

Original Paper

On the Translation of English Musical Songs from the Perspective of Skopos Theory

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Abstract

With the increased frequency intercultural communication, western musicals have been introduced into China and become a popular entertainment of the Chinese people. Some musicals will be dubbed in Chinese version for performance, so that the audience can enjoy the plots and songs more deeply. However, the different historical origins, social customs and religious cultures have formed specific cultural backgrounds, which in turn have formed different ways of thinking, values and pragmatic rules. All these factors have become obstacles in the translation of English musicals. As the main content of musicals songs, librettos have become an important medium for audience to appreciate musicals. Therefore, the translation of songs in musicals becomes the most important part in the study of musicals translation. Based on the Skopos Theory of functional translation, this thesis takes the Chinese version of a series of western musicals produced by SEVENAGES as the object, and analyzes the Chinese translation of these musicals from the rules of Skopos, coherence and fidelity, with the aim to find out the best techniques of translating musical songs, and improve the quality of the translation.

Keywords

Skopos Theory, English musical songs, Song lyric translation

1. Introduction

With culture exchanges expanding in the context of globalization, musicals, one of popular western culture forms, has been increasingly favored by the public in china. And the libretto, which serves as the main medium for Chinese audience to enjoy English musical songs, the translation of it becomes the most important part in the study of musicals translation.

Nowadays, however, compared with the English literature, the translation of English musicals songs still gets little attention in the academic field and has not been paid enough heed to for a long time. Let alone it starts later than that of English literature, and its development is not mature.

In the process of translation, it is necessary to maintain their colloquial characteristics and appropriately use the strategy of amplification to avoid information redundancy. At the same time, in the lines sung by the actors in musical, a multiplied translation strategies should be combined to achieve form equivalence as far as possible, so as to maintain the rhythms of songs; In the libretto sung by actors in musical, the translation of lines in narrative singing should put the transmission of the original text information in the first place, and the original content cannot be adapted at will.

In this paper, through sorting out the libretto translation of a large number of Western musical songs, a study on features and techniques of libretto translation was made by author under the guidance of Skopos Theory, and meanwhile offering the strategies for solving the problems encountered during the process in libretto translation. Its application value lies in providing practical experience and case studies for the translation of libretto.

Based on the German functional translation theory, first of all, this paper will introduce the development history and core content of the theory briefly. Then it focuses on the three principles of Skopos Theory to introduce the application of the three principles in musical songs translation. The starting point of this paper lies in the analysis of the translation of musical songs. Take the Chinese version of a series of Western musicals produced by SEVENAGES as the research object to analyze the Chinese translation of musicals in its series.

This report is composed of three chapters. The first chapter introduces the development of Function Translation Theory, and then leads to the key theory of this paper, Skopos Theory, including the core and classification of Skopos Theory, the main principles of Skopos Theory. The second chapter mainly introduces the background, purpose and significance of Chinese translation of English musicals songs, the problems might meet in translation as well as the features which should be concerned. The third chapter is to analyze the libretto translation of real case from different perspectives. The fourth chapter is the conclusion which is mainly includes the problems of the Chinese translation of musical song should care, and suggestions.

2. Functional Translation Theory

2.1 Development of Functional Translation Theory

Functional Translation Theory was released in the 1970s, by Katharina Reiss. The publication of *The Possibilities and Limitations Translation Criticism*, which was written by Reiss, was the mark of the theory has been come out. According to Christiane Nord's opinion, who is one of the main representatives of functional translation theory, German Functional Translation Theory has been developed by two generations of translation theorists.

