

AN ATEMPT AT A NEW APPROACH IN THE TRANSLATION OF CHINESE LITERARY TEXT INTO WESTERN LANGUAGES*

MARINA ČARNOGURSKÁ

Using modern medical knowledge about visual and sound centers in the human brain and about differences between cerebral mechanisms of creation of thoughts, the author of this paper applies it to the literary translation of Chinese ideographical texts visually readable by us humans. In her long-standing scholarly research she makes an effort to formulate a new theory of translation of Chinese ideographic literary texts into Western phonetically written literary structures. With the help of some particular examples, in the main initial tenets she tries to proclaim some syntactic, linguistic and literary consequences of many very important differences between the basic literary structures of the same literary text expressed in its Chinese original by the visually readable ideographic characters and the literary text transformed through its translation into the Occidental phonetic languages. The process of this transformation is still more complicated due to the fact that some special literary genres, quite unknown to our literary traditions, have been formed in Chinese ideographically written literature through the millennia of its development, for example a special genre of Chinese literary essay in a parallel style or a narrative poetry-and-prose style *bianwen*.

Chinese literary texts, written in their original by ideographic symbols, are not only phonetically but also visually perceptible, thus representing unique treasures in the literary inheritance of Mankind.

The ideographic characters, in which they are written, symbolize much richer verbal units than those represented only by phonetic letters. From the textual point of view, Chinese ideographical literary texts provoke a realization that the frontiers of their lexical contents, as well as of mutual stylistic, syntactic and grammatical relationships of their words, depend on absolutely different semantic norms, grammatical and syntactic regularities and determinations than the Western, phonetically written literary texts. Therefore, not only the basic process of

* An earlier version of this paper was presented at the XXXVIth International Congress of Asian and North African Studies at the Palais des Congr s, Montreal, Canada, (August 27th – September 2nd 2000) under the title “Avoiding Deformations in the Translation of Chinese Literary Text into Western Languages”.

literary creation in Chinese ideographically written literary texts, but also their literary translations to the phonetically written European languages ought to be, in a certain sense, specifically different than is the translation of literary texts from one European language to another.

Over the last decades, neurophysiological and neuropsychological research has been intensively devoted to scientific experiments, which map the differences in the creation of human thoughts and of the formulation of words in the opposite cerebral centres in the right and left hemispheres of the human brain. The right hemisphere processes the visual perceptions, while the left hemisphere processes the audio-vocal phonetic-speech perceptions. This new knowledge, which accrued from scientific experiments, drew the attention of modern world researchers to the biological divergences as much as to the psychogenetic heterogeneity in the development of mental mechanisms of human brain in various world cultures, following millennia of using different cultural habits in their oral, written, and visual communications. As human thinking is more a psychological than a sociological unit, according to American philosopher and cognitive scientist J. A. Fodor, the cognitive system which transforms language information in the human mind, is confining particularly to the recognition of acoustic symptoms and to the grammatical structure of language as well as to the connected with it logical moulds of expression, but its semantic interpretations are not realized only within language modulus, so the ability of writing can, therefore, be something quite independent from the ability of formation of sounds of speech. So neither scripts nor speech undetermine the final and incorporated conditions for heterogeneous competences of human receptivity (cf. Fodor 1983, 64–86).

Based on the opinion of Sperry's colleague and co-worker Gazzaniga regarding substantial and three-dimensional character of a dictionary of the right cerebral hemisphere, the visual perception of thoughts and their metamorphosis into the pictorially ideographic forms of literary texts is realized especially in the right hemisphere of human brain. Here, from the ideographic forms of literary texts, contrary to the perception of human thoughts in the left hemisphere, a reader has the perceptibility to read out and decode the encoded thoughts without using any sound-speech. This process represents a model of lexical organization with an explicit visual dictionary that is connected with a long-lasting verbal memory, operating with pictorial semantics. The structure of this dictionary, shaped in the right cerebral hemisphere with the help of visual perception, has therefore the connotative and associative character – much more imaginative than narrative. That characteristic makes it possible to connect such a structure with a universal non-linguistic apparatus of knowledge formed by the creation of associations. In its semantic memory, there are structures for storing non-verbal visions and images, reflected on a large scale of the understanding of three-dimensional and sensory-visual associations of knowledge. According to the research of American neuropsychologist Zaidel, thereto

the model of lexical organization in the right cerebral hemisphere is narrowly connected yet with another element of language apparatus which is co-joined by the non-verbal system of knowledge, as is three-dimensional visual imagery and concreteness of the sensory-sensitive perceptions (Zaidel 1978, 183–4).

