

## Comparative Analysis of Pavilion of Prince Teng Based on Construction Grammar

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**Abstract:** This paper explores the application and significance of Construction Grammar in the translation of poetry, specifically focusing on four different English versions of the classical Chinese poem Pavilion of Prince Teng. The study analyzes the construction choices, variations, and usage patterns across these translations, highlighting both their similarities and differences. The analysis is organized into three key levels: syntactic constructions, lexical constructions, and emotive constructions. By examining how each translation handles these constructions, the study sheds light on the translators' creative decisions and the impact of Construction Grammar on the resulting translations. Moreover, the paper evaluates the quality of each translation, considering how well they preserve the original poem's stylistic and emotive features. The findings suggest that Construction Grammar is a powerful tool for revealing the linguistic intricacies and expressive subtleties in poetry. It not only enhances the accuracy of translation but also enriches its emotional and stylistic depth, providing a novel approach to understanding and translating poetic works. This research offers valuable insights into the translation process, encourages further exploration of Construction Grammar in literary translation, and proposes a fresh perspective for future poetry translation practices. It contributes to the growing body of literature on the intersection of linguistics and translation studies.

**Keywords:** Construction Grammar; Pavilion of Prince Teng; Poetry Translation; English Translation

### 1. Introduction

Poetry translation is a sophisticated linguistic art that demands not only a deep understanding of the original work but also the ability to

convey its core elements—such as meaning, sound, rhythm, tone, and rhyme—into the target language in a seamless and coherent manner. This process transcends the mere substitution of words or phrases, requiring a comprehensive grasp of the poem's imagery, rhetorical devices, linguistic style, and rhythm. It also necessitates creative adaptation to ensure that the translated version retains the aesthetic and emotional resonance of the original. The translator must skillfully balance fidelity to the source text with the freedom to innovate, employing strategies that preserve the linguistic style and rhythm of the original while transforming the translation into a distinct artistic expression within the cultural context of the target language. The preservation and transformation of linguistic style and rhythm are particularly vital in poetry translation. Ensuring that the translated poem retains the original's rhythmic and stylistic qualities not only enhances its artistic appeal but also ensures its vitality [1].

Construction Grammar, as a cognitive-functional linguistic theory, provides a novel lens through which to view language, conceptualizing it as a symbolic system that consists of form-meaning pairings, or constructions. This study employs Construction Grammar as its theoretical framework to conduct a comparative analysis of four English translations of the Pavilion of Prince Teng, aiming to explore potential applications of Construction Grammar in the nuanced field of poetry translation.

### 2. An Overview of Construction Grammar

Construction Grammar is a linguistic theory introduced in the 1990s by scholars such as Fillmore, Kay, Lakoff, and Goldberg. It is grounded in the framework of Cognitive Linguistics, which prioritizes the experiential and cognitive dimensions of language. Unlike traditional structuralist approaches, which focus on abstract structures, Cognitive

Linguistics emphasizes the relationship between language and human experience, conceptualizing language symbols as emerging from a dynamic progression of “reality–cognition–language” [2]. This perspective underscores the role of cognitive processes in shaping linguistic meanings and structures.

In Construction Grammar, the construction is the fundamental unit, embodying a systematic correspondence between form and meaning. It can encompass linguistic phenomena at various levels, ranging from individual words to larger discourse structures, from fixed expressions to more flexible patterns, and from conventional to idiosyncratic constructions, as well as from abstract to concrete forms [3]. The relationship between form and meaning in a construction is inseparable, with both elements functioning as two interrelated facets of a unified entity that mutually influence and constrain one another. Moreover, the form-meaning pairing is dynamic, continuously adapting and evolving in response to language use and societal change [4]. In addition to phonological, semantic, and grammatical dimensions, constructions also encompass pragmatic, cultural, and emotional layers, reflecting the multifaceted nature of human communication.

