Language through Translation

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Exploring Alice in Chao Yuen-ren's Chinese 'Wonderland'

By

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For my daughter Xiaoyu

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List of Abbreviations Used in the Book

AW: *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*

BT: back literal translation

CDA: critical discourse analysis

SCD: stages of characterization development

SCD1: the first stage of characterization development

SCD2: the second stage of characterization development

SCD3: the third stage of characterization development

SFL: systemic functional linguistics

SL: Source language

SLT: Source language text

ST: source text

TT: target text

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION: MOTIVATIONS AND RELATED ISSUES

It seems to be a "common belief" that translating for children is easy because the language of children's literature is simple. This view may stem from the so-called simplicity of text of children's literature. However, as Nodelman claims, it is usually not the case:

> The simplicity of texts of children's literature is only half the truth about them. They also possess a shadow, an unconscious – a more complex and more complete understanding of the world and people that remains unspoken beyond the simple surface but provides that simple surface with its comprehensibility. (Nodelman 2008, 206)

So it may be that contrary to the above "common belief," translating for children may not be as simple as it seems, especially in comparison with translating for adults. Due to the fact that "children's semiotic experience does not allow them to interpret the signs of an alien semiosphere" (Nikolajeva 1996, 27), different manipulations may take place in the translating process. Zohar Shavit (1986, 112–3), in *The Poetics of Children's Literature*, points out that the translator of children's literature could manipulate the translation in different ways, trying to make the text appropriate and comprehensible for children. Taking children's reading and understanding ability into consideration, some translators may change the plot, characterization, and language styles, while others may delete or adapt improper scenes in order to make the text more accessible for young

children. Therefore, the task of the translator for children is to make it related to the target readers. This means that the interests and habits of the child readers rather than of the adults should be taken into consideration. However, this discussion seems to be more concerned with the plot adaptation rather than the representation of the modes of meaning in the text.

For a book like *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* (henceforth *AW*), which consists of fantastic descriptions and is actually intended to create dream visions by means of language (Sutherland 1964, 326; Peng 2007, 153), how did the translators deal with the textual features and representation of modes of meaning in the translation process? In *More Annotated Alice*, Gardner argues that "no other books written for children are more in need of explications than the Alice books" (Gardner 1990, ix). Of course, it is no easy task if we remember it contains parodies, puns, wordplay, proper names, encoded allusions, and unusual metaphors, as well as other elements of Carroll's creative style, such as seemingly simplified syntax which may result in a paradoxically humorous effect, rendering this book a big challenge for many translators. The method for translating the textual features of the *Alice* books is actually an issue that is seldom touched on in the translation studies of *AW*. In fact, fantasy literature, as Pennington (1995, 57) argues, is by nature "writerly,"[1] requiring diverse and sophisticated reader responses. Carroll's story is noted for its varied and distinctive use of style, palpable intertextuality, and the obscure relations created between fantasy and reality. Furthermore, in this book there are many details that are characteristic of Victorian

[1] A term invented by Roland Barthes (1974, 5), it means texts that require the reader to write meaning onto the "galaxy of signifiers" and which are "reversible," and which the readers can gain access to by several entrances, none of which can be claimed as the main one. Hutcheon (1985, 76) also argues that fantasy forces readers to engage in "the very act of imagining the world, or giving shape to referents of the words that go to make up the whole of the world that the 'concretized' text being read."

society. Modern English readers may still be able to identify these features in the text, but the Chinese readers would fail to understand them without additional explanations. Despite the fact that Carroll himself believed that his book was untranslatable (Kibbee 2003, 308), *AW* is asserted to be translated more often than any other book, except for the Bible (Carpenter and Prichard 1984, 17). This is also true in the Chinese context. As the most translated literary work in China, it has had at least eighty-three different translated versions[2] since the 1922 edition by Chao Yuen-ren, the well-known Chinese linguist and translator. Why has this novel, which was originally addressed to children, been so popular in the Chinese context? And what elements of it have drawn readers' attention? Taking into consideration the fact that children's literature has been marginalized in the Chinese literary history, if we use Even-Zohar's system theory (1979), it is also true for the situation of China in the early twentieth century, even though it underwent some kind of renaissance. The early twentieth century was the inchoation period of Chinese children's literature, which originated directly from translating foreign literature for children. So far, we may have had many possible questions to ask – for instance, what are the purposes of the translator in the translating for children? Is it to educate the children of the time? If the answer is *yes*, then in what way? Has this been reflected in their translations? And what are the translation strategies? Of course, these questions that I am going to explore in this research are closely related to the main research objectives which can be outlined as follows:

(1) The original text is a work of fantasy fiction. What linguistic features contribute to constructing a world of dream fantasy?
(2) Have these aspects or properties of the original text been

[2] According to my counting from the website of the National Library based in Beijing, *AW* has had at least eighty-three translations since it was first published in 1922. This number includes the twenty-two adapted translated versions.

transferred through the translation? And what translation norms can be disclosed?

