand the beauty of sound. In this part, three onomatopoeia iconicities in the English translation of Book of Poetry will be explored, and different methods and ways made by the translator will be analyzed.

3.1. Basic Onomatopoeia and Its Translation

Because onomatopoeia can produce unique acoustics through direct imitation between sound and meaning, it has been widely used in poetic language and has become an important means of expressing sound and beauty in poetry. The purpose of onomatopoeia translation is to make the target readers get the corresponding auditory stimulation just like the original readers through the description of onomatopoeic words, and produce the effect of really hearing the sound. There are two examples of the translation of onomatopoeia in the Book of Poetry.

Example (1): 原文：关关雎鸠，在河之洲。---《关雎》节选

Translation: By riverside a pair

Of turtledoves are cooing;   ---translated by Xu yuanchong

In this example, "关关"is an onomatopoeic word in Chinese, which means a kind of water bird's sound. In the translation, Xu Yuanchong translated it with corresponding onomatopoeia word in English---cooing, which means the sound made by a pigeon. Due to geographical and cultural differences, there are no identical expressions in Chinese and English. But "cooing" is enough for the target reader to understand the original poem's artistic conception. The use of such onomatopoeic words in the poem allows readers to connect the poem with the reality. Readers will also feel that the poem is catchy, vivid and visual. By the time the reader finishes reading the poem, the picture of a pair of birds swimming and singing together also appears in the reader's mind.

Example (2): 原文：喓喓草虫，趯趯阜螽。---《草虫》节选

Translation: Hear grassland insects sing

And see grasshoppers spring!   ---translated by Xu yuanchong

In this example, "喓喓"is an onomatopoeic word in Chinese, which presents the sound of insect chirping. In the translation, Xu Yuanchong didn't choose the corresponding onomatopoeia but the word "sing", which refers to making a high ringing sound like a whistle. Compared with unfamiliar onomatopoeia, target language readers are more likely to obtain the information to be conveyed by the original poem through "sing". Besides, "sing" and "spring" in the latter sentence use the same rhyme "ing", which is catchy for readers. This coincides with the artistic conception of "Grassland insect chirps and grasshopper jumps" that the original poem wants to express.

3.2. Secondary Onomatopoeia and Its Translation

The reason why secondary onomatopoeia is regarded as iconic is that the pronunciation of some phonemes in the words themselves can arouse some association of concept, artistic conception and atmosphere. Secondary onomatopoeia is almost a favorite skill for poetry because of its associative power. The translation of secondary onomatopoeia does have

translatability limits. However, since secondary onomatopoeia is a universal phenomenon in language, it is not impossible for the translator to find a phonetic symbol that has the same symbol with the original phonetic sound from the source language resources, and the found phonetic sound does not have to be the same as the original phonetic sound. In other words, phonetic association is the ultimate goal of our interpretation. There are two examples of the translation of secondary onomatopoeia in the Book of Poetry.

Example (3): 麟之趾，振振公子，于嗟麟兮。---《麟之趾》节选

Translation: The unicorn will use its hoof to tread on none

　　Just like our Prince's noble son.

　　Ah! They are one.　---translated by Xu yuanchong

In this example, "于嗟"is a kind of modal particle, which refers to the sound of praise. Therefore, in the translation, Xu Yuanchong chose the modal particle "ah" to express the emotion of plaint and praise. Besides, he translated "麟兮"into "They are one" by free translation to make target readers better understand the praise the poet wants to express. The unicorn mentioned in the poetry was regarded by the ancients as the highest and most beautiful beast, and there the poet said the unicorn and the prince are the same.

Example (4): 退食自公，委蛇委蛇。---《羔羊》节选

Translation: They come from court to rest

　　And swagger with delight.　---translated by Xu yuanchong

In this example, "委蛇"means that a person is very leisurely without urgent things to deal with. The overlapping use of the word "委蛇"here slows the reader's reading speed, in order to highlight this senior official's leisurely and unsteady manner more emphatically. The implication of the poet's words is very clear, he is trying to satirize this seemingly decent gentleman is nothing but a free living parasite. However, Xu Yuanchong adopted free translation instead of "swagger, swagger" or any expressions like this. Because of the difference between Chinese and English, the English readers may be very impossible to get the association by overlapping one word, and they may think this character is very sad.

3.3. Repeated Onomatopoeia and Its Translation

As a rule, languages should avoid repetition, especially English. However, under special circumstances, repetition, especially phonetic repetition in poetry, as a variation of convention, can produce special rhetorical effects. Whether complete or partial repetition of pronunciation has important value of attention and can form a strong sense of music. If it is combined with phonetic symbols and coordinated with rhythm, it plays an irreplaceable role in improving the aesthetic value of poetry. In Book of Poetry, there are two kinds of repetition---the repetition of rhymes and the repetition of the whole sentence or chapter(重章叠唱). There are two examples of the translation of repeated onomatopoeia in Book of Poetry.