The construction network is a central concept in Construction Grammar, representing the interconnected relationships among constructions that together form a complex, dynamic network structure [5]. This network is characterized by three fundamental features: hierarchy, inheritance, and multiplicity. Hierarchy refers to the organization of constructions within the network, arranged from the most abstract to the most concrete, creating a top-down structure. Inheritance implies that lower-level constructions inherit both the formal and semantic features of higher-level constructions, while also introducing their own distinctive characteristics, thereby establishing a hierarchical relationship of inheritance. Multiplicity reflects the fact that constructions at any given level can be linked to multiple higher-level and lower-level constructions, forming lateral relationships with multiple connections. Furthermore, Construction Grammar includes various classifications of constructions. One common approach categorizes constructions according to their

degree of fixedness, distinguishing between fixed and variable constructions [6]. Another classification is based on the transparency of the form-meaning correspondence, distinguishing between transparent and opaque constructions. These classifications highlight the flexible and multifaceted nature of constructions in the network.

Construction Grammar encompasses several prominent theoretical branches, each contributing to the development of the framework. The four primary branches are Fillmore and Kay’s Construction Grammar (CG), Lakoff and Goldberg’s construction grammar (cg), Langacker’s Cognitive Grammar, and Croft’s Radical Construction Grammar (RCG). Since the early 21st century, two additional frameworks have emerged: Embodied Construction Grammar (ECG) and Fluid Construction Grammar (FCG), both of which trace their origins to the early 2000s, with notable development occurring post-2005. Despite their theoretical significance, these frameworks have had limited impact and remain relatively underutilized in China. Another post-2005 framework, Discourse Construction Grammar (DCG), although not officially recognized as a distinct branch, has introduced innovative contributions to the scope of Construction Grammar [7]. DCG has garnered attention for its unique approach and has led to some applied research outcomes, which have gained traction in China.

This study conducts a comparative analysis of four English translations of the Pavilion of Prince Teng, focusing on three key aspects: syntactic constructions, lexical constructions, and emotive constructions.

In terms of syntactic constructions, the analysis uncovers significant differences in how the translators handle the sentence structures of the original text. These variations may arise from distinct interpretations of the original syntax or from adjustments made to conform to the syntactic conventions of English [8].

Regarding lexical constructions, the study observes that differences in lexical choices often reflect varying understandings of the original vocabulary or deliberate efforts to enhance the cultural relevance of the translations for the target audience [9]. These lexical variations are shown to influence both the semantic accuracy of the translations and the conveyance of cultural nuances.

In the realm of emotive constructions, the study highlights the different strategies employed by the translators to convey the emotional content of the original text. These strategies further differentiate the translations and affect their emotional resonance. Through the examination of these syntactic, lexical, and emotive aspects, the study reveals how construction choices shape the overall quality and cultural impact of the translations.

### **3. Introduction to the Pavilion of Prince Teng and Its English Translations**

The Pavilion of Prince Teng is a celebrated poem composed by Wang Bo, one of the Four Literary Eminences of the Early Tang Dynasty, who ranks alongside Yang Jiong, Lu Zhaolin, and Luo Binwang. Born into a Confucian scholarly family, Wang Bo was deeply influenced by Confucian ideals, while simultaneously embracing the spirit of his time. His poetry is characterized by a sense of grandeur, clarity, and passionate vigor, leaving a lasting impression on readers [10].

The poem complements Wang Bo's famous prose work, Preface to Pavilion of Prince Teng, encapsulating its themes and essence [11]. The opening couplet introduces the strategic importance of the Pavilion, evoking the opulence of the grand banquets held during its construction. The second couplet builds upon this imagery, describing the painted beams that rise to meet the clouds over the southern port and the beaded curtains that draw the rain from the western mountains, emphasizing the pavilion's towering magnificence. The third couplet shifts from spatial to temporal concerns, contemplating the passage of time, the changing seasons, and the shifting constellations, which naturally lead to the concluding couplet. The final lines lament the fleeting nature of human existence in contrast to the enduring presence of the pavilion and the ever-flowing river, bringing the poem to a poignant close [12].

The poem unfolds in dual dimensions of space and time, weaving an intricate tapestry of imagery that captures the essence of the Pavilion of Prince Teng. Its refined language, profound sentiments, and grand vision not only complement the Preface to Pavilion of Prince Teng but also elevate it, with both works standing as twin masterpieces that enhance one another's brilliance.

This study analyzes four English translations of the poem:

#### 1) English Translation One:

(Tr. by Xu Yuanchong):

By riverside towers prince Teng's pavilion proud.

No more ringing bells punctuate the dancers' refrain.

At dawn its painted beams bar the south-flying cloud.