The main representatives of the first generation, Katharina Reiss, Hans Vermeer and Justa Holz Manttari, built the sound system of the functional translation theory with their great contributions. In the book *The Possibilities and Limitations Translation Criticism*, Reiss introduces the "function" into the field of "translation criticism", classifies the text according to different functions, makes the

translator more sensitive to the linguistic mark of communicative function and the constituent unit of functional translation, and helps the translator to define the equivalence standard as an appropriate form for the specific translation purpose, that is, her so-called "integral communicative performance". Vermeer had played an important role in the establishment of Functional Translation Theory. He produced the core theory of Functional Translation Theory, Skopos Theory, which is the guiding theory of this paper. In his view, which translation strategies should be used must be determined by the purpose of translation, instead of the original text, and the original text only provides information, because translation is not just a language process. Therefore, other translation methods must be explored. And at that time, Justa Holz Manttari, pushed forward the theory of functional translation a step further by drawing on the concepts of communication theory and behavior theory, and put forward the concept of "translation behavior", which distinguishes the "translation" from the "translation behavior". His theory's key lies in the result of translation and regard the process of translation as the process of information transmission.

Christiane Nord was the moving force of the development of the second generation, and Margret Ammann, Paul Kussmaul, Heidrun Witte are also played an essential role in this development.

2.2 *The Core of Functional Translation Theory—Skopos Theory*

Vermeer, a student of Reiss, firstly put forward the Skopos Theory in his book, *Framework for a General Translation Theory*, which was published in 1978. In Vermeer's view, translation studies cannot just rely on the linguistics alone. There are two main reasons. First, translation is not just a language process. Second, linguistics has not yet raised the way of dealing the issue of translation difficulties. Therefore, he puts forward Skopos Theory of translation on the basis of Action Theory.

The core concept is that the purpose of the whole translation is the main factor should be concerned in the process of translation. Vermeer takes translation studies out of the shackles of the Source Centered Theory and holds that translation must follow a series of rules. Among them, Skopos Rule is in the priority, which means "any act of translation is determined by the purpose of translation. That is to say, the purpose of translation determines the means of translation."

The core idea of Skopos Theory is that every action has a purpose. According to the actual situation, the actor will choose the most appropriate way to achieve the expected goal. Since translation is also a kind of action, the translator will try to consider all related factors under the guidance of the translation purpose, so as to determine the most appropriate way to action. It can be concluded that there is a basic principle—the goal of translation action determines the strategy to achieve the desired goal. In other words, the target text should perform its intended function to the intended addressee.

Under his framework of Skopos Theory, the target audience is one of the most important factors that determine the translation purpose. Therefore, he stressed that it is very important to determine the purpose of translation when translating. He also pointed out that translators translate information according to other people's commission. As a result of the commission, the translation, ultimately met the needs of target language readers. As for the original text, is only for "transmitting information" in

translation.

2.2.1 Three Principles

Therefore, Vermeer also puts forward three basic principles which to be followed in Skopos Theory translation. (1) Skopos Rule, i.e. "the choice of translation methods and strategies is determined by the purpose of translation." (2) Coherence Rule, "refers to that the translation must meet the requirements of Intratextual Coherence in the text", that is, the translation must be consistent with the cultural background and language habits of the target language, so that it can be easily understood and accepted by the target language readers. (3) Fidelity Rule, refers to the coherence of Intertextuality between the target text and the original text. Among the three principles, the Skopos Rule is the first priority, followed by the Coherence Rule. The Fidelity Rule is under the principle of purpose, and it also subordinate to the principle of coherence.

2.2.1.1 Skopos Rule

Skopos Theory points out that the purpose of translation determines methods of it. No matter it is explained in which way, the highest principle above all is the Skopos Rule. "The text of the translation is determined by the purpose of the translation, instead of the source text" (Zhang, 2004).

The main purpose of musical libretto translation is to let the audience understand the content of the songs and the emotions conveyed by musical performances. Based on this purpose, when translating libretto, firstly, we should determine the text type of librettos according to the overall tone, the charter and the plot content of the song, and to determine the emotion and purpose of the song, and then adopt different translation strategies.

2.2.1.2 Coherence Rule

The Coherence Rule is intratextual coherence, which means that "in the context of the target language, readers can understand the content of the target language. In view of the relationship between the internal logic of questions and the cultural background of the target language receiver, the target language must meet the basic requirements of intralingual coherence" (Nord, 2001). Under the guidance of Skopos theory, we can come to the conclusion that the importance of the target text and its intended readers is higher important than that of the original text and its author. "Translators do not have to be restricted by the original text or the author of the original text, and do not have to be limited by the form of the original text. Instead, they should take into account the characteristics of the target language and the relevant cultural characteristics, as well as the understanding ability, reading expectation and communication needs of the readers" (Bian, 2008).

