Skopostheorie-oriented 3S Principle of Songs Translation
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Abstract. A gap in the translation principles of songs has led to an everlasting disagreement on translation principles of songs, resulting in various translation versions of uneven quality. This article tries to fill this gap by following fundament concepts of Skopostheorie. Based on the analysis of main features of songs and their consistency to rules of purpose, coherence and function of Skopostheorie, this article puts forward a 3S principle (Simplicity, Smoothness and Sentiment) to facilitate songs translation.

Introduction

As a vocal form of music, songs exist as one of the most popular forms of art - an art not only of emotions, but also of medium contributing to the cultural exchange among nations. With globalization turning the world into a global village, it is no longer strange to find people in street listening to foreign songs with a fashionable MP3 Player winging on the chest.

The enthusiasm for songs is not in the least in China. On one hand, Chinese are becoming more enthusiastic for western songs of different styles, such as pop, jazz, rap and rock; on the other hand, we are becoming more interested in songs translation in order to make them sound more natural and idiomatic. However, compared with the zest for songs and songs translation, there are more and more worries over the poor quality of songs translation and the inadequate theoretical researches. Therefore, there has been an appeal for a change of current unsatisfactory state to insure translated songs an efficient medium for cultural exchange.

One of the possible solutions to this change may come to reasonable translation principles. These principles must take such qualities of songs as literariness, artistry and musicality into consideration. However, compared with emphasis on translation practice, the theoretical research is unsatisfactory. Based on the above observation, this article tends to explore the translation principles of songs by applying Skopostheorie.

Literature Review

State of Research on Songs Translation

Based on our investigation, studies on songs translation are fairly rare between the year 1978 and 2010. There are all together 108 papers titled “songs translation”. Among these papers, 46 are personal experience or proposals and only 25 concerning about translation theories. In addition, there is only one paper, Skopostheorie and standards of songs translation, applies the theory to songs translation. In terms of monographs, only Xue[1] discusses the features and methods of songs translation. The insufficient studies reveal a gap in principles in songs translation.

Skopostheorie

Skopostheorie is the core theory of Functionalism and is outlined by Vermeer. It is an action-oriented theory marking a breakthrough from previous equivalence theory. By Skopo, Vermeer means the purpose of a particular translation or translational action. As it is pointed out by Vermeer, “translation is not a one-to-one transfer between languages, but to explain the specificity of communicative situations and relationship between verbalized and non-verbalized situational elements. The prime principle determining the translation process is not equivalence or fidelity but the purpose (Skopo) of
the overall translational action”[2]. Besides, he also emphasized that the source text should not be regarded as a Golden Rule of translation but a kind of raw materials that can be modified, improved and even altered according to purposes.

Skopos in the field of translation can be interpreted from three aspects: “the general purpose aimed at by the translator in the translation process (perhaps ‘to earn a living’), the communicative purpose aimed at by the target text in the target situation (‘perhaps to instruct the reader’) and the purpose aimed at by a particular translation strategy or procedure (for example, ‘to translate literally in order to show the structural particularities of the source language’). Nevertheless, the term Skopos usually refer to the purpose of the target text”[2].

It is no doubt that most translational actions allow a variety of purposes, and these purposes are related to each other in a hierarchical order. A qualified translator is expected to make specific choice of a particular purpose and follow one or more principles in a given translational situation. They ought to “translate, consciously and consistently, in accordance with some principle respecting the target text”[2]. Since translation is normally done “by assignment”, Vermeer regards the clients/addressees who are the intended recipients and audience as the most decisive factors of purposes.

Apart from the supreme rule of Skopos, there is another rule in Vermeer’s Skopostheorie, namely coherence which consists of intertextual coherence and intratextual coherence. Coherence focuses on the relationship between the source text and the target text within a functionalist framework and will be discussed specifically afterwards.

Christiane Nord, another major advocator of functionalist approach, introduced her approach of function plus loyalty as a complement to Skopostheorie. Function refers to the factors “that make a target text work in the intended way in the target situation”[2]. Based on Karl Bühler’s organon model, Nord developed four basic types of function – referential function, expressive function, appellative function and phatic function. These four basic functions can be further divided into sub-categories. Nord explains respectively the way they are represented in texts and how they concern specific translation problems. Loyalty means an “interpersonal relationship between the translator, the source-text sender, the target-text addressees and the initiator”[2]. It limits the range of target-text functions for one particular source text and strengthens the need for a negotiation of the translation assignment between the translator and the author or the client.

Nord’s function-plus-loyalty model is usually regarded as another rule of Skopostheorie. However, Hu criticizes the rule of loyalty since “it is rather idealistic to reach a consensus among initiators, target receivers and original authors in practical translation assignment”[3], indicating it is not so feasible in solving practical translation problems. In terms of songs translation, since its features require the target lyrics must be consistent with its purpose of popularization, keep smoothness from syntax to semantics, transmit sentiment, etc. the rules of purpose, coherence and function can be applied to explore the principles of songs translation. Consequently, Skopostheorie is employed as the theoretical basis of this article.

