

Reconstruction of Ecological Value in Translating Traditional Chinese Poetry: A Case Study of Li Bai's Poem

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Abstract

A good reconstruction of ecological value promotes the reception and transmission of translations of traditional Chinese poetry, especially when it is influenced by Taoism. From the perspective of ecological discourse analysis, this paper uses three analysis systems in systemic functional linguistics (SFL), including transitivity system, appraisal system and theme system, and explores the reconstruction of ecological value in the two selected English translations of Li Bai's poem, *Calling on a Taoist in Daitian Mountain Without Meeting Him*. We compare translations by Xu Yuanhong and Charles Budd to explore the characteristics of each version, delineating implications for traditional Chinese poetry translation more generally. Three significant conclusions are summarized. Firstly, translators could reconstruct ecological value in the source text by personifying or animalizing the non-human participants of each clause. Secondly, if the appraisal resources in the source text are positive, corresponding appraisal resources should also be rendered properly rather than be omitted randomly. Thirdly, translators should use more non-human organisms and environment elements, instead of human elements, as the themes to weaken human-centeredness.

Key words: Ecological discourse analysis; Ecological value; Traditional Chinese poetry; Li Bai

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1. INTRODUCTION

Taoism is used to probe the relationship among nature, society and human. And the research on Li Bai's thoughts mainly focuses on two aspects: Taoism and Confucianism (Guo Tangbao, 2002). His poem, *Calling on a Taoist in Daitian Mountain Without Meeting Him*, is all about Li Bai's experience of calling on a Taoist in Daitian Mountain, a place where the Taoist rites were performed at that time. It reflects the aesthetic and ecological ideas of Taoism, such as the unity of heaven and man, returning to simplicity and returning to the truth, emptiness and tranquility, and the inaction of nature (Jiao Aidi, 2009). Therefore, when evaluating the translation quality of this poem, it is essential to attach importance to the reconstruction of Taoist thoughts of ecological value. Li Bai's poetry have drawn many sinologists' attention and have been translated into many different English versions. However, in the past decades, no research has been done on the English translation of Li Bai's poems from ecological perspective. In response, based on the theory of ecological discourse analysis (EDA), this paper makes a comparative study of the translations of *Calling on a Taoist in Daitian Mountain Without Meeting Him*, examining how the two translations have achieved the reconstruction of the ecological culture stored in the source text (ST).

2. THEORETICAL BASIS

To clearly figure out EDA, we should first shed light on the concept "ecolinguistics". Haugen (1972) holds that ecolinguistics is a discipline that explores the interaction between language and environment. Alexander and Stibbe (2014) define that "ecolinguistics is the study of the impact of language on the life-sustaining relationships among humans, other organisms and the physical environment". EDA, a branch of ecolinguistics, aims to

explain how discourse constructs the relationship between human beings and ecosystem, and therefore reveals the underlying ecological value and ideology through discourse analysis. Recently, EDA has also been applied in translation studies.

2.1 EDA

This paper adopts the analysis structure proposed by He Wei and Zhang Ruijie (2017). They combine ecological philosophy with Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL) to construct a feasible ecological discourse analysis model for ecological discourse analysis.

2.1.1 Transitivity System

Transitivity system describes whole clauses, not just verbs and their objects (Thompson, 2000).

Halliday (1978) has stated that the transitivity system interprets world experience as a series of processes, including three semantic categories: participants by a noun group, a process by a verb phrase, and circumstances by an adverbial or prepositional phrase. Process is the key element of the transitivity system. Halliday (1994) proposed three main processes, that is, material process, relationship process and mental process, and three secondary processes: behavioral process, verbal process, and existential process.

Figure 1 shows the concrete classification of participants in each kinds of clauses proposed by Halliday.

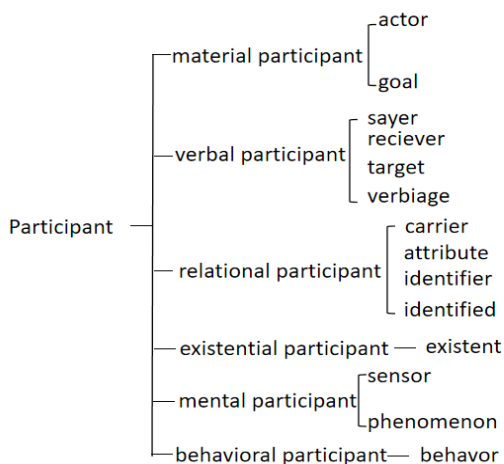


Figure 1
The classification of participants in different types of clauses proposed by Halliday (2000)

He and Zhang (2017) believes that the “delicacy” of transitivity system could be further improved. In order to highlight the ecological value of each participant and reflect the ecological value of clauses, we need to further refine the semantic roles in the transitivity system. And thus agent can be further subdivided into five types as shown in Figure 2.