Therefore, in light of the cognitive differences and linguistic and cultural background differences between the Chinese audience and the English speaking audience, we should try to use the familiar language expressions and localized expression habits of the Chinese audience, or simply make the audience understood by alternative ways.

2.2.1.3 Fidelity Rule

The Fidelity Rule means the expected coherence. There should be consistency between the source text

and the target text. The form of Fidelity depends on the translator's understanding of the source text and the purpose of translation. There is an inherent link between the target text and the original text, which cannot be broken arbitrarily. It is necessary to follow its inherent coherence (Nord, 2001).

From the perspective of Skopos Theory, the evaluation criterion of a good translation is not "equivalence", but the "appropriateness". Due to the differences of cultures and values between Chinese and Western, there are great differences in content structure and text length distribution between Chinese and English librettos, which make some translation lose the communicative effect of the original text. Therefore, the translation of English musical librettos should be made on the basis of the full understanding of the differences between Chinese and English, and rearranged according to the common structure of Chinese, and recreated appropriately targeted at multiple audiences.

3. Musical Songs Translation

3.1 The Background of Musical Songs Translation

In 2016, the Nobel Prize for literature was announced in Sweden, and the winner was Bob Dylan, an American folk song artist. It was a sensation. This landmark event shows that music and literature are closely related. Especially in the absence of melody, the creation of libretto and literature can be regarded as one, such as the musical soundtrack. Musicals songs have its special features, which are different with the pure music that can only be expressed through melody. Because of the particular form of acting, the characters' mood and plot development are mainly expressed in songs. Without fully understood the meaning conveyed by the libretto, the audience cannot appreciate and understand the connotation of the musical, even if they have seen it several times. When the musical actor sings a song, the audience can touch the soul and core of the song with the help of lyrics. "The creative subject interacts with the singer and the audience, and the meaning of the song is recorded in the communication, so as to realize deeper intercommunication" (Lu, 2015). It is of paramount importance for the libretto translator to convey the thoughts and feelings of original text to the audience who is under another language background.

"If the Chinese audience of English musical songs not only pursues emotional experience, but also hopes to find a spirits contact with the British and American audience and resonate with them, it is inevitable to understand the meaning of the lyrics" (Liu, 2008). This is the best way to describe the mood of an English musical audience. The audiences who pursue deep immersion tend to enjoy the meaning of the lyrics while listening to the songs and watching the performance.

The subtitles of musical libretto are similar to those of film and television. Because of the special acting form of musical, its lyrics are as limited and real-time as film subtitles. Because the lyrics switching quickly with the songs going on, the audience can only accept a limited amount of information in a short period of time, so each frame of lyrics should consider the audience's viewing range. Secondly, the translation of lyrics should be approachable. Musical has a wide audience, so the translation of lyrics is generally required to cater to the level of understanding of the public. Thirdly, the translation

of lyrics has the complementarity. The lyrics are complementary to the music and the performance of actors. Where the lyrics cannot be conveyed or cannot be fully conveyed, the original voice of the song and the actor's body language can fill in gaps.

3.2 Purpose and Significance of Musical Song Translation

The first impression a musical leaves on public might be a kind of musical movie that catch the ear as well as the eyes. It seems that the content is not important. Of course, music, dance and stage art are the first attractive elements, but script and drama poetry are the core and characteristics of musical. They make up all the text content of musical - dialogue and libretto. This paper discusses the core of the text - libretto, which gives the music and dance in musical drama narrative function and deepen the emotional expression.

Without libretto, music in musicals will lose its narrative function, unable to promote the development of drama plot, and difficult to depict the characters in the drama. In addition to the visual and auditory enjoyment, the widely spread classical musicals all have a grand or profound drama themes, as well as memorable libretto, leaving people with lasting touching and shock. Therefore, for audiences with different cultural backgrounds and language systems, rhythm and performance can help to form a vague impression of the plot and characters, but only with the help of the translation of libretto can they realize the deep feelings of the characters and the implied meanings of the story, and even feel the implicit beauty of music and dance. It can be said that song lyrics translation shoulders the responsibility of reproducing the "soul" of musical.