**Skopostheorie Applied to Songs Translation**

Songs are mixtures of multiple stylistic features, such as literariness, musicality and artistry, thus the corresponding translation principles are different from those of literature or general art. The following part will first present a detailed discussion on the characteristics of songs translation from the aspects of its purpose, coherence and function in the Skopostheorie-oriented way. On the basis of this analysis, a 3S (Simplicity, Smoothness and Sentiment) principle will be put forward as a suggestive guideline for songs translation.

**Purpose and Simplicity**

As is pointed out by Vermeer, clients/addressees are the most decisive factors of the purposes. Since not every addressee shares the same needs, the purposes of songs translation are fairly diverse. Generally, there are four categories: (1) For the purpose of understanding. Some audience do not require a translation of high quality. They just want to get a general idea of the songs through the
Chinese version. Therefore, there is translation that merely provides an understandable text without rhyme or even grammar. It is clear that translation of this category is for the purpose of understanding but not for singing. Examples like playbills, captions, etc. are quite easy to be found in live concerts or TV program. (2) For the purpose of language learning. People are now increasingly use websites and audiovisual products for the purpose of language learning. These websites and audiovisual products usually present correspondent Chinese aside of the source lyrics. In this way, learners could understand the original meaning and also learn natural expressions and cultural background through annotations. (3) For the purpose of appreciating. Some people tend to regard songs as poems because they share the same features of literariness and musicality. Consequently, there are Chinese poems adapted from foreign songs. (4) For the purpose of popularization. For the majority, songs are meant to be sung. Therefore, popularization must be at the peak of the hierarchy of translation purposes.

Since we are discussing songs translation for the purpose of popularization, it is necessary to examine its target-text addressees first. It is clear that addressees of this category are usually ordinary audience; therefore, the translated songs ought to be simple enough for their understanding. By simplicity, we mean the words must be ordinary and easy to understand and remember. Archaic and deserted dictions must be avoided. Below is an example from *A Red Red Rose*:

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O my luve's like a red, red rose.
That's newly sprung in June;
O my luve's like a melodie
That's sweetly play'd in tune.
As fair art thou, my bonnie lass,
So deep in luve am I.
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Jiongjiongchiqiangmi,
Shouxiachufabao,
Ceceqingshangqu,
Miaoyinheyuanyao,
Yumeiliangyaoshao,
Youqingzhongzichi.
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*A Red Red Rose* is composed by a Scotland peasant poet Robert Burns. As is known to all, Burns’ works are not only regarded as poems but also songs sung by folks. For that reason, words in his works are usually simple and clear. When we translate such works, we have the obligation to keep the original simplicity. However, in the Chinese version by Man-shu SU, these obscure words like “jiong”, “ce”, “miaoyin”, “yuanyao” and “yaoshao” would even make well-learned audience at a loss. Consequently, Su’s version is not successful as a translation but quite a good adaption as a poem.

### Coherence and Smoothness

The rule of coherence is described from two aspects in Skopostheorie: intratextual coherence and intertextual coherence. Intratextual coherence means the target text “should make sense in the communicative situation and culture in which it is received”[2]. Besides, a translation “is expected to bear some kind of relationship with corresponding source text”[2]. This kind of relationship between the source text and the target text is called intertextual coherence.

By applying the coherence rule to songs translation, the article puts forward smoothness as the second principle. By smoothness, we mean the target lyrics must make sense from syntax to semantics and this aspect is corresponding to the rule of intratextual coherence. In addition, smoothness requires musicality must be transmitted to target lyrics by regarding the relationship between source lyrics and target lyrics and this is consistent with the rule of intertextual coherence.

According to the rule of intratextual coherence, the target text must be comprehensible for the target-text addressees. However, since translation involves words convention between two languages, differences of these languages usually lead to misunderstanding. Accordingly, translators are expected to keep the target lyrics smooth from syntactic level to semantic level.

In terms of syntax, we especially focus on the difference in the aspect of word order. Take attribution for example, it is acceptable to put it before or after a noun in English but before a noun in Chinese. As for an adverbial modifier, it is always put after a clause in English while before a main clause in Chinese. Therefore, “feel her body rise when you kiss her mouth” can be translated into “qinwentadeshuangchun, ganshoutadeqingchun” by re-arranging the word order[4]

Moreover, misinterpretation also tends to occur in semantic level due to cultural differences. For songs translation, cultural differences are commonly reflected in aspects like cultural psychology, idioms, etc. For example, “beat it” is a slang in English, which means “hurry away”. A well-known
song written by Michael Jackson—Beat It aims to dissuade the young from behaving violently. It is however translated literally into Chinese “zouta”, “data” occasionally.