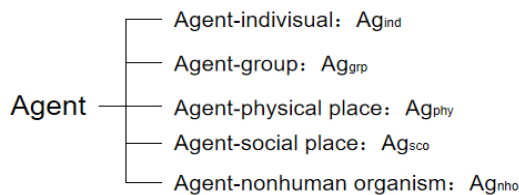


Figure 2
The classification of agent in transitivity proposed by He & Zhang (2017)

They also point out that the original meaning expressed by the transitivity system can be referred to as surface meaning, while its implicit ecological orientation is referred to as deep meaning. When conducting discourse analysis, the description of the process should include two steps: firstly, the process types should be classified to determine its surface meaning of the clause; secondly, based on the roles of participants, the ecological orientation of the clause should be determined to explore its deep meaning.

2.1.2 Appraisal System

Appraisal system is the development of interpersonal metafunction in SFL, mainly studying how speakers or authors express their subjective attitudes through language. Martin and White (2005) have identified three major systems for constructing language user positions, namely the attitude, engagement, and gradation. Martin (2000) has argued that it is in fact possible to group the types of values that we draw on in appraisal into a small number of categories of attitude: affect, judgement and appreciation, each of them can be positive and negative.

Affect is in a sense the most natural way of talking about how we feel about things. Affect focuses on the feelings of the appraiser, while the judgement and appreciation focus on the qualities of the appraised. From the perspective of ecolinguistics, appraisal system can also convey the speaker’s ecological views and classify them positively or negatively (He & Zhang, 2019).

2.1.3 Theme System

From the perspective of ecolinguistics, theme, as the starting point of a clause, usually represents general and self-evident background information. Therefore, when describing an event, the choice of theme can reflect different ecological orientations. It is necessary for us to pay more attention to non-human elements, enhance their existence in discourse, use them more as starting points for topics, and spread ecological protection awareness as much as possible (He & Zhang, 2019).

2.2 Application of EDA in Translation Study

Actually, appraisal system, a part of EDA, has been applied in translation studies early. By applying appraisal system, we can analyze the overall and local attitudes of the ST from different levels and perspectives, and also evaluate the translation by analyzing and comparing the attitudes in the ST and target text (TT) (Zhang, 2007).

As the structure of EDA is proposed more lately, only a few papers has applied it in translation studies. An examination of the papers in translation studies from the perspective of EDA included in China National Knowledge Infrastructure indicates that most of them focus on the translation studies of traditional Chinese poetry.

3. ANALYSIS

This paper attempts to make an EDA of the two selected English versions and the ST, on the one hand, to reveal how the ST reflects the poet's ecological value of "harmony between man and nature". On the other hand, it makes a comparative analysis of the differences in the two English versions.

3.1 Transitivity System

The author will make a detailed analysis from the perspective of transitivity system and make a comparison of the two selected translations in relation to their ecological value.

3.1.1 The First Part of the Poem

The first part of the poem is "犬吠水声中,桃花带露浓". And table 1 is its analysis from transitivity system.

Table 1
The transitivity system of the first part of the poem

Translator	Process	Participant	Circumstance
Xu	Material: are muffled	Actor: the rippling brook Goal: dogs' barks	
	Material: (were) tinged	Goal: peach blossoms	with dew, much redder look
Budd	Mental: hear	Senser: I Phenomenon: the distant baying of the hound	waters murmuring around
	Mental: see	Senser: I Phenomenon: peach-flowers	bearing crystal rain

The first part of the ST is both material processes. In terms of transitivity, Xu adopts material processes to render them. And he personifies the stream [Agnho] as something alive that has the ability to muffle the sound, reconstructing the ecological value stored in ST.

Budd uses mental processes, with an actor of "I [Agind]", who do nothing bad to destroy the place or hurt the non-human organisms. He takes "水声" and "带露浓" as circumstance and his translations are "waters murmuring around" and "bearing crystal rain", regarding "waters" and "peach flowers" as a human being that can say something or bear something. Both these translations can express the original poet's subjective love for "waters" and "peach flowers", which indicates the positive ecological value in the ST. Therefore, it cannot only

reflect the poet's positive evaluation of the environment, but also highlight the positive ecological significance of the poetry.

Therefore, the two English versions all do well in reconstructing the ecological significance in the deep meaning and express the concept of "harmony between human and nature".

3.1.2 The Second Part of the Poem

The second part of this poem is "树深时见鹿,溪午不闻钟". And table 2 is its analysis from transitivity system.