Example (5)：原文：《汉广》

南有乔木，不可休思；汉有游女，不可求思。

汉之广矣，不可泳思；江之永矣，不可方思。

翘翘错薪，言刈其楚；之子于归，言秣其马。

汉之广矣，不可泳思；江之永矣，不可方思。

翘翘错薪，言刈其蒌；之子于归，言秣其驹。

汉之广矣，不可泳思；江之永矣，不可方思。

Translation: A Woodcutter's Love

The tallest Southern tree /Affords no shade for me.

The maiden on the stream /Can but be found in dream.

For me the stream's too wide /To reach the other side

As River Han's too long / To cross its current strong.

Of the trees in the wood/ I'll only cut the good.

If she should marry me, Her stable-man I'll be.

For me the stream's too wide /To reach the other side

As River Han's too long /To cross its current strong.

Of the trees here and there /I'll only cut the fair.

If she should marry me, Her stable-boy I'll be.

For me the stream's too wide/To reach the other side

As River Han's too long /To cross its current strong.

        ---translated by Xu Yuanchong

In this poem, the repetition of whole chapter appeared several times. "汉之广矣，不可泳思；江之永矣，不可方思。"in this chapter is repeated three times. And the repetition of sentence also appeared several times. For instance, "之子于归，言秣其马。"and"之子于归，言秣其驹。"This kind of repetition is one of typical features in Book of Poetry. The repetition is coupled with different chapters of the poem changing different word and the same length of the sentence, and rhyme is also very harmonious. In that case, the music and rhythm of the poem could be enhanced. Therefore, the translator is supposed to try their best to restore such format. In Xu Yuanchong's translation, he does a good job of restoring the repetition of the original poem. "汉之广矣，不可泳思；江之永矣，不可永思"appeared three times, and it was translated into "For me the stream's too wide/To reach the other side/As River Han's too long /To cross its current strong." every time. The difference between"之子于归，言秣其马"and "之子于归，言秣其驹"is the last word in each sentence , but the two different word both means horse. One simply means horse, while the other word means young horse. In Xu YuanChong's translation, he also just changed the last two words, translating them into "man" and "boy" according to the meaning the poem wants to present. In fact, this repetition also implies that the character's emotional thoughts are intertwined and there is no relief of the mood as well as the progression of his emotion. This not only sets off a sad and lonely atmosphere from the visual image but also from the hearing, reproducing the beauty of sound and meaning of the original text.

Example (6): 原文：《汝坟》

遵彼汝坟，伐其条枚。未见君子，惄如调饥。

遵彼汝坟，伐其条肄。既见君子，不我遐弃。

鲂鱼赪尾，王室如毁。虽则如毁，父母孔迩。

Translation: A Wife Waiting

Along the raised bank green/I could down twigs and wait.

My lord cannot be seen, I feel a hunger great.

Along the raised bank green/I cut fresh sprigs and spray.

My lord can now be seen, But soon he'll go away.

"I'll leave your red-tailed fish: The kingdom is on fire."

"If you leave as you wish, Who'll take care of your sire?"

        ---translated by Xu Yuanchong

In original poem, the rhymes "ei", "I" and "ui" are repeated, which make this poem is very catchy for readers. Besides, the musicality and rhythm of the poem are also revealed through the

rhymes. Therefore, the translator is supposed to use rhymes to present the same form as the original poem. As a result, Xu Yuanchong used the rhymes "i: n", "eɪt", "eɪ", "ɪʃ", "aɪə" to restore the musicality and rhythm of the original poem.

4. Summary

The study of language iconicity is mainly focused on cognitive linguistics, but it is rare to apply iconicity theory to translation studies. This paper applies the theory of onomatopoeia iconicity to the study of poetry translation and provides a new perspective for the interpretation and translation of poetry. This study finds that in the process of poetry translation, besides having basic knowledge and skills of poetry translation, we should also pay more attention to the language iconicity behind the text. If we can properly use the iconicity of language, it will be conducive to the unity of the form and meaning of the translated text and the original text, and achieve the effect of expressing the form by the spirit and including both the form and the spirit. And onomatopoeia provides us a new perspective to understand the beauty of sound mentioned by Xu Yuanchong, which is also a new angle to appreciate poetry. Thus, when facing the onomatopoeia iconicity, the translator should adopt flexible translation strategies according to the characteristics of the original poetry language, recreating the iconicity or the association or image it brings.

Acknowledgments

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