



HOCHIMINH CITY PEOPLE'S COMMITTEE  
SAIGON UNIVERSITY

# APPLYING SOME ORIENTATIONAL PRINCIPLES TO TRANSLATING SONGS

*by Truong Van Anh*



In a world of integration, cross-cultural interactions, communities of nations and countries benefit more and more in sharing the cultural achievements of other communities. Popular songs spread in the communities. Alongside original texts in the source language, to better satisfy the needs of the audience, translators and musicians translate the songs into different target languages. It is possible to depend on translation theory for general directions. In addition, we use specific rules for translating songs: singability, number of words and syllables, rhymes and rhythms, keywords, themes, and grammar accuracy.

1 / The translated song must be easy to sing, so you need to arrange words so that the vowels and consonants flow slowly from one word to the other. First, song translation must be singability. To do so, the translator must know how to sing the song he is about to translate. Often translators like the song and often sing it. But at times, the translator is asked to translate a completely unfamiliar song. Therefore, translators have to listen and practice singing. After getting used to the tune, the translators begin to translate the song.

Translators can be asked to translate new songs, baby music, children's songs and even translate the ancient songs. In general, people ask translators to translate any songs they like. And the translator has to fulfill these requirements. Therefore, the translator must be able to sing the song in the source language. When switching to the target language, the translator must sing again to see if the song is singing correctly in rhyme and rhythm. If he cannot sing, the translator must change the word or word order to match the rhyme and melody. For example, "Biên cương, lá rơi, Thu Hà, em ơi" [15] changes to "In the border, falling leaves." Thu Ha, honey! " This sentence cannot be sung and must be changed to "Border. Leaves fall. Thu Ha, honey! " to be able to sing rhymes smoothly.

2 / The translated lyrics need to have the same number of syllables in each sentence as the original so that they will match the melody. Vietnamese words are equivalent to syllables in English. The number of words in Vietnamese must correspond to the number of syllables of English. If the amount is less or more, the song cannot be sung. Translators have to balance these two numbers. Therefore, when translating, it is necessary to add or remove the amount of text in the target language so that the singer can sing the song. It should be noted that adding or removing must ensure that the meaning of the translation is equivalent to that of the source language text. The Vietnamese words "Quân đao phủ thủ sắp ra tay hành quyết" [14] is translated as follows "The headman's gonna be in action". Syllable quantity is guaranteed and meaning is kept equivalent.

The song "Chuyện tình Lan và Điệp" [9] begins with the sentence "Tôi kể, người nghe". We can translate it as follows: I tell, you listen. The Vietnamese version has 4 syllables, but the translated into English has 5 syllables. So we can't sing. We have to translate it like this: I tell, you hear. Next is: the story of Lan and Diep, a bitter story. The word order in Vietnamese is reversed: a bitter love story. Sometimes in order to ensure the number of syllables, neat spellings are used, even in vong co songs. "Nghe hung tin Đơn nhị ca đà thọ khổn" [14] is translated to "Having heard Brother Don's gonna die". There is an omission of words, but the sentence is still fully expressed: "Quân đao phủ thủ sắp ra tay hành quyết" - "The headman's gonna be in action".

3 / The translation must follow the rhyme of the original song. Vietnamese songs are composed according to the tones (6 tones) and rhyme of Vietnamese. English has no 6 tones but only accents. Therefore, when translating, translators must follow the low sound (without accent) or high sound (with accent stress) in English. In terms of rhyme English has sound similar to Vietnamese. Example: Cháu lên ba / Cháu vô mẫu giáo / Cô thương cháu/ [11] We see from the beginning "cháu" high, and "cháu" at the end rhyme each other. Let's see English sentences:

Being three / I'm in nurs'ry / you love me.

The equivalent "Be" sound has stress, and the "ry" and "me" sounds match each other. Sometimes syllables have to be cut to match the rhythm of the lyrics. " Quyết tâm luyện rèn cho mình càng tiến nhanh " [13] was changed to "We try to make much rapid progress". Here the word "rapid" must be cut into 2 syllables "ra" and "pid" to sing the rhythm of the sentence in the source text. Similarly, "Cuộc đời tăm tối chốn lao tù bao hờn căm" [12] is translated into "Dark imprisonment life creates anger". The word "create" is cut to "cre" continuously with the previous beat and "ate" in harmony with the next beat. Or the phrase "Đảng đã mang lại tình yêu thương khắp nơi" is translated as "Party brought its love to everywhere". "Eve" is cut to match the previous one and "rywhere" is split up to follow the beat of the latter.

4 / The translation must keep the same keywords as in the original. In the song “Tiến lên đoàn viên” [13], there is a saying “trăm hoa hé tưng bừng”. “Trăm hoa” here has the norm, so we don't translate it naively like "one hundred flowers". In addition, the translated sentence will have 3 syllables left over, so it can't be sung. The sentence above can be translated as: "Flowers, all, blossom". Correct sentences with 5 rhymes are equivalent to the source language and guarantee meaning. Interestingly, sometimes, the translator could not find the exact word to express the meaning like the sentence “Hãy khoan đừng giết oan một anh hùng hòa kiết” [14]. We can't look up the word “giết oan” in the dictionary. Thinking for a while, the translator finds the exact equivalent as "Hold on." Don't kill an innocent hero. ” Killing an innocent hero means “giết oan”!

Images in two documents are shown differently, but the subject matter is still guaranteed. The sentence “Nhớ khi xưa thề câu chị ngã em nâng, dầu tử sanh cũng vẹn nghĩa kim bằng” [14] is translated into English "Formerly, to be brothers, despite death, we're also brothers". In the source language "sisters", while in the target language "brothers", but the meaning is still fully guaranteed. Maybe even more precisely, because being a man, the "brother" is more suitable than the "sister".