4. Case Study in Chinese Translation in English Musical Songs

4.1 Principles' Application in English Musical Songs Translation

➤ Example 1. *Do Re Mi*

<i>(Original)</i>	<i>(Version 1)</i>	<i>(SEVENAGES Edition)</i>
<i>Doe, a deer, a female deer</i>	鹿，是鹿，一只母鹿	Do(都)——是都来一起唱
<i>Ray, a drop of golden sun</i>	光，是金色的夕阳	Re(蕊)——是花蕊有花香
<i>Me, a name I call myself</i>	我，那是我的名字	Mi(咪)——是猫儿咪咪叫
<i>Far, a long, long way to run</i>	远，长长的路要跑	Fa(发)——是头发黑又长
<i>Sew, a needle pulling thread</i>	绣，是针儿穿着线	So(锁)——要锁在大门上
<i>La, a note to follow Sew</i>	啦，就跟在 so 之后	La(拉)——起手儿多欢畅
<i>Tea, a drink with jam and bread</i>	茶，是饮料配面包	Si(溪)——水潺潺清又亮
<i>That will bring us back to Do (oh-oh-oh)</i>	那就让我们再次回到 do	带着我们回到 - Do !

This is a selected libretto of the musical "*The Voice of Music*". Maria, the heroine, uses the method of homophony to teach children the notes. A case in point, "doe, a deer, a female deer". Because DOE has the meaning of "female deer" in English, it was translated into "Doe, 是一只小母鹿" in the version 1. However, in the Chinese context, "DOE" and "母鹿" have nothing to do with each other. If it is

translated directly according to the original text, the resulting translation will be as shown as "version 1". Although there are no mistakes in the translation, the rhythm and interest of the original text are totally lost, which makes the Chinese audience confused. Contrary to the other translation, the translation of SEVENAGES is different from the original according to the literal meaning, the effect is the same. The format, pronunciation and image of the translation are consistent with the original, full of childlike interest, and also in line with the intention of the original author.

➤ **Example 2. *The Impossible Dream***

<i>Dream impossible dream,</i>	追梦，不会成真的梦
<i>fight invincible enemies,</i>	挑战，不可战胜的对手
<i>endure unbearable grief,</i>	忍受，不能忍受的痛
<i>and run where brave people dare not go.</i>	跋涉，无人敢行的路

(Translated by SEVENAGES)

This is a short extract of *The Impossible Dream* in *Man of La Mancha*. The basic level of translation is the text. In addition to the communicative function and pragmatic meaning of the translated text, the translator should also emphasize the mapping of various meanings of the text. In the translation, the appropriate concept of "the brave" in the target language is selected to realize the mapping. In the original text, "the brave people dare not go" means "勇敢的人不敢走的路". Combined with the analysis of the previous and the following texts, the translation of "the brave people dare not go" into "无人敢行", it not only expresses the meaning of the original text, but also reflects the previous text and expresses the main idea of the whole article.

➤ **Example 3. *Man of La Mancha***

<i>Hear me now</i>	听我唱
<i>Oh thou bleak and unbearable world,</i>	你这人间已病入膏肓
<i>Thou art base and debauched as can be;</i>	放眼望尽是堕落癫狂

(Translated by SEVENAGES)

The lyrics are excerpted from the musical *Man of La Mancha*. In this extract libretto, the original writer uses five B-tones to exaggerate the emotion of the lyrics so that the melody sounds very inspiring. But Chinese has a special "four tones" system, which is very different from English, if it is not handled well, it will cause the lyrics and melody do not fit, resulting in the embarrassment of "mislistening". Considering that there is no alliteration or dullness in Chinese, the translation of SEVENAGES has been changed into intrasentence rhyme. That's how the high spirited knight on the stage comes.

