# Translating Literariness: A Cognitive Poetic Account

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**Absrtact:** This paper inquires into literariness, a much neglected problem in translation, from a cognitive poetic perspective; it tries to show the nature of proxy as concerns translation through various illustrations, hence what is termed by Bausse-Beier the proxy principle, and in passing answer the philosophical problem of translatability or untranslatability. Literariness, not limited to literature, may exist in all texts. It can be defined as the form of a text that is suggestive of something, different from that of a text that is not. Any text that is literary is a literary text. Literariness may be realized through the use of metaphors, personifications, imagery, hyperbole and so on, and through the employment of pattern such as alliteration, paranomasia, meter, rhyme and so on. In translating a literary text, a translator should capture the literariness, otherwise the translation fails. However, in the process of translation, some of these features that contribute to the form, such as phonological or prosodic ones, will be definitely lost. If literariness is to be maintained, there should be a way for compensation. Analogy comes to the fore, though translation is by nature analogical; it is employed to reveal the iconicity between signifier and signified through some means of representation. In such an endeavor, optimum relevance should be aimed at so that a good proxy can be ensured: what is in the mind of an original reader should be that in the mind of a translation reader.

**Keywords:** literariness, translatability, the proxy principle, iconicity, optimum relevance

## Introduction

Literariness is a distinctive feature of literature, though it is not exclusive to literature. It may be pervasive in all texts. For example, in Chinese classics, philosophical ones like The Word and the World (daodejing), geographical ones like Mountains and Seas (shanhaijing), and literary criticisms like Carving the Dragon with a Literary Heart (wenxindiaolong) and so on read like poems and may be judged as poems in their own right. A translation of a literary text should be literary, or if at all possible, it should be as literary as the original. Otherwise, a trans-

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lator fails in the purport of the text and his endeavor as well. However, important as it is, literariness has been much neglected due to a translator's vague idea of what literariness is or the difficulty to render it or represent it and, of course, due to the inadequacy of theoretical exploration. Literariness, as always, is a tricky problem, refusing a definite answer. Owing to cognitive poetics, a clearer picture of literariness can be seen, and the translation of literariness can be best explained and illustrated.

## 1. What is Literariness?

What is literariness? Or in other words, what does the literariness of a text consist of? It seems to be a mythic question to answer, however, no critic or theoretician can avoid this question, because it is central to literature. And when it concerns the translation of a literary text, a translator cannot ignore it, either. In a broad sense, literariness is simple. Roughly, it is the form of a text that is suggestive of something. That is to say, when the form of a text suggests a meaning or implicature, it is a literary text. The form of a literary text goes beyond its content to allow the text to do something, whereby what it does might be to echo a particular meaning in its form or to make a reader supply a meaning. Of course, all texts have a form. The difference is that: The form of non-literary text or an ordinary text does not suggest anything. For example, what I am writing here is a thesis; it means what I mean, but no more. In short, the form of this text does not carry a meaning or implicature. A poem like This World's April Day (Zhao Yanchun 2014: 75), however, not only expresses the semantic content of the text, but also carries a rich resource of connotations, like those conveyed through the use of tropes such as metaphor, personification and imagery, through the employment of pattern such as alliteration, meter and rhyme, and those conveyed though deviation and change of perspective. All these features are reduced to one thing, that is, the literary form of the text. Of course, the form of a literary text is ultimately a matter of mind. As regards translation, what is in the mind of an original reader should be that in the mind of a translation reader. So reasonably, a good translation should be one that keeps all these features, which make up the literary form of the translation.

To show what literariness is and how it works, we need to look more closely into what makes literariness possible, that is, signs and the combination of signs, which we will discuss in the following sections.

### 1.1 Nature of signs: the key to the problem of literariness

To have a better understanding of what literariness is, we need inquire into the nature of signs because a text is a composition of signs. And to know signs, we need to know those who use signs, that is mankind. First, we may claim that man is an animal of signs because no one can find a person that does not use signs. Secondly, we may claim that man is a literary animal because, as we have experienced or may imagine, there are no nations in the world that do not have a wealth of poetry, or at least a sense of poetry. And ultimately, we may say that literariness is closely related with signs, and of course, with the human mind that operates signs.