The rhetorical meaning is fully translated though the lyrics in the two texts seem different. The sentence “Đơn nhị ca ơi! Còn đâu một thời oanh oanh liệt liệt, quyết vẫy vùng cho rõ mặt núi sông”[14] which was translated into English as follows: " Hey, brother Don! How could you still spend your bright days, trying to be famous ever'where ". “Một thời oanh oanh liệt liệt” was changed into “bright days” and “quyết vẫy vùng cho rõ mặt núi sông” is translated as “trying to be famous ever'where”. “Rõ mặt” is changed to "famous" and “núi sông” here is shown everywhere, i.e. "ever'where".

5 / Translators need to keep themes, feelings and overall context. The theme and context of the source language song must be recreated in the original language. For example, when a child goes to kindergarten, the theme is children's music [11]. When a baby at the age of three sings, he confides in his teacher to show his love for her. Therefore, when saying “cô thương cháu” means "you love me" in English. In the song “Xinh tươi Việt Nam” [10], the theme is a beautiful, life-loving Vietnamese girl who wishes to represent Vietnam to serve the country and people all over the world. So the short sentences “Dành tình yêu tặng cho đời , dành tình yêu tặng cho người”, with the hidden subject is the girl, which is translated as "She saves her love for life. She saves her love for man”.

In the sentence “Hồng Đào Sơn, em mới quay ngựa về đây” [14], "Hong Dao Son" is Hong Dao mountain, if in that context we just translate "Hong Dao". It is enough. Like “núi Ngũ Hành Sơn”, we just say Ngu Hanh Son. Therefore, the short, but full-meaning English translation sentence is “From Hong Dao I came back here by horse”.

6 / The translation must be grammatically correct in the target language. The translator must be fluent in the target language for the translation to be grammatically correct. For example, the sentence “Hồng Đào Sơn, em mới quay ngựa về đây” [14] is translated as "From Hong Dao I came back here by horse". Here the tense of the verb is conjugated in the past simple tense to indicate what happened with a defined time and space. In the context of a narrative, “Dành tình yêu tặng cho đời , dành tình yêu tặng cho người” [10] is translated as "She saves her love for life. She saves her love for man ”. The verb is used in the singular present and the noun "man" is generic, representing the whole human race.

## **Conclusion and recommendations:**

In translation, the art work translation subsector, in general, and song translation, in particular, is the most difficult. Translating a normal text, the translator only needs to clearly and fully show the meaning of the source language text in the target language text regardless of the number of words or syllables, rhyme and rhythm. However, when translating a song, it is necessary to have the symmetries of the two languages or the following properties:

- Singable translation.
- Number of words and syllables.
- Rhyme and rhythm.
- Key word
- Theme
- Grammar correction

Song translation has two important goals. In terms of education, English learners will easily be able to sing Vietnamese songs translated into English by familiar rhymes and rhythms, and moreover, students are always excited when singing these songs. This is a great encouragement and inspiration for people to learn foreign languages and in this case English. In terms of international popularity, translating the song from Vietnamese to English will help bring Vietnamese culture to the world, help nations around the world understand more about Vietnam and have more feelings for us.

- Tiến lên Đoàn viên
- Advance, Youth union member!
- Đây một mùa xuân. Trăm hoa hé tưng bừng
- This is a spring. Flowers, all, blossom.
- Đây thời niên thiếu, hát ca vang lừng.
- Being children, we sing loudly.
- Khăn quàng đỏ tươi, em đeo, em mến yêu.
- The scarf's crimson, we wear and we love
- Quyết tâm luyện rèn cho mình càng tiến nhanh.
- We try to make much rapid progress.

- Tiến lên Đoàn viên, em ước ao bao ngày.
- The Youth Union, We all want to join.
- Xứng cháu Bác Hồ, dựng xây quê hương này.
- Uncle Ho's child will build his country.
- Tiến lên Đoàn viên theo Đảng tiên phong
- Follow the Party Avant garde
- Tiến theo lá cờ nhuộm màu đấu tranh.
- Follow the flag with full struggle.

- Khi còn niên thiếu, em luôn gắng nghe lời
- Being children, we try to obey.
- Khi này khôn lớn, đứng lên dựng đời
- When we grow up, we'll build country.
- Hòa bình, tự do, tay ta xây đắp nên
- Peace and freedom, we ourselves defend.
- Khắp nơi vang lừng tiếng kèn gọi tiến lên.
- Ever'where we hear bugle's call "forward".

- **Tân Quỳnh Khóc bạn**
- Having heard Bother Don's gonna die,
- (Nghe hung tin Đơn Nhị ca đà thọ khổn)
- From Hong Dao I came back here by horse.
- (Hồng Đào Sơn, em mới quay ngựa về đây)
- Oh, the deathground's dim with flying dirt.
- Ôi, giữa pháp trường cát bụi mịt mù bay)
- The headman's gonna be in action.
- (Quân đao phủ thủ sắp ra tay hành quyết)

- Hold on. Don't kill an innocent hero,
- (Hãy khoan, đừng giết oan một anh hùng hào kiệt)
- Obey me to hold on, hey, La ... Thanh.
- (Nghe lời anh mà đình thủ bớ La ... Thành)
- Alas, a sacred sword's just killed the brave hero.
- (Thôi rồi một lưỡi gươm linh đã giết mạng anh hùng)
- Oh, Brother Don, how could you still spend your bright days
- (Đơn Nhị ca ôi, còn đâu một thời oanh oanh liệt liệt)
- Trying to be famous everywhere?
- (Quyết vẫy vùng cho rõ mặt núi sông)

Thanks for your listening!