At dusk its uprolled screens mingle with west hills' rains.

Leisurely clouds cast hang o'er still water all day long.

The world and seasons change beneath a changeless sky.

Where is the prince who once enjoyed here wine and song?

Beyond the rails the silent river still rolls by.

#### 2) English Translation Two:

(Tr. by Giles):

Near these islands a palace was built by a prince.

But its music and song have departed long since.

The hill-mists of morning sweep down on the halls.

At night the red curtains lie furled on the walls.  
The clouds o'er the water their shadows still cast.

Things change like the stars: how few autumns have passed.

And yet where is that prince? Where is he? –  
No reply.

Save the splash of the stream rolling ceaselessly by.

#### 3) English Translation Three:

(Tr. by Hart):

The high pavilion.

Of the king of Teng.

Stands on the riverbank.

The tinkle.

Of jade ornaments.

The songs of birds.

The strains of music.

And the rhythm of the dance.

Are hushed forevermore.

On their southern course.

The mists of morning.

Drift past its painted beams.

And the rains.

From the western hills.

At sunset sweep by its lacquered screens.

The lazy clouds.

Still cast their shadows.  
On the pool.  
And the same sun.  
Looks sadly down from heaven.  
How all has changed!  
For how many autumns.  
Have the brilliant stars shone out!  
Where is the emperor's son?  
Who dwelt within these walls?  
Out the balcony.  
The long river flows ceaselessly, in silence.  
4) English Translation Four:  
(Tr. by Luo Jingguo).  
The lofty King Teng's Tower Overlooks the River.  
The jade pendants tinkle, and the carriage bells jingle.  
The banquet's over, the guests are leaving, and the singing and the dancing have stopped.  
In the morn the rosy clouds from the southern shore flit across the painted pillars.  
In the eve the rain in the western mountains is drawn in by the red curtains.  
The lazy clouds are reflected in the water and the days pass in leisure.  
Things change and stars move; how many years have passed since the building of the Tower?  
Where is its builder, King Teng?  
Only the River outside the railing flows to the east all by itself.

#### **4. Analysis of the Four English Translations of the Pavilion of Prince Teng**

In this paper, the four English translations of Pavilion of Prince Teng are analyzed through the lens of Construction Grammar, focusing on three key aspects: syntactic constructions, lexical constructions, and emotive constructions. The four translations under examination are those by Xu Yuanchong, Giles, Hart, and Luo Jingguo, as discussed in the preceding section.

##### **4.1 Syntactic Construction**

Syntactic constructions refer to the structure and components of a sentence, which determine its grammatical function and logical relationships. The selection and variation of syntactic constructions are crucial considerations in translation, as they directly impact the accuracy, coherence, and overall quality of the translation [13]. Syntactic constructions vary between native

and non-native translators. Apart from the different language preferences between native and non-native translators, syntactic constructions also vary based on different understandings of the source material. These four versions of translations illustrate the disparities between distinct linguistic conventions and aesthetic preferences, as well as the different understandings of the lines.

##### **4.1.1 Difference in preference**

Symmetrical parallelism is a preferred aesthetic and linguistic feature in Chinese, particularly in classical poetry. For instance, the second couplet of the Pavilion of Prince Teng exemplifies symmetrical parallelism, where corresponding parts of speech and components with similar semantic meanings are placed in parallel positions [14]. Two of the four versions, translated by Chinese translators Xu and Luo, exhibit similar approaches to represent this device.

In Xu's translation, "At dawn its painted beams bar the south-flying cloud; At dusk its uprolled screens mingle with west hills' rains," the parallelism is evident in the correspondence between "at dawn" and "at dusk," "its painted beams" and "its uprolled screens," and "bar the south-flying cloud" and "mingle with west hills' rains." Similarly, Luo's translation, "In the morn the rosy clouds from the southern shore flit across the painted pillars. In the eve the rain in the western mountains is drawn in by the red curtains," maintains the parallel structure through the alignment of "in the morn" with "in the eve," "the rosy clouds from the southern shore" with "the rain in the western mountains," and "flit across the painted pillars" with "is drawn in by the red curtains." However, this device is not employed by the English translator Giles or the American translator Hart, which can be illustrated by their translations of time adverbials. For example, in Giles' translation, "at dawn" is expressed using an of-construction, "the hill-mists of morning", which differs from the construction used for "at night". Similarly, Hart's translation also uses different construction for "at dawn" and "at dusk", highlighting their preference for variation.

