



A Contrastive Study of the Linguistic Variants in English Folk Songs and Yao Folk Songs

YAN Jiansheng^{[a],*}

^[a] Professor, Department of Public Curriculum Teaching in Hezhou University, Hezhou, China.

* Corresponding author.

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Abstract

As a unique symbol system, the human language is used to express people’s thoughts and feelings, carrying out the task of interpersonal communication. However, due to the different nation’s thinking ways, languages from different countries can be much different. For example, English generally emphasizes the separation of time and space, while Chinese lays emphasis on the homomorphism of time and space. That is why English folk songs and Yao folk songs, though typically rap arts created spontaneously by the working people, reveal great individuality from their own thoughts. Apart from the differences in language category, other differences are characterized by grammatical structure, syntactic structure, situational context, voice and mood etc. In order to better understand these two folk songs, this article aims at analyzing the language variants from vocabulary, syntax, word order and structure in both English folk songs and Yao folk songs, so that the interpretation for these language variants in the two folk songs can be deduced in synchronic as well as diachronic dimensions. Moreover, now that these language variants occur within a single language system, it is obvious that they do not affect their own coexistence and people’s reception effects.

Key words: Language; Variants; English Folk Songs; Yao Folk Songs; Synchronic and Diachronic

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1. INTRODUCTION

The appropriateness of language indicates that language should be used in a specific situation. As the saying goes, singing appropriate songs wherever you are means that at different times, different places, in front of different people, the contents and the ways we are talking and using should be made a corresponding adjustment. As Yang Yanrong (2018) points out, “Michael Halliday’s context theory reveals the mechanism of interaction between sociocultural context and language. He argues that language is a ‘behavioral potential’ that provides us with countless possibilities for using it, and that meaning arises from the choice between different possibilities. However, this choice is not arbitrary; it is subject to constraints of cultural context and situational context.” Therefore, the general communication can be free to execute by the speaker’s feeling, but those at conferences, celebrations, funerals and other regular occasions should be treated with a serious attitude, as jargon is used in industries’ communication, legal terms are used in court debates, diplomatic terms are used in diplomatic activities and so on. Thus, a language variant with a specific use, which is often opposed to a society or a region (varies from speaker to speaker), is a tendency to adapt linguistic behavior to a particular type of activity or the degree of formality.

Although it has been a long time since English folk songs and Yao Folk Songs were composed, we find first that they came out in the form of poetry, belonging to a poetry variety of an ancient style, their noteworthy features are the interpretation of the ordinary people’s living conditions, thoughts and feelings, setting music and narrative into one unit, and manifesting obvious national emotions and national habits. Second, the languages used in these two folk songs are usually simple and natural, not deliberately pursuing the magnificence of vocabulary

and rhetoric, but tending to use precise words to lay out a smooth narrative, create a fresh and beautiful artistic conception and express happy and joyful feeling, so their high self-consistency and the relevance of language are self-evident, which give us an artistic state of watching the spirited willows after a drizzle, appearing real and profound, and easy to be accepted. It can be supposed that on the human's early days, when the labor productivity was relatively low, man had to fight against nature to survive, however, in order to eliminate the fatigue of labor, or in order to find a little entertainment in the leisure time, someone took the lead in humming a tune or two of his own creation, resulting in the later development of a chorus or group singing, till at last it formed a literary form. From the historical linguistics point of view, ballad or folk song is a wonderful flower in the history of poetry even literature, it is not surprising that its words are sometimes rough and even indecent, and it is natural that its syntax is unique. Under the influence of the national culture, English folk songs and Yao folk songs show not only their commonness but individuality in their language use, which makes it necessary for us to analyze the language variants in them.

2. LEXICAL AND SYNTACTIC VARIANTS

Since both English folk songs and Yao Folk Songs originated from the folk and are typical spontaneous creations from daily life, their vocabulary and syntax are often different from those of authentic literary works, such as their employing prominent defamiliarization, focusing on the distortion of languages by using ancient words, obscure vocabulary, allusion, loanwords to form their own language characteristics, which make them a bit simple and casual, but the essence is plain and frank, implicit and meaningful. Scanning the vocabulary, we can find that most English folk songs use Old and Middle English words, in which the silent "e" is very active, often added at the end of a word, such as wee, hee, scule, stude, bukes, gude, noe, soe, meate, towne etc. , the letter "v" and the letter "u" are often used interchangeably, such as vp, vpon, vnmackley, vndergoe, haue, loue, fiue, neuer, sleue, etc. , while the letter "f" is often used in double-writing, such as ffor, ffrom, fflying, ffell, ffast, iff, wiffe, liffe, etc. ; Part of the English folk songs using Modern English vocabulary should be written in later period or translated from the

