

Strategies and Nuances in English-Chinese Poetry Translation: A Decadal Review

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Abstract

When translating poetry, the unique literary genre poses a significant challenge to the translator's ability. The work of translating English poems into Chinese has a history of 20 years in China. In this paper, the author collected and studied the strategies used in the translation of English poetry into Chinese from 2014 to 2024, focusing on solving the persistent confusion surrounding key terms such as “translation strategy”, “translation method” and “translation technique”. This study aims to clarify these structures and examine their practical significance in the context of real translation. In the decision-making process of translation strategy selection, translators need to balance cultural and aesthetic expectations with the practical application of these strategies. In this paper, a systematic literature review method is adopted as the methodology, and the results emphasize the importance of balancing domestication and foreignization strategies to ensure translation fidelity and emotional resonance. In addition, the study summarizes seven key research gaps, including the need for more empirical research to verify the effectiveness of these strategies in different contexts. This paper emphasizes the value of continuous academic discussion in improving translation practice, respecting both the original text and the nuances of regional languages, thereby contributing to a richer and more effective exchange of Chinese-English literature.

Keywords: Decadal review, English-Chinese poetry translation, systematic literature review, translation methods, translation strategies, translation techniques

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Introduction

Translation is basically about sharing ideas between different languages and cultures. It's not just about translating words from one language to another; it also requires a good grasp of how different texts are structured and what they mean. Hatim and Munday (2019) explain that a good translation keeps the original message's information but changes it to match the new language's style. Poetry is one of the hardest to translate and work with of all types of writing. Poetry is one of the hardest types of writing to translate and work with. The job requires a sharp awareness of the language, style, and cultural details of the original text while ensuring that the translated version maintains its emotional and rhythmic feel.

In the past decade, translating poetry from English to Chinese has presented distinct challenges and chances for translators, highlighting broader specific in the translation field. Even now, researchers still get confused about certain terms in translation, like “translation strategy”, “translation method”, and “translation technique” (Xiong, 2014; Dong, 2021). The absence of clear definitions has made academic discussions more complex and delayed the development of simple and effective translation methods.

This study looks at how translators have dealt with these problems by checking out the methods they've used in the last ten years, from 2014 to 2024, to translate English poetry into Chinese. The main aims are to explain important translation terms and examine how these methods have been used in actual situations. By doing this, the paper hopes to improve our grasp of how translation works and provide useful advice for research and translation work. This work is valuable for theoretical discussions and developing translation strategies that faithfully convey the original poetry while fitting the cultural and linguistic needs of Chinese readers.

Clarifying Terminology in Poetry Translation Studies

In the realm of academic discussions of translation studies, particularly in the context of poetry translation, the terms “translation strategy”, “translation method”, and “translation technique” often lack clear differentiation. This lack of clarity has led to significant confusion (Xiong, 2014; Dong, 2021), highlighting the need for our research. This section tries to distinguish these terms and discuss their interrelationships, as well as address common misunderstandings, hence providing a clearer framework for the subsequent analyses.

Translation Strategies

Translation Strategies are macro-level, principle-based approaches that control the entire process of translation. They are macro-level plans devised to accomplish specific goals of translation, with a focus on two major categories: “domestication” and “foreignization”. The term “strategy” is described by the *Cihai Editorial Committee* (2009) as “principles and methods suitable for specific situations” (p. 231), which are “a plan that is intended to achieve a particular purpose” (Oxford Learner's Dictionaries, n.d., strategy). This indicates that although translation strategies are related to methods and techniques, they emphasize macro-level “principles” and fundamental “plans”. Xiong (2014) believes translation strategies should be distinctly divided into domestication and foreignization, aligning with Venuti's (1995) interpretations. Venuti (1995)

emphasizes that translators should find a balance between preserving the cultural perceptions of the source text and adapting to the target culture, by choosing either domestication or foreignization strategies to determine the cultural positioning of the translation. This classification not only reflects the macro-directionality of translation strategies but also guides translators in choosing appropriate translation methods based on the specific text and the expectations of the target audience.

