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RECONSTRUCTION OF POETIC FUNCTIONAL CONTEXT – TAKING THE ENGLISH TRANSLATION OF LI QINGZHAO'S "*SLOW SLOW SONG*" AS AN EXAMPLE

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Abstract:
Based on Halliday's systemic functional context theory, this paper makes a contrastive analysis of the transitivity process, register variants, and text genre of the two English translations of Li Qingzhao's "*Slow Slow Song*" from the three dimensions of cultural context, situational context, and co-text to explore the characteristics of the language expressions of the two translations. It is found that there are differences in the process of transitivity, register variants, and discourse genre between the two translations and the original text. Based on the language use characteristics of the two translations, this paper further discusses the English translation strategies of Song Ci from the three levels of discourse cohesion, meaning interpretation, and genre selection to provide a reference for the translation practice of Song Ci.

Keywords: reconstruction of functional context; "*Slow Slow Song*"; English translation strategies

1. Introduction

Song Ci has a very important historical position and literary value in the history of Chinese literature. Traditional literary criticism divides Ci into two categories: the graceful school and the unconstrained school. Li Qingzhao is a representative of the restrained school. In the study of Sinology in the English world, she is the most outstanding and famous female writer in the history of Chinese literature. Her works have attracted more attention than male writers and other female writers. Many Chinese and foreign translators translate her works, which paves the way for the appreciation of the translations. Some scholars conduct contrastive research on the translation (Li Qing,

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2009), analyzing it from the perspective of Feminism (Yang Liu, 2013), and others study it from the perspective of the images of words (Sun Yi, 2015).

Li Qingzhao lived in a turbulent era. The theme of her works changed from the joy of her youth to the sadness of later separation, all reflecting the changes of the times. "*Slow Slow Song*" was written after the Change of Jingkang (1125-1127). Li Qingzhao's country was broken and her husband died. Her works in this period are no longer as pleasant as they were in those old days, but become gloomy and desolate. "*Slow Slow Song*" is one of the typical representative works of this period. The whole poetry is as follows:

> *"I look for what I miss, / I know not what it is. / I feel so sad, so drear, / So lonely, without cheer. / How hard is it / To keep me fit / In this lingering cold! / Hardly warmed up / By cup on cup / Of wine so dry, / Oh, how can I / Endure the drift / Of evening wind so swift? / It breaks my heart, alas! / To see the wild geese pass / For they are my acquaintances of old. // The ground is covered with yellow flowers, / Faded and fallen in showers. / Who will pick them up now? / Sitting alone at the window, how / Could I but quicken / The pace of darkness which won't thicken? / On the plane leaves a fine rain drizzles / As twilight grizzles. / Oh, what can I do with a grief / Beyond belief!"* (Xu, 2013: 136-137)

Halliday believes that all parts of language have different functions. He also mentions that context and language are inseparable. Different words have different functions, so they can play a role in different contexts (Halliday, 1994: 8). Context reconstruction, or re-contextualization, refers to those language users obtaining the elements and information in the source language context and reorganizing them in the new context to achieve the purpose of communication.

In the process of re-contextualization, it will involve adaptation such as addition, replacement, and reorganization. From the perspective of context reconstruction, the production of translation is the result of the deconstruction and reconstruction of the source context in the translation process. In this process, language users will screen the information in the source language and reprocess it in the context of the target language (Wu Jianguo, Li Xinmeng, 2017).

To be effective, the translation theory of context reconstruction must meet at least the following three criteria about the relationship between text and context: (1) it must explicitly consider the relevance of the source text and the translated text to different contexts; (2) it must be able to capture, describe and explain the changes necessary for re-contextualization with appropriate metalanguage; (3) it must connect the characteristics of the source text with the characteristics of the translation and different contexts (House, 2006: 343).

2. Literature Review

The theory of context originated in the 1920s and 1930s. At first, Malinowski (1923: 306), a British Polish anthropologist, divided context into situational context and cultural context. He believes that situational context includes the words, facial expressions, gestures, actions, and surrounding environment of all participants in the process of discourse communication. Cultural context is the sum of material facilities, human activities, interests, morality, and aesthetic values related to language (Malinowski, 1935: 22).

Firth refined the "*situational context*": the participants in the scene (character personality and other relevant characteristics); the behavior of participants (including verbal and nonverbal); other relevant characteristics of the scene (nonverbal and non-human characteristics, etc.); the effect and influence of speech act (Firth, 1950: 37).