All these medical and socio-anthropological scientific discoveries published over the past decades guided me to apply them also in the area of literary translation of Chinese visually perceptible ideographic texts. Literary creations formed within the frame of the human right hemispheric cerebral perception may be an integral part of the process of literary creativity of Chinese authors: their literary works are not created only in the left hemisphere and in its audio-acoustic and vocal-sound centre of thought perceptions (where the literary texts of our Western writers are usually stylized and worded), but especially in the right hemispheric imaginative centre of the non-verbal and three-dimensional pictorial creativity of human thoughts.

My thirty years translation practice was devoted to the translation of many significant Chinese literary and philosophic works that include translations of Chao Xueqin's *Hung lou meng*, Laozi's *Dao De jing*, Confucius' *Lunyu*, *Essays* of Confucian philosopher Xunzi, or *Eighteen Cries of the Hun's Pipe*, written by famous medieval Chinese female poet Chai Wenji, or modern poems of Taiwan's leading contemporary poets such as Xiang Ming, Zhang Guozi, Zhang Xianghua, Chen Xuying, and others. During the translation of ancient, medieval and modern Chinese writers and literary creators, I have found deeper and deeper confirmation of my opinion that Chinese literary creators have cultivated in the framework of their ideographic literary traditions an ability to create and, consecutively, read Chinese literary texts not only by the audio-vocal perception going on in the competent centre of the left cerebral hemisphere, but especially by the visual perception performed in its competent centre of the right cerebral hemisphere. This method of literary creation and the consecutive reading of its ideographic signscripts by the three-dimensional and a visually perceived creativity of thoughts is most of all connected by a non-lingual general apparatus of knowledge. It is moulded through the medium of associations of the basic concepts reflecting on a large scale of understanding of three-dimensional and sensory-visual imagery, correlated by ideographic signscripts, which have inside of them more universal and more extensive lexical significations and mutual semantic and syntactic interpretations than there are currently in European languages written with phonetic letters. As an example for the basis of this argument I could introduce the fact that all existing ideographic characters of the classic and modern Mandarin Chinese, apart from their syntactic position in the sentence, have very few other visible forms of changes of their grammatical destinations. For the reader and the translator, it means that every text written in such an isolating language without any inflection, as is Chinese, is at the first glance only a quantity of

signscripts put together, side by side, in their universal lexical significations. Theoretically, each of their words could have a large number of various so universal as partial lexical significations, and at the same time different grammatical, syntactic and stylistic delimitations and syntactic relations, which are not determined visually nor audibly by any special form of phonetic or graphic changes.

Let me illustrate this concept by an analogy. Operatic librettos may be interesting literary works but are seldom published or read. Only with the added component of music, the true dimension of the combined entity becomes a real masterpiece. Similarly or much more, Chinese operas when broadcast on the radio may not be that compelling. But with the added visual components of the staged performance, they become a tour de force, revealing the true splendor of the author's creation.

Every Chinese signscript within a Chinese sentence has in its phonetically expressed language many different specific lexical and grammatical explanations, but in the ideographic Chinese, it is still written by one and the same signscript.