Building on the outlined translation strategies, the classification of translation techniques further specifies the tools available to translators in achieving their strategic goals. This section categorizes techniques into three groups: those favoring domestication, those favoring foreignization, and neutral techniques, as detailed by scholars like Venuti (1995) and Newmark (1988).

Translation Techniques and Translation Methods

Building upon the foundational understanding of translation strategies as discussed in the previous section, this section will delve into translation techniques. According to Dong (2021), the terms “translation method” and “translation technique” are frequently conflated within the field of translation studies. Dong argues that these terms should not be taken as separate pigeonholes but as constituting a whole rounded approach to the translator’s toolbox, then Dong grouped those translation strategies into three types: the ones favoring domestication, the ones favoring foreignization, and neutral techniques. Techniques favoring domestication are the first type. They render texts more accessible and comfortable for the target audience by harmonizing with the cultural and linguistic expectations of a target language. Some examples of domesticating techniques are: 1). Established Equivalent: One makes use of a translation that is already known or even officially accepted in the target culture; 2). Generalization: This is the substitution of a specific term from the source language with a more general or more broadly comprehended term in the target language; 3). Amplification: The incorporation of information from beyond the source text in order to either clarify what is being said or to further enhance the text; 4). Semantic Translation: it aims at meaning of the source text without consideration of any specific wording and though it often means considerable change of grammar and syntax to target language norms; 5). Adaptation: it means changing references from the original language to similar ones in the target language that have the same meaning. This is done to make sure the message connects well with the intended audience; 6). Transcreation: Creating a new text that may deviate significantly from the source text to preserve its intended impact or aesthetic value, often used in marketing, advertising, or creative content; 7). Substitution: Replacing elements in the source language with a non-linguistic equivalent (or replacing elements in a non-linguistic message with a linguistic one), for example when translating idioms or culturally bound metaphors into more transparent local expressions; 8). Variation: Adapting the generic ‘local’ linguistic features of a translation to better fit the communicative conventions of the target culture, which could entail making the tone more colloquial where it is very formal in the source language, or using local slang words.

The second one is foreignization favoring techniques. Foreignization techniques maintain the cultural and linguistic uniqueness of the source text in a manner that the target audience is able

to enjoy the foreignness of the original. Common techniques to be employed include: 1). Literal Translation: Retention of the structural and lexical elements of the source language even though these are unusual to the target language audience; 2). Borrowing: Introducing directly from the source language words or phrases, without translation; 3). Calque: Making a word-for-word translation, as in the case of the foreign term or phrase, with the elements changed to those of the foreign language.

The third one is Neutral Techniques. Neutral techniques are those that do not inherently lean towards either domestication or foreignization but depend on how they are applied in context. These include: 1). Reduction: This refers to the elimination of some material from the translated text, considered redundant or inadmissible for various reasons, e.g. censorship norms, space restrictions, and subtitle translation in particular; 2). Particularization: This happens when a general/vague expression in the source language is replaced by a more particular term in the target language; 3). Descriptive Translation: This method of translation attempts to translate words or phrases not word for word but by describing their form, meaning, or function.

Through sorting out the definitions and relationships among these terms, which can help illustrate the practical applications of each technique within the broader framework of translation strategies. The following figure visually summarizes the inter-connectedness and specific uses of these techniques as part of a holistic approach to translation.

