

Zhao Yuanren's Child-oriented Translation*

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Zhao Yuanren's translation of *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* can be regarded as the best Chinese version even though dozens more have been published ever since. Its success can be largely attributed to Zhao's child-oriented concept which attaches much importance to children's tastes and interests. With the guidance of child-oriented principle, Zhao mainly adopted the strategies of addition and substitution to present a different Alice's wonderland to the intended Chinese child readership, especially in dealing with Carroll's word plays.

Keywords: *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*, child-oriented conception, translation strategies, word plays

Introduction

Child-oriented concept can be regarded as the most important standard for children's literature which requires all elements in a literary work serve the needs of children. This concept originated from the American educationist John Dewey's philosophy of child-centered education. When it comes to the introduction of this concept into China, it was in the late Qing Dynasty, a historical period in which China was undergoing vast changes, that scholars came to realize the importance of viewing a child as an independent human being instead of being affiliated to adults without any voice. Zhou Zuoren was the first to formally and systematically discuss children's literature in China. He put forward the child-oriented conception, "which is to make all judgments based on Children's born needs" (Zhou, 2002, p. 24). In spite of their physical and psychological features different from adults, children are complete humans and also have their own demands. Therefore, children's literature should attach importance to children's needs, abilities, tastes, experiences, expectations, thinking patterns, etc. Authors should try to go back to their childhood, speaking as a child, thinking as a child and meeting the child's demands (ibid.). His concept has greatly influenced the development of Chinese children's literature as well as the translation of children's literature ever since.

As the advocate of child-oriented concept, Zhou thought highly of *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*, commenting "I recommend *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* to adults who have not been contaminated by the society. I particularly wish that parents and teachers or the would-be parents and teachers would read it. If they find it interesting, they are qualified for educating the children" (Wang, 1989, p. 113).

Carroll's *Alice* and Zhao's Translation

Alice's Adventures in Wonderland (*Alice* in short in the following), written in 1862 by Charles Lutwidge

* It is one of the research results of Beijing Social Science Fund Project NO. 16YYC033.

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Dodgson under the pseudonym Lewis Carroll, is among the children's classics of most popularity and significance. It demonstrates a child's dreamland full of childhood innocence and imagination, and establishes a unique literary interest in plain, baffled but also amusing language. Since its publication in 1865, it has won everlasting popularity with children as well as adults throughout the world for its fancy and humour. By the time of Carroll's death in 1898, this novel had become the most popular children's book in England; by the time of his centenary in 1932, it had already been considered perhaps the most famous literary work in the world. So far it has been rendered into over 80 foreign languages, only next to the *Bible* and Shakespeare's plays. Even today *Alice* has never been out of print and still remains a global popular work of verbal art "with profound philosophical, logical, linguistic and literary value" (Feng, 2009).

However, there is no denying that fewer and fewer English-speaking children nowadays can directly and fully appreciate the text because Carroll's *Alice* novels are deeply rooted in the nineteenth-century Victorian Britain when and where he lived. According to Martin Gardner, editor of *The Annotated Alice*, "the time is past when a child under fifteen, even in England, can read ALICE with the same delight as gained from, say, *The Wind in the Willows* or *The Wizard of Oz*" (Gardner, 1960, p. 7). The difficulty in understanding *Alice* cannot be exaggerated for foreign children who are completely ignorant of the language and the historical background. Translators therefore must give consideration to the target readership, adjust the text to that audience and make it acceptable to them.

Alice remained unknown in China until Zhao Yuanren translated it into Chinese (*A Li Si Man You Qi Jing Ji*, the Chinese title) in 1922. Zhao was a prestigious mathematician, philosopher, linguist and artist of modern China. He firstly applied modern linguistics theories to study Chinese language and also made significant contributions to the development of modern Chinese phonology and grammar. He was thus regarded as the father of Modern Chinese Linguistics. Zhao's translation of *Alice* turned out to be a great success. The well-renowned Chinese scholar Hu Shi highly praised it by writing "What an excellent translation!" (quoted from Shen, 1998, p. 107). Zhao's translation further inspired writers to create new novels and helped stimulate the development of Chinese modern literature, especially children's literature. For instance, Shen Congwen published a fairy tale *Alice's Adventure in China* in 1928; and Chen Bochui produced *Miss Alice* in 1931. It was because of its popularity among the Chinese readers that Zhao's version had been reprinted more than 17 times by 1949. Up till now, about 40 full translations have been produced in China, yet Zhao's version still has its unrivalled charm in terms of literary value and creativity.

