

On the Representation of Three Beauty's in the Translation of Chinese Lyric Prose

YANG Ying¹

Abstract: Lyric prose centers on expressing the writer's thoughts and feelings toward real things. Rich in poetic flavor, the language of lyric prose has a strong aesthetic function besides transmitting meaning. From the aesthetic perspective, this paper points out that as an aesthetic practice, the translation of Chinese lyric prose should convey all levels of aesthetic properties. The beauty in sense, sound and form between the original and the version should be unified. In this way the target readers can appreciate the artistic features contained in lyric prose.

Key words: Lyric prose; Translation; "three beauty's"; Aesthetic properties

1. INTRODUCTION

According to Webster's New Collegiate Dictionary, "prose is a literary medium distinguished from poetry, esp. by its greater irregularity and variety of rhythm and its closer correspondence to the pattern of everyday speech." Prose, which has quite a long tradition in China, is a kind of language art to express one's thoughts and feelings. This is particularly true of lyric prose.

Prose translation is one part of literary translation. It aims at realizing the transference of the original beauty. The translation of lyric prose focuses on the principles of "three beauty's" advocated by Prof. XU Yuanchong, a master well known for his rhymed translations of Chinese poetry into English and French. The "three beauty's" refer to beauty in sense, beauty in form and beauty in sound, which should be transferred into the English version as far as possible. A desirable version ought to successfully reproduce the original beauty in sense, form and sound so as to bring the TL readers the same aesthetic experience as can be felt by the original readers.

2. STRIKING FEATURES OF LYRIC PROSE

Lyric prose generally refers to the one that lays special emphasis on expressing the writer's subjective feelings through the description of objective things. Intense feeling is the soul of lyric prose, which is "the spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings" (W. Wordsworth) and "the true voice of feeling" (John Keats). Characterized by its poetic language, lyric prose stresses the creation of artistic conception, artistic images and musical rhythms in order to arouse the reader's fertile imagination and bring about aesthetic feelings on the part of the reader. It can be embodied in the following five aspects:

¹ Yang Ying (1975-), female, lecturer, master. Address: School of International Education, Shandong Economic University, Erhuan Donglu#7366, Jinan, 250014, P. R. China. E-mail: ccyangying@126.com

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Firstly, the term “artistic conception” is especially applied to lyric prose. For lyric prose, poetic charm plays a predominant role. It comes from those people and events that can move the writer. Secondly, lyric prose can bring the reader visual enjoyment. Like painters, prose writers pour all their strong feelings and create bright-colored pictures that can arouse people’s rich imagination and aesthetic feelings. Thirdly, lyric prose can also bring about the beauty of harmonious sounds made by words, phrases or sentences. The devices of repetition and reduplication endow prose language with musical beauty. Fourthly, prose writers also lay stress on the dynamic description so that the pictures will look more vivid and lifelike. A properly used verb may be superior to many adjectives accumulated together. Finally, rhetorical devices like simile, metaphor, personification, etc. are equally of great importance to prose writers. Therefore, the use of various rhetorical devices can help to highlight the images in pictures.

3. FIRST THINGS TO BE CONSIDERED IN TRANSLATING LYRIC PROSE

Considered by many to be the founder of modern Chinese literature, LU Xun pointed out the artistic beauty of prose language includes three aspects—first, beauty in sense to make our heart moved; second, beauty in sound to move our ears; third, beauty in form to move our eyes. Prof. XU Yuanchong, applies what LU Xun said in the translation of Chinese poetry and puts forward his famous translation principles—“three beauty’s”. In the same way, his theory is also of great value in directing the translation of lyric prose.

By sense we mean the content expressed by language; by sound we mean tone, rhythm, melody, etc.; by form we refer to sentence length, parallelism in structure, etc. Therefore, first things to be considered in translating lyric prose are as follows: to preserve the original beauty in sense, to reproduce the original beauty in sound, and to recreate the original beauty in form.