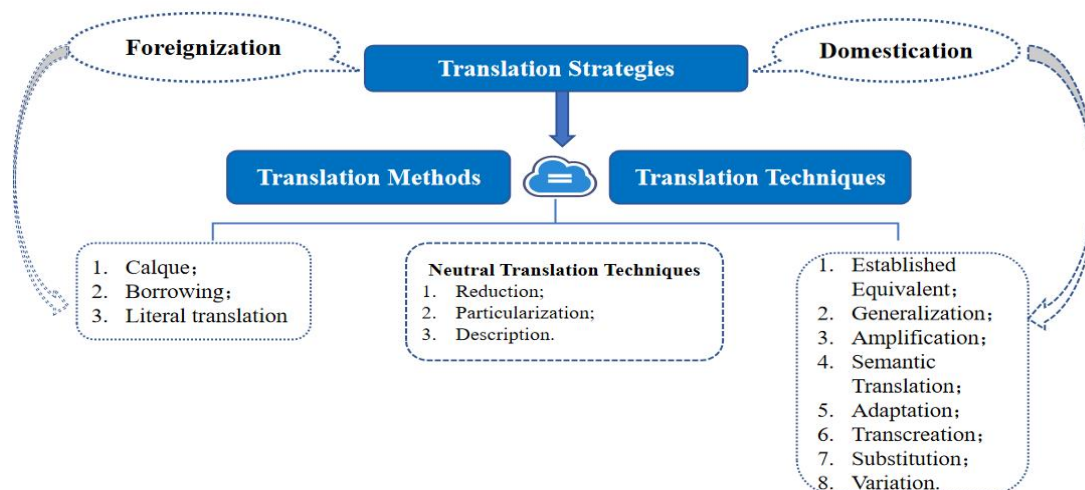


Figure 1. Definitions and relationships among translation strategies, methods, and techniques

Literature Review

This literature review aims to synthesize key studies from the past decade on the strategies used in translating English poetry into Chinese. It covers various theories and methods, showing key trends, discussions, and progress in this area. The review sorts the scholarship into different sections according to the main focus of each study. This includes the translation theories used, the methods applied, and how cultural factors affect translation (Li, 2022; Chen, 2023; Wang & Han, 2022).

Theoretical Frameworks and Translation Strategies

Li (2022) and Chen (2023) look at how certain translation ideas, like “以顿代步” (substituting pause for foot) and reception aesthetics, affect the translation process. They stress that translators need to match the cultural and style preferences of the audience they’re translating for. The strategies talked about range from straightforward translation to more flexible approaches like adapting to local culture or keeping things as they are from the original language. Wang and Han (2022) look into these methods more closely, paying attention to how cultural aspects are kept during translation.

Methodological Approaches in Poetry Translation

Translation research has adopted different methods. For example, Xia (2023) studied language features through corpus-based approach, and he focused on the use of adjectives in poetry translation. These methods help scholars clearly evaluate how different strategies, such as literal translation or more flexible translation, affect the final translated products. However, there are still some criticisms, such as the situation of shortage of source citations, emphasizing areas where academic quality can be improved.

Cultural Adaptation and Translation Techniques

Culture is crucial for translators when choosing translation methods. Zheng (2022) studied how translation methods can enhance or diminish the aesthetic and emotional effects for the source poetry. Studies like Li’s (2016) closely focus on how to maintain the original meaning while aligning it with cultural expectations. They suggest adopting a creative approach which respects both the original culture and the new culture. Guo (2019) also found that foreignization often perfectly preserves the integrity of the original language and culture, especially in poetry translation.

Analysis of Individual Translators and Poems

Research into how individual translators operate, as carried out by Liu (2017) among others and applied by Hu (2015), serves as useful pointers for the practicality of translation theories. Such studies often explore the extent to which personal preferences may affect a translator's decision-making, as well as how those decisions in turn influence translational fidelity and cultural appropriateness. For example, Liu (2017) discussed the role of translators on their translations and called for a high level of congruence with original text as well as adaptation depending cultural circumstances.

Comparative Studies of Multiple Chinese Translations of a Single English Poem

The research of Wei (2018) focuses on and compares different Chinese translations of Robert Frost poems, which offers insight into how these translation strategies are taking place along with corresponding preferences from their recipients. Chen, in 2023, analyzed three Chinese versions of John Donne’s poem “A Valediction: Forbidding Mourning” with relevance translation theory. They demonstrate how difficult is to move poetry and rhythm across cultures in translation,

what does and doesn't work as a translations method.

