

# *A Comparative Study on the Translation of the Song Blowing in the Wind from the Perspective of Eco-translatology*

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**Abstract:** With the acceleration of globalization, cultural exchanges among countries have become increasingly close. Many excellent English songs have spread to our country through translation and have been loved by the majority of listeners. *Blowing in the Wind* is a song written by American folk-rock singer Bob Dylan, and there are quite a number of translated versions in China, among which there is no lack of excellent translations on the Internet. In addition, Mr. Xue Fan, a famous translator in China, has also translated his version of the song. Under the guidance of Eco-translatology, this research analyzes the lyrics of the original English version and the three translations from the perspective of "three-dimensional" transformation in order to explore the connotation of the translations made by professional and non-professional translators. Meanwhile, to show the unique charm of the Chinese and English language. The analysis of this research shows that in the field of song translation, the translation of professional translators is not necessarily more credible than that of non-professional translators. Instead, professional translators tend to produce translations with higher overall accuracy compared to their non-professional counterparts. The widespread dissemination of various translation versions implies the presence of notable merits in each rendition.

**Keywords:** Eco-translatology, three-dimensional transformation, *Blowing in the Wind*, song translation

## 1. Introduction

*Blowing in the Wind*, written in 1962, is the masterpiece of Bob Dylan, the winner of the Nobel Prize in Literature. It is also one of the most important works in the history of American folk-rock, with a landmark significance, popular with listeners at home and abroad. The song was created in American society during the Vietnam War. At that time, the situation seemed to go against the United States. In order to contend for international status, the government sent more soldiers into Vietnam against the wishes of its people. Witnessing compatriots enlisting with patriotic fervor only to cost their lives for an unnecessary war, Dylan expressed his thoughts on peace in his unassuming words, giving voice to the countless Americans who were similarly disgruntled. The song was not only applicable to the United States then, whose meaning can be universally practicable, and it has been baptized by time to remain fresh, with a high value of discussion. At present, there is no classic translation of *Blowing in the Wind*, but some excellent translations can be found on the Internet, among which two versions

are more widely accepted. In addition, famous Chinese musicologist and translator Mr. Xue Fan also translated the song.

Translation difficulties, such as "over-foreignization and over-domestication", "cultural differences", and "loss of aesthetic", are problems encountered when translating English songs into Chinese. Trying to produce a style similar to that of the original work, the translator should not only possess a certain degree of music appreciation but also do extensive and in-depth research on the author's personal characteristics as well as the historical background of the work and also have profound writing skills. This research analyzes the original English lyrics of *Blowing in the Wind* and its three Chinese translations from a three-dimensional eco-translatological perspective. The first two translations were done by non-professional translators, i.e., netizens, while the third version was translated by a professional, Mr. Xue Fan. This study will conduct an in-depth analysis of the source text and each translation version, comparing the different translators' choices in adapting the three-dimensional aspects. Furthermore, the translations can be categorized into professional and non-professional versions, allowing for a discussion on which translation is more suitable for the song in the case of *Blowing in the Wind*.

## 2. Definition and Theoretical Framework of Eco-translatology

Eco-translatology was born in China. In recent years, the term "ecology" has been highlighted in various fields. In this context, it is a natural reflection of the development of the times that "ecology" has attracted attention in many fields of social science research, including translology [1]. In 2001, Hu Gengshen introduced ecological terms such as "Adaptation" and "Selection" into translology. In 2008, Hu proposed the concept of "Eco-translatology" for the first time in Interpretation of Eco-translatology and pointed out that "Eco-translatology is an interdisciplinary and multidisciplinary construct, aligning seamlessly with the current societal and academic trends" [2]. Eco-translatology is relevant to research based on Translation as Adaptation and Selection. According to this theory, translation is actually "the translator's selection to adapt to the translation ecological environment", i.e., the translator is working in a "world" jointly composed of the original language, the source language and the translated language [3].