Old English. As to the use of rhyme, because the stress of Old English words usually falls on the first syllable of the initial word, and the Old English poetry of this period had chosen alliteration without exception. In *Beowulf* for example, "Wyrn woh-bogen Wealdan ne moste" (line 2827), the continuous reading of the consonant [w] makes the line catchy and musical, showing its unique musical effect. As to the words and sentences, the characteristics of oral literature are also fully reflected in *Beowulf*, for a large number of synonyms are used in it, such as no fewer than 30 different ways of spelling the word "King" appear in this epic, according to scholars' statistics, this epic uses more than 4000 different words in a short span of more than 3000 lines. Of these 4,000-plus words, about one-third are compound words, take "Sea" and "Sun" for example, they each have more than 50 compound expressions, as "Whale Road" (sea) , "World Candle" (Sun) and so on. (Li, 1999) These rich and varied words no doubt provide poets, especially singers, with countless opportunities to fully depict scenes and characters, making this epic in oral recitations more unpredictable, and full of fascinating artistic charm. Scanning the syntax, we also find that English folk songs often use some unusual sentence patterns, sometimes the subject is missing, sometimes the predicate is missing, and sometimes some conjunctions are omitted, as we called syntactic variants. For example, "O mither, if ye'll believe nae me, (5C: Gil Brenton)" is equal to "O mother, if you'll not believe in me", " 'And gin ye kill me, it's he'll kill thee.' (14A: Babylon or The Bonnie Banks o' Fordie)" is equal to " 'And if you kill me, he'll kill thee.' ", "Thow wilt saye us no harme. (60: King Estmere)" is equal to "You will say there's no harm to us.", "As ere did weare womans wee<de).(63A: Child Waters)" is equal to "As our women did wear before.", "Na women mane gae we me, Hellen, (63[K]: Child Waters)" is equal to "No women except men will go with me, Hellen," etc. These phenomena fully show that the period of English folk song's creation is just the time of English formation, in which there is multilingual hybrid phenomenon as well as the trend of mass consumption; the syntactic structure is obviously much freer than that of in the traditional ancient poetry.

In Yao folk songs, some expressions are also not consistent with the traditional Chinese; take their self-coined words for example:

𠂇、𠂈 (father) 𠂉、𠂊 (mother) 𠂋 (grandpa) 𠂌 (go/come out)

𠂍 (be the same) 𠂎 (turn towards) 𠂏 (order) 𠂐 (intestines)

𠂑 (no/not) 𠂒 (letter) 𠂓 (place) 𠂔 (come) 𠂕 (inauspicious)

𠂖 (county) 𠂗 (call) 𠂘 (dragon) 𠂙 (three) 𠂚 (person)

𠂛 (wind) 𠂜 (fire) 𠂝 (get something together) 𠂞 (state)

In syntax, influenced by the dialects of Chinese as well as Zhuang language, sentences in Yao folk songs may be those of putting the subject and modifier at the end of them, which are different from the authentic Chinese. According to the law of language use, the normal arrangement of sentence elements follows the principle that the argument with high vitality is placed before the argument with low vitality, (Croft, 2003) so “爺姐問妹因何事Grandpa and elder sister ask the young sister why” is a normal sentence pattern while “半桶洗面出官人Half a bucket washes to be officials” is a variant, but such variants can appear commonly in Yao folk songs. Professor Liu Zhengguang (Liu, 2021) points out that a nation’s way of thinking will affect the language, so Chinese thinking will also affect the Chinese language and reflect in the use of it. When we start from the facts of the Chinese language and re-examine the ways in which space and time are embodied in it, we will find that the space-time relationship in the Chinese language is not as discrete as that in the western language, it is homomorphic and syncretic. Because of the extensive use of conceptual metaphors in Yao folk songs and the inheritance of the homomorphism tradition in Chinese, putting the low-life argument or predicate verb before the high-life argument it can be also acceptable. For example:

Variant 1 燕子紫雲遮Swallows covered the purple clouds. (space-time homomorphism)

Normal: 紫雲遮燕子Swallows are covered by the purple clouds.

Variant 2 海岸坪田出火烟Coasts and fields come out fire and smoke. (space-time homomorphism)

Normal: 火烟从海岸坪田冒出Fire and smoke come out of the coasts and the fields.

Variant 3 發下洞頭百姓村Settled down at the cave entrance was a village full of hundreds of families. (space-time homomorphism)

Normal: 百姓村在洞頭發下A village with hundreds of families settled down around the cave entrance.

Variant 4 世今差落松柏樹The changing of time falls on the pines and cypresses. (conceptual metaphor)

Normal: 世今差落于松柏樹The changing of time can be perceived from the changing of pines and cypresses.

Variant 5 酒盞多盃粗傑（糙）人Drinking too many cups of wine a rough guy. (conceptual metaphor)

Normal: 粗傑（糙）人酒盞多盃A rough guy is the one who always drink too many cups of wine.

Variant 6 森（深）山竹木刘王種 井边樹林圣人栽 Bamboos and trees on mountains King Liu planted and woods around the well the Saints. (conceptual metaphor)

Normal: 刘王種森（深）山竹木 圣人栽井边樹林 King Liu planted bamboos and trees on the mountains and the Saints planted woods around the well.

Variant 7 恨杀金鸡金色毛Angry to kill golden chicken golden feather. (modifier moves backward)

Normal: 恨杀金色毛金鸡Angry to kill golden chicken with golden feather.

Variant 8 一双杨鸟飞南上A pair of birds flew South. (modifier moves backward)

Normal: 一双杨鸟南飞上A pair of birds flew from South.

Variant 9 路逢杨梅十二对 树头杨鸟十三双On the road met twelve pairs of Bayberry trees and on the tree thirteen pairs of poplar birds. (modifier moves backward)

Normal: 路逢十二对杨梅 树头十三双杨鸟Twelve pairs of Bayberry trees were met on the road and thirteen pairs of poplar birds were seen on the tree.

Different from the elegance and profundity of formal literature, folk songs are more suitable for the common and popular cultural pastimes, and they have their own unique ways of expression, such as preference of seeking vocabulary and choice of content in reflecting the theme of narrative, or using abnormal syntax and rhetoric to express the narrative mood, or using connectives and pronouns to highlight the narrative style. In a word, folk songs come from the folk, standing for the working people’s living language, and more suitable for the folk cultural communication and dissemination at that time. As far as the British people were concerned, their early surviving involved not only to deal with the danger of the sea, but also to resist the continuous foreign invasions, so English folk songs often reflected the territorial sense and heroic adventure in courtship and so on. For example:

302A.1 WHEN two lovers love each other well,
Great sin it were them to twinn;
And this I speak from Young Bearwell;
He loved a lady young,
The Mayor’s daughter of Birktoon-brae,
That lovely, leesome thing.

