

English Translation of Metonymy in Du Fu's Poems

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Abstract: This paper studies the English translation texts of Du Fu's poems selected from 300 Tang Poems, which were translated by Xu Yuanchong, and displays his poetry writing stages and styles clearly by learning about his life experience. This paper classifies the translation methods of metonymy that have been adopted by the translator, Xu Yuanchong, through analyzing specific English translation texts of metonymy in Du Fu's poems so as to provide translation methods with reference to translating metonymy in Chinese poetry into English.

Keywords: Du Fu; 300 Tang Poems translated by Xu Yuanchong; Metonymy; English translation

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1. Du Fu

1.1. Du Fu's life experience

Du Fu (712–770) was born in the Jingzhao Du family, which was one of the noble families at that time. His family was a bureaucrats' family for years and had a long history, with generations following the philosophy of being Confucians and imperial officials. He had the opportunity to receive Confucian education and be enlightened by various cultures because of his affluent family, laying a firm foundation for his poetry writing in the future. Influenced by his paternal grandfather, Du Shenyang, he specifically focused on antitheses and poetry meters when he was writing poems. His life could be roughly divided into four periods, which were traveling around as a teenager, being stuck in Chang'an City for ten years, being displaced during wartime, and drifting around Southwest China^[1-3].

Du Fu's teenage years were in Kaiyuan's heyday of the Tang Dynasty. It was politically and socially stable, economically prosperous, and culturally flourishing at that time. He started his adventure during Kaiyuan's heyday. He put his experience as "The next few years, I played and roamed"^[4]. He had finished his adventure in 746 and went to Chang'an City with such political ambition that he put it as "to lift my ruler higher than Yao and Shun, restore the purity of the people's ways", preparing for the next year's imperial examination. He was

really confident of achieving his political dream when he first arrived in Chang'an City. However, he failed his imperial examination due to a farce that had been organized by Li Linfu, who claimed all the talents had been recruited by the imperial court^[5]. After he failed his imperial examination, he lost his financial assistance from his father, Du Xian, who passed away. In order to find other accesses to becoming an imperial official to solve his financial crisis and pursuing his political dream, he wrote a large number of self-recommending poems. Additionally, he actively wrote odes for the imperial court, hoping that he could start his career as an imperial official. To his disappointment, all these efforts led to nothing.

An Lushan Rebellion, broken out in 755, changed the destiny of the Tang Dynasty that started declining from its prosperity. Du Fu had visited his family, who lived in Fengxian County, prior to the outbreak of the war. On his way home, he witnessed the luxury lifestyle of the ruling class and the misfortune of the people. He took his family to escape the war during the wartime. They were separately displaced. What's worse, he was captured by the rebels on his way to the new emperor, Emperor Suzong of Tang. Later he caused trouble for himself for trying to save Fang Guan, resulting in that he was never put in an important imperial official position, which led him to imperial displeasure most of his career. An Lushan Rebellion, which was a huge devastation for the Tang Dynasty, was raging for eight years. As a survivor of this war, he witnessed the misfortunes of the era and the struggles of the people, and he put all his witnesses in his poems. He took his family on the journey to Southwest China in 759, and they were in Sichuan Province, Hunan Province, and Hubei Province.

1.2. Poetry writing and styles of Du Fu

Traveling as a teenager for almost a decade, Du Fu increased his knowledge and broadened his mind. His poems were romantic during this decade, focusing on his love of nature and longing for a promising future.

Being stuck in Chang'an City for ten years with constant financial crises and imperial displeasure about his career, he had more opportunities to be in touch with ordinary people, which forged his poetry style. His ten-year life experience in Chang'an City changed his poetry style from romantic to realistic.

Being displaced during wartime, his poems were mainly expressing his worries about the destiny of the Tang Dynasty and the suffering of the people. Missing his family was also one of the main topics. His poems of this wartime were full of people's sorrow and grief and were regarded as poet-history by the following generations.

Drifting around Southwest China, his poetry writing was in many and various styles. Some were about missing his hometown and the glory days when he was a teenager. Some expressed his disappointment regarding his unpleasant imperial career path. Some voiced a sense of loneliness because of his drifting. Some were full of high spirits about enjoying the countryside lifestyle.