Table 2
The transitivity of the second part of the poem

Translator	Process	Participant	Circumstance
Xu	Mental: is seen	Phenomenon: a deer in the thick woods Senser: I	at times
	Mental: hear	Phenomenon: no noonday chimes	along the stream
Budd	Mental: see	Senser: I Phenomenon: sportive deer	around the forest fane
	Mental: hear	Senser: I Phenomenon: no noontide bell	

We can see the the first two processes in ST is mental processes. Xu also uses mental processes to render them. In his translation, the senser is "I[Agind]" who see and hear the deer[Agnho] and chimes[Agnho], but "I" don't do anything harmful to the non-human organisms, which shows that the poet only wants to admire the beauty of his surroundings and that he respects the balance between human and non-human world.

When translating this part, Budd does the same as Xu. He chooses mental processes to correspond to the ST.

Therefore, Xu and Budd's translation accords with the surface meaning of the original text, and both express the poet's thought in its deep meaning.

3.1.3 The Third Part of the Poem

The original text of this part is "野竹分青霭,飞泉挂碧峰". And table 3 is its analysis from transitivity system.

Table 3
The transitivity of the third part of the poem

Translator	Process	Participant	Circumstance
Xu	Material: divide	Actor: wild bamboos Goal: blue haze	
	Material: hang on	Actor: tumbling cascades Goal: green mountainside.	
Budd	Material: aspire	Actor: the waving tops of the bamboo groves	
	Material: tire	Actor: the clouds	in fleeting change
	Material: fall in	Actor: the sparkling cascades	in fairy rills

The first process above in the ST is material process. Xu translates “分” into “divide”. He renders it correctly according to its surface meaning, but fails to construct the deep meaning, ecological value, in his translation. This clause is rendered into two clauses in Budd’s translation. “Bamboo groves[Agnho]” and “the clouds[Agnho]” are regarded as human beings who have the ability to aspire and tire, through which conveys the poet’s love for the bamboo groves and the clouds and a more positive ecological significance.

The second clause of the ST is a material process, and both of the translations use “hang on” or “fall in” to correspond to that. Actually, by using “tumbling” and “fall in”, the two translators can give the target readers a sense of dynamic beauty of the cascades.

Therefore, in this part, Budd gives us a better translation that can not only convey a more positive ecological significance but also accord with the ecological pursuit of Li Bai.

3.1.4 The Last Part of the Poem

The original text of this part is “无人知所去,愁倚两三松”. And table 4 is its analysis from transitivity system.

Table 4
The transitivity of the last part of the poem

Translator	Process	Participant	Circumstance
Xu	Verbal: can tell	Sayer: none Receiver: me	where the Taoist gone
	Material: lean on	Actor: I Goal: this or that pine tree	saddened
Budd	Relational: is	Carrier: the temple Attribute: empty	
	Material: has gone	Actor: the priest	
	Material: list	Actor: I	in vain
	Material: was left	Goal: I	to mourn my grief alone.

The first clause above in the ST is verbal process. Budd doesn’t notice that, and he render this clause with two clauses. One is relational process and the other one is material clause, both of which have different meaning with the ST. So his translation is not appropriate if seen from the surface meaning. Xu uses the verbal process to translate this clause, and express a correct surface meaning of this sentence.

The latter clause in ST is material process. Both of the two selected translations use material process, but Budd translates “倚两棵松” into “I was left”, which doesn’t express the surface meaning of the ST.

Therefore, of the two translations above, the Xu’s translation is more suitable.

3.1.5 Overview of Transitivity System

After analyzing the two selected English versions in detail, an overall analysis of transitivity system is conducted below, including the ST and the two selected English versions. Figure 3 is their application of all processes.

Figure 3 makes it clear that the process types of clauses are mostly material processes in the ST and the two selected versions. In Xu’s translation, the actors in material process are “rippling brook”, “wild bamboos”, “tumbling cascades”, “none”, “I”. We can see the former three actors are Agnho, through which a beautiful picture of Daitian Mountain is depicted. The latter two are Agind, illustrating the empty temple and “my” sad feeling. Same as Xu, Budd also uses “bamboo groves”, “clouds”, “sparking cascades” to depict the scenery of Daitian Mountain. And two Agnho, “priest”, “I”, to describe the temple is empty and “I” am sad.

Though using more mental processes, Budd tries his best to adopt 4 personifications (murmur, bear, aspire, tire) to give the non-human organisms the ability to perceive the world, reconstructing a better ecological value. However, Budd fails to convey the surface meaning correctly in the last part of the poem.

