

An Experiential Metafunctional Analysis of Poetry in Song Dynasty ---- Take *Ru Meng Ling* as an Example

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Abstract

This paper is based on the experiential metafunction of Halliday's systemic functional linguistics, including material process, mental process, relational process, verbal process, behavioural process and existential process. It is an aim to study the poem "Ru Meng Ling" written by Li Qingzhao and four English versions from the perspective of experiential metafunction in systemic functional linguistics. It starts with a brief introduction of experiential metafunction; then, it analyses the experiential metafunction in original poem. Next, it compares with the experiential metafunction of these four English versions. Finally, it comes to a conclusion. At the same time, it aims to explore the feasibility of systemic functional linguistics in discourse analysis and translation by studying Chinese poetry, and try to provide a new way for the analysis of Chinese poetry translation.

Keywords: *Ru Meng Ling* translation; Li Qingzhao; systemic functional linguistics; experiential metafunction

1. Introduction

Li Qingzhao is a well-known poet in Song Dynasty in China. Although her poems are not famous in quantity, they all wide spread at home and abroad. And her achievements are quite high. In her early years, she mainly described her private life and girl's fantasy. *Ru Meng Ling* is one of her masterpieces at that time. The words express the feelings of the girl during bloom and fading. At the end of *Ru Meng Ling*, the sentence "应是绿肥红瘦" is marvelous and well praised. English version of Chinese poetry is very popular in recent years. There are many related theories about Chinese-English translation, but the standard of English translation of ancient poetry should be in line with "Three Beauty Theory" proposed by Xu Yuancong (1979a, 1979b, 1987, and 1990), that is, beauty of meaning, sound and form. According to this standard, some are in favor of it, while others are against it. It seems that the standard of English translation of ancient poetry cannot be unified (Huang, 2002).

At the same time, most of the comments on the English versions of ancient poetry focus on literary criticism and literary translation. As one of the leading linguistic schools, systemic functional linguistics has been applied to various fields of language research and has achieved fruitful results. However, on the whole, the use of systemic functional linguistics to study the translation of Chinese classical poetry is relatively rare (Huang, 2007:1). Therefore, this paper employs the framework of systemic functional linguistics proposed by Halliday in 1994, and makes an analysis of experiential metafunction on four versions of *Ru Meng Ling*.

2. Theoretical Framework

In the middle of the 20th century, linguistic schools developed rapidly. Among them, the systemic functional linguistics represented by British linguists quickly developed. Halliday (2004) divided the metafunction of language into three kinds, namely, ideational metafunction, interpersonal metafunction and textual metafunction. Experiential metafunction and logical metafunction consists of ideational metafunction. In functional linguistics, experiential metafunction refers to the use of language to talk about our experience of the world (Thompson, 2008), in other words, to reflect what happens in the objective world and the subjective world, the people and things involved, and the time associated with it (Hu, 2012). The experiential metafunction includes multiple semantic systems, and the most important of which is transitivity system. Its role is to express people's experience of the real world and the inner world in several processes, and to indicate the participants and circumstances involved in these processes.

Halliday (1994) defines six processes that is, material process, mental process, relational process, verbal process, behavioral process and existential process. Material process represents the process of acting. The process is often represented by dynamic verbs; mental process represents the process of mental activity such as "feeling", "reaction" and "cognition"; the relational process reflects the relationship between things.

It can be divided into "attributive" and "identifying"; the behavioral process represents psychological activities such as breathing, coughing, sighing, dreaming, crying and laughing; the verbal process refers to the process of exchanging information through words; existential process is the process of indicating the existence of something.

3. An experiential metafunctional analysis of *Ru Meng Ling*

In order to facilitate the comparison with the English versions, this paper firstly analyzes the transitivity of the original poem, which is shown in Table 1:

Table 1 An experiential metafunctional analysis of *Ru Meng Ling*

Original Poem	Original Translation	Transitivity
(1) 昨夜雨疏风骤	昨夜虽然雨小但风猛急	behavioral process
(2) 浓睡不消残酒	我沉睡一宿翌日酒劲尚存	material process
(3) 试问卷帘人	想要问卷帘的侍女海棠花现状	mental process
(4) 却道海棠依旧	她却说海棠花开如昨日之景	verbal process
(5) 知否，知否？	你可知道，你可知道？	mental process
(6) 应是绿肥红瘦	现在该是绿叶繁茂，红花稀少	relational process

In the case of experiential metafunctional analysis, once the processes are determined, the participants as well as circumstances are determined at once (Huang, 2002a). Detailed analysis of the transitivity of the original poem is elaborated below.