Then what is a sign? In line of Saussure (1983: 67), a sign is a dyad of signifier and signified, and a dyad is a pair that is inseparable, like two sides of a sheet of paper. As one side of this pair, signifier is expressed as sound image and the other side, i.e. signified, as concept. Remember neither sound image nor concept is material; they are independent of the physical world, if not irrelevant to it. That is why signs make an autonomous world, and literature has been regarded as an autotelic art (art's for art's sake). A signifier is but a form which signifies the content, so we may understand the distinction between signifier as form and signified as content:

(1)form = signifier; content = signified

Accordingly, the form/content relation can be identified as the signifier/signified relation, as is shown below:

(2)form/content = signifier/signified

And logically, form of a sign can be identified as signifier of a sign, as is shown below:

(3)form of a sign = signifier of a sign

Now that we have clarified what the form of a sign is, we move on to the form of a text.

### 1.2 Form of a text

To understand the notion of the form of a text, we need to look at the structure of language. According to Saussure  (1983: 67), there are two relations of language: syntagma and paradigma. The linear or horizontal relation is called syntagma, that is, the combination of signs in a linear relation, as is shown below:

(4)sign1 + sign2 + sign3 + sign4... This is a rose.

The sentence "This is a rose" is composed of four signs: "this" "is" "a" and "rose", though each of them is combined with some other sign to make a larger

constituent, like "a" and "rose"make a noun phrase "a rose". Now let us look at the vertical relation, i. e. paradigma. In the following schema, "this" "my dog" "the wind"have the same value, that is to say, in the same position as the "this" in the sentence"This is a rose". Here,"my dog"or"the wind"can serve as subject, having the same status as "this".

    (5) sign1 This...

        sign2 My dog...

        sign3 The wind...

    ...

Where does literariness arise? Actually, when we say "My dog is a rose"or "This wind is a rose", it is literary, though it may sound bizarre. Let us look at the following two sentences to illustrate non-literariness and literariness:

    (7) This is a rose.

    (8) You are my rose.

In the first sentence, "this" is not a person or an animal, hence marked [-ANIMATE], while in the second, "you" refers to a person, hence marked [+ANIMATE]. Let us imagine in what circumstances the first sentence is used, for example, telling a child who doesn't know what a rose is. In this case, "rose" may involve three things, rose [rouz] as a sound image, rose in the mind as a concept, and rose in the world as a referent. The second sentence is different, "You are my rose" may be uttered to someone you love. The sign "rose" in this case involves three things, rose [rouz] as a sound image, rose in the mind as a concept, and rose as a token of something else. In the first case, a rose is a rose, the form or signifier or sound image signifies the concept "rose" and refers to a thing named rose in the world, no more, no less. In the second case, "rose" is a token for something else; the form or signifier or sound image invokes not only the concept of "rose" but also something else, the construed similarity between a rose and someone you love. Through this illustration, you may feel what literariness is. It is something generated besides the basic meaning of the text. We may now give a temporary definition of literariness:

    (9) Literariness is the form of a text that is suggestive of something in contrast to one that is not.

We may now look at the distinction between a non-literary text and a literary one.

A non-literary text is the pair of form and content, as is shown below:

(10) Non-literary: form / content

while a literary one as is shown in (11) has two pairs, that is, the pair of form1

and content and the pair between from2 and content. In other words, form1 and form2 are each paired with the same content.

(11) literary: form1 - form2 / content

The pair between form1 and content is basic while the pair between form2 and content is what makes a text literary. In short, it is form2 that matters.

Now we may understand that form1 in contrast with content is not important, and is neglected in translation, but form2 is important because it is what makes a text literary, and content in contrast with form2 is secondary as long as literariness is concerned. So generally speaking, literariness or the form of the text comes to the fore in a literary text; it becomes primary or central.

## 1.3 Why Is Form So Important?

The form of a text determines whether a text literary or not. Now it is necessary to think about the significance of form in western philosophy and literature.