Halliday divides context into co-text, situational context, and cultural context. He believes that co-text is language itself. Situational context is the language choice made by readers and translators in the face of specific situations. Later, it developed into register theory, which contains three items: field, tenor, and mode, involving participants (including characters and their personality and characteristics) and their behavior (including linguistic behavior and nonverbal behavior), other relevant features in the scene (including surrounding things and events related to the scene) and the effect of language behavior (changes brought by participants' necessary language behavior) (Halliday, Hasan, 1985: 8). Cultural context is the sum of countless situational contexts. It determines and affects the use of language in the overall system (Hasan, 2016: 16).

From the contextual perspective of functional linguistics, the context reconstruction of the English translation of classics includes three aspects: Reconstruct the text genre from the cultural context, that is, translate poetry into poetry rather than poetry into prose or novel; Reconstruct the register variables from the situational context, that is, translate the words in the original text equally through the three variables of field, tenor and mode, to produce the correct translation; Reconstruct the coherence of the text from the context to make the translation conform to the reading habits of English readers (Qiu Yifan, Li Xiuying, 2021). Therefore, I will compare the translations of Xu Yuanchong and Lin Yutang according to these three levels and analyze how they reconstruct the functional context from these three levels.

3. A Contrastive Analysis of Li Qingzhao's English Translation of "*Slow Slow Song*" from the Perspective of Functional Context

3.1 Co-text

Halliday believes that context is embodied by three pure meta-functions, and empirical meta-function is one of the subsystems. Empirical meta-function refers to the function of language to talk about the external world (such as events, things, and quality.) and our inner world (such as thoughts, beliefs, and feelings). Its function is mainly embodied by the transitivity system, which consists of the transitivity process, participant role, and environmental component. According to the nature of activities and events, Halliday divides transitive processes into six types: material process, psychological process, relationship process, behavior process, speech process, and existence process (Halliday, 1994:79). Based on the transitivity process and classification of empirical meta-function, this paper makes a contrastive analysis of the English translation of Li Qingzhao's "*Slow Slow Song*". The analysis results are shown in the table below:

Table 1: Transitivity process of the original text and two versions of "*Slow Slow Song*"

	Transitivity Processes	**Xu Yuanchong's Translation**	**Lin Yutang's Translation**
First sentence	Material process + Psychological process	Material process + Psychological process	Relationship process
Second sentence	Relationship process	Relationship process	Material process
Third sentence	Material process	Material process	Material process
Fourth sentence	Material process + Psychological process + Relationship process	Material process + Relationship process	Material process + Psychological process
Fifth sentence	Material process + Relational process	Material process + Relational process	Material process
Sixth sentence	Material process	Material process	Material process
Seventh sentence	Material process	Material process	Material process
Eighth sentence	Material process	Material process	Relationship process

Compared with the original text, the translations have a lot of transitivity processes. Some sentences achieve partial correspondence, but others do not achieve the correspondence of the transitivity process. For example, in the first sentence, Lin's translation uses the phrase structure of seven "*so*", and there is no corresponding material process or psychological process in the original text. While Xu directly uses the phrase "*search for*" to indicate the material process. In the Fifth sentence, Lin Yutang translated it as "*let fallen flowers lie where they fall*", which is a material process. Xu's translation is more faithful and achieves the correspondence of the relational process. It also shows that Xu is more faithful to the original text while Lin's translation is more creative.

The co-text concerns whether the target text is coherent and meets the reading habits of the target readers. From the perspective of functional linguistics, textual coherence can be embodied by cohesive words or clauses; as far as the stylistic characteristics of poetry are concerned, this coherence is mainly reflected by cohesive words. Halliday summarized the cohesive devices of English into two types: grammatical cohesion and lexical cohesion. Grammatical cohesion is divided into reference, substitution, ellipsis, and connection; Lexical cohesion is divided into repetition, synonymy, antonym, hyponymy, and lexical collocation (Halliday, 1994: 533). By comparing the original text and the two versions, it is found that the two versions reflect coherence in different places, such as:

> *"The wild goose is also sad, but it is an old acquaintance.*
> *It breaks my heart, alas / To see the wild geese pass / For they are my acquaintances of old.*
> *I recognize the geese flying overhead: / my old friends, / bringing not the old memories back*!"

The writer of this sentence couldn't help sighing when she saw wild geese flying by and recalled the past and old friends. In Xu Yuanchong's translation, the translator uses "*for*" to connect the context, which explains why the poet feels sad about the past when she sees the wild geese. In Lin's translation, he also directly pointed out that "the geese" are "*my old friends*", which echoes the context and helps readers better understand the meaning.

> *"How hard is it / to keep me fit / in this linking cold!*
> *The weather, / now warm, / now cold, makes it harder / that ever to forget!"*

The second sentence mainly describes that the author feels unwell because of the weather. In Xu Yuanchong's translation, the translator uses the word "*it*" to connect the author's inner sadness with the weather in late autumn. The word "*hard*" shows that the author expresses her inner loneliness because of the influence of season and environmental factors on her mood. In Lin Yutang's translation, the first sentence is the relationship between the author's inner sadness and the weather in late autumn and the second sentence echoes with the original text. The strong contrast also highlights the author's inner sadness.

