Practical Strategies for Devising Singable Song Translations: A Case Study on Wuhan University Anthem Translation

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Abstract: The aim of the paper is to make singable English versions of Chinese University Anthems in the case of Wuhan University Anthem translation. A "Hexathron Principle" pertaining to song translation is formulated on the basis of Peter Low's "Pentathlon Principle" and Xue Fan's objection to "displaced diction" phenomenon. The "Hexathron Principle" refers to six requirements a translated song-text should meet, i.e. "Singability, Sense, Unity, Naturalness, Rhythm, and Rhyme", among which, the singability principle is paramount. As for the song translator, how to retain the singability in a translated song-text is of the most significance. To sum up, strategies for devising singable songs are to ensure singability of the translated lyrics, match rhythm and sustain rhyme of the original, properly manipulate sense, maintain the unity between linguistic and musical directions as well as pay special heed to seek naturalness of the TT. It is hoped that the paper can provide better ways of looking at song translations by testifying and refining the existing song translation theories.

Key words: singability; translation; university anthem

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1 Introduction and Literature Review

Song translation is a relatively new linguistic research field. Ali Omar holds that "songs are special in that they comprise both melodic and lyrical information" (2006:512), hence an interdisciplinary study of linguistics and musicology. Researches in this field can be divided into two types: on song translation, the dubbing phenomenon *perse*; on song translation practice guided by translation theories. Strategy studies are mostly carried out from Nida's Effective Translation theory or from the perspective of German Functionalism, especially *skopos* theory. The two theories have been widely applied in translation practice of all kinds, hence the desire for a more specific theory. Besides, domestic studies focus more on translating foreign songs into Chinese than vice versa, not to mention a particular genre of Chinese songs. Translations of university anthems have rarely been discussed. Therefore, there still remains space for improvement in this field.

Studies at home and abroad have established principles of and reviewed the approaches to translating songs. Henry Drinker (1950) suggests six requisites[1] in an adequate English text for a vocal work. Andrew Kelly (1992) devotes himself to making singable English versions of French songs and offers his advice to translators, namely "7 Respects"[2]. On the basis of previous researches, Peter Low (2003a) proposes a "Pentathlon Principle" pertaining to song translation, i.e. five criteria including "Singability, Sense, Naturalness,Rhyme and Rhythm", among which, singability is paramount and merits further exploration. As for song dubbing, Xue Fan (2002) illustrates the ways of devising singable songs in *Gequfanyitansuoyushijian*(歌曲翻译探索与实践, *Exploration and Practice of Song Translation*).

Two articles concern the translation of this genre. YinXifang and YeCongling(2014) investigate the principles of song translation in the case of NanHua University anthem translation. The principles are summed up as following the rhythm, beat and context. Tang Yao (2010)observes that according to Newmark's Text Typology, different translation strategies should be available so as to highlight the corresponding function, expressive, informative or operative, of the song-text.

2 Theoretical Basis and Structure

Low(2003a) explains his strategy— the "Pentathlon Principle" in this way. An Olympic pentathlete must complete in five events and optimizes his scores overall. Sometimes a pentathlete would choose to come second or third in one event for saving energy to achieve better results. Accordingly, a song translator should satisfy these criteria with singability as the *sine qua non*. One or two criteria can be less focused if urgently needed.

Xue (2002) presents a complete dubbing process and points out deficiencies in certain translated song-texts such as hackneyed phraseology, distorted rhythm, "倒字(daozi)", etc. "Daozi", literally meaning displaced diction,heppens when the sound direction of a combined tones' (≥2) group deviates from that of the musical tune. Included are three musical directions: ascending, descending, and horizontally moving. In tonal languages, Chinese for instance, there also exists three audible linguistic directions. The divergence between the direction of linguistic sounds and that of melodic tune may incur unnaturalness and even ambiguity in the receptors' ears. See the following score sample, in the first two bars, the tonal direction is descending whereas the musical direction is ascending with a disjunct fifth. Setting the lyrics to the musical

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tune, it sounds like "鬼来吧 (*Guilaiba*)", meaning "let ghost come", which mars the beautiful nostalgia of the original(Xue, 2002:138). Thus, the disunity between the two directions may result in ambiguity.