##### **4.1.2 Difference in understanding**

Chinese, as an analytic language, has fewer inflections than synthetic-analytic hybrid language like English, which may lead to

ambiguity in meaning, especially in classical Chinese. Additionally, in Chinese, verbs are a type of noun, specifically “dynamic nouns”, which possess a dual nature, combining both nominal and verbal characteristics, as well as referentiality and predicativity, where nouns encompass verbs [15]. In contrast, the distinction between verbs and nouns is much clearer and more rigid. All these characteristics often result in diverse interpretations of poem, and consequently lead to diverse translations.

In translating the second couplet, different understandings are revealed by translations. Among them, Xu and Hart offer similar interpretations. Although their forms of expression differ, Xu’s translation, “south-flying cloud” and “west hills’ rains, “ and Hart’s translation, “on their southern course” and “rains from western hills, “ both interpret Nanpu as the direction of the clouds and west hills (or western hills, or western mountains) as the origin of the rains. By contrast, Luo’s translation, “the rosy clouds from the southern shore” and “the rain in the western mountains” regard both Nanpu and western mountains as the origins of the clouds and rains, respectively. However, Giles’ translation neglects these two phrases and leaves them untranslated.

The ways of understanding the sixth line and the resulting focuses are quite different. Xu’s translation, “The world and seasons change beneath a changeless sky,” depicts the transformation of the scenery and contrasts the changing elements with the unchanging sky. This approach focuses more on interpreting the first half of the sentence, while omitting the reference to the rest. In contrast, Giles’ translation, “Things change like the stars: how few autumns have passed,” employs a paradoxical device to highlight the significant changes that have occurred. Additionally, the use of an exclamatory sentence emphasizes the word “few.” Here, “few” may not refer to an exact number of years but rather to a kind of psychological time. This understanding intensifies the contrast with the first half of the sentence and focuses more on the rapid and extensive changes that have taken place. Hart’s translation and Luo’s translation share a similar understanding. Both translate the changes of things and the movement of stars, and interpret the latter part of the sentence as a special interrogative element.

## 4.2 Lexical Construction

Lexical constructions pertain to the selection and combination of words, which shape the semantics and stylistic nuances of a sentence [16]. The choice and variation of lexical constructions are pivotal in translation, as they influence both the accuracy and expressiveness of the translated text.

Constructions, formed within the human cognitive domain, are the projections in language of image schemas [17]. Lexemes, as basic components of constructions, are essential for conveying the accurate meaning in translation. Nevertheless, gaps exist in the choice of lexemes due to different experiences between cultures. This can lead to the phenomenon where one lexeme or lexical construction, if translated literally, may not convey an equivalent semantic meaning in another culture. Translations of the second line reveals this issue.

Xu’s translation:

No more ringing bells punctuate the dancers’ refrain.

Giles’ translation:

But its music and song have departed long since.

Hart’s translation:

The tinkle.

Of jade ornaments.

The songs of birds.

The strains of music.

And the rhythm of the dance.

Are hushed forevermore.

Luo’s translation:

The jade pendants tinkle, and the carriage bells jingle.

The banquet’s over, the guests are leaving, and the singing and the dancing have stopped.

In this example, it literally states that ornament jade pendants and bird-like bells make (performers) stop singing and dancing. This semantic meaning contradicts empirical knowledge, as jade pendants and carriage bells cannot be the agents that perform activities. This contradiction give rise to rhetoric metonymy.

By employing metonymy, the line conveys that all those participants, along with music and dance no longer exist. If one lacks the knowledge that jade pendants are preferred and worn by scholar-officials, and bird-like bells are ornamented on the carriages of imperial families and senior officials, one may be

confused about the sentence. Therefore, the metonymy might not make sense. Thus, Xu's translation, "No more ringing bells punctuate the dancers' refrain," may lead to misunderstandings. Moreover, "punctuate" means to interrupt something repeatedly, which also diverges from the original work that emphasizes more on the condition of the stop of songs and dance in the past.