3.2 Situational Context

People's verbal communication is always carried out in a specific context. Situational context is represented by three variables: field, tenor, and mode, which constitute register variants (Qiu Yifan, Li Xiuying: 2021). In short, the field is "*what happened*". The field of the original text is a poem sung with regret after the poet experienced the tragic situation of the collapse of the country and family in her later years. In both Xu's and Lin's translations, it is a description of the poet's lament of the time, which is consistent with the original language field.

Secondly, from the perspective of discourse style, the status of a text and the function it performs in the context are often realized by different modes and rhetorical devices. Mode refers to whether the expression form of a text is oral or written, or a mixture of the two; Rhetorical devices refer to the effects that a text is committed to, such as preaching, criticism, and exclamation. The original text and the two versions of the English translation are expressed in the form of written language (small sentences), and the effect to be achieved is an exclamation. Therefore, the translations and the original text are consistent.

Finally, this paper makes a contrastive analysis from the dimension of discourse tenor. Tenor mainly involves the nature and identity of participants, that is, the types of roles played by participants in discourse and the relationship between participants. Through the comparison of the translations, it is found that Xu's translation is basically consistent with the tenor of the original text, while Lin's translation does not explain the identity of the poet the first time. The difference is mainly reflected in the first sentence. Xu Yuanchong translated it as "*I look for what I miss, / I know not what it is. / I feel so sad, so drear, / So lonely, without Cheer*". It can be found that Xu Yuanchong translated the identity of the poet as the first person "*I*". Lin translated this sentence as "*so dim, so dark, so dense, so dull, so damp, so dank, so dead*!". Although the seven "*so*" can reflect the characteristics of this sentence, they cannot directly reflect the identity of the writer. It may make readers confused and not know who is lamenting. However, in the following part, both Xu and Lin use the first person "*I*" when translating the poet's rhetorical questions, which is consistent with the tenor of the original text, but the degree of equivalence is different.

Therefore, although the registers of Xu's translation and Lin's translation are basically equivalent to the original text, the equivalence is slightly different in terms of the tenor.

3.3 Cultural Context

Cultural context refers to the social and cultural background, historical tradition, social psychology, values, and mode, as well as people's common understanding of nature, human society, and human thinking, that is, "*common sense*" (Jiang Jiansong and Peng Liyuan, 2006:73). Each text plays a communicative role in a specific social and cultural context, and people belonging to a specific cultural background can usually see its communicative purpose.

This kind of speech activity for a certain communicative purpose is called "*discourse genre*" in discourse analysis. If the communicative purpose is the same, the discourse genre is the same. Therefore, the style of the text reflects the context and the structure of the text, while the style of the text reflects the culture.

The following is a contrastive analysis of the original text and its two English translations from the perspective of the discourse genre. There are similarities and differences in the embodiment style and outline structure: in terms of embodiment style, Xu's translation and Lin's translation are basically equivalent to the embodiment style of the original text, both of which are questions and statements. In terms of rhetorical questions, Xu's translation and Lin's translation reconstruct the original text. The biggest difference lies in the first sentence. Xu translated it into a declarative sentence, while Lin translated it into a phrase. Secondly, in terms of outline structure, Xu's translation and Lin's translation are also equivalent to the original text.

4. Conclusion

Based on Halliday's functional context theory, this paper analyzes the transitivity process, register variants, and text genre of the two English versions of Li Qingzhao's "*Slow Slow Son*" (translated by Xu and Lin, respectively) from the three dimensions of co-text, situational context, and cultural context, focusing on the differences in language expression between the two versions. The results show that: (1) From the perspective of the transitivity process, Xu's translation is highly consistent with the original text, but the transitivity process types of Lin's translation have been adjusted; (2) In terms of register variants, Xu's translation and Lin's translation are basically consistent with the original text; (3) For the text genre, both Xu's and Lin's translations are consistent with the original genre.

From the above analysis, we can see that in the process of reconstructing the functional context of Song Ci, we should reconstruct the text genre from the cultural context; the register variables should be reconstructed from the situational context, that is, the discourse in the original Song Ci should be translated equally through the three variables of field, tenor and mode so as to produce a good translation; It is also necessary to reconstruct the textual coherence from the co-text to make the translation conform to the reading habits of English readers. In the process of the English translation of Song Ci, if we can reconstruct the translation context from three aspects of functional context to make it conform to not only the meaning of the original text but also the reading habits of the target language readers, we can promote the development of the English translation of Song Ci.

Conflict of Interest Statement

The authors declare that there is no conflict of interest.

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