302A.2 One day when she was looking out,
When washing her milk-white hands,
That she beheld him Young Bearwell,
As he came in the sands.

302A.3 Says, Wae’s me for you, Young Bearwell,
Such tales of you are tauld;
They’ll cause you sail the salt sea so far
As beyond Yorkisfauld.

302A.4

.....
‘O shall I bide in good greenwood,
Or stay in bower with thee?’

302A.5 ‘The leaves are thick in good greenwood,
Would hold you from the rain;
And if you stay in bower with me
You will be taken and slain.

302A.6 'But I caused build a ship for you
Upon Saint Innocent's day;
I'll bid Saint Innocent be your guide,
And Our Lady, that meikle may.
You are a lady's first true-love,
God carry you well away!'

302A.7 Then he sailed east, and he sailed west,
By many a comely strand;
At length a puff of northern wind
Did blow him to the land.

302A.8 When he did see the king and court,
Were playing at the ba;
Gave him a harp into his hand,
Says, Stay, Bearwell, and play.

302A.9 Had not been in the king's court
A twelvemonth and a day,
Till there came lairds and lords anew
To court that lady gay.

302A.10 They wooed her with brooch and ring,
They nothing could keep back;
The very charters of their lands
Into her hands they pat.

302A.11 She's done her down to Heyvalin,
With the light of the moon;
Says, Will ye do this deed for me,
And will ye do it soon?

302A.12 'Will ye go seek him Young Bearwell,
On seas wherever he be?
And if I live and bruik my life
Rewarded ye shall be.'

302A.13 'Alas, I am too young a skipper,
So far to sail the faem;
Bit if I live and bruik my life
I'll strive to bring him hame.'

302A.14 So he has saild east and then saild west,
By many a comely strand,
Till there came a blast of northern wind
And blew him to the land.

302A.15 And there the king and all his court
Were playing at the ba;
Gave him a harp into his hand,
Says, Stay, Heyvalin, and play.

302A.16 He has tane up the harp in hand,
And unto play went he,
And Young Bearwell was the first man
In all that companie.
* * * * *

——302A: Young Bearwell

In this folk song, such words and expressions as “in the sands, sail the salt sea, in good greenwood, build a

ship, sailed east, sailed west, northern wind, blow him to the land, Great sin, Saint Innocent's day, God, milk-white hands, brooch and ring, a harp into his hand and so on” provide us at least three messages: one is that “sands, salt sea, greenwood, ship, sailed, northern wind, land” suggest that the location of the story is far from the continent; the second is that “sin, Saint Innocent's day, God” suggest the existence of religious belief; and the third is that “milk-white hands, brooch and ring, harp” are more related to the western women. In addition, “he sailed east, and he sailed west, till there came lairds and lords anew” display hero adventure in courtship and territorial awareness.

Yao folk songs are more closely related to the farming life and nature worship of their own, thus a lot of passages in folk songs are similar to Taoist recitation, using a rhythmic singing voice that just prove the high compatibility between language and environment. Different from English folk songs, many Yao folk songs are related to ancestor worship and marriage ceremonies, resulting in the obvious tendency of ritualization of the language in these songs, take *Tune of Burning Incense in Song of Meeting Guests on the road Early in the Morning* for example:

一行初書請出前世前行先亡二行初書請出後世
后行先祖三行初書請出先祖案前叔孫有人推出
後生年少亦會攔門數笛亦會攔門數陳一雙富人
來客到赴白公面前魚見江水子見父母低頭為
拜白公面前亦來上香一拜獻上明香二拜獻上綠水
三拜責下銀財錢紙定落淥山保卦為保眾房
叔孫人口加好戰丁富人來客亦來賀起屋門高地
門儀橫爐房厅琉璃瓦房富貴良厅又獻紙調
一封銀錢財紙一封銀錢財不劝何神不劝何名先來
劝上全州灌陽全陽灌州前世前行先亡後世後行先祖
接客大討路在樓接客所起唱
李羅李西來呢李羅李傑羅阿來呢李西來呢羅阿來呢
來衣

——（赵有福收藏瑶族歌谣手抄本《朝踏接客大讨路歌》）

Tr.

Sing the first line to invite the deceased kings and the second line to the later generations

Sing the third line to invite the ancestors and someone is recommended to hold the ceremony

The younger generations are able to play flute at the door and deal with anything

A pair of rich guests are eager to bowing in front of Bodhisattva as fish long for water and children long for parents

Burn incenses to worship and provide top-quality incense for the first bow and good wine for the second bow

And the third bow for accumulating wealth to stabilize the country and protect the people

With clan flourishing and population increasing the honorable guests come to visit them constantly

And paper of wish has been presented in the holy house with high door and glazed tile and with furnace

Don't ask god for fame and fortune but work hard by yourself to earn your living

Do remember to urge the people in Quanzhou and Guangyang to mourn the ancestors and inspire the later generations

Sing the songs of meeting guests upstairs to begin the ceremony

Li lo li la li la li lo li la la li lo li la li lo li la la.....

—from Manuscripts of Yao folk Songs
collected by Zhao Youfu

It is believed that English folk songs were composed about in the 12th and 13th centuries, and right round the time when Chaucer lived, English in this period, we called Middle English, is much different from Modern English in terms of vocabulary and syntax. As the original text of *Ghost Rider on the Road* is:

3A.1 'O WHARE are ye gaun?'