By contrast, Giles' and Hart's translations focus more on the integrated meaning Giles' rather than translating the construction of the original work. Giles' translation, "But its music and song have departed long since," deliberately omits the image of jade pendants and carriage bells, adopting free translation. This choice expresses the poet's underlying meaning more directly but more accurately. In Hart's translation, although "the songs of birds" is a mistranslation, which misunderstands the phrase in original work, the sentence ingeniously extracts common feature of "sound" from the jade pendants, music and dance. By translating the line into a passive sentence that all these sounds are hushed, it not only accurately conveys the implied meaning of the poet, but also retains almost all the images of the original work.

Luo's translation adopts a quite different method, which departs from the causality between the "jade pendants and the carriage bells" and the stop of singing and dancing. This construction would have been a good adoption, implying that on viewing the present scene, the poet imagines the past. However, the translation "the banquet's over, the guests are leaving, and the singing and the dancing have stopped," reveals that the translator misunderstood the original line. According to the essay completed by the poet at the same time as the poem, this poem is written in the banquet but not after banquet. Thus, the tense should not employ the present tense. What's more, it extends highly concentrated construction of the four-character phrase into several loose clauses, which is lack of poetic and artistic conception.

### **4.3 Emotive Construction**

Emotive constructions refer to the linguistic mechanisms through which emotions are expressed and conveyed, utilizing specific syntax and vocabulary. They focus on how language encodes emotional experiences and

responses through structured forms. In translation, emotive constructions are manifested in various ways, including sentence modification, vocabulary selection, and tone adaptation. The primary aim of these strategies is to faithfully reproduce the emotional depth and intensity of the original text, ensuring that the emotional resonance is preserved in the target language [18].

Famous literary scholar Wang Guowei pointed out that all descriptions of scenery are but reflections of feelings [19]. In the first couplet, although there are no emotive words, the description of the still-standing spectacular pavilion and the past banquets creates a contrast that reflects an implicit lament for the elapse of time.

Xu's translation, "By riverside towers prince Teng's pavilion proud, No more ringing bells punctuate the dancers' refrain," employs a locative inversion at the beginning and a negative construction. According to Langacker, in locative inversion constructions, the locative phrase at the beginning of the construction serves as a reference point for determining the newly introduced element and makes the new element focused [20]. By starting with a locative inversion, Xu's translation draws readers in the scene, making them more involved and the reading experience more immersive. Furthermore, negation, as a distinctive stylistic device, has a significant foregrounding effects and emotional functions [21]. With the negative construction "no more...", Xu's translation subtly conveys a sense of lament. Giles' translation, "Near these islands a palace was built by a prince, But its music and song have departed long since," utilizes another way to express this subtle feeling. By deploying adversative construction "but..." and a time adverbial phrase "long since", it effectively conveys the lament. Similarly, Hart's translation uses the time adverbial "forevermore". Whether it is the time adverbial "long since" or "forevermore", they respectively emphasize the span of time since the cessation of singing and dancing and the enduring feature of the cessation; Moreover, in this translation, it employs the passive voice with an intransitive verb, without specifying the agent. This emphasizes the ease with which human life can change, thereby expressing the feeling of lament. However, in Luo's translation, such emotive implication is absent.

The last couplet, by using the form of the rhetorical question and the description of the scenery, exposes the lament of the poet that time passes in vain: the river remains and continues to flow ceaselessly, while the people who was once in the pavilion is no longer there. Different translators translated with different constructions to represent the sensation.

Xu's translation: Where is the prince who once enjoyed here wine and song?

Beyond the rails the silent river still rolls by.

Giles' translation: And yet where is that prince?

Where is he? -No reply.

Save the splash of the stream rolling ceaselessly by.

Hart's translation: Where is the emperor's son?

Who dwelt within these walls?

Out the balcony.

The long river flows ceaselessly, in silence.

Luo's translation: Where is its builder, King Teng?

Only the River outside the railing flows to the east all by itself.

Among those translations, Giles' translation is the most outstanding. It combines several devices, one of which is vowel patterns. According to Sun, vowel patterns play a significant role in rhetorical effect in English: long vowels and diphthongs require more articulatory effort due to their longer duration and the need for tongue transitions, which results in a slower speech rate and a smooth and more sustained rhythm. Conversely, the frequent use of short vowels speeds up the speech flow and creates a more rapid and intense rhythm [22].