Innovations and Challenges in Translation Practice

Emerging trends and challenges are discussed in recent research by scholars like Fan (2023), who explores innovative strategies in the context of modern translation practices. The need for ongoing adaptation of translation strategies to contemporary linguistic and cultural contexts is a key theme, reflecting the dynamic nature of translation as a practice.

Research Gaps

Our review of thirty scholarly articles reveals not only terminological inconsistencies but also multiple areas where current research on English-Chinese poetry translation strategies could be enhanced:

① **Terminological Clarity:** A substantial two-thirds of the studies—17 out of 30—demonstrate confusion or inconsistency in the use of key terms such as “translation strategies”, “methods”, and “techniques”. For example, Li (2022) uses terms like “substituting pause for foot” and “emulation method” interchangeably as translation strategies, reflecting a lack of terminological precision. Similarly, Xia (2023) identifies Literal and Free translation as strategies while categorizing Shift, Conversion, Replacement, and Amplification as techniques but fails to clearly cite sources for these definitions. Wang and Han (2022) further add to the confusion by inconsistently labeling “foreignization” as a “method”. Liu (2017) discusses “variable translation” but does not sufficiently distinguish between strategies and methods, adding to the overall confusion.

The distinction between a “translation strategy” and a “translation method” in Chen (2023) is not clear and confused. In her study, she emphasizes fidelity to both content and style, adhering closely to Spenser’s original, while Cao seeks a balance between the original text and its expression in Chinese, leveraging the linguistic strengths of Chinese to enhance readability and aesthetic appeal. The research fails to clearly differentiate between the broad strategies and the specific methods employed to implement them.

Wei (2018) compounds this issue by listing translation strategies like literal translation, formal equivalence, and simple vocabulary without clarifying their conceptual distinctions. Similarly, another study by Chen (2023) identifies several translation strategies such as balancing literal and interpretive translation and using culturally appropriate terms, but the terminology is inconsistently applied throughout the study. While Mei (2018) flags selected strategies as “methods” in the abstract yet refers to them as “strategies” within the text, perhaps underscoring a lack of terminological homogeneity.

Jiang (2016) introduces four key translation strategies used by Xu Zhimo but does not distinguish them clearly from methods or techniques. Zheng (2022) focuses on the translation strategy of “picture reproduction,” aimed at evoking aesthetic sensitivity and emotional responses, but lacks clarity in differentiating it from methods or techniques. Zhu (2022) also blurs the lines by using terms like repetition, direct, and domestication methods interchangeably with interpretive strategies, further contributing to the confusion.

In the studies by Liu (2022) and Xu (2022), the terms strategy and technique are used in a manner that lacks consistency. Lu (2017) and Sun (2020) also reveal some inconsistencies in strategy terminology because they regard “free translation” as the “translation strategy” in their studies.

Wang (2017) looks at how people mostly use direct translation but doesn't clearly differentiate it from other methods or techniques. Similarly, the same problem reflects in Xiong (2021)'s study, he pertained to preserving the aesthetic value, rhythm and structure of poems, however Xiong didn't really state recognizably distinct from methods or techniques. These studies adds up more into ambiguity in terminologies. These studies indicate the need for clearer definitions and consistent use of key terms in translation research, which will facilitate communication and make academic discussions more effective.

② **Over-reliance on Quantitative Analysis:** Some studies, such as Li (2022), mainly rely on quantitative methods, which may miss the subtle cultural and emotional aspects in poetry (Baker, 2019). Baker (2019) emphasizes the importance of using qualitative analysis to understand emotional and cultural details, which are key to fully mastering translation, especially in poetry.