Sentence one is behavioral process. “昨夜” is the circumstance, “雨疏风骤” is the process. However, “雨” and “风” can also be recognized as the process, while “疏” and “骤” as the complements. In sentence 2, the actor “我” is ignored; the verb “睡” and “不消” are both material processes; “酒” is the goal, “浓” and “残” are both circumstances, expressing the extent of “睡” and “酒”. Sentence 3 is mental process, which is displayed by the word “试问”. The word “试问” shows the author's ambivalence. Among them, the senser "I" is implicit, but it can be seen from the above. “卷帘人” is the phenomenon. In sentence four, the word “道” expresses the verbal process. The sayer must be the “卷帘人”, which is hidden, and receiver should be the asker “我”; and “海棠依旧” is the verbiage. Sentence five is mental process. The repeated use of the word “知否” is the process, and the senser “你” is hidden. This sentence is also a direct quotation, which is also verbiage. On one hand, it is a reflection on the answer of the maid; on the other hand, it is also a kind of self-talking, expressing the author's love to blossom. In sentence six, “是” is the process, “绿” and “红” are carrier; “肥” and “瘦” are attribute. In the end, the author equalizes herself as flowers, which expresses her love of spring along with her sadness for the aging.

Before analyzing the English version of *Ru Meng Ling*, we have to pay attention to several questions, which are the key notes to the translation.

- (1) How can we understand the word “试问”? Why does the author ask the curtain-drawer about the crab-apple tree?
- (2) How does “却” reflect the attitude of the curtain-drawer?
- (3) Why does the author employ the word “知否” twice?
- (4) How can we explain the word “应是”?
- (5) Why does the author adopt the phrase “绿肥红瘦” instead of “叶繁花稀”?

With these questions, combined with the four English versions below, we can better analyze *Ru Meng Ling*, with an aim to explore the most sophisticated translation that can express the essence of the original poem.

4. An experiential metafunctional analysis of Translation on *Ru Meng Ling*

This paper has collected four English versions of *Ru Meng Ling* (see appendix), which are: Xu Yuancong's translation (Xu's translation), Yang Xianyi and Dai Naidie's translation (Yang's translation), Wang Shouyi and John·Neuffer's translation (Wang's translation) and Xu Zhongjie translation (Xu Zhongjie's translation). We will conduct an experiential metafunctional analysis on these four versions as follow.

4.1 An experiential metafunctional analysis of “昨夜雨疏风骤”

In order to facilitate the comparison, this paper compares and analyzes each sentence of the four translations. Table 2 is the experiential metafunctional analysis of the translation of the first sentence.

Table 2 An experiential metafunctional analysis of “昨夜雨疏风骤”

Translator	Transitivity	Participants	Circumstances
XuYuanchong	relational process: was	carrier: the wind, rain	time : last night; attribute: strong, fine
YangXianyi& Dai Naidie	relational process: was	carrier: the rain, the wind	time : last night; attribute: light, fierce
Wang Shouyi&John·Neuffer	behavioral process: rained material process: blew	actor: the wind	time : last night; method: hardly, like crazy
XuZhongjie	relational process: was		time : last night; attribute: windy method: with intermittent rain

After the analysis of transitivity on the four versions, the processes, the participants, as well as the circumstances of each translation are discussed in detail below.

(1) Processes and participants

Focusing on the type of process, three of the four versions have chosen the relational process (see Xu's version, Yang's version and XuZhongjie's version). The process is "was", using a modified relational process to directly describe the weather. XuYuanchong and Yang literally translated the original carrier as "the wind" and "the rain", keeping in line with the original poem, which is easy to understand. XuZhongjie takes the form of no participants. The former part of Wang's version is the behavioral process, while the latter part is the material process; the behavioral process only illustrates the weather, and the material process highlights the wind at night, with different emphasis.

(2) Circumstances

Undoubtedly, the time of the four translations is consistently translated as "last night", following the original poem. We focus on the expressions of the attributes and methods of the four versions. The translation of the first sentence of Xu's version and Yang's version is very similar. Not only is the process of the object consistent with the participants, but the attribute is also literal translation of the wind and rain. Compared with the choices of "fine" and "strong" of Xu's translation, Yang's choice of "light" and "fierce" is more in line with the original poem. Xu's translation is to transform the wind into "windy", focusing on the circumstances; the original verb phrase "雨疏" is converted into the prepositional phrase "with intermittent rain", highlighting the intermittent rain and the urgency of the wind; Xu's translation highlights the degree of the wind and rain to better grasp the details, it is worthy of praise. In Wang's translation, "hardly" means that the rain is light, very close to the original text; and "like crazy" means that the wind is violent, helping readers to accurately master the degree of wind; retaining the original behavioral process, fit with the original poem.