Zhao himself thought highly of *Alice*, as he wrote in the preface of his translation, "I believe the book is competitive even with Shakespeare's most decent books in terms of literary value. They just belong to different types" (Zhao, 1988, p. 10; the author's translation). Zhao chose *Alice* to translate not only out of his love for the novel but also because of the demand of the then Chinese society. *Alice* was translated during the influential time in China, the period around the May Fourth Period from the 1900s to 1920s, which was regarded as the Renaissance and enlightening period of China, an all-around transitional stage of Chinese society and modern Chinese literature as well as the birth age of modern Chinese children's literature. Zhao emphasized the value of *Alice* as a children's book, holding "Alice is written for children" (*ibid.*, p. 7). As for his translation, Zhao highlighted being faithful to the spirit of the source text and meanwhile gave due consideration to the acceptability of the translated text. He also offered a more concrete explanation of his translation methods, one of

which was to show concern for the child readership and the translation purpose to make the translation acceptable in the target context.

When Zhao started to translate *Alice* in 1921, the Vernacular Chinese Movement had already come to thrive. Zhao reckoned translation was a good way to enrich the Vernacular Chinese language. As he said in the preface, "When the Chinese language is experiencing such an experimental period, why not make some experiment from several perspectives" (ibid., p. 10). Zhao made a bold departure from the tradition and conducted lots of experiments on pronouns, word plays and verses in his translation. For instance, he creatively translated the English personal pronouns "he", "she", "they", "it" respectively into "他", "她", "他们" and "它" to differentiate the characters in vernacular Chinese while only "他" (he) was available in Classical Chinese. He used "咱们/我们" to refer to "we". Besides, modal auxiliaries like "的", "地", "得", modal particles like "了", "嘞", "啦", punctuation mark "·" and so forth were also adopted by Zhao for the first time. To help readers better understand the book he also provided a well-designed glossary and offered a comprehensive introduction of his translation methods and other translation issues in the preface.

Child-oriented Language Features of Zhao's Translation

Zhao was fully aware that the target child readers had very limited knowledge of the western language and culture. Zhao gave much consideration to their reading ability and preferences to make the language clear and close to children and avoid abstract, rare and difficult words to meet their psychological characteristics and language proficiency levels. Normally speaking, children prefer short and simple words and sentences to express themselves. Accordingly, accurate delivery of the meaning in a vivid and effective way to children should always be taken into account by translators.

First, take the translation of proper names for instance. Zhao domesticated some of them, like Alice into "阿丽思", Bill into "毕二爷" to make the names sound familiar and meet the children's expectations because the two Chinese characters "阿" and "毕" were also used for names in China. Besides, Zhao at times added some Chinese element to make it closer and more appealing to readers. For example, the title of Chapter Twelve "Alice's Evidence" was rendered into the eye-catching "阿丽思大闹公堂" which literally means "Alice caused a havoc at the court".

Second, he would choose informal children's words especially in translating dialogues. See the following example.

Alice was beginning to get very tired of sitting by her sister on the bank, and of having nothing to do: once or twice she had peeped into the book her sister was reading, but it had no pictures or conversation in it, "and what is the use of a book," thought Alice, "without pictures or conversations?" (Carroll, p. 4)

阿丽思陪着她姊姊闲坐在河边上没有事做，坐得好不耐烦。他有时候偷偷地瞧她姊姊看的是什么书，可是书里又没有画儿，又没有说话，她就想到，“一本书里又没有画儿，又没有说话，那样书要它干什么呢？” (Zhao, p. 5)

"儿", which is often used as an ending sound in the northern dialects in China, has no sense at all. When this novel was translated, China was going through the Vernacular Chinese Movement. Actively engaged in the language reform, Zhao boldly introduced many words into the modern Chinese language. The introduction of the ending "儿" into the vernacular Chinese is such a success that it has gradually turned into a habit of adults'

speaking to children. "Conversation" here was rendered into "说话", which is more colloquial than the formal correspondent expressions like "谈话" or "对话".