(3) Following this, the research will demonstrate how the individual choices made by the translator on the surface of the text (texture) may provide evidence for the underlying pragma-semiotic effect behind the translational activities.

(4) The research will also demonstrate what fictional world has been built up around these choices made in the translation process, and how these choices can contribute to the audience's understanding of the characterization intended by the author. How can the translator exploit this understanding for their own purposes towards the translational texts.

Based on the structural properties of the original text of *AW*, I have picked up the following aspects in both the original and the translation for the process of text analysis:

(1) The language used for the descriptions of dreamland in *AW* as a dream fantasy will be explored in the Chinese translation.

(2) By taking into consideration the status of characterization in the dream fantasy, the focus will be on how the original language is used to characterize Alice in the ST and how it is characterized in the TT.

(3) Characterizations of the protagonist Alice in the ST and the TT will be compared by examining the translation of the transitivity profile.

In the following I will outline briefly what I am going to look at in this research. One of the important aspects is the semantics of the discourse and the role it plays in constructing the characterization in the dream fantasy, and how the world constructed by the transitivity patterning is represented in the translation. It is known that the whole book of *AW* is

said to be of a dreamland. In describing the dreamland, the syntax – or to be more accurate, the transitivity patterns – has played an important role. In the textual comparisons between ST and TT, I have observed that the author Lewis Carroll mostly used the syntax which Halliday (1971, 98) called intransitives, which was later termed non-transactives by Hodge and Kress (1993), to represent a special status of the protagonist Alice, such as passiveness and impotency in the book of *AW*.

By incorporating the descriptive-explanatory literary linguistic approach to the study of the Chinese translation of Chao Yuen-ren, I will focus on what is conveyed in and through the use of language in the translation and how the individual choices made by the translator on the surface of the text (texture) may provide evidence for the underlying pragma-semiotic effect, and what impact will be exerted on the characterization of the protagonist. Of course, this investigation is based on another principle in stylistics – that is, style as choice, which will be discussed in detail in Chapter two.

Since this research is an interdisciplinary study of the translation of *AW* by using a tool constructed from systemic functional linguistics, there must be significant findings on how the social functions concerning the characterization are realized in the original text, how the characterization is constructed in the translation, and how it can play a role in the interpretation of the book as a specific genre of dream fantasy. Due to the SFL framework adopted and the interdisciplinarity of this research, it is hoped that this research will contribute to our understanding of the translation of children's literature in general, thus promoting our understanding of its function and meaning in the socio-historical contexts, along with the interaction between translation and the social contexts. At the same time, it will provide data in favour of SFL as well as CDA approaches to the field of translation studies of children's literature thanks

to the complementarities of systemic functional linguistics for literary studies (Butt 2005, 82). On a deeper level, this research can promote our understanding of the asymmetrical relationships as well as the image of *the other* in cross-cultural communication. In the rest of this chapter, as an indispensable part of this research, the reasons for studying the translations of *AW*, a brief review of the studies of *AW* translations, and the data will be discussed.

1. Why the translation of *AW*?

As a book of fantasy for children, *Alice in Wonderland* has attracted a large group of readers, translators, and critics to look into its workings. According to Weaver (1964: 59), this book has been translated into 47 world languages by year of 1963, and the number today has been assumed to be more than one hundred and fifty. Its vast popularity constitutes a main reason for this present research, along with the Chinese translation 阿麗思漫遊奇境記 (*Alisi Manyou qijing ji*, literally *A Record of Alice's Wanderings in the Wonderland*) published by Commercial Press in 1922, the translator of which is the famous Chinese linguist Chao Yuen-ren.

1.1. Lewis Carroll and his book *AW*

The author of *Alice in Wonderland* is Lewis Carroll, whose real name is Charles Lutwidge Dodgson. He was thirty years old when the story was written and was on the way to being a successful scholar of mathematics at Christ Church College, Oxford University. Dodgson was the eldest son in the family. His father was a priest and he was a deacon in the Church of England.

It was on July 4, 1862 that the story of Alice happened when Dodgson and another young priest Robin Duckworth picked up the three Liddell sisters,

the daughters of new dean of Christ Church, for a boat journey up the river. It was a beautiful golden afternoon and the descriptions of this afternoon were later written for the beginning of the story when Dodgson elegized it in the introductory poem to *AW*. It was in this dreamy, fantasy-like weather that the three children requested Dodgson to tell them a tale. The oldest sister, Lorina, asked him to "begin it." Alice, the second, said "There [would] be nonsense in it," while the youngest interrupted "no more than once a minute."