Tonal direction:

Unlike Chinese, English is not a tonal language, but it does not necessarily mean that there is no "*daozi*" phenomenon in English songs. English is a stress language. The position of accents helps to distinguish meaning. For example, "content" means the things that are contained when the first syllable is stressed while it means complacent when the accent lies in the second syllable. If a stressed syllable is positioned on an upbeat or a light syllable, a downbeat, displaced diction takes place, thus leading to unnaturalness for performers and hearers.

The songtranslator is deemed as an intermediary between the first sender, the secondary sender, and the users and listeners. According to Low (2003b), the first sender refers to the text's author or the lyricist; the secondary sender is the composer whose intention should be compatible with the lyricist's; the users mean the performers in the target context. A responsible translator should attend to these four parameters.
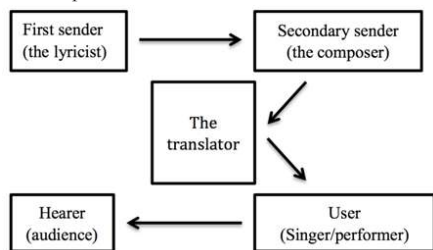

Chart1

As is shown in Chart2, a Hexathron Principle is demonstrated in a clearer hierarchical manner. Sense, Unity, together with Singability consisting of Rhythm and Rhyme at the core of the structure, serve the highest purpose of Naturalness.
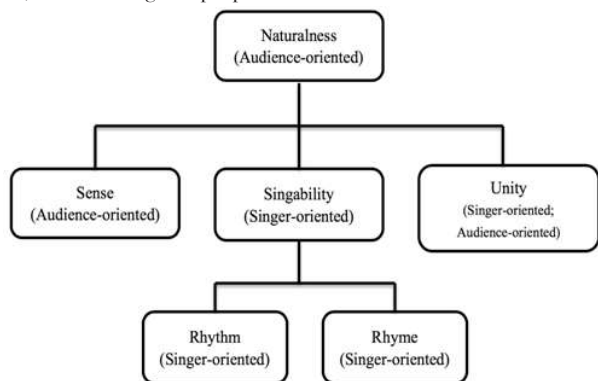

Chart2

Singability is of the most significance. For the compatibility with rhythm, English syllable counts should be consistent with Chinese word counts in that most Chinese words are monosyllabic. As for Chineseand English, there are two types of phonemes in nature: vowels and consonants. The type of phoneme is decided on note-values of the music. For instance, it's suitable to place a short consonant on a crisp quaver while a long vowel, on a lengthy minim.

In song translation, lexical sensecan be stretched on the grounds that semantic accuracy is guaranteed. Take two translated lyric versions in *Scarborough Fair* as an example. In version1, "Parsley, sage, rosemary and thyme" was translated into "香菜、鼠尾草、迷迭香和百里香(*Xiangcaishuweicaomidiexianghe bailixiang*)"which is 100% lexically correct, but it is hard to be sung becausewords are three counts more than syllables. In version2, the phrase was translated into "我的花儿百里香(*Wodehuaerbailixiang*)"which is stretched in sense but easier to be sung in that less word counts lessen the singer's aeration intensity.

The issue of unity cannot be overlooked. As discussed before, it is prone to displaced diction when there is a disjunct musical interval. Musical directions can be easily seen from melodic lines while linguistic directions can be heard when read. The inconsistency between linguistic directions and musical directions will incur unnaturalness. Sometimes the translator's deviation from direction in music also detracts the sense. Thus, Chinese words of a comparably rising tone should be placed on notes of an ascending scale while stressed English syllable should be translated at the highlighted musical location.

The TT should be rendered and presented in a natural way. In terms of register, the (in)formality of the TTshould be in concord with that of the ST. In terms of language, concise dictionand natural word order can be essentialsince the audience have no time to process the language when listening to music.

Rhythm is indispensible in any poem or any piece of music. Its components have been discussed in "Singability", hence no need to go into details. In this aspect, the translator should give more considerations to the singer because most written texts can be read at whatever speed while most sung texts are only "transient".