3.1 Beauty in Sense

Among the three things, beauty in sense is the most important one in translating lyric prose. If a translation fails to transfer the original beauty in sense, it is devoid of aesthetic values no matter how hard it pursues beauty in sound or form. Beauty in sense is mainly embodied in the linguistic and cultural aspects. This requires that the translation correctly reproduce both the literal and the implicit meanings of words, phrases or even sentences in a proper way.

3.1.1 Properness in wording

Words are the basic units of composition. According to the features of lyric prose, the word chosen should fit the original circumstances. It can be said that properly chosen words can assist the reproduction of the artistic conception and, accordingly, of the original beauty in sense.

As an art of language, the transmission of the artistic conception in literary works mainly depends on word translation. ZhU Shenghao, a Chinese translator, once rendered “waters” into “碧水”, “the sun” into “麗日”, “驕陽”, and “her eyes” into “盈盈妙目” when he translated dramas of Shakespeare into Chinese. The modifiers in the Chinese version do not appear in the original, but they are implicit in the meaning of English word. In lyric prose, the frequent use of verbs and adjectives becomes a marked feature in diction because they are of vitality and can give vivid colors. Proper words in proper places reflect the aesthetic psychology of the Chinese people. One example of English-Chinese translation is as follows:

Original: A melody is heard, played upon a flute. It is small and fine, telling of grass and trees and the horizon. The curtain rises.

Version: 橫笛吹起, 優雅的旋律訴說著芳草、佳樹、天涯, 幕起。

“芳草”, “佳樹”, and “天涯” properly reproduce the graceful artistic conception in the original. In this example, if the three nouns are respectively translated into “草地”, “樹木” and “地平線”, the style features of the original sentence fail to be represented. It is the same with Chinese-English translation:

Original: 雪野中有血紅的寶竹山茶，白中隱青的單瓣梅花，深黃的磬口的臘梅花；雪下面還有冷綠的雜草。（魯迅《雪》）

Version: In the snowy wildness are blood-red camellias, pale, white plum blossom tinged with green, and the golden, bell-shaped flowers of the winter plum; while beneath the snow lurk cold green weeds. (Tr. YANG Xianyi & Gladys Yang)

The natural scenery depicted in the original text is full of rich and bright colors. Vividness features these color words endowed with image or synaesthesia. The translators fully comprehend the subtlety of each word and represent their respective trait during translation. “Blood-red”, “white tinged with green” and “cold green” are the result of literal translation so as to keep the unique visual effect. “深黃” is rendered into “golden” so that the original bright-colored impact is vividly embodied, presenting the target readers the same striking visual effect as the original does.

3.1.2 Figurative meaning

To achieve the “three beauty’s”, prose writers often make skillful use of words or expressions rich in figurative meaning to create attractive and touching images. CHEN Shuhua (1990) states that many images, but by no means all, are conveyed by figurative language, therefrom, we have various kinds of imagery figures like simile, metaphor, metonymy, personification, etc. Figures of speech that frequently appear in lyric prose can greatly enhance the beauty in sense.

First, simile used equally common in prose and poetry means that one thing is likened to another in such an imaginative way as to clarify and enhance an image. To reproduce the original figurative meaning, a translator can just adopt literal translation.

Original: 而兩三木船，卻齊整的搖動著兩排木槳，象鳥兒扇動著翅膀，正在逆流而上。（劉白羽《長江三日》）

Version: Two or three junks work their way upstream against the current, their two rows of rhythmically moving oars reminiscent of the wings of birds. (CLP: A Retrospective of Chinese Literature)

In the original, “齊整的搖動著兩排木槳” is compared to “鳥兒扇動著翅膀” since the actions of the two objects are quite similar. The version uses the phrase “reminiscent of” instead of the word “like”, giving more prominence to association and imagination.

Second, a proper metaphor can both enrich the connotation and increase the aesthetic meaning of works. Lyric prose writings usually impress us with metaphorical images. If metaphorical meanings are appropriately transferred, the artistic appeal in the translated work will surely be enhanced.