Also the good use of onomatopoeia and interjections added to the vividness of his translation. For instance,

However this bottle was not marked "poison", so Alice ventured to taste it, and, finding it very nice, (it had, in fact, a sort of mixed flavour of cherry-tart, custard, pine-apple, roast turkey, toffee, and hoe buttered toast,) she very soon finished it off. (Carroll, p. 12)

然而这一回瓶子上并没有“毒药”的字样在上，所以阿丽思就大着胆尝他一尝，那味儿到很好吃（有点像樱桃饼，又有点像鸡蛋糕，有点像菠萝蜜，又有点像烤火鸡，有点像冰淇淋，又有点像芝麻酱），所以一会儿功夫就唏哩呼噜地喝完了。(Zhao, p. 13)

In dealing with this sentence, Zhao deliberately repeated “有点像” (“somewhat like” in English) and added an onomatopoeic word “唏哩呼噜” to describe how quickly Alice finished off the liquid in the bottle. His addition makes the language vivid and interesting and thus makes the sentence favourable and acceptable to children.

Zhao's Translation of Carroll's Word Plays

The biggest reason for *Alice's* ever-lasting world-wide popularity lies in Carroll's exquisite use of the English language. He gives his wit and humour into full play in his *Alice* stories by various means of word play, including parody, pun, rhymes and songs, allusions, irony, faulty reasoning and so forth. Words are displayed by him as games with endless rules and variations and possibilities. In spite of the vast difference between Chinese and English, Zhao successfully translated most of word plays which also won much popularity of the Chinese children.

Simile

Simile may differ in images employed between English and Chinese due to the cultural differences. Because children of Zhao's time had little knowledge of the western world, some images needed to be translated into what they were familiar with so as to maintain the original vividness. For example,

Alice caught the baby with some difficulty, as it was a queer-shaped little creature, and held out its arms and legs in all directions, "just like a star-fish," thought Alice. (Carroll, p. 76)

阿丽思很费事地接住那孩子，这孩子很不好抱，他的样子很古怪，手啊，脚啊，四面八方地伸出去，阿丽思想他好像是个五爪海鱼似的。(Zhao, p. 77)

The English word "star-fish" has the correspondent phrase "海星". Zhao translated the word by describing it as "五爪海鱼" (five-claw sea fish), which presented a clear picture of this creature. By the way, his addition of "five-claw" helps readers imagine the ugly appearance of that pig baby while "海星" may leave readers a beautiful or even romantic impression.

Puns

Punning depends much on phonological or morphological similarity within one linguistic system. Chinese is a tonal language with four tones for almost all characters. Each character phonologically consists of one syllable and one of the four tones. There is thus no correspondence between English and Chinese at phonological and

morphological levels. Therefore, the source text context has to be transformed into a new contextual setting in the target text. To achieve the same comic effect, Zhao made necessary changes to create new puns by making a complete or partial substitute. Take the “not/knot” pair in Chapter Three for example.

“I beg your pardon,” said Alice very humbly: “you had got to the fifth bend, I think?”

“I had NOT!” cried the Mouse, sharply and very angrily.

“A knot!” said Alice, always ready to make herself useful, and looking anxiously about her. “Oh, do let me help to undo it!” (Carroll, p34)

阿丽思很谦虚地道，“对不住，对不住。你说到了第五个弯弯儿嘞，不是吗？”

那老鼠很凶很怒地道，“我没有到！”

阿丽思道，“你没有刀吗？让我给你找一把罢！” (Zhao, p. 35)

(Back translation: Alice said very humbly, “I beg your pardon. Pardon. You had got to the fifth bend, didn’t you?” / The mouse said angrily, “I have not dào (arrived!)” / Alice said, “Don’t you have a dāo (knife)? Let me offer you one!”)

Zhao created a new pair of Chinese pun “到” (dào) and “刀” (dāo) which are homophonic but have different tones. Here Zhao changed “knot” into “knife” (dāo in Chinese) so the original sentence “do let me help to undo it!” was substituted for a new one “Let me offer you one!” Though the translation is not faithful to the literal meaning of the original, it succeeds in reproducing the humorous effect of the original in a creative way.