As an interdisciplinary translation theory, Eco-translatology believes that a perfect translation results from proper selection and multi-dimensional adaptive transformation. The theory also provides a new perspective for the English-Chinese translation of song lyrics. In this research, the Adaptation and Selection carried out by professional and non-professional translators in translation are interpreted from the three dimensions of language, culture and communication. It aims to select a translated version that is more appropriate to the original lyrics from the point of view of general audiences while providing a feasible perspective for the study of song translation.

## 3. "Three-dimensional" Adaptive Transformation

Hu pointed out that Translation as Adaptation and Selection focuses on the conversion among "three dimensions", i.e., the conversion of linguistic dimension, cultural dimension and communicative dimension with adaptive selection. This requires translators to not only achieve linguistic conversion between two different languages but also pay attention to the transmission of message and communicative intention between different cultures.

### 3.1. Linguistic Dimension

Linguistic adaptation refers to "the adaptation of language forms in the translation process" [4]. After understanding the whole translation ecosystem, translators should first concentrate on the transformation between the source language and the translated language on the linguistic level.

Comparing Chinese and English, it can be found that Chinese mainly focuses on the internal cultural expressions, and the parts of the sentence are looser from each other, thus requiring interactive understanding. However, English belongs to the Indo-European language family, which varies considerably with Chinese, and its expression form is quite different from Chinese. It can be said that Chinese is based on meaning, while English is founded on form. Therefore, when translating English songs, translators need to deeply analyze the logical relationship between each phrase in different cultural backgrounds and semantics.

(1) allowed to be free

Version One: 获得自由

Version Two: 最终获得自由

Version Three: 把自由盼到 [5]

In this lyric, it involves the translation of the passive voice, which is usually done in two ways. The first method is to transform the passive voice into the active voice and to exchange the position of the subject and object according to the meaning of the sentence. The second one is to replace the word "被" with another word, such as "为". In this case, the first two online versions translate the original lyric "allowed to be free", which contains the passive voice, as "(最终)获得自由", while Xue translates it as "把自由盼到". Firstly, all the three versions select the active voice, which shows that the translators have made adjustments to the original text to make the lyrics conform to Chinese expressions, so that the target audience, i.e., the domestic listener, can better understand the meaning of the lyrics. Secondly, in the original text, the preceding sentence mentions how many more years it will take before these people can get rid of the war and live in a liberal environment. Analyzing the three versions of Chinese translation in this context, the first two versions use the expression "(最终)获得自由", although there is a sense that liberty is not easy to come by, but compared to the third version, "把自由盼到", that kind of strong desire for liberty is slightly inferior, and it does not show the determination to act without delay. The words "把" and "盼" vividly present that it is difficult to obtain liberty and great efforts must be made. Furthermore, the word "把" directly indicates the active voice of the sentence, which, compared with the literal translation of "被允许自由", not only conforms to Chinese expressions, but also embodies the spirit of resistance that liberty depends on the initiative of the people to fight for, which fits the anti-war theme of the original work.

(2) The answer, my friend, is blowing in the wind

Version One: 答案啊,我的朋友,在风中飘扬

Version Two: 朋友,答案在风中飘荡

Version Three: 答案自己找,它在风中飘 [5]

The Europeanization of the Chinese language appears in Version One. English often uses abstract nouns as the subject of sentences, and this version does not change any word order and literally translates the original text word by word, making the sentence structure cumbersome, and native Chinese speakers cannot quickly comprehend such a sentence in the few seconds that the lyrics are sung. Version Two advances the parenthesis, in other words, it indicates whom the sentence is meant at first, which is more in line with the Chinese expression. And then translates the two parts "The answer" and "blowing in the wind" together, which echoes the title of the song, and listeners have no obstacle to understand the lyrics, so that they can concentrate more on the connotation of the song. Version Three adopts the division method of translation. Moreover, the words "找" and "飘" also rhyme. However, this version expresses the feeling that the rhyming is intentional and the omission of "my friend" is not as interactive as the one in Version Two, which directly states the target of

discourse (friend), and it is easier for listeners to empathize. Therefore, Version Two is the chosen one.

