



A SURVEY OF THE ENGLISH TRANSLATION OF SONG CI POETRY FROM THE PERSPECTIVE OF MULTIMODAL DISCOURSE ANALYSIS

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Abstract:

The rapid development of modern science and technology and the innovation of human communication methods have made multimodal discourse research a hot topic in current interdisciplinary research. Based on the domestic and international research, this study describes the development of multimodal discourse analysis (MDA) theory, the characteristics of the English translation of Song Ci poetry and its shortcomings. It points out that the MDA theory should be combined into the English translation of Song Ci poetry in future research to promote the spread of Chinese traditional culture.

Keywords: multimodal discourse analysis; Song Ci poetry; English translation

1. Introduction

Song Ci, one of the treasures of the profound Chinese traditional culture, plays an important role in foreign cultural exchanges. However, for a long time, the translation of classical Chinese poetry has basically been based on textual translation only, and the medium of communication is often considered mono-modal. Hodge & Kress (1988) believe that research on the text and meaning only is far from enough, and that meaning is strongly and widely present in other recognized sensory systems such as those for vision, hearing, somatic sensation, taste and olfaction. In response to this phenomenon, this paper attempts to combine the theory of multimodal discourse analysis (MDA) with the English translation of Song Ci, to sort out its development and characteristics, to enrich the research of MDA theory, and to promote the multimodal communication of the English translation of Song Ci poetry.

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2. The Development of MDA

Emerging in the West in the 1990s, MDA is a new research direction in discourse analysis. It studies all communicative modalities as resources for meaning generation. Baldry & Thibault (2006) state that multimodal research is concerned with how some independent symbolic systems encode and form discursal meanings in different ways. All modes such as texts, sounds, images, movements, colors, facial expressions are sources of meaning in a multimodal discourse. Researchers can discover and formulate the grammar of each modality and obtain its law of meaning generation.

2.1 Development of MDA Abroad

In the West, MDA emerged in the 1990s. Most of the Western scholars' research on multimodal analysis was published in *Social Semiotics* founded in 1990, which is an important academic journal on the construction of meanings of modal systems and symbolic systems other than language. MDA uses Halliday's "language is a social symbol" as the theoretical starting point (Zhu Yongsheng, 2007). Based on the social semiotics approach of Halliday's language studies (Halliday, 1978; Halliday & Hasan, 1985), O'Toole (1994), and Kress and Theo Van Leeuwen (1996; 2006) studied in the 1980s to the 1990s the significance of words, sounds, and pictures as a series of interconnected systems and structures, which laid the foundation for multimodal research. In the new century, multimodal research flourished in the West. The first International Symposium on Multimodal Discourse was held in Austria in 2002 and held every two years. In the following years, the vision of multi-modal research was broadened, gradually covering topics such as action, network, film and television, animation, teaching, and scientific computing, bringing a new research perspective and many research methods to humanities and social sciences.

O'Toole (1994) first used the Systemic-Functional Grammar for the analysis of visual symbols in *The Language of Displayed Art*, which was revised and reprinted in 2011. Gunther Kress and Theo Van Leeuwen (1996) co-authored and published *Reading Images: The Grammar of Visual Design*, which was the first systematic and comprehensive analysis of visual symbols for the construction of a visual grammar framework for MDA. It is the most influential research in the field of visual symbols. Later, Theo Van Leeuwen (1999) began his exploration of the world of sound, with his publication *Speech, Music, Sound*. In addition to the above visual modality and auditory modality studies, multimodal studies on different subjects such as scientific text research (Lemake, 1998), hypermedia research (Lemake, 2002), behavioral and body language research (Martinec, 2000), teaching research (Jewitt, 2006) and cultural literacy research (Kress, 2003) continued to emerge and develop rapidly. Angelica Lim et al. (2012) attempted to construct a unified framework through three modes: sound, gesture and music, and discussed the application of music robots in a multimodal perspective. Susan Harrop-Allinl (2014) studied the traditional sports games for children in South Africa and introduced the interaction between games and country music, dance and

communication, highlighting the commonality between Soweto music games and global music games. She suggested that music education should pay attention to children's music skills outside the classroom and mobilize a variety of multimodal resources. Victor Fei Lim (2017) proposed an annotation and analysis method based on MDA for teachers to use gestures in the classroom, aiming to develop theoretical tools for teachers to promote classroom instruction. These studies broadened the research methods of MDA theory and greatly enriched its research.

2.2 Domestic MDA Development

MDA in China began in the early 20th century (Du Jinbang, 2013). Compared with the study of multimodal discourse in foreign countries, the domestic multimodal discourse research started late, however with a strong potential. The domestic concern about MDA was first seen in Li Zhanzi's (2003) "Social Semiotic Analysis of Multimodal Discourse", which introduced the visual grammar proposed by Gunther Kress and Theo Van Leeuwen in 1996. Since then, Chinese linguists such as Hu Zhuanglin (2007), Zhu Yongsheng (2007), Xin Zhiying (2008), Zhang Delu (2009), Yang Xinzhang (2009), and Wei Qinhong (2009) conducted representative studies on multimodality, multimodal construction of meaning, and the theoretical basis and research methods of multimodal discourse. The related literatures between 2008 and 2018 generally showed an increasing trend.