In chapter Nine Alice met Duchess again who always liked to make conclusion with some idioms. Here she used an adapted saying “The more there is of mine, the less there is of yours.” The word “mine” is a polysemous word in the above example which means “我的” (belonging to me) and “矿” (excavation made in the earth for extracting coal, mineral ores, precious stones, etc. in Chinese). English readers may burst into laughing when reading the pun. For instance,

“Only mustard isn’t a bird,” Alice remarked.

“Right, as usual,” said the Duchess, “what a clear way you have of putting things!”

“It’s a mineral, I think,” said Alice.

“Of course it is,” said the Duchess, who seemed ready to agree to everything that Alice said; “there’s a large mustard-mine near here. And the moral of that is—‘The more there is of mine, the less there is of yours.’” (Carroll, p. 118)

阿丽思道，“可是芥末不是个动物，怎么同鹭鸶比呢？”

那公爵夫人道，“又对啦，你说话真说得好明白！”

阿丽思道，“我想它是一种矿物。”

那公爵夫人似乎任阿丽思说什么，她总以为然的，她道，“自然是矿物。这儿近处有一个芥末矿。于此可见——‘所旷愈多，所学愈少。’” (Zhao, pp. 119-120)

However, it cannot be translated literally into Chinese without losing all the humorous effect. Zhao thus partly substituted for the original one by introducing a new pair of Chinese pun “矿” and “旷” which shares the same pronunciation but has a different meaning, “absence”. He also created an idiom following the structure of the original, “所旷愈多，所学愈少” which means the more you are absent from school, the less you will learn. This Chinese rendering is not only fluent but also sounds familiar to child readers. From this point we can see that despite giving up the original pun, Zhao still creates the same humorous effect, and children can easily understand the homophone “矿” and “旷”.

In the same chapter, when the Mock Turtle told Alice about his history, he said his former teacher was a Turtle, but he used to call him Tortoise. The comic effect is achieved by the homophonic “tortoise” and “taught us” in the original text. Zhao rewrote the whole conversation in his translation by introducing the pair of Chinese homophones “老忘” and “老王”. It is a traditional Chinese way to call someone by adding “老” (old in English) before his/her surname to show the familiarity between each other. “王” is a common Chinese surname while “忘” is not which means “forgetful” but has a similar pronunciation with “王”. At the same time, “王” also has the meaning of “king” when used as a common noun, so Alice mistakenly thought the teacher was a kind of king. In this sense Zhao’s creation added more humour to the original.

“We went to school in the sea. The master was an old Turtle--we used to call him Tortoise—”

“Why did you call him Tortoise, if he wasn’t one?” Alice asked.

“We called him Tortoise because he taught us,” said the Mock Turtle angrily: “really you are very dull!” (Carroll, p. 126)

“我们小的时候到海里去进学堂。我们的先生是一个老甲鱼——我们总叫他老忘。”

阿丽思问道，“他是个什么王，你们会叫他老王呢？”

那亲甲鱼怒道，“我们管这老甲鱼叫老忘，因为他老忘记了教我们的工课。你怎么这么笨？” (Zhao, p. 127)

(Back translation: “We went to school in the sea when we were little. The master was an old Turtle—we used to call him Lao Wang (Old King / Old Forgetful literally).” / “What kind of king was he? Why did you call him Old King?” Alice asked. / “We called him Old Forgetful because he always forget to teach us lessons,” said the Mock Turtle angrily: “really you are very dull!”)

The rendering of the last sentence is also very creative, making the whole translated version reasonable. His addition “he always forgot to teach us lessons” justifies why “老忘” is called instead of “老王”. His creation makes the humorous effect of the original perfectly presented to the Chinese readers.

Malapropism

Malapropism is a subtype of wordplay and is often used as a humorous device in literature. A malapropism (Orero, 2002, p. 76) is a deliberately misspelled word—sometimes suggesting another meaning. In some cases the misspelling results in another word altogether. Carroll applies malapropism in a marvelous way particularly in Chapter nine when the Mock Turtle introduces his education. The subjects he mentions are Reeling and Writhing, and the different branches of Arithmetic—Ambition, Distraction, Uglification, Derision, Mystery, Seaography, Drawling, Laughing and Grief. Those wrongly spelt words are also the descriptions of the movements and actions of the creatures in the sea. Everyone cannot help laughing and feeling amazed at Carroll’s exquisite usage of language whenever reading this part.