③ **Limited Theoretical Frameworks:** In the studies by Chen (2023), Jiang (2014), Zhu (2022), Zhang (2019), and Li and Zhang (2019), the types of theories used were very limited, which restricted the breadth of researchers' interpretation of research results. Chen (2023), Jiang (2014), and Zhu (2022) studied the specific theories or translation elements used in poetry translation. In contrast, when discussing Kenneth Rexroth's poetry translation, Li and Zhang (2019) included ecological aesthetics and Zen aesthetics to broaden the scope of the dialogue. However, these studies are often criticized for not providing sufficient practical examples. For example, in Li and Zhang's study (2019), a new and creative theoretical approach was mentioned, but it may not have sufficient practical evidence. This is a common issue that can be improved by examining more data to support their proposed strategies. In addition, Guo's (2019) study provides a detailed study of alienation methods, but as it only uses one theoretical approach, a too single theoretical framework may miss the perspectives of other translation theories. Expanding the theoretical scope and incorporating practical data will improve the analysis and usefulness of these studies, thereby better producing translation results.

④ **Inadequate Source Citation:** Xia's (2023) study suggests that without proper citation, the reliability and academic quality of research results can be weakened. Improving the way researchers use citations is crucial for maintaining academic integrity and supporting claims with reliable sources, as “correctly citing sources is essential for validating and trusting research results” (Ngatuvai, 2021, p. 1).

⑤ **Cultural Sensitivity and Adaptation:** Li's (2016) study on the “Creative Translation Method” demonstrates the difficulty of maintaining cultural respect and accuracy towards the original text. It reveals a lack of strategies to address cultural importance and maintain the essence of the original poem. Wang and Wu's (2021) study on the recent Chinese version of “My Heart is on the High Ground” suggests how translation techniques can adapt this poem to modern Chinese culture. Their research also suggests that there is still not yet sufficient detailed analysis on how new forms and structures can improve cultural connections. They emphasize the importance of

participating more in adapting to cultural changes to maintain poetic qualities. Lu's (2017) study on Hu Shi's translation work during the New Culture Movement highlights his choice to adapt foreign poetry in everyday language to suit Chinese readers. However, this method may alter the emotional perception and layout of the original poem, reflecting a struggle between adapting to different cultures and remaining faithful to the original work. Li (2020) also explored Malang's translation, even though they use modern poetic styles, sometimes the imagery changes due to cultural and historical differences. This makes it more difficult to maintain the subtlety and depth of the original work. Xiong's (2021) study explores the difficulties in translating poetry between Eastern and Western cultures. Proposed methods to overcome cultural differences while maintaining the original style and rhythm. Wang's (2017) study on Zhao Luorui's translation strategy shows that direct translation can maintain the style and meaning of the original text. This highlights Zhao's unique approach of being faithful to the original text while also making adjustments for readers.

⑥ Empirical Data Shortage: Liu (2022) highlights a significant gap in empirical research that considers feedback from target audiences. Incorporating more empirical studies would help validate theoretical claims and improve the practical relevance of research findings. Feedback from bilingual readers, as suggested by Yuan (2022), could also provide valuable insights into how effectively translation strategies convey poetic nuances and cultural contexts. The lack of practical research currently limits the applicability of these studies, resulting in conclusions that remain largely theoretical rather than empirically grounded (Hadebe, 2023).

Li's (2014) study on applying Skopos Theory in translating Emily Dickinson's poetry into Chinese is notably limited by the absence of empirical data, including reader feedback and assessments of translation effectiveness. This shortfall underscores the study's limited practical applicability and highlights the ongoing need for empirical research in translation studies. Incorporating real-world evaluations would better validate theoretical approaches and provide a clearer understanding of their effectiveness in practice.

Wang's (2015) analysis of Sun Dayu's early English-to-Chinese poetry translations focuses on the preference for foreignization to maintain the poem's structure and integrity, yet it lacks the necessary empirical evidence to fully substantiate its claims. Similarly, Li and Zhang's (2019) exploration of "ecological and Zen beauty" in Kenneth Rexroth's poetry translations offers an innovative theoretical perspective but faces the same challenge of limited empirical support. This trend reflects a broader issue in translation studies, where theoretical assertions are frequently unsupported by sufficient data. The lack of empirical validation hinders the practical application of these strategies across diverse linguistic contexts, a common limitation in studies that prioritize theoretical models over real-world evidence (Xiao, 2015).