2.2.1 Research in Journals and Dissertations

In the online version of China National Knowledge Infrastructure, we searched with Chinese keywords “多模态话语” “多模态语篇” “多模式话语” “多模式语篇”, and found that from 2008 to 2018, a total of 1,353 journal articles and dissertations of MDA-related research in China had an increasing trend, as shown in Table 1:

Table 1: Quantitative statistics of MDA research from 2008 to 2018

2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018
11	18	47	93	128	142	211	181	208	161	153

Among the 1353 works, some are the introduction, interpretation and review of foreign MDA research, while most research are verifying the explanatory power of multimodal theory, or analyzing practical problems. Their research objects include TV commercials, cartoons, TV news, audio and video files, and movies. However, we did not find any research mainly conducted on the English translation of Song Ci poetry, because it mainly involves three kinds of modal symbols, namely, language, visual and auditory modes, even though a few research introduced elements in the visual grammar or auditory grammar framework, and used visual grammar to analyze the image information, or the auditory grammar to analyze the sound information in the discourse. The studies of different modal expressions are relatively few.

2.2.2 Monographs

Although MDA was incorporated into many linguistic textbooks such as the *Discourse Analysis* by Du Jinbang in 2013, monographs on multimodal discourse research are still quite limited in China. Wei Qinrong (2009) introduced the visual grammar framework created by Kress and Van Leeuwen, and applied it to the case studies of visual images, which combined multimodality and multi-disciplinary reading to explore its significance to college English teaching and learning. Zhang Lixin (2012) proposed an interactive model of affect and cognition to construe visual and verbal humors from cognition, pragmatics, semiotics, systemic-functional visual grammar, evaluation theory, and other aspects. Zhang Zuocheng, Xing Jianyu, et al. (2014) theoretically explored issues such as impromptu discourse, context, interaction mechanism and corpus construction from a multimodal perspective, and conducted empirical research on multimodal impromptu discourse in business discourse, academic discourse and media communication discourse. It can be seen that the monographs on MDA were not concerned with Song Ci poetry or its translation.

In general, since its birth in the 1990s, MDA has developed rapidly in the West in the past 20 years, attracting more and more scholars' attention. The research topics involved are very extensive, regular academic conferences are frequently held, and a large number of related works have been published. From China's introduction of MDA in 2003 until recent years, domestic concerns about this theory increased dramatically. However, domestic research is mainly to introduce, interpret, evaluate and simply apply the Western MDA theory, and only a few studies are extending the multimodal theory from certain aspects of linguistics. There are only a handful of studies on Song Ci poetry and its English translation based on the theoretical framework of MDA.

3. The Status Quo of English Translation of Song Ci

In the 1920s and 1930s, Song Ci poetry began to gradually enter the English world, but at that time it was limited to the translation and brief introduction of individual Ci poems. With the increasing interest of Western readers, there appeared the translation of important Ci poets from the Tang and Song Dynasties such as Wen Tingyun, Wei Zhuang, Li Yu, Ouyang Xiu, Liu Yong, Su Shi, Li Qingzhao, Jiang Kui, and Wu Wenying. In 1953, Professor Glen William Baxter of Harvard University wrote the article "Metrical Origins of the Tz'u", which marked the beginning of academic research on the Tang and Song Ci poetry in the English world. Burton Watson published *Selected Poems of Su Tung-P'o* in 1965, introducing the main translation of the Ci-poet Su Dongpo. In the 1970s and 1980s, James Liu, a Chinese-American scholar, and Florence Chia-ying Yeh, a Canadian-Chinese scholar, continued to make wide-ranging discussions on the Tang and Song Ci poetry in the English-speaking world.

With the implementation of China's strategies of "One Belt, One Road" Initiative and "Chinese Culture Going Global", the English translation of Song Ci poetry has been paid more and more attention to, and relevant literature in recent years has also

increased. Taking examples from Prof. Xu Yuanchong's translation *300 Song Lyrics*, Fu Ying's (2007) explored Mr. Xu's translation theory, free translation method, and pointed out problematic translations. Taking "Three Beauties" as a theoretical basis, Ding Jun and Xuan Zhifeng (2015) and Zhou Fangheng (2017) studied the specific reproduction of the beauty of sense, sound and form in Xu Yuanchong's English translation of Song Ci poetry. Most of these literature analyzed the English versions of Song Ci poetry with a certain theory or in a single mode, while others are concerned with the translation of a certain translator of Song Ci poetry without constructive ideas.

A few scholars tried to combine the English translation of ancient Chinese poetry with multimodality. Liu Yiting (2016) studied the beauty of imagery and operation process in the English translation of Song Ci poetry from the perspective of multimodality, taking Xin Qiji's Song Ci poems as examples. Jia Jia (2016) introduced pictures into the discussion of translated texts, and explored the relationship between pictures and translations, and the influence of pictures on translations. Huang Yanping (2018) introduced the theory and research status of multimodality from a macroscopic perspective, and analyzed the achievements of poetry translation theory, poetry translation viewpoints, and new fields of poetry translation from the perspective of multimodality. These scholars' exploration on poetry translation is useful for the translation of Song Ci poetry from the perspective of multimodality. However, most of the research focused on macro-discussion, or limited their discussion to only one viewpoint of multimodality. Studies on the English translation of Song Ci poetry from the textual, visual and auditory modes are still inefficient.

4. Conclusion

Western MDA theory has not been applied to the English translation of Song Ci poetry since its introduction to China. In the field of translation studies, the English translation of Song Ci poetry is still mainly concerned with the content, images and aesthetics of Song Ci poetry based on the textual translation theories. By tracing the development of MDA theory home and abroad, and analyzing the characteristics and trends of the English translation of Song Ci poetry, this paper points out the shortcomings of current research, and indicates that the MDA theory should be combined into the English translation of Song Ci poetry in future research because Song Ci poetry has multimodal characteristics.

Acknowledgment

This work was supported by the China Scholarship Council under Grant [201808420043]; Hubei Provincial Institutions of Higher Education Humanities and Social Sciences Research Award under Grant [2018ZA31].

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