4.2 An experiential metafunctional analysis of “浓睡不消残酒”

Table 3 An experiential metafunctional analysis of “浓睡不消残酒”

Translator	Transitivity	Participants	Circumstances
XuYuanchong	material process: dispel	actor : sleep; goal : the taste of wine	attribute: sound
YangXianyi& Dai Naidie	material process: dispel	actor : sleep; goal : the effects of wine	attribute: deep
Wang Shouyi&John·Neuffer	mental process: feel relational process: was	senser : I; phenomenon : the wine; carrier : my sleep	time : this morning; attribute: dreamless
XuZhongjie	material process: slept relational process: remain	actor : I carrier : the effects of drink	method: sound

(1) Processes

Among the above four translations, Xu's translation and Yang's translation are single transitive processes, all of which are material processes. The process adopted by both is the verb "dispel", keeping in line with the original verb, emphasizing the author's dislike of hangover, and hopes to be fully awake. Wang's translation and Xu's translation are both double-transitive processes. Wang employs inverted sentences for the original text. The former part is a mental process. The word "feel" indicates that the power of alcohol also affects the author, emphasizing the author's feelings; the latter part describes the state of her sleeping last night; In Xu's translation, the first part objectively describes her sleep last night, and the latter part of the sentence uses the verb "remain" to indicate the influence of the wine. In a word, Xu's and Yang's versions highlight the verb "不消", which are better than other versions.

(2) Participants

The participants of Xu's and Yang's are quite common. The actor is "sleep", the goal is "the taste of wine" (seen from Xu's version), while in Yang's translation, the goal is "the effects of wine" (seen from Yang's version). The use of the word "taste" by Xu focuses on indicating that wine is tasty, while Yang's translation emphasizes the power of wine. The focuses of the two versions are different, and Xu's translation is better. Wang divides the original text into two clauses. The first clause indicates the fact that the author had overdrunk last night. The second one is a dependent clause, emphasizing that the author is dreamless after drinking too much last night. These two clauses are connected by a conjunction "although", highlighting that even if after a sweet dream, the author still regrets drinking too much last night. Xu's translation and Wang's translation have the same effect. Xu Zhongjie describes the fact of a good dream as well as employing the transitional conjunction "but" to connect two clauses, emphasizing that drinking has a great impact on the author.

(3) Circumstances

Among these four translations, the attributes of sleep are similar. The "sound" of Xu Yuanchong and Xu Zhongjie versions emphasizes that the author slept well last night; in Yang's version, the word "deep" highlights that the author slept well last night; the word "dreamless" in Wang's version emphasizes that the author is dreamless last night. In the original poem, the author doesn't illustrate the fact, but it has implied the meaning of becoming sober the next day, so adverbial "this morning" in Wang's version is redundant.

4.3 An experiential metafunctional analysis of “试问卷帘人”

Table 4 An experiential metafunctional analysis of “试问卷帘人”

Translator	Transitivity	Participants	Circumstances
Xu Yuanchong	verbal process: asked	sayer : I; receiver : the maid	attribute: who's rolling up the screen
Yang Xianyi & Dai Naidie	verbal process: ask	sayer : I; receiver : the maid	attribute: rolling up the curtains
Wang Shouyi & John Neuffer	behavioral process: comes in verbal process: question	behave : the maid; sayer : I; receiver : her	time : now, as she rolls the window shade
Xu Zhongjie	verbal process: ask	sayer : I	verbiage: how the flowers are of the curtain-drawer

(1) Processes and participants

The four translations adopt the verbal processes regarding “试问” in the original poem. Wang translates the word “试问” into “question”, while others translate it into “ask”. Wang highlights that the author questions the maid deliberately, which displaying the author's mental activity. In this aspect, Wang's version overwhelms others. Although the author in the original text does not specify the fact that the maid came, but according to the author's inquiry about the maid, the maid already comes. Hence, the word “comes in” in Wang's translation makes the text more coherent, but redundant, it can be deleted.

(2) Circumstances

Xu Yuanchong and Yang Xianyi both translate the word “卷帘人” with similar methods who both make it into an attributive to modify the maid, and the difference is that Xu's translation treats it as an attributive clause, emphasizing the action of the maid, while Yang translates it as an attributive, emphasizing the behavior of the maid.