Refrain: Quo the fause knight upon the road:
'I'm gaun to the scule,'

Refrain: Quo the wee boy, and still he stude.

3A.2 'What is that upon your back?'

Refrain: quo etc.

3A.3 'Atweel it is my bukes,'

Refrain: quo etc.

3A.4 'What's that ye've got in your arm?'

'Atweel it is my peit.'

3A.5 'Wha's aucht they sheep?'

'They are mine and my mither's.'

3A.6 'How monie o them are mine?'

'A' they that hae blue tails.'

3A.7 'I wiss ye were on yon tree:'

'And a gude ladder under me.'

3A.8 'And the ladder for to break:'

'And you for to fa down.'

3A.9 'I wiss ye were in yon sie:'

And a gude bottom under me.'

3A.10 'And the bottom for to break:'

'And ye to be drowned.'

—3A: The Fause Knight on the Road

Contrasting to Modern English, the differences in spelling include:

WHARE—WHERE, ye—you, gaun—going(gone), Quo (used before singular subjects of the first and the

third person)—Says, knicht—knight, scule—school, wee—little, stude—stood, Atweel—Well, bukes—books, Wha's aucht—Whose are, mither—mother, monie o—many of, A'—All, hae—have, wiss—wish, yon—yonder, fa—fall, sie—sea, gude—good;

The syntactic differences are:

and still he stude—and he stude still; (the need of rhyme)

What's that ye've got in your arm—What's in your arm; (emphasis)

Wha's aucht they sheep—Whose are those sheep; (simplify)

A' they that hae blue tails—All of them have blue tails; (simplify)

And a gude ladder under me—And under me is a gude ladder; (the need of rhyme, omission)

And the ladder for to break—And the ladder for me is to break; (omission)

And a gude bottom under me—And under me is a gude bottom. (the need of rhyme, omission)

Yao people, on the other hand, do not have their own scripts, their folk songs are recorded in Chinese characters, but the songs are sung in Yao dialect, therefore, it is inevitable for them to use some heteronyms instead of homonyms, which is equivalent to "false words". Take the twenties section of *Sing for the Old Once Again* in *Yang Song of Stepping for Twelve Years* for Example:

深山难得千年木，世上难逢百岁人。
老人长有老人年，老竹皮黄面自巖。
老木逢春出嫩叶，不见老人偏少年。
日头出早照筛筛，照见老人街上行。
逢茶逢酒老人吃，路上逢花插后生。
日头出早照庭前，照见老人街上行。
老人头带广州纱，脚踏麻鞋金秀花。
日头出早照庭前，照见老人街上行。
夜里受盏清淥酒，朝时受盏有盐茶。

Tr.

It is hard to find a thousand-year-old tree in remote mountains,

And it is hard to meet a hundred-year-old person in the world.

The old people always have their old ages,

As old bamboos have yellow skins but strong body.

Tender leaves come out of old trees in every spring,

But the old are never seen to renew their youth.

As the sun rises early in the morning and shines in the sky,

The old are seen to walk on the street in the sunlight.

Every tea and every wine the old are willing to taste,

And the flowers on the road will come back to life by cuttage.

As the sun rises early in the morning and shines on the garden,

The old are seen to walk on the street in the sunlight.
The old are seen to wear Guangzhou yarn on the head,
And wear hemp shoes embroidering golden flowers.

As the sun rises early in the morning and shines on the garden,

The old are seen to walk on the street in the sunlight.
Do enjoy a cup of good wine in the evening,
Do enjoy a bowl of salt tea in the morning.

——from Manuscripts of Yao folk Songs collected by
Zhao Youfu

In this song, the Chinese characters “长(long)” is equal to “常(always)”, “带” is equal to “戴”, “秀” is equal to “绣”, “绿” is equal to “凉”, while “厝” is a Yao dialect word coined by themselves, means “stay”, such self-coined words consist of a certain percentage in Yao folk songs, there are about two thousands all together. Variant sentences as “日头出早照筛筛（照庭前）” should have been “日头早出照筛筛（照庭前）” according to the Chinese usage, and “脚踏麻鞋金秀花” should have been “脚踏绣金花麻鞋”. Similar examples as in the *Song of Meeting Guests on the road Early in the Morning*: “行李百般齐妆十” should have been “百般行李装拾齐”, “书籍是件齐妆什” should have been “十件书籍装拾齐”. Though it seems that the words and sentences in Yao folk songs are simple and vulgar, they are more direct and truthful in expression full of life flavor, making them more accords with the characteristics of folk oral literature.

客

行李百般齐妆十，妆什盘缠归本乡。
三条大路行哪条，不知哪条到家乡。

主：

书籍是件齐妆什，三条大路有条通。
湖南大路两三条，中央一条透家乡。

主：

急急去时急急游，嘱郎上紧马笼头。
前揪后揪脚上起，嘱郎路上慢行游。

客：

博郎慢出慢行游，落泪作揖下阶头。
郎那齐出庭前下，依郎拢手出门楼。

——（赵有福收藏瑶族歌谣手抄本《朝踏接客大讨路歌》）

Tr.

Guest:

When all kinds of luggage had been packed,
I prepared money for my going home.
Which of the three main roads should I follow?
I didn't know which one led to my hometown.

Host:

Since ten bookcases had been packed all,
Now there must be one in three roads could be available.

Although two or three roads led to Hunan,
Only the Central line led to your hometown.

