

A Comparative Analysis of English Translations of Allusions in Song Lyrics from the Perspective of the Frame Theory

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DOI: [10.36348/sijll.2022.v05i08.005](https://doi.org/10.36348/sijll.2022.v05i08.005)

| Received: 13.07.2022 | Accepted: 20.08.2022 | Published: 24.08.2022

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Abstract

To shed some light on the English translation of Song lyrics, this paper takes the English translation of allusions in Song lyrics by Xin Qiji as the research object, analyzes the role of the frame theory in the English translation of allusions in Song lyrics, and explores the strategies suitable for the translation of allusions from the frame theory perspective.

Keywords: English translation of Song lyrics; frame theory; allusion translation.

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1. INTRODUCTION

As a prominent figure in the field of frame theory research, Fillmore (1992: 75-102) believes that the meaning and transmission of language depend primarily on the cognitive frame, and those linguistic expressions are the triggers that activate the cognitive frame.

Song lyrics are a gem of Chinese literature, and many of them contain allusions. The allusion is one of the ways lyricists can express their thoughts and emotions, and it is a crucial and challenging aspect of the English translation of Song lyrics. How to accurately translate allusions in Song lyrics and how to convey the intents of the original lyrics to readers of the target language are important in the translation of Song lyrics.

During the English translation of Song lyrics, translators should unearth the hidden meanings within the lines and find appropriate English expressions to convey them. According to the frame theory, translators must use their current frame knowledge to accurately analyze the original lyrics before reconstructing them to activate the same or similar frames in the minds of the target readers (Zou, 2010: 67).

2. OVERVIEW OF FRAME THEORY

2.1 Definition of Frame Theory

Since anthropologist Bateson (1955:39-51) first introduced the notion of “frame”, research on the frame theory has been conducted for more than six

decades and has demonstrated a multidisciplinary and interdisciplinary trend of development. Originating in anthropology, the frame theory has been extensively developed in sociology, psychology, and linguistics (Yuan & Wang, 2017:19). Fillmore (1975:123-131) described the frame as any language decision system that can be associated with scenario prototypes. He initially divided the frames into cognitive frames and interactional frames, which can assist language users in better comprehending their surroundings and information (Zhou & Ning, 2015:104). Later, he established frame semantics in the early 1980s. Fillmore (1985:22-54) described the frame as a distinct and unified knowledge frame or a coherent empirical schema. That is to say, it can be utilized to depict a stable knowledge structure. Fillmore (1992:75-102) argued that the frame is a knowledge structure suitable for expressing objective facts in memory, and it can express the knowledge of specific and recurrent circumstances. Moreover, the cognitive frame is the primary determinant of the meaning and transmission of language, and language expression is the stimulus that activates the cognitive frame. According to Van Dijk (1981:140-148), the frame is a definite and agreed-upon cognitive unit. Taylor (1995:36–89) characterized the frame as a knowledge network connecting numerous cognitive domains, which are in turn connected to particular language forms. Ungerer & Schmid (2008:208-215) characterized the frame as a cognitive model for representing knowledge and beliefs associated with particular and repetitive events.

In conclusion, based on the aforementioned perspectives, it can be found that the frame is the shared knowledge system among people and expresses their understanding of something. From the perspective of frame theory, when translating, translators should find a linguistic expression in the target language that activates the same or a comparable frame as the source language. This principle is the foundation of a good translation (Wang, 2005:30).

2.2 Characteristics of Frame Theory

Understanding the functions of frames in translation requires comprehension of the primary characteristics of frames. These are the distinguishing characteristics of cognitive frames. Initially, cognitive frames are composed of fundamentally stable components. For instance, Fillmore's frame of "business event" includes the fixed components "customers", "sellers", "goods", and "money". Daily events are preserved in the long-term memory as potential frames. Secondly, linguistic expressions can vary according to different cognitive perspectives inside the same frame, i.e., changes in perspective within the same frame can result in distinct linguistic expressions. For instance, in the "business event" frame, we can use the verbs "buy", "sell", "pay", and "charge" to describe this event. We can explain the event from the buyer's perspective: the buyer pays the seller; or from the seller's perspective: the buyer is charged by the seller. Thirdly, all components of the frame are interconnected, such that when one component is mentioned, other components of the frame are also triggered. People grasp the meaning of linguistic expressions through activating cognitive frames (Ungerer & Schmid, 2008:208-215). In the "shopping" frame, for instance, the component "clothing" activates other components in this frame, such as "clothes", "money", and "sellers". Frames are brain-conceptualized abstract information, and cultural differences are an essential and crucial aspect of frames (Wang, 2005:29). According to Taylor (1995:89), frames are knowledge configurations based on cultural conventions, and the knowledge contained within a

frame is shared by at least a portion or some people of a language region.