Musicality is one of the most distinctive features of songs; as a result, being aware of transmitting the original musicality to make the target lyrics sound smooth and metrical is also important. “Musicality consists of two indispensible elements: rhyme and rhythm”[1]. The rhyme scheme in English songs is quite diverse, such as aab, abab, aabb, abcc, etc. Sometimes several rhyme schemes even appear simultaneously in a single song. Compared with western songs, Chinese songs do not highly appreciate changeable rhyme schemes. Therefore, “a consistent approach to transmit musicality is to adopt one rhyme to the end way”[1]. One rhyme to the end does not mean every line of lyrics has to use the same end rhyme but “it is free whether the odd-numbered lines rhyme or not but the even-numbered lines need rhyme”[1]. The following example from Season in the Sun is to illustrate this method.

Goodbye Papa please pray for me Zaijianbaba, weiwozhufubua, I was the black sheep of the family Woshijialdehaiqunzhima, You tried to teach me right from wrong Nifeijjinxinsijiaowomingbianshifei, Too much wine and too much song Wochennigejiuwufaziba, Wonder how I got along Hunhun’ee, xudu’rianhua

In this example, the original rhyme scheme is abccc. When it is translated into Chinese, the original scheme is removed. Instead, the way of one rhyme to the end is adopted by employing the Chinese phone [a:] as the end rhyme that lasts throughout the whole song. In this way, the target lyrics are accordant with the auditory habit of Chinese, and may sound more lyrical to Chinese.

Beside of rhyme, translators also have to transfer rhythm to keep smoothness. A common method is to follow the original musical notes, that is, to place one Chinese character under each note. Take an excerpt from Yesterday Once More (translated by Bo YANG) as an example:

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When I was young I’d listen to the radio waiting for my favorite songs. When they played I’d sing a long It made me smile.

In this excerpt, each Chinese character is correspondent to each note. This method benefits both composers and audience. On one hand, the original tempo is kept, making the composers’ intended feelings of nostalgia and warmth easily felt. On the other hand, the match between lyrics and notes makes the songs sound more smooth and easier to be remembered.

Function and Sentiment

Expressive function in Nord’s model refers to “the sender’s attitude towards the objects and phenomena of the world”[2]. As songs are vehicles to express one’s feelings, emotions and attitudes, the expressive function is essential. Accordingly. “sentiment” as the third principle for songs translation is put forward. It requires translators to transmit sentiment from the original songs to the translated ones and keep the style by concerning sentiment expressed in original songs. By transmitting sentiment, it means translators have to be aware of the feelings, emotions or attitudes expressed in the original songs and try to convey the same sentiment in the target lyrics.

Different kinds of sentiment ask for particular style and needs to be kept the same in the target text, otherwise the process of translation can never be called “translating” but “composing”. For example, solitude and loneliness in songs of cowboy ask for a style of soreness while passions and joyousness in songs of lovers may be consistent with a bright style. An efficient way to keep the original style is to select words and sentences that accord with the sentiment expressed in songs. Here is an example from For Baby (translated by Fan XUE):

In this song, John Denver expresses his feelings of peace and affection through the end rhyme laih. These feelings uncover the style of the song, that is, a song full of love and attachment. In order to keep its original style, Xue does not translate by your side, cling to your hand, and your name literally
into “zainishenpang”, “qiannishou”, “mingzi”, but words sound more peaceful and elegant as “peibanni”, “shouwanshou” and “fangming”. From these words, we can feel the same way as Denver does.

I’ll walk in the rain by your side,
I’ll cling to the warmth of your hand,
I’ll do anything to help you understand,
I’ll love you more than anybody can.
And the wind will whisper your name to me...

Woyuan peibanni yuzhongxing,
Woyuan shouwanshou zouyicheng,
Woyuan zuoqierangninenglijiwo,
Woshenshen’ainichaojurenheren.
Rangqingfengduiwoyingchangni fangming...

Conclusion

Literary translation is always difficult in that it carries two different culture features, which need not only transfer the linguistic codes involved but also deal with the source culture that may have a wide gap from the target culture. The translation of songs is even more difficult because songs are the combination of literariness and musicality.

Adopting the Skopostheorie as a theoretical framework, the article has probed into the translation features of songs from the aspects of its purpose, coherence and function. It is found that songs are commonly written for singing and popularization, therefore, the target lyrics must be simple enough; intratextual coherence requires the target lyrics be smooth from syntax to semantics and intertextual coherence asks for smoothness in transmitting musicality; expressive function demands original sentiment and style be transmitted to the translated songs. Accordingly, a 3S (Simplicity, Smoothness and Sentiment) principle is put forward. It is believed to help songs translation in future.

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References