Host:

Hurry up, hurry up! hurry to go and hurry to travel,
The young fellow was told to tighten his bridle.
Holding tight the rein back and forth the lad leapt on,
And he was told again to walk cautiously on the road.

Guest:

The young fellow went out cautiously to travel,
He bowed down the stairs with tears in his eyes.
The young fellow went down fall from the courtyard,
And he went out of the gatehouse accompanied by the host.

——from Manuscripts of Yao folk Songs collected by
Zhao Youfu

3. VARIANTS IN WORD ORDER AND SENTENCE STRUCTURE

After the advent of language, human's communication has become much more convenient, so in a long-term use and constant revision, language forms has become relatively fixed. Generally, “Any linguistic information is linear, at least including verbal message as well as writing message. In a message conveyed orally, a string of sounds unfold over a period of time, with a single sound popping up at each point in time, then followed by a single sound..... until the last note of the sentence is uttered. In a written message however, the words that make up a sentence or a passage spread out in a space, and each word occupies a position. For example, ‘It is a windy day today.’ We won't write the word ‘day’ and ‘wind’ covering the word ‘today.’ And after we've written ‘It’ we also won't write the words ‘is, a, windy’ covering the word of ‘It’, etc.” (Lan, 2009) Thus, it is the convention of language use that forms its special law.

Nevertheless language is complex and changeable, not only do languages vary widely, but at the same time many variants do exist in a same language. As vocabulary is the basic unit of a language, sentences are produced by the proper arrangement of the words. Sometimes, in order to highlight the importance of a certain part in a sentence, people will always consciously change the order of words to emphasize or draw our attentions. For example, “Be careful of that car!” is a normal tip, it shows that the car may be a safe distance from us at this time, but “Car, be careful!” shows the car may be very close to us and reminder must be made in less time. It is obvious that the changing of word order always contains special pragmatic functions. Of course, word order is also a process of development in languages, whether English or Chinese, there exists a diachronic and synchronic problem, for example, between Old English and Modern English, or Old Chinese and Modern Chinese, the differences of word order in them are very common, as for Modern English

and Modern Chinese, their word order differences are much more obvious. It is widely believed that “the word order of English is a SVO type, and on this basis, it can be converted into passive and inverse passive types, forming various word order types. However, in the aspect of macro word order, Chinese belongs to a SVO type, and it can bear the features of different word order types to appear freely in various genres.” (Liu, 2015) Therefore, the word order in Chinese is much more flexible than that in English. For example, using three Chinese characters of “人, 难, 做”, we can make sentences at will: “人难做”, “难做人” and “做人难”, if they are translated into English, the only version is “It is hard (difficult) to be a (good) man.” That is to say, no matter what kind of person he/she becomes, the word order of this sentence in standard English cannot be changed. Of course, after a long period of development, the word order in both English and Chinese is basically fixed. If we regard simple sentences as the basic sentence patterns, then any other complex sentences are composed of simple sentences.

There are seven basic types of simple sentences in English (Quirk, et al, 1985, pp.28-34):

1. SV (subject + predicate), for example: He has arrived.
2. SVO (subject + predicate + object), for example: He has had breakfast.
3. SVOC (subject + predicate + object + object complement), for example: We made him monitor.
4. SVOO (subject + predicate + direct object + indirect object), for example: I gave him a book.
5. SCVP (subject + link verb + predicate), for example: He is a teacher.
6. SVA (subject + predicate + adverbial), for example: He stood on the chair.
7. SVOA (subject + predicate + object + adverbial), for example: He put the vase on the table.

There are eight basic types of simple sentences in Chinese (Liu & Wang, 2015):

1. SV (subject + predicate), for example: 我读了。(I have read.)
2. SVO (subject + predicate + object), for example: 我读完了书。(I have read a book.)
3. SOV (subject + object + predicate), for example: 书读完了。(I the book have read.)
4. OSV (object + subject + predicate), for example: 书我读完了。(The book I have read.)
5. OV (object + predicate), for example: 书读完了。(The book has been read.)
6. SVOV (repeat the verb sentence), for example: 我喝酒喝醉了。(I have drunk wine drunken.)
7. SVVV (conjunction-predicate sentence), for example: 我乘公交车去书店买了两本书。(I went to the bookstore by bus and bought two books.)
8. SVOSV (synchronic sentence), for example: 主任

通知我去北京出差。(The director informed me to go to Beijing on business.)

Generally speaking, the sentence-formation rules of both English and Chinese follow the predicate structure, that is to say, a sentence needs a predicate verb to be a center to develop, and the predicate structure is made up of “arguments” and “predicates”. According to the number of arguments contained in a predicate structure, it can be divided into one-bit predicate structure (including one argument), two-bit predicate structure (including two arguments) and null predicate structure (without any argument), etc. The significant difference of predicate structure between English and Chinese is that the function of predicate meaning in English is stronger than that in Chinese, and its tense, voice and modality are all reflected by the change of predicate form, while in Chinese, this is not so obvious, its tense, voice, modality can be expressed through other auxiliary words. For example, “我吃了饭。” and “我在吃饭。”, their English equivalents are “I have had my dinner.” and “I am having my dinner.” Here, tense distinction in Chinese is in the way of adding “了” and “在” without changing the verb “吃”, while tense manifesting in English needs to change the verb “have” into “have had” and “am having”. Differences are the same as in modality and voice between English and Chinese.