We can trace the notion of form to Ancient Greece. Plato initiated the progenitive notion of Eidos/Morphee, which denotes the beginning of all things. "Morphee" means "form", and "eidos" "idea" or "content". According to Plato, without this Morphee, there would be no world, though "Morphee" and "Eidos" are inseparable. And according to Aristotle, form is active while stuff or content is passive. These two figures laid the philosophical foundation of form in the west, this is why formal sciences are the basis of all learning. And in literature, Russian formalists foreground form. In their eyes, form is content, and this form is even more important than content, i.e. the semantic content of a text because form is what makes something art  to begin with, so in order to understand a work of art as a work of art (rather than as an ornamented communicative act) one must focus on its form (Shklovsky 1990). It is true if we consider the nature of a sign, a disembodied being. Form, be it of Eidos,  of logic, of language, or of poetry, is one with different realizations or reincarnations. Anyhow, the beauty of form is a salient feature of literature or it is what literature relies on. Of course, form without content is unimaginable, and as far as literariness is concerned, form is content itself. A good work of art satisfies both form and content, and more specifically, it is in the tension between form and content, namely the mutual haulage between form and content. Therefore, a translator's disregard of poetic form can be regarded as a misunderstanding of literary translation, a fundamental mistake.  In short, translating a poem into meaning without its poetic form is inadequate, if not meaningless.

In terms of a literary text, as mentioned above, form itself is content; it is content on a second level in contrast to content expressed with the semantics of words,

or more exactly, the composition of words. Some aspects of the form may be obvious like meter and rhyme, and others may have to be felt or discovered. Form in general is left open to interpretation or infinite interpretations by the writer to the reader. Any irresponsible act of manipulation may warp or mar the form, thereby blocking the possibility or potential of interpretation. In some cases, like the translation of wordplay, the semantic content of the original can be neglected or vetoed for the preservation of the literary form. For without such a form, a translation is meaningless.  (I will discuss it in 3.2) In short, form can be summarized as how something is said, which may be reduced to the notion of style, as Basse-Beier (2011) claims that style is as important as content, perhaps more so, in translation. Now that style has been defined as "proper words in proper places", it is a matter of diction. I will regard style roughly as the same thing with, or part of, the form of a text.

## 2. The Dialectics of Translating Literariness

It is self-evident that a good translation should keep the literariness inherent to the original, although it is heavily, if not totally, lost in many translations.

### 2.1 Translating Literariness

"Translation"is too vague a word for the discussion of literary translation. We may understand the translation here as representation because  "representation" means "representing a likeliness or image of" and "standing for", so we may use the word "represent" in our discussion. For the purpose of representing literariness, let us first look at the realization of literariness, or to be more specific, in what way literariness is realized.

Literariness may be realized through the following devices, which are used to manipulate signs for better effect of form:

(1) tropes: metaphor, personification, transferred epithet, hyperbole...

(2) patterns: rhythm, rhyme, alliteration, repetition, paranomasia...

However, these crucial factors are liable to be lost in literary translation. That's why I say a literary translation is real translation. As far as an ideal translation is concerned, no abridgment, supplementation or adaptation is encouraged, and it requires a translator to be highly exact and at the same time highly flexible when need be. One may look at the translation of This World's April Day (Zhao Yanchun 2014: 75) to see where it is exact and where the translator took to his flex-

ibility.

To be highly exact, we may follow Timothy Huson's Guidelines (2014: 9-12):

The best translation is faithful in the broad sense of the word, considering the meaning, the imagery, the tone, the ambiguity, suggestiveness, and the narrative structure. The full range of literary tropes employed in the original should be as much as possible preserved in the translation.

Procedures

--word choice--

(1) Do not try to improve the original author's word choice, but rather seek to capture it.

(2) Every significant word in the original must be in some way captured in the translation and every word in the translation needs to be supported by the original.

(3) Do not translate the implicit meaning of a Chinese word or phrase into an English word or phrase that makes that meaning explicit. That is, if at all possible, retain metaphors and imagery in the translation, rather than making them explicit, and as far as possible, use the same metaphor and imagery in English.

(4) When they can be understood, translate Chinese idioms directly and literally rather than rendering them with English or western cliches  (except the Chinese itself is using a western cliche).

(5) Do not add remarks or choose words to bring out  what you  think what the author should have said, but rather render a text that leaves to the reader of the translation an interpretive task similar to that of the reader of the original. Remember that ambiguity and counter-intuitive word choices are an essential part of creative writing, and should be retained if at all possible.

--style--

(6) Do not try to improve or change the original author's style , but rather try to capture it.