Wang translated the time into "now", which is redundant. Wang makes the action of rolling up the curtain into the conversation between the author and the maid, softening the action of rolling the curtain. And in Xu Zhongjie's version, it is a projecting clause. The projecting clause is "I ask" and the projected clause is "how the flowers are of the curtain-drawer". Such translation reflects the author's inquiry, but it ignores the receiver "curtain-drawer", which is not equivalent in metafunction to the original poem. What deserves our attention is the translation of the curtains. The four versions of the curtains are different. According with the characteristics of the ancient buildings of Song Dynasty, "window shade" in Wang's translation is more in line with the original poem.

4.4 An experiential metafunctional analysis of “却道海棠依旧”

Table 5 An experiential metafunctional analysis of “却道海棠依旧”

Translator	Transitivity	Participants	Circumstances
XuYuanchong	verbal process: says mental process: is seen	sayer: she; phenomenon : crab-apple tree	attribute: the same
YangXianyi& Dai Naidie	verbal process: answers mental process: look	sayer : she; phenomenon: the crab-apple blossoms	attribute: the same
Wang Shouyi&John·Neuffer	verbal process: says relational process: are	sayer : she carrier : the crab-apples	attribute: the same as yesterday
XuZhongjie	verbal process:says relational process: are	sayer : she carrier : begonias	attribute: e'er as before

(1) Processes and participants

All four translations are double-transitive processes, which involve both the projecting clauses and the projected clauses, in which the contents are the projected clauses. In these versions, the processes of the former part are verbal processes, keeping in line with the word “道” in the original poem. Yang translates it as “道”, while others adopt the word “says”, paying attention to the interaction between the author and the maid. And the speaker are all translated it as “she”, corresponding to the “the maid” above. The second process of Xu's version and Yang's version is mental process. The sener "I" is implicit, and the phenomenon is "crab-apple". The word “blossoms” employed by Yang is more specific than the “tree” adopted by Xu, which highlights the great blooming. Xu uses the passive voice "is seen" to objectively describe the fact; while Yang uses the verb "look" to emphasize the mental activities of the maid. In a word, Yang is better than Xu. Wang and Xu Zhongjie both take the relational processes for the latter part, in which the word “are” highlights the state of Begonia. Regarding the carrier, Wang translated it literally as "the crab-apples" and Xu Zhongjie translated it into "begonias". In these four translations, only Xu uses the singular form, viewing the flower and the tree as a whole, while others are all plural, highlighting the blossom.

However, there is a shortcoming in these versions. The word "却" in the original poem indicates the author's feeling, but these four translations ignore it. What a pity!

(2) Circumstances

The circumstances of the four translations have commonalities. Among them, Wang's translation illustrates the time “yesterday”, emphasizing that the flowers are just like yesterday, which expresses that the flowers are strong enough to resist the wind and rain. The other three versions are not clearly indicated the time compared with the original poem. Therefore, Wang grasps the details and overwhelms others.

4.5 An experiential metafunctional analysis of “知否，知否？应是绿肥红瘦”

Because the last two sentences are the author's responses to the maid, we analyze them together.

Xu's version ("Don't you know, Don't you know, The red should languish and the green must grow?"): the sentence is a direct quotation; the sayer "I" and the verbal verb "say" are omitted. The use of double “Don't you know”, indicating the author's urgency. For one thing, it is to refute the answer of the maid; for another thing, it is a reminder to elicit the answer of the author. The word "know" is a mental process, in which the sener is "you", that is, the maid, indicating that the maid ought to know that after fierce wind and rain last night, the flowers are impossible to keep the beauty as yesterday.

The second clause is material process, in which the actor is "the red" and "the green", retaining synecdoche as the original poem, referring to the object by color; the process is "languish" and "grow". In the original poem, "肥" and "瘦" are personalization, making the green leaves and the flowers vivid. In the circumstances, "should" and "must" indicate that it is normal that the green leaves grow, and the flowers wilt.

Yang's version (I cry, "Can't you see? Can't you see? The green leaves are fresh but the red flowers are fading!"): the sentence is a direct quotation; the behavior is "I" and the process is "cry", showing that the author is upset because she doesn't find a way to express her feeling. The use of double "Can't you see", for one thing, accuses the maid of not caring about the blossom and the wilt; for another thing, highlights that nobody cares about the author. The second clause is a relational process, in which "the green leaves" and "the red flowers" are carriers, and the leaves and flowers clarify the meaning of the original poem. The process "are" indicates the attributes of green leaves and the flowers, and the attributes are the adjectives "fresh" and "fading", emphasizing the appearance of the leaves and flowers.