According to the characteristics of frame theory, translators should avoid frame conflicts resulting from cultural differences when translating allusions in Song lyrics, and they can also use these characteristics to select appropriate linguistic expressions that activate the same or similar frames for readers as the original lyrics.

3. A COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS OF THE ENGLISH TRANSLATION OF ALLUSIONS FROM THE PERSPECTIVE OF FRAME THEORY--TAKING THE TUNE: "JOY OF ETERNAL UNION" THINKING OF ANCIENT HEROES IN THE TOWER ON THE NORTHERN HILL AT JINGKOU AS AN EXAMPLE

永遇乐·京口北固亭怀古

千古江山，英雄无觅孙仲谋处。舞榭歌台，风流总被雨打风吹去。斜阳草树，寻常巷陌，人道寄奴曾住。想当年，金戈铁马，气吞万里如虎。

元嘉草草，封狼居胥，赢得仓皇北顾。四十三年，望中犹记，烽火扬州路。可堪回首，佛狸祠下，一片神鸦社鼓。凭谁问：廉颇老矣，尚能饭否？

This lyric's allusions are delicate and exceptional, and the entire lyric expresses Xin Qiji the lyricist's grief and helplessness at being unable to serve his nation.

This part focuses mostly on the English translation of the five allusions of "孙仲谋", "寄奴", "元嘉", "佛狸祠" and "廉颇", and analyzes four translations of Zhuo Zhenying (Zhuo), Ren Zhiji & Yu Zheng (Ren & Yu), Huang Hongquan (Huang), and Xu Yuanchong (Xu) in conjunction with the frame theory (see Table 3.1 for details).

Table 3.1 Five Translators' Translations of Allusions

Allusions Translators	孙仲谋	寄奴	元嘉	佛狸祠	廉颇
Zhuo	Sun Quan	Jinu	Yuanjia	Foli Temple	Lian Po ¹
Ren & Yu	Sun Zhongmou	Ji'nu ²	Yuanjia ³	Theancestral temple of Foli ⁴	Lian Po ⁵
Huang	Sun Zhongmou	Jinu	His successor, however,-- Yuanjia his reign title--	The Lynx Temple	Lian Po
Xu	A hero like the King	The Cowherd-King	His son	The chief aggressor's shrine	An old general

"孙仲谋" refers to Sun Quan, the first emperor of the kingdom of Wu during the period of the Three Kingdoms. And Zhongmou is his courtesy name. Throughout his life, he accomplished remarkable

military feats and ruled Jiangdong as a world-renowned hero. Xin cited this allusion to illustrate his intense criticism and discontent with the Southern Song Dynasty's government. According to the aforementioned table, Zhuo translated it into "Sun

Quan”, Ren & Yu and Huang directly translated it into “Sun Zhongmou”, and Xu translated it into “a hero like the king”. According to frame theory, the “name” framework is activated for target readers when they read “Sun Quan” or “Sun Zhongmou”. They can recognize that this is a person’s name, but extra details are tough to obtain. As for “a hero like the king”, although it explains the features of the character and helps readers comprehend the connotation of the allusion and the emotions the lyricist wishes to convey, it lacks specific and genuine character portraits. If appropriate annotations are provided, the effect may be enhanced.

“寄奴” is the nickname of Liu Yu, Emperor Wu of the Liu Song Dynasty. He was poor since childhood and was the founder of the Liu Song Dynasty in the Southern Dynasties. Zhuo and Huang both transliterated it directly; therefore, more information about the “name” frame cannot be activated for the readers. In contrast, Ren & Yu added a note at the end of the text based on transliteration (2. Ji’nu is the nickname of Liu Yu (刘裕 363-422) Emperor Wu, founder of Song of the Southern Dynasties, famous for his bravery and military exploits) (Ren & Yu, 2006:267), explaining the identity of “寄奴” in detail to the readers. In Xu’s translation “the Cowherd King”, “King” directly points out the identity of “寄奴”, but the cowherd’s original meaning can easily lead the reader to the frame of “a cowboy” or the “Cowherd and Weaver Girl Romance”, probably causing misunderstandings.