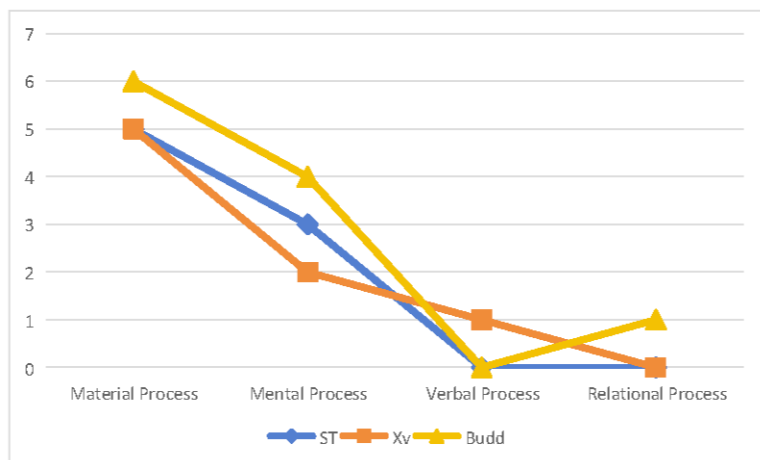


Figure 3
Types of transitivity processes

3.2 Appraisal System

In the ST, only one word, “愁”, belongs to affect, while “浓”, “深”, “飞”, “碧”, “野” belongs to appreciation. However, there is no judgement in this poem.

Table 5
The affect and appreciation in ST and TT

	ST	Xu's translation	Budd's translation
Affect	愁	Saddened	Morn my greif
	浓	Much redder look	
Appreciation	深	Thick	
	飞	Tumbling	Sparkling
	碧	Green	Emerald
	野	Wild	Waving

Table 5 clearly shows that all these appreciation resources are used to modify these non-human organisms, and all of them are positive. Xu renders all the appreciation resources each by each, but Budd omits some of them. In Xu's translation, these appreciation resources are properly rendered, depicting the beautiful scenery of Daitian Mountain. Budd's omission of these appreciation resources cannot help the target readers understand what those non-human organisms look like, so his translation cannot convey the positive ecological value stored in the ST. Meantime, Budd has added some other appreciation resources, and they are presented in Table 6.

Table 6
Added appreciation resources by Budd

ST	Added appreciation resources
犬吠	Distant
露	Crystal
鹿	Sportive

By putting these positive appraisal resources on these non-human organisms, we could conclude that Budd tries to use more vivid adjectives to make Daitian Mountain more beautiful. But this kind of addition makes his translation not appropriate if seen from the surface meaning of these clauses.

3.3 Theme System

By analyzing the themes of the two translations (excluding prepositions and articles), the following two sets of theme distribution cloud maps are generated. In Xu's translation, each organism appears once, and only one of them is a human element, while the rest are place elements and nature elements. This kind of theme distribution indicates the author's full attention to the places where people live and various nature elements around, and promotes a positive view of ecological values. “I”, one of the theme in Budd's translation, has appeared four times. If “I” is used as the starting point too much, from the perspective of ecolinguistics, it

will reflect a strong human-centeredness and should be avoided. Therefore, from the analysis of theme system, Xu's translation can better reflect the ecological value of the ST.

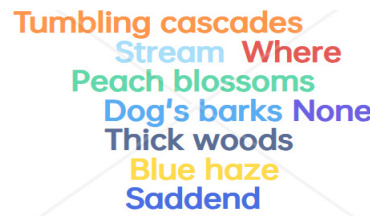


Figure 4
Theme distribution cloud map of Xu's translation



Figure 5
Theme distribution cloud map of Budd's translation

4. CONCLUSION

Through comparative analysis, it can be concluded that Xu Yuancong's translation has the following characteristics. In terms of transitivity system, the surface meaning of each clause is more in line with the ST, and his translation also strives to express the original poet's idea of the unity of heaven and man, and respect for nature. In his translation, the alternation of human and non-human organisms and places achieves a harmonious ecological view. In terms of appraisal system, due to the positive attitude resources used in the ST, corresponding attitude resources are also adopted by Xu to depict the positive description of the non-human elements in the TT. In terms of theme system, Xu tries his best to avoid using human elements as the themes, reflecting his full attention to non-human organisms and environment factors.

The translation of Budd tends to personify and animalize the participants of each clause, which is superior in reconstructing ecological value of ST. However, Budd fails to express some of the surface meaning of ST. In terms of the appraisal system, Budd's translation omits some attitude resources, which cannot convey the poet's attitude towards nature. In terms of the distribution of themes, Budd uses too many human elements as the themes, conveying a self-centered ecological value orientation.

This study has implications for the English translation of traditional Chinese poetry. EDA will help us understand the ecological value stored in the ST better in terms of the text's meaning and the poet's

thought. Therefore, this study must be of some value for the transmission of traditional Chinese poetry and enhance people's yearning for nature and cultivate their environmental awareness.

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