### 3.2. Cultural Dimension

Adaptive transformation of cultural dimension refers to "translators should pay attention to the transmission and interpretation of bilingual cultural connotations in the translation process" [4]. There is a close connection between culture and language in different countries, and most of the languages will be characterized by differences due to the influence of different cultures. On this condition, when translating English songs, translators should not only examine the creation background of original lyrics, but also need to deeply understand the utilization of its linguistic content, so as to better disseminate the work, thus enhancing the translation of English songs. Especially under the perspective of eco-translatology, translators need to explore the humanistic environment of Chinese and English language on the basis of the precise expression of the culture of the original English lyrics so as to make the translation express the correct connotation.

#### (1) sleeps

Version One: 安眠

Version Two: 安歇

Version Three: 睡觉 [5]

Xue (Version Three) translates "sleep" as "睡觉", while the other two online versions translate it as "安眠" and "安歇". The word "安眠" has two meanings: a state of peaceful sleep and a euphemism for death. "安歇" is interpreted as rest and sleep. In contrast, the word "睡觉" literally means sleep, and it is a daily routine, expressing people's desire to end the war as soon as possible and return to a peaceful life and showing the preciousness of ordinary life. By translating "sleep" as "睡觉", listeners can immediately realize that the war has taken away too much from the people from this word, which is used particularly frequently. The author thinks that Version Three is more appropriate to the theme of the original song.

#### (2) sky

Version One: 天空

Version Two: 蓝天

Version Three: 云霄 [5]

There are three translations of "sky" in the lyric, and the author considers that "蓝天" in Version Two is better. First of all, Version One literally translated into "天空", which does not consider the song's creation background. The people in the war expect things to be beautiful, which is their spiritual support to survive the time, and "天空" cannot show that kind of desirable beauty of the sky. However, in Version Two, "蓝天" means blue sky in English, giving the sky its color. The blue sky symbolizes tranquility, healing, freedom and openness in the public's cognition, which is in line with people's desire for liberty and peace, and there is also the expression of "blue sky" in the English language. In Version Three, "云霄" is far-fetched here, which refers to the clouds and sky high in the upper air, a mysterious realm far away from the ordinary world, and can also be compared to long-term goals, lofty ideals, or big ambitions. The use of the word "云霄" here is too grandiose, and besides, clouds at this altitude are hard to see with the human eye. Seeing the blue sky is a blessing for the people who have suffered so much from the war. Therefore, the author believes that the most appropriate translation of "sky" is Version Two.

### 3.3. Communicative Dimension

Communicative adaptation refers to "the adaptation of bilingual communicative intentions in the translation process" [4]. When translating English songs, translators not only need to pay attention to the cultural backgrounds of different countries and the conversion of linguistic connotations but also focus on whether the translated text is suitable for the audience with different communicative intentions [6], so as to better enable the audience to understand the central idea expressed in the original lyrics.

(1) call him a man

Version One: 被称为真正的人

Version Two: 称得上男子汉

Version Three: 有人的称号 [5]

In the original lyrics, "call him a man" refers to the recognition of a person who deserves the title of a true man. Here the three versions are translated differently as "被称为真正的人", "称得上男子汉", "有人的称号", in English they mean, respectively, to be called a real man, deserve to be called a manly man, to have the title of the person. Firstly, "man" in the lyrics is a general concept, not only referring to men, so the word "男子汉"(a manly man) in Version Two is not entirely apposite. Secondly, the word "称号" (title) in Version Three, in the context of this version, shows that the translator used this word for the sake of rhyming, but in fact, in terms of the communicative meaning of the Chinese language, this word is not appropriate in the lyrics here. The word "称号" has two meanings in Chinese: an honorary title formally conferred by the authorities, and a certain title to indicate one's identity. Imagine for the people in the war, no matter what kind of status, everyone is equal in a catastrophe, and no one can be spared because of their status and title. The presence of the word "称号" in this line makes it impossible for Chinese listeners to immediately grasp the lyrics' meaning, and the translation's communicative function is greatly diminished. The author believes that it would be better to change the passive usage in Version One to an active voice that is more in line with Chinese expression, i.e., to combine Version One with Version Two, which translates as "称得上真正的人".