In most cases, the sentence structure of English folk songs and Yao folk Songs is not complicated, because they both use short and long lines of narrative poems suitable for singing, which not only ensures that ballads or folk songs are in tune with what we talk normally, but also that they are not difficult to sing and uneasy to be jammed. However, a lot of unconventional expressions are used in the word order to make people feel strange and deviant, which just represents that ballads or folk songs are different from other literary forms in the unique nature of art. As Viktor Borisovich Viktor Shklovsky, a representative of the Russian formalist, points out in *The Art as a Device*: The reason why art exists is to make people restore the feeling of life, is to make people feel things, so that stone shows the texture of stone. The purpose of art is to make people feel things, not just know of them. Literature can be regarded as a skill. The technique of art is to make the object unfamiliar, to make the form difficult, to increase the difficulty of the sensation and its duration, because the sensory process itself is an aesthetic object and must be prolonged.

To better analyze the word order in folk songs, we'd better begin with the word formation. Although English folk songs were formed in the 12th and 13th centuries, influenced by Old English, the inflections of words in English folk songs are reflected from time to time, one is in sex, number and case, the other is in the negative form of verbs. For example:

- (1) a. The wind hath blown my plaid awa. (The Elfin

Knigh)

b. He blowes it where he lyketh best. (The Elfin Knight)

c. Which lyeth low by yon sea-strand. (The Elfin Knight)

(2) a. 'Thou art over young a maid,' quoth he, (The Elfin Knight)

b. 'Married with me thou il wouldst be.' (The Elfin Knight)

c. And then thou wilt be a true lover of mine. (The Elfin Knight)

(3) a. 'I'm gaun to the scule,' (The Fause Knight on the Road)

b. en thou hast gotten thy turns well done, (The Elfin Knight)

c. I've wat my gowden girdle.' (Lady Isabel and the Elf Knight)

(4) a. And no lose a stack o't(out) for your life. (The Elfin Knight)

b. And na tyne a pickle o't for your life. (The Elfin Knight)

c. Who one wink couldna get. (Lady Isabel and the Elf Knight)

d. If ye canna gang, I will cause you to ride.' (Lady Isabel and the Elf Knight)

e. Without I have my parents' leave, (Lady Isabel and the Elf Knight)

In 1a-c, the present tense of verb behind the singular third person should end in th, so "hath, lyketh, and lyyeth" are correspond to "has, likes, lies" respectively.

In 2a-c, the verbs "art, wouldst, wilt" behind the second person singular are variants of "are, would, will" respectively, they have the function of representing tense.

In 3a-c, "I'm gaun, thou hast gotten, I've wat" are variants of "I'm going, you have gotten, I've wet", they have the function of representing tense and voice.

In 4a-d, the negative form of the predicate verb takes the form of adding the negative word directly before the verb (no lose, na tyne), or adding the negative word directly after the modal verb (couldna, canna), or using negative words directly (without).

Then we examine the overlapping of word meaning. That is, a semantic unit may repeatedly use words with synonyms or categories to express the meaning, these words mostly represent time or location.

(5) Oft times I've watered my steed
Wi the waters o Wearie's Well.'

(6) Then next he went to May Collin,

She was her father's heir,

(7) From below his arm he pulled a charm,

And stuck it in her sleeve,

(8) But as he turned him round about,

She threw him in the sea, (Lady Isabel and the Elf Knight)

In example (5), "Oft times" really means "Oft" (Often); in (6), "Then next" really means "Then"; in (7), "From below" really means "below"; in (8), "turned him round about" really means "turned him round".

Finally, we examine the structural changes in the song texts. It is a common phenomenon in English ballads that the elements of sentences are displaced or omitted, making the seemingly disordered sentences in fact concise and intuitive.

(9) a. Full sevenscore o ships came her wi,

b. The lady by the greenwood tree.

c. There was twal an twal wi beer an wine,

d. An twal an twal wi muskadine:

e. An twall an twall wi the goud sae red. (5A:Gil Brenton)

In (9 a), apparently the position between "her" and "wi" (with) changed; in (9 b), the predicate element "lived or was" is omitted; in (9 c), it is against the rule that "twal an twal wi beer an wine" appears behind "There was", the normal word order ought to be "There was a twal (twals) wi beer an wine" or "There was beer an wine in a twal (the twals)", here "twal" is used as a noun; in (9 d), the predicate element "There was" is omitted; in (9 e), the normal word order of "wi the goud sae red" should have been "wi sae red (the) goud".

The changing of word order in Yao folk songs is reflected in the postposition of modifiers and the flexible disposal of verb position in a verb-object structure.

(10) a. 日头出早妹担水, 半桶清水半桶沙。

b. 夜深深, 點火夜行茶里林。

c. 正光落日歌堂散, 郎慢数還灯火前。

d. 大星上, 无雲帶雨白青灵。

e. 千郎萬郎月不托, 单托娘门花一兜。

f. 一片烏雲四片开, 主人请客生客来。

g. 雨落山頭雪, 燕子紫雲遮。

h. 湿得罗衣了, 下馬六罗圍。

——《盘王大歌词》

Tr.

(10) a. The sun rises early and a sister goes out to carry water.

b. Late at night, light a torch to walk in the tea woods.

c. When the sun had set down and the singers in the song hall had left, the young fellow was leaving for home in front of the light.

d. The stars had climbed on, and the sky was clear without cloud or rain.

e. No young fellows were entrusted but only a flower in front of the girl's gate was.

f. A dark cloud parted in four, the new guests had come under the host's invitation.

g. Rain fell on the mountain snow, and swallows were covered by the purple clouds.

h. With the clothes wet, he got off the horse and was surrounded by them soon.