Later, Dodgson was asked to note the story down by the children, especially Alice, who insisted that he should write the story down. On the next day he began to write it, and on completing it he also drew some pictures for the story. Dodgson named the book *Alice's Adventures Underground* and kept his promise to give it to Alice as a present. After that, upon the encouragement of his friends who urged him to publish the book, he spent the next three years expanding it, and invited a cartoonist to draw some pictures for the story. It was this expanded version that was published in 1865 and which has become part of the canon of children's literature. In this research, it is this version and its translation that will be investigated.

1.2. Chao Yuen-ren and his Chinese translation of *AW*

Born in Tianjin with his ancestry in Changzhou of Jiangsu Province, Chao Yuen-ren (1892–1982) attended Cornell University in the United States to study physics and mathematics in 1910. He was a famous Chinese linguist who had very extensive interest in many areas, such as mathematics, physics, music, and linguistics. He taught in many American universities, such as Cornell, Harvard, Yale, the University of Michigan, the University of Hawaii, China's Tsinghua University, Beijing University, and then in 1947 he began to teach at the University of California Berkeley until 1963, when he retired. Chao was one of the

pioneers of modern Chinese linguistics and has been known as "father of modern Chinese linguistics" for his prominent contributions to the study of the Chinese language. His works include *A Grammar of Spoken Chinese*, *Studies in the Modern Wu Dialects*, and *China's Social and Linguistic Aspects*. As a translator, he translated Carroll's *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* into Chinese for the first time, in which he tried to "make a language experiment" to preserve the wordplay in the source text. Either due to Chao's quality of translation or/and his influence as a famous linguist, his translation still enjoys unparalleled popularity in today's Chinese context, even though there had been more than eighty-three Chinese translations of this work by 2011.

Of course, there has been a lot of research conducted on this book and its translations. In *Alice in Many Tongues*, Weaver gave a very brief history of the translation of *AW*. According to Weaver (1964, 28), in the fourteen years until 1879 following *AW*'s publication, the book was translated into five languages: German (1872), French (1869), Swedish (1870), Dutch (1875), and Russian (1879). Although much difficulty was involved in the translation process, especially in translating the parodies, wordplay, and nonsensical poems, the translations gained wide popularity. After 1889, *AW* was translated into forty-one other languages.

In the Chinese context, Chao Yuen-ren first translated *AW* in 1922. Following his translation, up until 1948 before the founding of the People's Republic of China, there were three other translations by Xu Yingchang (1933), He Junlian (1936), and Fan Quan (1948). Diachronically speaking, the translated versions of *AW* represent the efforts of translating *Alice in Wonderland* in the period of the Republic of China – that is, before the year 1949, when the People's Republic of China was founded. Theoretically speaking, the translators after Chao had the opportunity to imitate and evaluate Chao's translation. In fact, I

have found they indeed imitated his translation, or at least drew a lot of inspiration from it. For instance, He Junlian's translation is very similar to Chao's wherever there are very tough language issues to deal with, such as puns and wordplay.

Since 1949, Chao's translated version has been reprinted several times. Meanwhile, there were no new versions translated during this period until the end of 1979. During such a long period, China first translated the "revolutionary" works from other Communist countries (such as the Soviet Union) under the Maoist principles. In 1966 China underwent a destructive event – the Cultural Revolution – which repressed and almost destroyed all translation activities. Until December 1979, three years after the end of the Cultural Revolution, a simplified version of *Alice in Wonderland* was translated by Xin Ruo and published by the Hubei People's Press. Then, in 1981, two more versions were published, one (《愛麗絲奇遇記》) was translated by Guan Shaochun and Zhao Mingfei, the other (《阿麗思漫遊奇境記》) was translated by Chen Fu'an and published by the China Translation and Publishing Corporation. In 1984, a new translation (《艾麗絲漫遊奇境記》) was translated by Zhu Hongguo and published by the Sichuan Children's Press. The 1990s witnessed an explosion in translations of *AW*, which has been translated extensively ever since. By 2011 there were eighty-three different translations of this book in the Chinese mainland, excluding the various versions by the same translators which were published at different times. Among the eighty-three translations, the number of adapted versions is twenty-two; the number of complete translated versions (or claimed complete version) is sixty-one. If classified chronically, there were four translations before 1949 and seventy-nine afterwards (see Table 1.1 below).