“元嘉” refers to the reign title of Liu Yilong, Emperor Wen of the Liu Song Dynasty. Liu Yilong is the son of Liu Yu, Emperor Wu of the Liu Song Dynasty. Liu Yilong ordered Wang Xuanmo to attack the Northern Wei Dynasty in the 27th year of Yuanjia. Lacking adequate preparation, he was greedy and impulsive and ultimately failed. “元嘉” indicates the reign title, which is used by Chinese feudal dynasties to mark the year but is not found in English culture. If the transliteration is directly utilized as Zhuo, the reader’s frame of “name” will be activated, which will cause confusion if the reader thinks it is a person’s name. However, Ren & Yu have annotated at the end of the text based on transliteration to avoid reader ambiguity (3. Yuanjia is the reign title of Emperor Wen of Song (宋文帝 407-453) of the Southern Dynasties. Impatient and reckless by nature, he had tried three times to win back Henan province that was occupied by Wei of the Northern Dynasties, but all ended in defeat. The last one was the most devastating, which took place in 45 or the 27th year of his reign) (Ren & Yu, 2006:267). In addition to translating the relationship between Liu Yilong and Liu Yu, Huang clarified the meaning of this word. Although Xu’s translation also demonstrates the bond between the two individuals, it is slightly unclear than Huang’s.

佛 (bì) 狸祠: Tuoba Tao’s nickname is “佛狸”. He fought back against Liu Song in the 27th year of Yuanjia (450). After defeating Liu Yilong’s army, he constructed a temporary palace on Guabu Mountain on the north bank of the Yangtze River, which became known as the “佛狸祠”. “佛 (bì) 狸” refers to a kind of fox. It is easy for English readers from diverse cultural backgrounds to misunderstand the meaning of the word due to the absence of a similar cultural frame or the disparities in frame components. To avoid misconceptions resulting from cultural differences, translators need to have a clear understanding of the source language. In Huang’s translation, for instance, he translates this word into “Lynx” in an attempt to clarify it. In fact, the original meaning of “Lynx” was “Bobcat”, not the “fox”. Therefore, the target readers will activate the frame of “bobcat” rather than the image of “fox” in reading.

Both Zhuo and Ren & Yu translated this word into “Foli”, yet the Baidu encyclopedia’s annotations read “bili”, so I think this was a mistranslation. In addition, both versions will trigger the readers’ frame of “temple”, and readers can only know the temple’s name through the translation, but it is difficult to obtain extra information. However, in the translation of Ren & Yu, thorough end-of-text comments are included (4. Temple of Foli is originally a travel palace built by Tuoba Tao (拓跋焘 408-452), Emperor of Wei of the Northern Dynasties. Later it turned into an Ancestral Temple of Foli, a nickname for Tuoba Tao) (Ren & Yu, 2006:268), which partially compensate for the lack of information.

In Xu’s translation, he translated it into “The chief aggressor’s shrine”. According to the frame theory, linguistic expressions within the same frame will vary along with cognitive viewpoints. From Tuoba Tao’s perspective, this campaign was a battle of self-defense, so he was not the aggressor. However, Liu Yilong believed that even though Tuoba Tao fought back, the result was the occupation of a huge portion of his land, which was an act of aggression. From various viewpoints, diverse judgments will be made. Consequently, this translation cannot be considered the best option.

Due to exclusion, “廉颇” was exiled to the state of Wei from the state of Zhao, where he was a renowned general. When the state of Zhao was in peril, the king of Zhao dispatched envoys to inquire about his physical condition, and he stated that he was still able to work for the country. Xin selected this allusion to show his tenacity and his genuine gratitude to the imperial court, as well as his resolution to retrieve the lost land and serve the nation. However, if the name is transliterated, it provides no additional information to the reader and the frame that can be triggered is quite limited. It is a good option to add annotations at the

end, such as Zhuo (1. Lian Po was a famous general of the State of Zhao in the Warring States period. The king, who intended to reinstate him, sent an envoy to see if his appetite was still good (i.e., he was in good condition). As the envoy was not bribed, he gave the king the false report that “That old general went to the toilet thrice during a meal”) (Zhuo, 2008:135) and Ren & Yu (5. Lian Po: Famous general of State Zhao during the Warring States Period. He was virtually invincible. However, in the battle of Changping (长平之战 262B.C.-260 B.C.), he staunchly defended his positions for three years against the enemies until King Xiao Cheng of Zhao (赵孝成王 226B.C.-245B.C.) replaced him with Zhao Kuo (赵括? -260B.C.) as general, and the Zhao army thus suffered an ignominious defeat. Lian Po was known for his great appetite and physical prowess, but he was neutralized by the backbiting of his political enemies). (Ren & Yu, 2006:268). Xu translated this word into “an old general”, which not only pointed out the identity of “廉颇” but also indicated his status--old, but without details.

Based on a comparison of the English translations of the aforementioned allusions and the characteristics of the frame theory, it can be concluded that when translating allusions involving characters, it is difficult to help the reader activate extra information in the frame if the name is transliterated directly. Although the availability of end notes can compensate for a certain lack of information, there are ten end notes in the translation of Ren & Yu, some of which are very sophisticated and may pose difficulties for readers. On the other hand, although Xu’s translation has some flaws, it can provide readers with a better reading experience; yet, his translation is overly simplified. Hence, if relevant annotations are added, the effect may be better.