Original: 江南的雪，可是滋潤美艷之至了；那是還在隱約著的青春的消息，是極壯健的處子的皮膚。（魯迅《雪》）

Version: The snow south of the Yangtze is extremely moist and pretty, like the first indefinable intimation of spring, or *the bloom of a young girl radiant with health*. (Tr. YANG Xianyi & Gladys Yang)

LU Xun is highly sensitive to the beauty of language by choosing the words that are original and lively, full of strong artistic appeal. The translators take great pains to select their counterparts in English, which are equivalent both in meaning and in spirit. The adjective “radiant” in the version has two meanings: “sending out light” and “bright, showing joy or love”, so it is appropriate to describe the bright snow as well as the young girl. Besides, “皮膚” is translated into the word “bloom” because it reminds the TL readers of the best or happiest time when one is young. The general word “skin”, however, cannot reveal the figurative meaning implied in it.

Personification is actually one variety of metaphor for it compares the nonhuman to the human and endows nonhuman entities with human characteristics. It also has such functions as beautifying prose language, adding vividness and arousing people’s association, impressing the reader with rich figurative meaning.

Original: 有的松樹望穿秋水，不見你來，獨自上到高處，斜著身子張望。有的松樹像一頂墨綠大傘，支開了等你。有的松樹自得其樂，顯出一副瀟灑的模樣。（李健吾《雨中登泰山》）

Version: Some of these noble trees grew out at an angle from the mountainside, as if leaning out to gaze down; some awaited travelers like great dark green umbrellas; some seemed exultant, glorying in their strength.

This paragraph employs several figures of speech, among which personification is the most striking. The writer describes the various postures of the pine trees on Mount Tai by means of personification. The pine trees under description are endowed with human qualities, and the personalization makes the static pine trees full of imagery and dynamic beauty, presenting us a vivid and lively picture.

In the above examples, the translators basically adopt literal translation and at the same time, they tend to choose active verbs to enliven the inanimate objects. The translator is duty-bound to reproduce the original beauty in sense and help the TL readers get the same pleasure and enlightenment as the original readers.

3.2 Beauty in Sound

Music is the soul of all kinds of art like poetry, dance, drama, painting or architecture, and prose is no exception. Musicality or beauty in sound means an aesthetic feeling engendered by the language of lyric prose that reads smooth and sounds sweet and harmonious. The musicality of language is mainly reflected in tone, rhythm, melody and so on. Lyric prose writers attach much importance to these aspects because they believe that good articles can make people willing to read as well as willing to listen to.

3.2.1 Modulation in tone

Language varies in tone regularly, which gives birth to harmonious beauty in tone. Chinese is a tone language. There exist alliterative compound and rhyming compound peculiar to Chinese. The former refers to a compound consisting of two syllables with the same initial consonant; e.g. “踟躕” (chichu), “參差” (cenci), while the latter a compound consisting of two syllables that rhyme with one another; e.g. “徘徊” (paihuai), “宛轉” (wanzhuàn). If a writer is careful in alternating words of alliterative compound with those of rhyming compound, he can achieve harmonious tones and hence, musicality of language. For example:

Original: 黯淡的水光，像夢一般；那偶然閃爍著的光芒，就是夢的眼睛了。（朱自清《槳聲燈影裏的秦淮河》）

Version: The dim water seemed to be a dream, the occasionally glittering ripples the eyes of the dream.

In this sentence, “黯淡” (andan) and “光芒” (guangmang) are words of rhyming compound; “閃爍” (shanshuo) is an alliterative compound. The alternation of these words increases the harmonious beauty of the original. Since these disyllables in special forms are peculiar to Chinese, readers may find it difficult to feel the same beauty in sound in the translated text, but /i/, /l/, and /r/ in the words “dim”, “glittering” and “ripples” help the readers better understand the original musicality.