(2) hear

Version One: 听见

Version Two: 听到

Version Three: 理解 [5]

There are two versions of the word "hear" in the lyrics. In the original text, it refers to hearing the cries and screams of the people in the war. In the translation, the first version is literally translated as "听见" and "听到", while the second version translates it as "理解", which means understand in English. On the communicative level, simply translated as "听见" or "听到" cannot convey deep condolences for the victims of the war, as the human ear can capture the sound of weeping and screaming, so the translation of "听见" or "听到" is meaningless. From the physical action of listening, the audience cannot realize the depth of its meaning. Listening is passive, not a subjective will of man. In this case, Xue (Version Three) translates it into the word "理解", which is an act that needs to be done actively. It can make listeners feel deep sympathy for the people who are in the midst of war and appreciate the anti-war theme of the original song, thus demonstrating the sense of communicative transformation between Chinese and English languages.

#### 4. Prospect of Song Translation

As an important form of literary translation, song translation currently has a relatively large gap, and the development is still immature [7]. At the same time, the study in this field is complex and multi-dimensional, which needs translators to have interdisciplinary knowledge as well as profound textual skills. This requires translators to combine more translation theories with the practice of song translation and to provide references for the study of song translation from specific cases. Eco-translatology, as an interdisciplinary translation theory, coincides with the needs of the study of song translation. In its practice, translators must analyze the three dimensions of language, culture and communication. In the linguistic dimension, translators should select words, syntax, rhetoric, chapter structure and more from the completeness and appositeness of semantic meaning to achieve the interactive comprehension between the two languages [8]. In the cultural dimension, the creation background of the song and the specific symbolism of certain things in different cultures are the important factors affecting the translation, so as to produce a masterpiece that can be accepted and even sung by contemporary people [9]. In the communicative dimension, it is necessary to pay attention to the group for which the translation is intended, to consider whether the translation of the song meets the aesthetic standard of the people at that time from the audience's point of view, and to make listeners resonate with the song without ambiguity, so that the song can be given a new life and soul. Certainly, these three dimensions are not separated [10], but require translators to actively stand under the perspective of three-dimensional transformation. The three dimensions support and collaborate to adapt to the ecological environment of translation and achieve excellent translation works of songs.

#### 5. Conclusion

In the ecological environment of English song translation, the success of translation depends on the "multi-dimensional" adaptation to the specific ecological environment of translation and the selection of at least "three-dimensional" (linguistic, cultural and communicative) transformation. Through the above analysis, all three selected versions have their own unique features of adaptive transformation in each dimension. Although the first two versions are made by non-professionals, there are many brilliant and ingenious parts in them. However, by way of specific examples, Version Three, i.e., the translation of professionals, is indeed better overall, despite some imperfections in terms of detail and appositeness with the original lyrics. Therefore, in the practice of song translation, whether the translation is made by professionals or by non-professionals, it has its own merits if it is well-known and widespread. The author hereby encourages all translation enthusiasts, regardless of whether they are professionals or not, to engage actively in the practice of song translation. Through this involvement, individuals are bound to experience the enjoyment it offers. In the discussion of this research, the professional translator's text after scrutiny can express the theme of the original work more clearly and accurately.

The "three-dimensional" transformation of this research brings a new perspective of evaluation to song translation, which is of referential significance to the study of English-Chinese translation of song lyrics. Additionally, due to the limited space of the research, it is impossible to discuss the English-Chinese translation of song lyrics under the "three-dimensional" transformation of eco-translatology. Moreover, this research only analyzes the song *Blowing in the Wind*; although it discusses three translated versions, there are still limitations. The author hopes that more people will explore the study of song translation under the theory to enrich and improve the limitations of this research. It is believed that more translators will consider the ecological environment of translation and achieve the appropriate transformation of the "three-dimensional" perspective so that more excellent works will be known to the world.

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