4. EXPLORING ENGLISH TRANSLATION STRATEGIES OF SONG ALLUSIONS GUIDED BY FRAME THEORY

4.1 Constructing a new frame

Because the lyricists and the Chinese readers share a common cultural background, the Chinese readers can read the lyricists’ allusions without much difficulty. However, due to cultural differences and the absence of a corresponding frame system, it is often difficult for English-speaking readers to comprehend the meaning of the allusions in Song lyrics. Hence, in order to enable target readers to activate the same or similar frames as the original lyrics, translators can establish a new frame in the target culture throughout the translation (Zou, 2010: 68).

For example, 马作的卢飞快, 弓如霹雳弦惊

Translation 1: Mottled steeds flat-out, flying, / Bowstrings as pealing thunders, shocking. (Ren & Yu, 2006:273)

Translation 2: Lo! The galloping steeds / Like lightning passed. / Like peals of thunder / the strained bows twanged. (Huang, 2001:245)

Translation 3: On gallant steed / Running full speed, / we’d shoot with twanging bows. (Xu, 2006: 171)

“的卢” is a kind of horse with white spots that is renowned for its speed. Allegedly, Liu Bei escaped from danger with the assistance of this horse. “霹雳” indicates that when the arrow is released, the bowstring sounds like thunder. These two sentences are mainly to illustrate the tense and aggressive atmosphere and the tense situation of the conflict, as well as Xin Qiji’s willingness to fight for his country despite his age. Though “的卢” is one of ancient China’s top ten most famous horses, it would be excessively redundant if translated into details. In addition, this quote largely exaggerates the strain of the conflict. Therefore, the translator can completely construct a new frame, bypassing the translation of this horse, and directly translate its features -- “fast”. For example, the above three translations are all literal translations of the original lyric. Moreover, setting up a new frame and leaving out the explanations of allusions not only shows how tense the war situation was at that time but also activates the readers’ frames about the horse’s traits and the “tense situation”.

4.2 Frame Annotation

If the allusions in Song lyrics are translated too succinctly, it is easy to cause information loss. And due to cultural differences, it will be difficult to help the target language readers activate the same or similar frames as the original lyrics, so they will only understand the surface meanings. With the aid of frame annotations, translators can add several notes at the end of the text to clarify the context of the allusions, enabling readers to better comprehend the connotations and concepts of the original lyrics.

For example, 求田问舍, 怕应羞见, 刘郎才气。

Translation 1: Shopping around for land and houses*, / But afraid in shame to confront / The formidably talented young Liu Bei. (Ren & Yu, 2006:278)

* During the time of the Three Kingdoms, Xu Si (许汜) said to Liu Bei, later King of Shu that Chen Deng (陈登?) had been very impolite to him by sleeping himself in the upper bed and letting him sleep in the lower bed. Upon hearing this, Liu Bei retorted, “If I were him, I would have slept in a hundred-foot high upper room and put you in the basement to sleep on the ground. People such as you never concern themselves about the nation. They only care about shopping for land and house even when the world is in a great tumult.” (Ren & Yu, 2006:279)

Translation 2: I'd be ashamed to see the patriot, / should I retire to seek for land and cot. (Xu, 2006:155)

The original meaning of the phrase“求田问舍” is “to purchase land and ask for the price of a house”. Xin Qiji utilized this allusion to demonstrate that, unlike Xu Si, he was committed to serving the country and would not buy land and homes for personal benefit.

Regarding this allusion, both of the above versions have been literally translated, activating the frame of “purchasing a house” in the target language readers. Translation 1 additionally included some endnotes to supplement the lyricist's intentions to quote this allusion, which can more effectively help readers in comprehending the lyricist's profound meaning. However, if the contents of the notes can be condensed, it may enhance the reading experience for the readers. In the second translation, the original sentence was rendered in the subjunctive mood, which was a perfect idea. However, due to the lack of an explanation of this allusion, it may be difficult for the target readers to activate a frame similar to the original lyrics, despite the fact that this translation represents the lyricist's attitude. Consequently, proper annotations can be used to produce performance improvement.

5. CONCLUSION

People prefer to adopt an activated cognitive frame in order to grasp the meaning of linguistic expressions, according to the frame theory. Therefore, when translating allusions in Song lyrics, we should try to find suitable language expressions in the target language, either by constructing a new frame or by adding certain annotations to the frame, to help the target language readers activate the same or similar frames as the original lyrics, to provide more information, and to assist them in better understanding the context and ideas of the lyrics.

FUNDING STATEMENT

This work was supported by the Key Project (21ZD040) of Hubei Provincial Institutions of Higher Education Philosophy and Social Sciences Research.

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