What is more, the mildness of speech sounds is another important means to help create the modulation in tone. The frequently used method is reduplication, which involves repetition of words to form a word group. In this way, monosyllable is sometimes extended into disyllable, or disyllable into quadrisyllable. In terms of its word form and expressive effect, reduplication is peculiar to the Chinese language too. It is characterized by tuneful sound, clear rhythm and harmonious cadence. For instance:

Original: 牆裏常是人家的竹園，修竹森森，天籟細細；春來時還常有幾枝嬌豔的桃花杏花，娉娉婷婷，從牆頭殷勤地搖曳紅袖，向行人招手。（柯靈《巷》）

Version: Inside the walls are residents' gardens with dense groves of tall bamboos as well as soft sounds of nature. In spring, beautiful peach and apricot blossoms atop the walls, like graceful girls waving their red sleeves, will sway hospitably to beckon the pedestrians. (Tr. ZHANG Peiji)

The formation of words and collocation of syllables in English are completely different from those of Chinese. It is not as necessary to add such structural composition to English words as it is to Chinese in order to create sound effect. The common practice in translation is to transfer their meanings only, so the original beauty in sound may get lost during translation. In the version, “soft sounds” form the English alliteration. Similarly, if “graceful” was changed into “slim and supple”, the target readers would better appreciate the musicality in the original text.

3.2.2 Repetition

To create the musicality of prose language, it is absolutely necessary to use the strongly accented rhythms. “Repetition is the essence of rhythm. In prose, rhythm is produced by the repetition—always with some variation possible—of patterns of stressed and unstressed words” (Kreuzer & Cogan, 1966. p. 308). From the perspective of stylistic effect, repetition is frequently used in Chinese with the purpose of adding force and emphasis to the repeated items or increasing readability. For example:

Original: 秦淮河裏的船，比北京萬生園，頤和園的船好，比西湖的船好，比揚州瘦西湖的船也好。這幾處的船不是覺著笨，就是覺著簡陋，局促；都不能引起遊客們的情韻，如秦淮河的船一樣。秦淮河的船約略可分為兩種……（朱自清《槳聲燈影裏的秦淮河》）

Version: *The ships* on the Qinhuai are better than *those* in Beijing’s Myriad-Creature Garden and Summer Palaces and Hangzhou’s West Lake, better even than *those* on Yangzhou’s Shouxi Lake. The *vessels* in those places are either clumsy or crude and cramped, less inviting than *those* on the Qinhuai, *which* fall roughly into two categories...

Comparing these two paragraphs, one can easily find the difference between Chinese and English. The word “船” in the Chinese text appears for seven times without clumsiness. This adds emphasis to the repeated item and helps to form the accented rhythms. While in the English version, the word “ships” only appears once when it is mentioned for the first time and the others are substituted by the pronoun “those”, the relative pronoun “which” or its synonym “vessels”. Therefore, it can be said that the English sentences attempt to avoid repetition. Substitution is another way to deal with repetition in English translation, but the original musicality will sometimes be greatly affected at the same time.

3.3 Beauty in Form

The formal beauty of prose language is an essential component in prose aesthetics because the appropriate form can help convey the writer’s feelings accurately and completely. Generally, the formal beauty of prose language mainly consists in beauty of orderliness and beauty of irregularity. The alternation of some regular structures and irregular ones can produce a sense of harmonious beauty. The former is achieved by antithetical or parallel structures while the latter by variations of sentence length.

3.3.1 Antithesis

The term antithesis applies to a kind of parallelism that repeats structure not to stress similarity but to stress contrast. Antithesis is the deliberate arrangement of words of contrasting meaning in balanced structural forms to achieve force and emphasis. Prose writers often resort to this phonological figure, by means of which, they can express the opposite ideas in a symmetrical way. Example 1:

Original: 沉默呵，沉默呵！不在沉默中爆發，就在沉默中滅亡。（魯迅《紀念劉和珍君》）

Version: Silence, silence! Unless we burst out, we shall perish in this silence!