2. Du Fu's poems from 300 Tang Poems translated by Xu Yuanchong

Three Hundred Tang Poems was compiled by a Qing Dynasty scholar, Sun Zhu, who was also known as the retired master of Hengtang^[6]. The purpose of this poetry anthology was for children's enlightenment of poetry. This poetry anthology was organized by poem's formal types, of which there were seven: five-character ancient verse, seven-character ancient verse, five-character regular verse, seven-character regular verse, five-character quatrain, seven-character quatrain, and folk song-styled verse. Altogether, there were three hundred and one poems in this anthology. There were thirty-five poems of Du Fu in Three Hundred Tang Poems compiled by the

retired master of Hengtang.

When Xu Yuanchong was compiling his own version of 300 Tang Poems, he also selected thirty-five Du Fu's poems. Xu Yuanchong and Sun Zhu chose the same sixteen poems from Du Fu's works. The formal types of Du Fu's poems, selected by Xu Yuanchong, were ancient verse, regular verse, and quatrain. There were eleven ancient verses, which included seven five-character ancient verses and four seven-character ancient verses. As for the regular verse, sixteen of them were picked, which consisted of ten five-character regular verses and six seven-character regular verses. With respect to the quatrain, there were eight of them, which were made of two five-character quatrains and six seven-character quatrains.

3. Metonymy

3.1. Metonymy in rhetoric

The earliest research on metonymy was in rhetoric. The word metonymy originated from Greek *metōnymía*, literally “change of name.” Aristotle classifies metonymy as a kind of metaphor in his *Poetics* ^[7]. According to Webster Online Dictionary, metonymy is a figure of speech consisting of the use of the name of one thing for that of another of which it is an attribute or with which it is associated, as shown in example (1) ^[8].

Example (1): Lend me your ears.

The sentence in example (1) is spoken by Marc Antony from Julius Caesar, which was written by Shakespeare. In this example, ears are the organs of hearing, which enable humans to listen to sounds and are used to refer to people's attention ^[9].

The word metonymy can be translated into Chinese as *Zhuanyu*, *Jiedai*, *Jieyu*, and *Huanyu*. The earliest research on metonymy can date back to the Spring and Autumn Annals of Wu and Yue, which recorded an ancient song called *The Song of Slingshot* ^[10]. Chen Wangdao defined *Jiedai* clearly for the first time in his book *On Rhetoric* ^[11]. Wang Manyu further discussed *Jiedai* from the perspective of its three elements, which were “original entity”, “borrowed entity”, and “the correlation between original entity and borrowed entity” in his book *On the Art of Chinese Rhetoric* ^[12]. Example (2) shows the usage of *Jiedai*.

Example (2): 黄发垂髻，并怡然自乐 (The Peach Blossom Spring by Tao Yuanming)

In example (2), the borrowed entity “黄发” was used to refer to its original entity “老人。” In ancient China, when people became old enough, their white hair would turn yellow. Therefore, the yellow hair color of the elder was employed to indicate their age. Meanwhile, in this example, the borrowed entity “垂髻” was referring to its original entity “儿童。” In ancient China, children were not required to tie their hair up, so their hair would droop naturally. Hence, the droopy hair of children was used to imply their age.

3.2. Metonymy in cognitive linguistics

Metonymy had been researched only as a figure of speech in the conventional rhetoric field for a long time until Lakoff and Johnson published their book titled *Metaphors We Live by* in the 1980s. In the book, Lakoff and Johnson initially regarded metonymy as a basic cognitive mechanism and discussed it in the field of cognitive linguistics ^[13].

Lakoff and Johnson put forward conceptual metonymy in 1980 and defined it as “...We are using one entity to refer to another that is related to it.” They argued that conceptual metonymy was referential and understandable in nature by pointing out that “...metonymic concepts are part of the ordinary, everyday way we

think and act as well as talk”, as shown in example (3).

Example (3): The ham sandwich is waiting for his check.

In example (3), the “ham sandwich” is a type of food, which was used to refer to “the customer who had ordered the ham sandwich.” In this example, this type of food was used to refer to the people who had ordered it. Besides, a listener or reader of this sentence could comprehend that the “ham sandwich” was referring to a person rather than the food itself because of the following personal pronoun “his” in the sentence.