To the question 'Do song-translations need to rhyme', Low (2008) gives a best answer— 'Not if they are not intended to be sung'. Rhymeshelp to retain the phrases' shapes. True rhymes refer to two words rhyming in a way that they end in open syllables with the same final vowel and preceding consonant(s); or they end in closed syllables with the same final consonant(s) and precedingaccented vowel. Rhyming words that fall short of these types belong to near-rhymes which are also good devices to song translations.

To sum up, within the Hexathron structure, the six criteria are interrelated while hierarchical. Taking a bottom-up approach, it can be seen that Rhythm and Rhyme go a long way towards Singability. Rhythm should be paid special heed for dictions are strictly constrained by music whose main dimensions are pitch and duration. In song translation, proper manipulation of sense can be adopted on the basis of semantic accuracy. Besides, unsingability is severer than disunity that is unbeneficial to naturalness, either. At the top of the hierarchy, naturalness requiring conformity of register as well as suitable languages can be achieved when all the criteria are satisfied. In other words, sensible readability and comfortable audibility are the guarantee of a natural translated song-text.

3 Case Study and Translating Strategies

As the Hexathronstructure shows, "Sense, Singagbility and Unity" are "peer principles" that involve certain overlapping linguistic and musical elements. In "Sense", there are two levels: semantic accuracy and manipulation of the sense, the latter is to be explored deeper; in "Singability", Rhythm and Rhyme are the requisites. In "Unity", the issue of displaced diction should deserve keen attention. And "Naturalness" is the ultimate goal.

The paper aims atoffering strategies for translating songs by the case of Wuhan UniversityAnthem[3] translation. The principles

will be examined in the following analysis.

武汉大学校歌
Anthem of Wuhan University

陈国权 曲
珞宣 词
陈斯扬 译配

Strategies for Ensuring Singability

To ensure singability, English syllable counts should be consistent with Chinese word counts. This is never easy. In Chinese university anthems, often applied arefour-character phraseologies featuring concise structure but rich meaning, which incurs great difficulties for rendering. In the fifth and sixth bars of the second verse, "德业并进，求是拓新(deyebingjin, qiushituoxin)" means students should seek truth and pursue originality in order to advance both in morality and learning. If translated into a complete sentence, it can hardly be sung with the original rhythm. In this case, English phrases can be a proper choice. Considering the match with short quavers, English vocabularies with fewer syllables can be better. For instance, "ethics" or "morals" is more appropriate than "morality". Besides, it is easier to start with a front vowel, thus "ethics" is selected out.

Strategies for Matching Rhythm

Rhythm is of great significance in song translation. In the third bar of the first verse, the first two quavers were at first matched by an abbreviation "'tis". It is, however, not fitting the quick quavers. Therefore, "'tis" is replaced by "it is" that can be in consistency with the rhythm. In the eleventh bar of the first verse, "丽(li)" occupies 3-beat note-values, hence the ending syllable of the target word should be a prolonged vowel. That is why "pretty" is better than "beautiful" here.

Strategies for Sustaining Rhyme

Proper rhyming is also important. In the eighth, fourteenth, and sixteenth bars, "煌(huang)" and "梁(liang)" constitute a near rhyme pair for they belong to the same rhyme unit. It can be seen that "future" and "pillar" constitute a near-rhyme pair as well, which helps the singer memorize the lyrics and ensures singability.

Strategies for Manipulating Sense

The metaphor issue will be discussed. When the author encountered "桃李(taoli)" in the seventh bar of the first verse, shewas perplexed as to whether to retain this metaphor. "桃李

(taoli)" refers to students in Chinese, but "peaches and plums" have no identical implied meanings in the target language. Subsequently, the author used ahypernym—fruit to translate it. "Garden" can be collocated as a garden of knowledge, of wisdom, etc. Therefore, the author assumed that "fruit" here would not cause much effort for the audiences. Besides, if it is not extremely culturally-abound, metaphors should be kept in the target text for retaining the taste of the original.

Strategies for Maintaining Unity

In the first two bars of the second verse, the author translated the musical phrase as "From the Yangtze River to the sea it sails" at first but she discerned somewhat insufficient to express the vigorous momentum of the River, later on the authoradjusted the phrase into "Riding the rolling wave by the Yangtze River". The adjustment helps to render possible an uplifting emotion that the lyrics intend to evoke in the audiences.