For example Chinese signscript 家 has, in phonetically-written language, many lexical differences, but in ideographic Chinese it is written by one and the same signscript:

Family, in family, familiar, etc.	家 (jia)
at home, home, inside home	家 (jia)
lineage	家 (jia)
yard, home yard	家 (jia)
birth-place	家 (jia)
familiar relations	家 (jia)
firm	家 (jia)
gram.suffix of a specialist	家 (jia)
gram. suffix of a school	家 (jia)
gram.suffix of an artist	家 (jia)
gram.suffix of "all of us"	家 (jia)
gram. suffix of the mother country	家 (jia)

The same applies to many thousands of other Chinese words and their ideographic forms and because of it, Chinese literary texts in such universal and isolated language look, for example, like this:

老子：道德經 (38.part)

上德不德是德有德
下德不德是德無德
上德無為而無以爲
下德無為而無以爲
上仁爲之而無以爲
上義爲之而無以爲
上禮爲之而無以爲
則攘臂而扔之應

故
失道而後德
失德而後仁
失仁而後義
失義而後禮
失禮者忠信之
薄而亂之首
前識者道之華而愚之始
是以

大丈夫處其厚不居其薄
處其實不居其華
故
去彼取此

荀子：修身 (2.essay)

見善，修然必以自存也；
見不善，愀然必以自省也。
善在身，介然必以自好也；
不善在身，菑然必以自惡也。

故
非我而當者吾師也；
是我而當者吾友也；
諂諛我者，吾賊也。

故
君子隆師而親友，以致惡其賊。
好善無厭，受諫而能誠，
雖欲無進，得乎哉！
小人反是：
致亂而惡人之非己也；
致不肖而欲人之賢己也，
心如虎狼，
行如禽獸，而又惡人之賊己也。
諂諛者親，
諫爭者疏，
修正爲笑，
至忠爲賊，

The correct and precise semantic, grammatical and stylistic destination of every single ideographic signscript, from which the specific Chinese literary text is composed, are definitively determined only inside the author's memory as a part of his visually perceptible thoughts and imagination, so outwardly the text looks like something isolated inside its sentences into the naked Chinese characters, without any or with very pure grammatical destinations. Afterward, in the reader's brain, these destinations ought to be reconstructed more precisely through his visual thoughts perception rather than through reading or hearing the Chinese original only phonetically. By the visual way of imaging, every reader is able to see the author's thoughts and ideas more accurately. But to read an ideographic text correctly means that the text needs to be read with the help of detailed visual perceptions of all ideographic characters from which the text is built, as well as to control this process at once by reading it also phonetically. The reader (and translator) needs to reconstruct its correct content in his or her imagination above all with the help of the nonverbal associations of visual perception, reconstructed in the reader's mind in the same way as it was originally created in the writer's mind.

In this process, the readers and the translator borrow author's literary imagination as precisely as possible. In the phonetically written Western translation, the translator, instead of the author, ought to create and adapt the whole stylistic composition of original text in its new phonetically written Western literary form, without a loss of its Chinese literary originality.

For example, the poem *Amsterdam's Canals* of modern Chinese poet Duo Duo could be translated by this method into English in this literary form:

阿姆斯特丹的河流

十一月入夜的城市
唯有阿姆斯特丹的河流

突然

我家树上的桔子
在秋风中晃动

我关上窗户,也没有用
河流倒流,也没有用
那镶满珍珠的太阳,升起来了

也没有用
鸽群象铁屑散落
没有男孩子的街道突然显得空旷

秋雨过后
那爬满蜗牛的屋顶
——我的祖国

从阿姆斯特丹的河上,缓缓驶过.....

Duo Duo: AMSTERDAM'S CANALS

*In the night of November,
Amsterdam's canals are
just like our.*

*In the breeze of autumn wind,
their level disturbed by falling fruit
that is swallowed by water and carried away.
Uselessly! I shut the window.*

*And even the glittering share of rising sun
an never bring back (memories from my home).
Yes, uselessly!*

*The flock of pigeons whirls soot from the dirt
and a lonely strangehood spreads in an empty street.
After a horrid rain,*

*even the snail comes from its shell a lot faster
...in my homeland*

*Here,
by the canals of Amsterdam,
it crawls out indifferently slowly...*

although its literal translation from Chinese is:

阿姆斯特丹的河流

十一月入夜的城市
唯有阿姆斯特丹的河流

突然

我家树上的桔子
在秋风中晃动

我关上窗户,也没有用
河流倒流,也没有用
那镶满珍珠的太阳,升起来了

也没有用
鸽群象铁屑散落
没有男孩子的街道突然显得空旷

AMSTERDAM'S CANALS

November to come into a night town
only exist (to have) Amsterdams' canal
Abruptly

from my family's tree fruit
in autumn wind to fall down, shudder (its water)
I shut the windows, useless

rivers flows, also useless
that glittering pearl'sun rises
also useless

Flock of pigeons as whirled metal shaving spill on
without to have boy's street abruptly appear broad and
spacious

秋雨过后
那爬满蜗牛的屋顶
——我的祖国
从阿姆斯特丹的河上,缓缓驶过.....