(7) As far as possible, make your English as simple and concise as the Chinese. For example, if possible, find an English word or expression that largely carries the nuances of the Chinese word or expression rather than expounding all of those nuances in English.

(8) When they are clearly indicated, direct discourse and indirect discourse in the Chinese text should remain the same in the translation if at all possible.

--punctuation and structure--

(9) Do not try to improve or change the original author's punctuation, but rather to capture it.

(10) Use the same paragraph divisions in the translation as appear in the origi-

nal.

(11) Strive initially to capture the sentence divisions of the Chinese text (try not to break up long sentences or combine short ones), and deviate from the original only when other considerations make it necessary.

(12) Dashes, semi-columns, exclamation marks should be retained in the translations when possible.

(13) Initially strive to preserve roughly the same order of phrases or clauses within a sentence, and vary this to the extent that smoothness and meaning requires it.

These basic guidelines are helpful, but these alone do not necessarily ensure the success of a translation because a translator may fail in verse translation or translation of such wordplay as puns, panoromasias and tongue twisters. That is why flexibility is another necessary condition required of a translator.

Literariness is idiosyncratic, varying from person to person, relevant to his mind and command of language. In some cases like wordplay such as paranomasia and pun, the literariness is also dependent on, or limited to, the phonological and prosodic features of a language. When an original text is translated into another language, the phonological or prosodic features of the original language are automatically lost, and totally lost. If the form of a text is not significant, only a vehicle of the semantic content, that is, the form itself does not suggest or do anything, then the loss of such features can be totally neglected. For example, when  (12) is translated into (12a), the form that is dependent on the features is totally lost.

(12) I drink tea (12a) wo he cha

In this translation, we see two aspects: 1) The content  (what is meant) is kept intact; 2) The form (the prosodic features) is lost.

This is what translation is. Without such a loss of the form or the phonological / prosodical features, there would be no translation, in other words, translation entails the loss of form. In this case, translatability can be ascertained. However, when the form of a text suggests something, it should be captured in translation, otherwise, the literariness is lost, and a target text reader has no access to the literary charm of the original. Therefore, a non-literary translation of a literary text is meaningless. That is probably why Robert Frost jeers poetry is what is  lost in translation.

## 2.2 The Loss of Literariness and the Problem (UN)translatability

To discuss how to keep literariness in translation, we need to see how literariness is lost in it. It is obvious that some features will be lost in one way or another, or to various degrees. Let us look at the following examples.

(13) Il pleure dans mon coeur / Comme il pleut sur la ville (Verlaine 2001: 25)

(14)Veni, vidi, vici.

Of course, it is a great challenge to translate the form if it is at all translatable. It seems that the form of the two texts are almost untranslatable due to the idiosyncratic phonological features of the original. They have been translated into

(13a) He is crying in my heart / just as it is raining on the town (Boase-Beier 2011: 8)

(14a) I came, I saw, I conquered.

In the case of (13), the near repetition of "il pleure", and "il pleut" and the repetition of "il V dans" and "il V sur" are overlooked. In the case of (14), the alliteration, rhyme and the repetition of CVCV (C stands for consonant; V stands for vowel) are lost. The loss of the significant form detracts from the beauty of the original or even makes the translation meaningless in some extreme cases, like

(15) The sixth sick Sheik's sixth sheep is sick.

(15a) 第六个病酋长的第六只羊病了。

This translation totally fails because it fails to capture the intention of the author due to the loss of prosodic feature that make up the tongue twister.

Now we have two cases of the loss of form: the loss of form that does not affect the meaning of the original, like (12), a non-literary translation, and the loss of form that renders the translation meaningless, like  (15), a  literary translation. And there is a case between, like  (13) and  (14), which are not ideal, though not meaningless.  The form lost which renders the translation meaningless and the form lost which detracts from the beauty of the original may verify untranslatability. That's to say, these cases may strongly support the assumption of untanslatability, a philosophical notion or stance held by Derrida and many others, since the form cannot be translated anyhow. Now we are cornered to rethink the problem of (un)translatability problem. Is translation possible at all? Of course, the existence of translations and act of translation by many people presupposes the possibility and fact of translation. Then what is translation? Translation is what it is. The problem is that we are not clear what it is, that is, we are not very sure of the ontos or identity of translation. Translation can roughly be understood as an exchange of words from one language to another to keep the meaning. What we should be aware of is that meaning is not only the semantics expressed by words but also what arises through the design of the form of text. Derrida was wrong because he misunderstood the ontos (identity) of translation. As is the case of translation, the form must be lost while the content represented by the form must be retained. That's the minimum requirement of translation. When the form itself suggests a meaning besides representing

the content, the form must be represented in one way or another. The former is non-literary translation, and the latter literary translation.