⑦ Gaps in Historical and Cultural Analysis: Bakhronova (2024) stated that effective translation of poetry requires a deep understanding of the historical and cultural contexts from which the original text emerges. In other words, studies that incorporate broader historical and cultural analyses, rather than narrowly focusing on individual texts, offer more comprehensive insights into translation strategies. For instance, Hu's (2015) research could be enriched by a wider historical perspective, linking the translated works to broader socio-cultural movements of the

period. Likewise, Li's (2020) study on the cultural contexts behind poetic deviations and Sun's (2020) thesis on E. E. Cummings' poetry translations underscore the importance of anchoring translation practices within the historical and cultural realities that influenced the original texts. These studies highlight that a deep understanding of historical and cultural nuances is vital not only for preserving the poetic essence but also for achieving translation accuracy. By adopting interdisciplinary approaches that integrate historical and cultural analysis, translators can more effectively address the complexities involved in translating stylistically unique poetry.

Methodology

This study used systematic literature review as methodology to organize and combine existing research results. The approach follows the guidelines set by Okoli and Schabram (2010), which stress the need for a systematic method to make a literature review more thorough and trustworthy.

Data Collection

The main sources for this research are journal articles that have been reviewed by experts and published in the last ten years. These articles came from various academic sources like JSTOR, Google Scholar, and Web of Science, making sure the results covered a wide range of current discussions on translating English-Chinese poetry. The author used keywords like "poetry translation", "English-Chinese translation", and "translation strategy" to narrow the search and maintain the research focus.

Data Analysis

The analysis looked at how each chosen study helped understand translation strategies while spotting terminology issues and methods gaps. The author then analyzed the findings to organize them into main themes like cultural adaptation, methods used, and theories, which helped structure the literature review. This method fits the thesis's aim to give a detailed look at English-to-Chinese poetry translation methods from the last ten years. This section shows how the data was gathered, chosen, and examined, ensuring the study's results are dependable and accurate.

Synthesis of Key Findings

This review demonstrates that strategic choices like domestication and foreignization play a key role in shaping how translated poetry is received within Chinese cultural contexts. Li (2022) and Chen (2023) show that it's crucial to match translation methods with what the target audience expects culturally and aesthetically to keep both the accuracy of the translation and its emotional effect. These results highlight how important it is for translators to pay close attention to cultural context to make their translations more effective and meaningful.

Theoretical and Methodological Implications

The talk about translation methods has been improved by different theories, but this review points out that there's still a problem with clear terminology. Many studies reveal mixed usage of

important terms, which might disrupt academic discussions and slow down advancements in the area. Fixing these problems is essential for improving translation studies, particularly in teaching and applying translation techniques more accurately.

Conclusion

This paper looks at how English and Chinese poetry have been translated over the last ten years. It brings together important research and gives useful information about how different strategies, methods, and techniques work in this field. The review of existing literature points out key trends and new developments while also dealing with the difficulties and issues of translating poetry between different languages and cultures.

Practical Applications and Recommendations

This review highlights the need to keep a balanced method in translation that respects both the original text and the cultural details of the target language. The results show that understanding the language and cultural expectations of the audience is key to making a translation effective. Also, teachers and trainers in translation can use these ideas to improve their programs by adding more specific talks about translation techniques and how to use them in real situations.

Future Research Directions

This review points out significant areas for improvement in current research, especially the need for more practical studies and broader theoretical approaches. Future research should focus on qualitative studies that explore how translations affect people emotionally and culturally. Looking at how readers respond and analyzing how translations are received can provide helpful information on how well different translation methods work. Comparing these strategies might help researchers understand how they express artistic qualities in different cultures. Translating poetry is a complex skill that combines language knowledge with a profound grasp of cultural context. This study examines the issues and methods of translating English poetry into Chinese. It adds to current academic conversations and examines the difficulties of connecting different languages and cultures. Researchers need to look into these details more closely to improve translation methods. Ongoing conversation and teamwork within the translation research field are crucial for enhancing how international translation is done and how effective it is.

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