—from *The Great Song of King Pan*

In (10a), according to normal word order, “日头出早” should have been “日头早出”; in (10b), “夜行茶里林” should have been “茶林里夜行”; in (10c), “数还灯火前” should have been “灯火前数还”; in (10d), “无雲带雨白青灵 (岭)” should have been “白青灵 (岭) 无雲带雨”; in (10e), “花一兜” should have been “一兜花”; in (10f), “四片开” should have been “开四片”; in (10g), “燕子紫雲遮” should have been “紫雲遮燕子”; in (10h), “湿得罗衣了” should have been “罗衣湿了”. In the process of Chinese development, most of the monosyllabic verbs in ancient Chinese have evolved into double-syllabic verbs, which lead to the obvious detransitification of Chinese predicate verbs.

- (11) a. 一村白馬真白馬，一人出来来见看。
 b. 莫怪歌词相说报，便是金花石上開。
 c. 羊儿出门跳又跳，马儿出门飘又飘。
 d. 踏上船头打三转，船头船尾得团圓。
 e. 神屋有雙收拾了，仔屋無雙收拾难。

Tr.

(11) a. As he is a rare white horse (talent) in the village, everyone comes out to meet him.

b. Don't blame me which are lyrics to report, it's time for the golden flowers to bloom on the stone.

c. A sheep goes out jumping and jumping, and a horse goes out like a whirlwind.

d. Stepping on the head of boat he bows and bows, then the young on both sides of the boat are reunited.

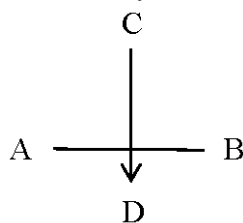
e. A home with a housewife is tidied up orderly, but a home without a housewife messy.

In (11a-e), “见看”, “说报”, “跳又跳”, “飘又飘”, “团圓”, “收拾” are superposed by two monosyllabic verbs with the same meaning, which can be used without reference to the specific objects, so that no objects is needed behind them.

4. SYNCHRONIC AND DIACHRONIC INTERPRETATION TO THE VARIANTS

When we study these language variants in English folk songs and Yao folk songs, we find that they can be explained diachronically and synchronically. “Diachronic is the historical change of the development of a system (past-present-future), and synchronic refers to the relationship among the factors in the system at a particular time. These factors may be formed through different historical evolution, or even belong to different ‘stages of historical development’. Since they co-exist in a system, their historical evolution takes a secondary position; what matters is the systematic relationship formed by the coexistence of all factors.” (Zhao, 1990, p.57) If we

think of folk songs as a separate language system, then the above-mentioned variants only occur within this system and are related to time and space, the story (or content) itself in a folk song represents space, while the elements that make up the story represent time, while the story is relatively stable, the elements that make up the story, such as vocabulary, grammar and text construction, will change over time, that is why pure literary works such as novels, poems, and plays are generally created by specific authors based on their own experience, which are difficult for other authors to reproduce with the same names once they are made public, such as there is only one *Homeric Hymns* in the world as well as only one *Book of Songs* (诗经) in China, but it is not totally the same as in folk songs, folk songs with a same theme and a same subject do exist, for example, in the English folk songs, even the same song may be under a number of different versions, as F. J. Child used 1A, 1B, 1C, etc. to mark them, and some song texts are quite different from words; As for Yao folk songs, there are also many versions of the same theme or subject due to different regions or family branches, thus, whether in English folk songs or in Yao folk songs, there are not any disputes about which song is orthodox and which one is not, instead, all versions are acceptable to the public, which fully shows that both English folk songs and Yao folk songs “are formed by overcoming constantly the contradiction between the synchronic and diachronic, that is to say, the system should be formed in the process of diachronic transformation or displaying into a series of synchronic.” (Zhao, 1990) According to the Swiss linguist Ferdinand de Saussure’s viewpoint, language is a valuable system of signs, and any worthwhile science must distinguish between synchronic and diachronic views in the study of its objects, that is, to study them on both the simultaneous axis and the continuous axis, it can be showed by the follow graph:



Synchronicity is expressed in a language system in which different languages exist at the same time, such as a language A and language B, they are in parallel and do not interfere with each other, which can be regarded as a static existence; Diachronic shows that a language can change at different times, such as a language C and language D, they are in dynamic, that is, language C is used to describe things in the present, while language D is a variant of language C that goes back to descriptions in the past. However, on the whole, this change only takes place in the changes of language elements such as vocabulary and grammar, and does not involve the complete subversion

of the entire language system. Thus, the language system of ballads or folk songs is not rigid and inelastic; instead, it is the dynamic variants within them that ensure the folk songs remain fresh and attractive now. See the beginning of folk song *Lord Rendal*:

12F.1 ‘O WHERE hae ye been, Lord Ronald, my son?
O where hae ye been, Lord Ronald, my son?’

‘I hae been wi my sweetheart; mother, make my bed soon,
For I’m weary wi the hunting, and fain wad lie down.’

12F.2 ‘What got ye frae your sweetheart, Lord Ronald, my son?’

‘What got ye frae your sweetheart, Lord Ronald, my son?’

‘I hae got deadly poison; mother, make my bed soon,
For life is a burden that soon I’ll lay down.’

* * * * *

——12F: Lord Rendal

12G.1 ‘WHERE have you been today, Billy, my son?
Where have you been today, my only man?’

‘I’ve been a wooing; mother, make my bed soon,
For I’m sick at heart, and fain would lay down.’

12G.2 ‘What have you ate today, Billy, my son?
What have you ate today, my only man?’

‘I’ve ate eel-pie; mother, make my bed soon,
For I’m sick at heart, and shall die before noon.’