Strategies for Seeking Naturalness

One aspect is language style. University anthems are mostly written in a formal and artistic manner. To avoid sounding unnatural, the target lyrics should be rendered in a similar way. For instance, in the fifth bar of the first verse, "百年沧桑(bainiancangsang)" was rendered into "she weathered frost and storm" in which, "weathered" is quite a literary word that makes possible an image of a time-honored university having undergone vicissitudes while remaining competitive. Wordorder is another aspect of naturalness. Usually the TT preserves the same word order as in the ST. It is, however, not absolutely irreversible. For instance, "百年沧桑 (bainiancangsang), 弘毅自强(hongyiziqiang)" was rendered into "Brave and self-strong, she weathered frost and storm". This reversion of phrasal order can be acceptable for it does not affect the lyric's inner logic nor does it consume more processing time of the receptors. More over, "strong" and "storm" are well chosen to fit the minims in the melody in that the combination of long vowels and nasal sounds can be lengthened to satisfy the vocal effect.

4 Conclusion

The paper aims to devise singable Chinese university anthem translations as well as examine and refine the existing song translation theories. Based on Low's Pentathlon Principle and Xue's objection to displaced diction, a Hexathron Principle, six requirements of "Singability, Sense, Unity, Naturalness, Rhythm, and Rhyme" is proposed. The six considerations are hierarchical with Singability as their core.To sum up, strategies for devising singable songs are to ensure singability of the translated lyrics, match rhythm and sustain rhyme of the original, properly manipulate sense, maintain the unity between linguistic and musical directions as well as seek naturalness of the TT for the sake of performers and hearers.The song translator should always bear in mind that linguistic elements should be governed by musical factors.Withfixed melody, alterations should be fallen on the linguistic part if conflicts arise. Devising singable song translations is an intricate task but never impossible as long as the translator follow the Hexathron Principle, with great patience and appropriate flexibility.

Notes:

1
(1) To preserve the notes, rhythm, and phrasing of the music;
(2) To be readily singable with the particular music;
(3) To be appropriate to the particular music;
(4) To be idiomatic and natural English, and not merely translated German, Italian, etc.;

(5) To contain rhymes wherever the music or the text calls for them; and

(6) To reproduce the spirit and substantially the meaning of the original.

2

(1) Respect the rhythms;

(2) Find and respect the meaning;

(3) Respect the style;

(4) Respect the rhymes;

(5) Respect the sound;

(6) Respect your choice of intended listeners; and

(7) Respect the original.

3 Created in 1998, the Anthem of Wuhan University was published in the university's 105th anniversary. This version differs from the university's previous versions in its clear and plain language.

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众来说是一种较为有效的翻译方法,异化翻译的形式将反映西方社会文化习俗和价值观的英语形式保留了下来,能够充分展示了原剧的异域文化。以《美女上错身》中的台词为例:

"I am visiting from Colorado amish country."

译文:我来自科罗拉多州的阿米什教区

由于"amish"在中文背景下,没有相应的表达词语,因此,这句翻译直接将"amish"翻译为"阿米什",同时加上注释:"阿米什"是基督教的新教派之一,这个教派追求回到本质化的生活,抛弃电子设备和一切现代化的设施。通过这样异化加注释的方法可以帮助观众对阿米什教派产生新的知识。

4 结束语

如今,影视化的多媒体属性给不同文化之间的交流,创造了许多便捷的途径,它对文化信息的传播和交流有着重要的意义,针对当前阶段美剧翻译中存在的翻译人才质量参差不齐、某英文难以恰当表达以及翻译人员有意曲解等问题,究其原因,主要是文化背景的迥异、翻译人员对美剧的矛盾态度和双方价值观的不同,得出了要从提高翻译人员质量、使文化意象本土化、使翻译更接近中国观众生活实际以及使用适当地异化策略等方面入手来解决这些问题,以期解决当前阶段美剧翻译中的文化缺失问题,更好地促进中美双方的文化交流。

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