After autumn rain
snail from shell crawls
...my homeland
from Amsterdam's canal slowly climb over...

The same applies to the poem of Taiwan poet Mrs. Zhang Xianghua, which was translated and published in Taiwan by traditional phonetic reading of the Chinese text into English in this phonetic translation:

張香華：

飛翔的我

從來
沒有人聽到我的謳歌
除了落日，夕照
和遍天連綿的晚霞

甚至
沒有人說我是鳴禽
翅膀堅硬，目光銳利
是識別我的獨特的標記

儘管
疾風狂野，雲霧濃厚
天色澄墨，暴雨傾盆
我還是掄動雙翅，瞄準目光

終於
蒼冥中，一隻飛鷹漸漸消失
在叢宇盡處，化成一個小點
那就是我歌唱尾音的音符

Solo Flight

Never has there
Been anyone to hear my song
Only the setting sun, the slanting rays
The sunset clouds embroidered on the hem of the sky
None
Has ever called me a songbird
With the stiff wings, and the razor-sharp gaze
That are my trademarks
Even if
The wind blows savagely, the clouds grow denser
The sky becomes a dark wash, the rain falls down in sheets
I only sharpen my aim, and continue beating my wings
Until, finally
In the gray vastness, a flying eagle slowly fades from view
Turning, at the edge of the world, to one small dot
The ending phrase, the final note of my song.

But after reading its Chinese original also with visual perception, I have translated Mrs. Chang Xiang-hua's poem into English in this literary form:

飛翔的我

從來
沒有人聽到我的謳歌
除了落日，夕照
和遍天連綿的晚霞

甚至
沒有人說我是鳴禽
翅膀堅硬，目光銳利
是識別我的獨特的標記

儘管
疾風狂野，雲霧濃厚
天色澄墨，暴雨傾盆
我還是掄動雙翅，瞄準目光

Zhang Xianghua:

FLYING ON MY OWN

Yet
No one was captivated by my singing
Only the setting sun and evening twilight
With the velvet golden laces of clouds.
So
No one told the world: though I am a songbird
But on the strong wings and with sharp sight
Those are my trademarks!
Let the cold wind blow,
Let the darkest clouds grow
And let the fog and heavy rain cover everything,
I keep on flying, depending on my wings
And my sharp sight impales the thickest mist.

終於

蒼冥中，一隻飛鷹漸漸消失
在寰宇盡處，化成一個小點
那就是我歌唱尾音的音符

Until finally

*From the crestfallen grayness I rise above the clouds
Into the world of clarity
And there shall I sing my most magnificent song!*

Instead of only a literal phonetic translation, according to my new theory of translation, the Western translator must take a deeper journey from the author's significantly neutral Chinese ideographic original toward her real and stylistically adequate literary imaginations. Such new literary translations into Western languages, without their only phonetic limitations, can be overcome through a medium of very attentive and watchful "visual" reading of the Chinese original, as well as through the medium of the reader's and the translator's patient visual reconstruction of the original Chinese verbal units into the Western audio-vocal phonetically perceived words, written only with phonetic letters.

To be more specific, I introduce a couple of other examples. The first one is from Confucius' *Book of Sayings* 論語：

子曰：學而時習之不亦說乎
有朋自遠方來不亦樂乎
人不知而不愠不亦君子乎

A word-for-word literal translation of this saying by Confucius into English would not convey the logical, grammatical or stylistic relations very well:

Master to say:

Study and afterward time to repeat isn't too joyful?

Have friend from a faraway place to come isn't too lucky?

Man not known and afterward not to be troubled isn't too noble master?