- **1. Skopos Rule.** The communicative purpose of this song is to show the audience an image of a knight with great dignity and high spirits. The melody is impassioned. Due to the rhyme and long sound of the syllables of the song, in order to convey its significant Lyric features, the translation has changed the translated sentence into the intrasentence rhyme, and expressed its indignant feelings with the rhyme "ang" of Chinese.
- **2. Coherence Rule.** The translation should be natural so that the audience can appreciate it easily. In this libretto, the writer uses five B (tone) to exaggerate the emotion of the lyrics so that the melody sounds very inspiring. But because Chinese has a special "four tone" system, which is very different from English, if it is not handled well, it will cause the lyrics and melody do not fit, resulting in the embarrassment of "mislistening". In the translation of SEVENAGES version, the consonance of the whole song is adopted, which not only avoids the embarrassment that the melody of the lyrics does not fit, but also makes the original emotion reappear in the translation, which conforms to the requirements of the principle of coherence.
- **3. Fidelity Rule.** The translation of libretto retained the connotation of the original lyrics, restored the image of knights with justice for the audience, and conveyed his feelings of hatred. The version of SEVENAGES makes the image of Knights of justice stand out in front of the audience.

5. Conclusion

First of all, the translator must have a sound knowledge of Chinese and English, and have basic bilingual ability. The premise of following this principle is that the translator must have a strong perception of English speaking countries and their own cultures. Translators should have a deep understanding of Chinese and English cultural background and cultivate bilingual aesthetic appreciation. The most important point is that the translator needs to have a comprehensive understanding of the background of the work and the meaning of the song lyrics of the musical.

Then, when translators study Chinese lyrics, they need to deepen their understanding of music theory and enhance their aesthetic appreciation. For example, the *man of La Mancha* showed in example 3, the writer of the selected libretto uses five B-tones to render emotion, so the translator should think over the emotion and melody when translating the lyrics. Otherwise, the translation will not fit the melody, or just confused the audience with strange texts.

Musical is a special stage art form which integrates music, dance, drama, literature and other elements. And at the same time, it is also a form of entertainment for the public. Because of the complexity of musical and the lack of systematic theory of musical translation, the author believes that Vermeer's Skopos Theory is the best choice for musical songs translation. According to the analysis of the above examples, we can see that the translation skills of musical songs tend to be flexible free translation, but the translator needs to bear in mind the rule of Skopos in order to achieve the best balance between "Fidelity" and "Coherence".

A successful musical song translation pays more attention to the combination of lyrics and melody, the unity of lyrics and images, and the consistency of bilingual context. Based on this goal, the translator needs not to stick to the content and form of the text. Vermeer pointed out that the translation does not have to imitate the original faithfully. If the translator was curbed by the original text, and translate the musical songs words by words, use the same translation methods stubbornly, the audience will not be immersed in the purpose of the plot and play its function. The song translator can get the ideal song translation only if he is clear about the expected effect of the translation, chooses the appropriate translation strategy, adjusts the language according to the norms of song translation, and omits some unnecessary information.

No matter in Chinese or English, there are more than ten kinds of rhetoric devices in the lyrics, such as antithesis, inversion, etc. in Chinese; metaphor, analogy, pun, etc. in English, it is the translator's responsibility to retain the rhetoric of the original lyrics as much as possible and convey beauty and emotion. At last, all the masterpieces of famous teachers have been tempered by their own self-esteem. The lyrics translation of musical plays is more accurate to say that the lyrics translation matches. Due to the different purposes of translation, the needs and preferences of different audiences of songs are different, and there is no end to the room for modification and promotion. What the translator needs to do is to polish his mind, cultivate patience and constantly improve his translation level.

Practice makes true knowledge. If we want to make a thorough study of the translation of lyrics, we need not enough theoretical knowledge. Only through rich translation practice can we find problems, explore and constantly improve translation methods, and achieve the combination of theory and practice, so as to translate the original music.

As the increased practice of translating English musical songs, the application of Skopos Theory will be more intensive and proficient. Therefore, scholars are required to study teleology more deeply. At the same time, the maturity of musical song translation will also promote the process of cross-cultural communication between China and the West, hence lead to a all-win situation in various aspects.

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