Wang's version (I say well is that a fact you ought to know. They should look much greener now and a lot less red.): the former part of the sentence is verbal process, in which the sayer is "I" and the process is "say"; "that a fact you ought to know" is the verbiage. The content of the verbiage is also a mental process, in which the sener is "you"; the process is "ought to know", and the phenomenon is "a fact". Wang translates the author's responses as indirect quotations, highlighting the fact that the maid doesn't know the fact that flowers wilt, making the implicit meaning in the original poem clear. The latter part of the sentence is mental process, the sener "you" is implicit and the process is "look"; "a lot" is phenomenon and the circumstances are "much" and "less"; and "red" is the attribute. The contrast of the circumstances is distinct, highlighting the difference between green leaves and safflower.

Xu Zhongjie's version ("Don't you recognize it for a fact at all. Now leaves should be large and flowers should be small?"): this sentence is a direct quotation, in which the sayer is "I", and the process is "say". The whole sentence is verbiage. The first sentence in the verbiage is mental process, in which the sener is "you"; the process is "recognize"; the phenomenon is "a fact" and the circumstance is "at all", which indicates the author's dissatisfaction with the maid's ignorance. The second clause is relational process. The carrier are "leaves" and "flowers", the process is "should be", the attributes are "large" and "small", and the circumstance is "now", highlighting the present. The whole sentence has the same structure, making the sentence beautiful in sound and form.

5. Answers to the previous questions

(1) In the original poem, "试问" reflects that the author eagers to know the state of begonias, but she can't bear to watch the scene of flowers wilting, and that's the reason why she enquiry her maid. Compared with the word "ask" in three versions, the choice of "question" in Wang's translation can express the author's ambivalence.

(2) The word "却" in the original poem shows that the author is disappointed at her maid's answer. However, these four versions do not display the emotions hidden in the poem. What a pity!

(3) The double use of the word "知否" in the original poem strongly expressed the author's dissatisfaction with the answer of the maid. On one hand, it is to accuse the maid of not caring about thenature; on the other hand, it can express the author's unhappiness. Xu and Yang employ the same structure of the original poem. Wang and Xu Zhongjie highlight the fact that the maid does not know the wilting, which are more profound. Therefore, each of these four translations has its own merits.

(4) The word "应是" in the original poem shows that the author is familiar with begonias. Xu, Wang and Xu Zhongjie employ the word "should"; more accurately reflects the author's attitude; while Yang ignores such implicit meaning.

(5) In the original poem, "绿肥红瘦" uses two figure of speech, that is, synecdoche and personification, making the poem more vivid and beautiful. In these four versions, Xu adopts the same figure of speech as the original poem, while others employ literal translation, which is easier to understand, but lack of the imagination and charm.

6. Conclusion

This paper makes experiential metafunctional analysis of four English versions of *Ru Meng Ling* written by the poet Li Qingzhao from the perspective of Halliday's systemic functional linguistics. Great deals of scholars have made abundant research on the poetry of Tang and Song Dynasty, but they rarely study the poetry from the perspective of systemic functional linguistics. Therefore, this paper tries to innovate and combine the theory of systemic functional linguistics to study the translation of Chinese poetry from a new perspective. By comparing the four translations with the original poem with the help of word-for-word experiential metafunctional analysis, this paper aims to explore the quality of Chinese poetry translation, contributing to the translation of Chinese poetry and offering new ideas.

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Appendix: Four English Versions of *Ru Meng Ling*

- Xu Yuanchong (2000a: 153) : //Tune: "Like A Dream"// Last night the wind was strong and rain was fine./Sound sleep did not dispel the taste of wine./I asked the maid who's rolling up the screen./"The same crab-apple tree," she says, "is seen"./"Don't you know, Don't you know, The red should languish and the green must grow?"/
- Yang Xianyi& Dai Naidie(Li Qing, 2005:156) : // Ru Meng Ling// Last night the rain was light, the wind fierce./And deep sleep did not dispel the effects of wine./ When I ask the maid rolling up the curtains,/ She answers, "The crab-apple blossoms look the same"/ I cry, "Can't you see? Can't you see? The green leaves are fresh but the red flowers are fading!"/
- Wang Shouyi&John·Neuffer(Li Qing, 2005:155): //Lines for the Ru Meng Ling Melody// It hardly rained, but the wind blew like crazy last night./ I feel the wine this morning although my sleep was dreamless./ Now the maid comes in and I question her as she rolls the window shade./ She says the crab-apples are the same as yesterday./ I say well is that a fact you ought to know, They should look much greener now and a lot less red./
- Xu Zhongjie(Li Qing, 2005:155): //Rumengling// Last night was windy with intermittent rain./ I've slept sound, but the effects of drink remain./ I ask how the flowers are of the curtain-drawer./ She says, "Begonias are e'er as before."/ "Don't you recognize it for a fact at all; Now leaves should be large and flowers should be small?"/