Giles ingeniously integrates vowel patterns with other rhetorical devices and constructions. By setting two similar rhetorical questions together, Giles' translation creates a rapid and intense rhythm, which evokes and intensifies the emotion. This is followed by an answer, "no reply," in which both words end with diphthongs, which slow the rhythm. Such a rhythm transitions to the next sentence, which mainly inherits the slow rhythm through the use of diphthongs. However, in this line, polysyllabic "ceaselessly" temporarily breaks the slow rhythm, but ultimately, it returns to the rhyme /ai/. By using, integrating, and changing these vowel patterns, the translation creates different speeds and rhythmic tensions, contributing to a striking contrast that successfully conveys the lament and the

unchanging nature of the passing of time. Moreover, "no reply" is not directly translated from the original line but an extension of it. Giles impressively captures the sound qualities between the reply and the splash of the stream, complemented by the prepositional phrase "Save the splash of the stream rolling ceaselessly by," instead of a complete sentence. Furthermore, the participle verb in the phrase semantically matches its continuity and ceaselessness.

In Xu's translation, the last sentence begins with a locative phrase, which echoes the first line of the poem and intensifies the emotion conveyed: things remain the same, the pavilion still stands proud, the river still rolls by, but people have changed. What's more, Xu's translation ends the poem with the preposition "by," which is stressed and pronounced with a diphthong and a descending intonation, conveying the sense of the lament. Hart's translation of the last sentence adopts a similar approach to Xu's, starting with a locative phrase. However, this translation does not end the poem with a diphthong, but with the adverbial phrase "in silence," which modifies the verb and ends with a voiceless fricative /s/. Unlike the loud and sustained diphthongs, the voiceless fricative /s/ evokes a subtle sense of lament, less intense than the feeling created by diphthongs, and conveys a different shade of sorrow. In Luo's translation, the emotion is conveyed through the adverbs "only" and "all." The adverb "only" emphasizes that the flowing river outside the railing can be seen, while the prince is nowhere to be found. Meanwhile, "all" modifies "by itself," highlighting the manner in which the river flows, thereby enhancing the sense of solitude.

## 5. Conclusion

This study has offered a detailed exploration of the four English translations of Wang Bo's classical Chinese poem "Pavilion of Prince Teng," using Construction Grammar as its analytical framework. By focusing on syntactic, lexical, and emotive constructions, we have gained deeper insights into the translation process and the creative decisions made by translators.

In examining syntactic constructions, this paper observed that the translations diverged significantly in their handling of the original text's sentence structures. Classical Chinese

poetry often features symmetrical parallelism, a characteristic evident in Wang Bo's poem. However, this structural feature was not consistently preserved across the translations. While Xu Yuanchong and Luo Jingguo, both Chinese translators, retained parallel structures in their versions, Giles and Hart, the English translators, opted for alternative syntactic approaches. These differences reflect not only linguistic preferences but also varying interpretations of the source material.

The analysis of lexical constructions underscored the critical role of word choice and combination in conveying the poem's meaning and stylistic nuances. Translating culturally specific lexemes posed significant challenges, highlighting the delicate balance between fidelity to the original and cultural relevance in the target language. For instance, the second line of the poem was translated quite differently by each translator. Hart's version, which preserved much of the original imagery while effectively conveying the underlying sentiment, stood out as particularly successful.

The emotive constructions analysis revealed that translators employed a range of strategies to capture the poem's emotional depth. The study emphasized the importance of linguistic devices such as locative inversion, negation, and vowel patterns in evoking a sense of lament for the passage of time. Giles' translation of the final couplet, which skillfully utilized vowel patterns and rhythmic contrasts, was particularly effective in conveying the poem's emotional resonance. In contrast, Luo's translation, while accurate in meaning, lacked the emotive subtlety seen in the other versions. Overall, this study has shown that Construction Grammar is a powerful tool for analyzing the complexities of poetry translation. It provides a robust framework for examining the interplay between form and meaning, revealing how different construction choices can impact the quality and cultural impact of translations. While no single translation can fully capture the multifaceted nature of the original poem, a nuanced understanding of Construction Grammar can enhance the accuracy, expressiveness, and emotional depth of poetic translations.

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