Orero also points out the use of common words with a situationally inappropriate meaning, which in normal conversational circumstances might be considered a variant on malapropisms. For example, the words “uglifying” and “uglification” mentioned by the Mock Turtle can be viewed as this variant. Carroll changes the word form by adding the commonly used suffix “-ing” and “-cation” to create a new word. Deliberate violation of grammar is also a way to create a malapropism, like “curiouser”.

“Curiouser and curiouser!” cried Alice (she was so much surprised, that for the moment she quite forgot to speak correct English). (Carroll, p. 16)

“越变越奇罕了，越变越希怪了！”（因为阿丽思诧异到那么个样子，连话都说不好了）(Zhao, p. 17)

The correct comparative degree form of “curious” is “more curious”. Carroll deliberately misspelt the correct form by using another comparative degree form the suffix “-er”. Zhao ingeniously blended the corresponding Chinese phrases “奇怪” and “希罕” to generate two funny words “奇罕” and “希怪”. As a result, the picture of Alice’s disorder produced in the original is vividly presented before the Chinese readers.

Parody

Parody is intended to amuse readers by imitating the style of writing used by somebody else. All the verses created by Carroll are parodies of the then famous didactic poems written by British poets like Robert Southey, Jane Taylor, Mary Howitt and Issac Wates. But Carroll’s parodies are not intended for educating children but for entertaining them. To well present the humorous effect to readers, Zhao translated in a creative way rather than get confined to the structures or contents of the original because readers might be ignorant of what they were.

Take Carroll’s parody of the poem “Little Star” for instance, which may be the most familiar to Chinese children.

Twinkle, twinkle, little bat!
How I wonder what you’re at!
Up above the world you fly,
Like a teatray in the sky.

Twinkle, twinkle— (Carroll, p. 90)

汀格儿，汀格儿，小蝙蝠！
好好儿说来你何所欲！
飞在天上那么高，
像个茶盘儿飘呀飘。

汀格儿，汀格儿—— (Zhao, p. 91)

The Chinese translation reads very funny. Zhao followed the structure of the original verse but also made some creative adaptations. He transliterated the word “twinkle” into an omonotopia word “汀格儿” based on its English pronunciation, thus enhancing the comic atmosphere as if readers could hear the sound of bats’ flittering their wings in the sky like tea trays.

In Chapter Two, Alice, unable to specify who she was, tried to recite something in great anxiety to prove she was not the stupid Mabel. But the words went all wrong from her mouth and the verse changed into a different one.

How doth the little crocodile
Improve his shining tail,
And pour the waters of the Nile
On every golden scale!
How cheerfully he seems to grin,
How neatly spreads his claws,
And welcomes little fishes in,

With gently smiling jaws! (Carroll p. 20)

小鳄鱼，
尼罗河上晒尾巴。
片片金光鳞，
洒点清水罢。
笑咪咪，
爪子摆得开又开。
一口温和气。

欢迎小鱼儿来。(Zhao, p. 21)

Zhao chose very simple colloquial words to translate this verse. In the meantime, he managed to maintain the rhymes of the original by introducing three pairs of rhymes in Chinese, “巴” and “罢” (both of which contain the phoneme /a/), “开” and “来” (both containing the phoneme /ai/), “咪” and “气” (with the phoneme /i/ in both). Zhao's translation can be easily accepted and even remembered by children for its vividness and musicality.

Conclusion

When the child-oriented concept was introduced into China in the early 1900s, Zhao met the demands of the times and succeeded in translating the world-renowned children's classic *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* into vernacular Chinese. His translation with much concern for children's tastes and preferences reads as amusing and humorous as the source text. Zhao adopts vivid child-like vocabulary and adapts the exotic cultural setting of the source text closer to the then Chinese children so that his translation can win so much popularity among the target child readership. Besides, in dealing with the baffling word plays, he created a lot to cater for the target context by means of addition and substitution to help readers firstly understand the text and then appreciate the literary and aesthetic features of Carroll's *Alice*. Although Zhao's wonderland is, to much extent, different from Carroll's, the two books can both lead readers to a world full of wonders. His big success in translation has not only laid a solid foundation for the development of modern vernacular Chinese language, but also exerted a far-reaching influence on the growth of Chinese children's literature, even the Chinese literature as a whole.

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