We should also be clear that no translation, literary or non-literary, is the original, that is why we have the notion equivalence. If we evade negative words such as facsimile or copy, we may say that a translation is a proxy for the original, hence the proxy principle (Boase-Beier 2011: 96-7). What we are concerned here is how to be  a good proxy. If the literary form of texts like (2), (3) and (4) is not represented, the translation is certainly not a good proxy. How to make a translation a good proxy is what we shall discuss in the next section.

### 2.3 How to Ensure a Good Proxy?

By far, we have discussed literariness, its mechanism and the loss of literariness in various literary translations. As regards the fact that literariness is lost, it seems to be a  strong support for untranslatability. However, if the form  can be represented in one way or another, is it an evidence for translatability? We may go back to the literal meaning of the word translation, that is, change or carry something over. If the beauty of the original is carried over, hence made visible in the translation, then we may safely say that the text is translatable. Now we may give the following definition of translation:

(16) Translation is what is carried over from ST to TT, which captures its content and, when necessary, also its form.

With this perspective,we may give another representation of the examples mentioned above.

(13b) Falling tears in my heart / Falling rain on the town. (Sorell 2001: 69)

(14b) I made it, I saw it, I beat it.

(15b) 四只狮子私吃四只涩柿子。

The silhouetted parts can be seen in the following schemata:

(16) il + pleure...il pleut

falling tears...falling rain

(17) v...i, v...i, v...i

I...it, I...it..I...it

(18) siks...sik...shi:ks...siks...shi:..s...sik

shi...zi...si...chi...si...zhi...se...si...zi

The similarity through analogy may give the reader the same feel of the form of the original, that is to say, the intention or implicature of the original is captured in the translation. Then isn't it a successful translation? In this case, translatability can be testified.

Now we can come back to the fundamental question: Which is more important? Form or content? Certainly, it is form, because without such a form, there would be no such a content. How is form realized? It is realized through analogy. Then since analogy is a key word, we need to explicate it, as is shown below:

(19) analogy: a is not b but is similar to b in one way or another

Form should be profiled because it is crucial to literariness. Revealing the features by analogy is the nature of literary translation while at the same time we should follow the principle of proximity, that is, translating or make the translation as close as is possible to the original, which is a variant of "as literal as is possible". It is a matter of elegance of parsimony in the spirit of Occam's Razor, which is spelled out as "Entities should not be multiplied unnecessarily". Meanwhile, translation has no fixed rules to follow, hence the vague or dialectical idea of "as free as is necessary". In some cases, to translate is to find clues, governed by the optimum relevance (Sperber & Wilson 1995; Gutt 2000). Therefore, anything can be vetoed according to right weight, that is to say, anything can be sacrificed for the optimum holistic effect of a translation. Translation is by nature a system of checks and balances, loss and compensation. In a word, a translation is but a proxy of the original, therefore the proxy principle can be spelled out as

(20) What is lost should be compensated in one way or another so that what is invoked by the form of the original is represented in the translation.

# 3. Conclusion

With a cognitive poetic perspective, we have explored the nature of signs, and from this springboard we have come to have a better understanding of the entity (ontos) and mechanism of literariness, how literariness is liable to be lost in literary translation, and how it can be represented through analogy. The following points have been profiled through the discussion of this paper:

(1) Literariness is crucial to literature, therefore crucial to literary translation.

(2) The argument of translatability can be supported.

(3) A translation should approximate the original in content as well as form.

(4) No translation is the original; any translation is but a proxy.

(5) What is lost in translation should be compensated in one way or another.

And reversely, the discussion shows that cognitive poetics is a necessary perspective for the explanation of, and a guarantee for, literary translation. We hope to have more findings in later research.

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