In the original, LU Xun uses both repetition and antithesis. The former indicates his resentment against being silent while the latter tells people his attitude toward this problem. Both of the two methods impress the reader with the symmetrical beauty in form together with the rhythmical beauty in sound. Here the translator adopts free translation to represent the original meaning, leaving beauty in sound and form to the

position of secondary importance. It is reasonable to do like this if the “three beauty’s” cannot be realized at the same time. Example 2 :

Original: 只要流傳的便是好文學，只要消滅的便是壞文學；搶得天下的便是王，搶不到天下的便是賊。（《文學和出汗》）

Version: Whatever lives is good literature, whatever dies is bad. Whoever seizes the world is a king, whoever fails is a bandit.

In the original, the antithesis pattern in the two clauses is used to display the prejudice of some people. The English version scrupulously adheres to this pattern of the original, so both the content and the form present the TL readers a kind of symmetrical beauty.

3.3.2 Parallelism

A parallel series of more than three terms can achieve striking formal beauty as well as strong power through the persistent regularity of its rhythm. Parallelism is a device of balance. The balance can run from sentence to sentence through an entire passage, controlled not only by connectives repeated in parallel, but by phrases and sentences so repeated, as in the following example:

Original: Reading maketh a full man; conference a ready man; and writing an exact man. And therefore, if a man write little, he had need have a great memory; if he confer little, he had need have a present wit; and if he read little, he had need have much cunning. (Francis Bacon, *Of Studies*)

Version: 讀書使人充實，討論使人機智，筆記使人準確。因此不常作筆記者須記憶特強，不常討論者須天生聰穎，不常讀書者須欺世有術。(Tr. WANG Zuoliang)

Of Studies written by Bacon is characterized by parallelism running through the whole passage, the most striking stylistic feature. The Chinese translation successfully keeps the original feature by using the similar parallel structures. In this way, not only can the original formal feature be reflected, but also the cadenced beauty in Chinese is given prominence to. Therefore, one can say that the version perfectly reproduces the original beauty in form and sound besides accurately transferring the original meaning.

3.3.3 Sentence length

Too much of anything can wind up being a bore. And too many sentences of the same size and structure can lead to boring prose, even when the content is far from boring. The simple strategy of inserting some short sentences into longer ones or vice versa is one of the most effective methods to achieve a pleasurable and forceful variety in the sentences.

Generally speaking, short sentences are clear and forceful, expressing one’s nervous, excited or uneasy feelings; on the contrary, long sentences sound fairly mild and smooth, indicating one’s calm, unruffled or contented sentiments. Prose writers pay much attention to the alternation of long and short sentences in order to create the beauty of irregularity and form distinct rhythms. For example:

Original: 在它的途中，它也曾發射出種種的水花，這裏面有愛，有恨，有歡樂，也有痛苦。這一切造成了奔騰的一股激流，具著排山之勢，向著唯一的海流去。（巴金《〈激流〉總序》）

Version: While on its way, it sometimes throws clouds of spray into the air embodying love and hate, and happiness and sorrow. All that makes up the tumultuous torrent rushing with terrific force toward the only sea. (Tr. ZHANG Peiji)

In the source text, long sentences are interlaced with short ones. As a result of the alternation of long and short sentences, the tone of the original sentence is changeable, pressing one moment and mild the next. Moreover, the formal beauty of irregularity brings out rhythmical beauty. The English version is also remarkable for different lengths of clauses and accented rhythms. The changing rhythms make us feel the momentum of the torrent.

4. CONCLUSION

Lyric prose, is an art of language to express one's thoughts and feelings. Undoubtedly, the translation of lyric prose is also an art of turning one language into another. The "three beauty's" are first things that the translator should bear in mind when translating lyric prose, however, they are not of equal importance. Beauty in sense must always be placed first. A translation, faithful to the original content but incapable of representing the "three beauty's", is by no means successful or desirable.

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