——12G: Lord Rendal

In the two folk songs, although their themes are of the same, there are many changes in the vocabulary use, first, in 12F, there are obvious traces of Old English in the words’ spelling, such as “hae, ye, wi, frae”, and in 12G, more Modern English words are obviously used; second, some words themselves are replaced, such as “Ronald” changed into “Billy”, “my sweetheart” into “a wooing”, “deadly poison” into “eel-pie”, etc.

In the same way, there are many different versions of Yao ballads around one theme, such as the ethnic origin songs on the origin of Yao people:

• Song of Tao Yuan Cave

Our forefathers once lived in Hunan while our sisters in a state,

Our forefathers once lived in Tao Yuan Cave of Hunan province.

Our sisters once lived in Shuang Shui Gou in Guizhou,
Near Tao Yuan Cave there were lots of good farmlands.

Beside the cave were storied buildings with halls for song singing,

Wild bison and wild boars were wandering around freely.

.....

Farmlands and forests were around Tao Yuan Cave,
And three hundred bulls were ploughing side by side.
But the other side was left untouched,

And wild boars and red deer slept in the village.

What a real vast and open land outside the cave,

There were tens and thousands of happy lyrics echoing behind.

Thankful songs in the singing halls were heard year after year,

And endless songs were sung all the year round.

(Popular in Jiang Ha county of Hu Nan and Ling Chuan county of Guang Xi)

• Song of Mei Shan Cave

The Mei Mountain located on the border of Yong Zhou County,

And An Hua of Le County lay in the East Metroplis.

The Mei Mountain was one hundred li from the administrative district,

With eighteen caves were distributed over there.

In every caves there lived Yao People,

And Mei Mountain spread to Mo Shi ridge on the east.

It spread from south to Huo Shui Road of the East Metroplis,

And from west to the Sha Luo Roud of Ji Ning.

It spread from north to Jing Fan where birds flew up the sky,

An area of more than one thousand li it covered.

Till government officials took back our farmlands,

The Yao People were forced to escape from famine here and there.

(Popular in Guan Yang county of Guang Xi)

• Song of One Thousand Household Cave

Our forefathers once lived in a one-thousand-household cave,

All around it were high mountains and hills.

With Tens of thousands of fertile farmlands around,

And the mountain forest was rich in soil.

We ploughed the hills and farmed the land to harvest the crops,

What an easy life and a happy mood!

One thousand Yao households had been there,

Untill the government army invaded in later.

The Yao People were forced to flee away here and there,

To give up the productive land to escape from the famine.

In the 6th and 8th of the ten Heavenly Stems we arrived at Dao county,

And continued to make an arduous journey over mountains and across rivers.

At last in one year we came to Guangxi province,

But our brothers had to depart continuously to Guizhou.

And our sisters fled to Vietnam too,

And some had to wander around in Guangdong. (Yao, 1991)

It is well-known that in the past almost in every Yao’s family, there was a copy of hand-written *Guo Shan Bang*

(a charter issued by king) kept. Although the names are different, their contents are much similar, their titles include *Guo Shan Bang*, *Guo Shan Tu*, *Guo Shan Die*, *Guo Shan Bang Wen*, *Bang Wen*, *Ping Wang Quan Die*, *Pan Wang Quan Die*, *Ping Huang Quan Die*, *the Old Decree Issued by the Nanjing King*, and so on.

The synchronic and diachronic difference between English folk songs and Yao folk songs lies in the fact that English inherits the western philosophical system, emphasizing logical analysis and strict precision, the mainstream view is that people tend to recognize time through the experience of space, thinking of time and space as two opposite worlds; while Chinese lays emphasis on intuition and enlightenment, full of imagination, regarding time and space as homomorphism, that is “The ‘universe’ in ancient times is the unity of time and space, the four sides with ups and downs make the ‘Yu’, throughout the ages is the ‘Zhou’, they both constitute the ‘Yu Zhou’ (universe).” (Liu, 2021) These cultural differences between English and Chinese determine the time narration in English folk songs, and it is used to arrange the elements of language (vocabulary, grammar, structure, etc.) strictly in time sequence, for example, there are obvious differences among Old English, Middle English and Modern English, but the whole English language system can basically maintains stability, therefore, the vocabulary of English folk songs can be those of Old English, Middle English, Modern English and even French, which determines it much more abundant than Chinese in genre, voice and case, the narration (theme, structure, tone, etc.) and lyricism (direct lyricism, one thing in a narration, standing out characters, etc.) generally following the law of three in one; while Yao folk songs inherit the Chinese tradition, mainly adopt space narration, emphasizing the interdependence and coherence of the various elements of the language, its vocabulary, syntax and structure are relatively fixed, allowing to seize upon a pretext and make a fuss within a stylized framework, they are characterized by rich imagination and indirect lyricism, which determines the use of segmented narrative, that is, from one story to transit to another so that each story can be linked together, forming a perfect circular extension. In general, Yao folk songs have the characteristics of the same origin, and their language variants mainly come from the language differences of different family branches or regions where Yao people lived, as well as the copying or creativity of folk songs in the process of oral transmission and transcription.

5. CONCLUSION

Although English folk songs and Yao Folk Songs belong to two different language systems, they share the same features in genesis of literature and reappear the early life of these two peoples, both of them can be called the national living epics. Because of the long time span of the formation and existence of ballads or folk songs, there are a lot of language variants in them, but these variants do not affect the discourse system of the speech group, on the contrary, they make the language systems perfect and vigorous. By analyzing the similarities and differences of the two variants in terms of vocabulary, syntax, word order and structure, and explaining their synchronic and diachronic features of language, we can benefit from them undoubtedly. Besides, such comparisons are helpful for us to understand the language variants both in English folk songs and Yao Folk Songs.

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