It is clear, that this is really an illogical translation of Confucius' sayings, but according to our general theory of translation, in the sense of which the translator is obliged to respect stylistic structure of the translated original, in its speech-words reading, the content of this sayings is really as I have shown above. In such a case, the translator should not have permission to make any inherent interventions into its contents and into its semantic structure. I hope that you agree that to translate Confucius' sayings in this way would terribly dishonour not only the translated author (in this case, Confucius) but also the Western reader who could not accept such illogical and "literarily" poor expression of the translated original. So, there must be a better method of reading Chinese ideographic texts that can help us translate Chinese literary texts not only by its phonetic reading. The original literary structure of Chinese originals ought to be reconstructed in their translations also artistically and aesthetically quite perfectly. The reconstructed word-formation must also include all its thought components and stylistic relations, which are not visible

at its only phonetic reading. Everything what was literarily created by the Chinese author in his ideographic original, the Western translator is obliged to transfer, and stylistically and literarily reconstruct into the phonetically written but artistically the same literary translation. For example, in the case of the above saying of Confucius, the translator would have a right to reconstruct it into a phonetically written language as follows:

And the Master said:

Is there a greater happiness than to engage yourself into study?

Is there a greater joyfulness than to welcome your just returning friend?

And isn't it noble-minded not to grieve if the people don't know about you?

The next sample is from Du Fu's poetry.

This is Du Fu's Chinese original of his poem

THINKING OF MY BROTHERS ON A MOONLIT NIGHT:

戍鼓斷人行
邊秋一雁聲
露從今夜白
月是故鄉明
有弟皆分散
無家問死生
寄書長不達
況乃未休兵

Taken word-by-word, it means:

Military drums broken people's travelling.

Autumn in borderland, sound of one goose.

Dew from today's night white.

Moon is, a cause, countryside, bright.

To have brothers, all (in) parts to disperse.

Not to have family, to ask(who is) dead (or) living.

Letters (from) home very long (or) not come.

and situation is so that not to rescue (before) war.

In the English translation by William Hung this poem by Du Fu's also looks very unpoetical:

The watch-tower drum has sounded to close the road to traveling, I hear a lone wild goose's cry in the autumn skies of the frontier. The White Dew Season begins tonight; The moon is not as bright as I used to see it at home. Brothers I have, but they are all scattered. There is no home where I can inquire if they are alive. Their letters will never reach me now; Moreover, the war that separates us is not ended.

With the help of visual perception, I have translated Du Fu's poem into this English poetic transformation:

戍鼓斷人行
邊秋一雁聲
露從今夜白
月是故鄉明
有弟皆分散
無家問死生
寄書長不達
況乃未休兵

*Journey is over, war drums have sounded,
Through autumn country, only a goose cries.
Full moon reminds so brightly of home
making the dew sparkle tonight.*

*Brothers o' mine all you are scattered.
Can't ask at home: are you alive? Who knows?
With war raging, it often happens,
letters are answered, if ever, slowly.*

Of course, I cannot force my theory of translation onto the Western literary translators to be used in their translation of Chinese literature. Maybe, in the future, it may help as one of many experiments to improve the accuracy of literary translations of Chinese literary masterpieces into the Western phonetically written languages.

References

- Fodor, J.. *The Modularity of Mind*. Cambridge, Mass.: A Bradford Book. The MIT Press, 1983.
- Konfucius, Mencius, Cun C'. *A riekol Majster...* (Translated by M. Čarnogurská.). Bratislava: Tatran, 1990.
- Sun C'. *Eseje*. (Translated by M. Čarnogurská.) Bratislava: M&J Čarnogurský, 2000.
- Tu Fu. *Stokvetá rieka*. (Translated by K. Strmeň, M. Čarnogurská.) Bratislava: Petrus, 1998.
- Zaidel, L. Lexical Organization in the Right Hemisphere. In P. A. Buser (Ed.). *Cerebral Correlates of Conscious Experience. Insem Symposium*. Amsterdam-New York-Oxford, 1978.

Institute of Oriental and African Studies,
Slovak Academy of Sciences,
Klemensova 19,
813 64 Bratislava,
Slovak Republic
Tel.: +421-2-52926321
Fax: +421-2-52926326
E-mail: –