4. The analysis of the English translation of metonymy in Du Fu’s poems

Xu Yuanchong selected thirty-five Du Fu’s poems to translate when he anthologized his version of 300 Tang Poems. He adopted three main translation methods, which were translating the original entity, translating the borrowed entity, and translating the original entity and the borrowed entity, when it came to translating metonymy in Du Fu’s poems.

4.1. Translating the original entity

Example (4): 烽火连三月，家书抵万金^[14]

The beacon fire has gone higher and higher;
Words from household are worth their weight in gold.

Example (5): 忆昔霓旌下南苑，苑中万物生颜色
I remember rainbow banners streamed at high tide;
To Southern Park where everything was beautified.

In example (4), the original entity of “烽火” referred to alarming bonfire at frontier stations in Western Zhou Dynasty, but the borrowed entity of it was to indicate An Lushan Rebellion in Tang Dynasty. In example (5), the original entity of “霓旌” was to denote cloud-like colorful imperial flags, yet the borrowed entity meant the Emperor Xuanzong of Tang. With respect to “烽火” in example (4) and “霓旌” in example (5), Xu Yuanchong employed the method of translating the original entities. “烽火” and “霓旌” were translated into “beacon fire” and “rainbow banners”, respectively.

4.2. Translating the borrowed entity

Example (6): 峥嵘赤云西，日脚下平地

Like rugged hills hangs gilt-edged cloud;
The sunset sheds departing ray.

Example (7): 江碧鸟逾白，山青花欲燃。
Against blue water birds appear more white;
On green mountains red flowers seem to burn.

Example (8): 正是江南好风景，落花时节又逢君
Now the Southern scenery is most sweet;
But I meet you again in parting spring.

In example (6), the original entity “日脚” meant the foot of the Sun because people in ancient time thought the Sun was walking around without knowing the rotation of the Earth around the Sun; however, the borrowed entity of it referred to rays between clouds. In example (7), the original entity “燃” was the burning of fire;

nevertheless, the borrowed entity of it denoted the color red. In example (8), although the original entity of “落花时节” was the flower falling season, the borrowed entity of it implied the late spring. Concerning metonymy in examples (6), (7), and (8), Xu Yuanchong adopted the method of translating their borrowed entities into “ray”, “red” and “in parting season”, respectively.

4.3. Translating the original entity and the borrowed entity

Example (9): 明眸皓齿今何在？血污游魂归不得^[15]

Where are the first lady's pearly teeth and eyes bright?

Her spirit, blood-stained, could not come back from the height.

Example (10): 黄昏胡骑尘满城，欲往城南望城北

At dusk the rebels' horse overrun the town;

I want to go upward, but instead I go down.

In example (9), the original entity “明眸皓齿” meant bright eyes and white teeth, while the borrowed entity of it suggested the imperial consort Yang. The original entity of “血污游魂” was blood-stained wandering ghosts, yet the borrowed entity of it indicated the ghost of the imperial consort Yang. In example (10), the original entity of “胡” was the minority groups in the western border and northern border of China in ancient time; nevertheless, the borrowed entity of it implied the rebels. The original entity of “骑” was horse, but its borrowed entity denoted the cavalry. For example (9), Xu Yuanchong translated both the original and borrowed entities of “明眸皓齿” and “血污游魂” into “the first lady's pearly teeth and eyes bright” and “Her spirit, blood-stained.” With respect to example (10), Xu Yuanchong employed a translation method by combining the translated borrowed entity and the translated original entity together. He translated the words “胡” and “马” separately. As for the word “胡”, he translated it into the rebel, which was its borrowed entity. Concerning the word “马”, he translated it into horse, which was its original entity.

5. Conclusion

In his anthologized 300 Tang Poems, Xu Yuanchong selected thirty-five Du Fu's poems. This paper explored four important stages of Du Fu's life and classified his poetry writing and styles in accordance with his life stages. By analyzing the English translation texts of metonymy in Du Fu's poems, this paper concluded three metonymy translation methods used by Xu Yuanchong, which were translating the original entity, translating the borrowed entity, and translating the original and borrowed entities.

Disclosure statement

The author declares no conflict of interest.

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