Table 1.1. Overview of translations of *AW* from 1922 to 2011

Versions	**1922–48**	**1949–78**	**1979–89**	**1990–2011**
Complete versions	3	0	4	52
Adapted versions	1	0	1	22
Total	4	0	5	74

The great number of translations is unparalleled by any other foreign author's translations into Chinese – even Shakespeare. Against the backdrop that *AW* has been translated so widely in the world, the research on its translation has also been done worldwide. According to my observation of the data at hand, a systematic study of its translation started from the 1920s.

Of the multitude of translations emerging since 1922, one has stood the test of time – Chao's translation. As Weaver (1964, 108) commented: "it was Chao's excellent translating skills and his deep understanding of both the Chinese and English languages that made him overcome all the difficulties in the translation process." Until now, *AW* has been translated into more than seventy languages across the world. This wide popularity, as Stoffel (1998, 10) points out:

> is not just a linguistic challenge or a novelty – people the world over have connected with Alice. The stories and characters live in their minds … Alice's story speaks of an essential truth about the human condition, and it does so not in the blunt language of sociology or psychology, but in the subtle tongue of art.

As one of the most translated works of art, *AW* has attracted the attention of not only translators but also translation studies scholars. People have

been interested in the wonderland world constructed by Lewis Carroll as well as his manipulation of language in constructing such a world attracting both child and adult readers. How, then, can this little story, written by one particular person for another in a very definite place and time (the idiosyncratic world of mid-nineteenth-century Oxford), say so much to so many people for such a long time? And how has Carroll manipulated the language of the dreamland in order to realize such an objective? And how about the translations? Do they distort the language and the characters? These questions have attracted attention of the scholars who are interested in the language and its functioning in *AW*. Actually, according to Weaver (1964), Carroll himself recognized the difficulty involved in translating his work, though he also encouraged it.

2. Studies on translations of *AW*

In past decades there have been two tendencies in studying the translations of *AW*. One is the linguistic-oriented tendency, while the other can be referred to as the cultural approach. The linguistic approach mainly prevailed before the 1970s, and focuses on the translation of sentences as its upper rank unit, basically ignoring the macro-structural aspects of whole texts, not to mention the semiotic meanings conveyed by the linguistic structures. In the linguistic approach, the difficulties involved in translating the parodies, nonsensical poems, wordplay, and the ambiguous sentences are highlighted. Usually, this approach can be referred to as the study of the techniques of translating. Weaver's (1964) study of the translation of *AW* is a representative of this approach, in which Weaver concentrates on the translation strategies, which can be reflected from the name of one of his book chapters: "How Can Alice Be Translated?" As mentioned, this is a complicated task for translators because it is assumed that the descriptions of the wonderland, excitement, and childish humour, including the actualized narrative of the adventure

stories, should be preserved, and Weaver believes that these elements can promote children's love of this book. Weaver then looked at how successfully these textual features could be captured and conveyed in the translation. Similarly, Mango (1977, 63–84) seemed to have noted the special properties of the language used in *AW*, and investigated the German translations by focusing on the micro textual and stylistic levels. She then points out that the syntax, though simple, representing the interpersonal meaning and point of view, has been converted into a kind of "colloquial-childish" tone that could not be found in the original (1977, 67). This mismatching thus distorts the relations and different concepts represented in the fantasy world. It is worth noting that the stylistic aspects Mango discusses mainly include the syntax and lexical features. She emphasizes that Carroll's language is very simple, his word order very direct, and the thing he expresses very refined, without any metaphors or clichés. However, "it is the very outstanding verbal nature of language that may explain our arguments above" (1977, 69). By resorting to Halliday's "The Structure of English Sentences," Mango further argues that the language and style in *AW* are very appropriate for representing the fantastic dream adventures, but this delicately constructed world has been damaged in the translation due to the inappropriate handling of the language and style. Still focusing on the linguistic aspects of *AW*, Davies's (1999) study is mainly on the comic mechanism entailed in the linguistic structures and the comic effect they produce.

It is worth noting that many Chinese scholars' studies of the translations of *AW* fall into this orientation that focuses mainly on the translation techniques or transfer of the original words or clauses, such as the wordplay or difficult sentences. Of course, the stylistic aspects of this book, along with its cultural constraints on translation, have been looked at, and valuable conclusions have been reached by many scholars (Zhang

2007). Some Chinese scholars (such as Peng2007) also noticed the linguistic mechanism of the original work which was difficult to transplant in the TT.

The rise of the "cultural approach" to translation studies benefited from the cultural turn in this discipline in the 1970s, where the contexts – social or linguistic – began to be given full consideration. When discussing the translation of *AW*, the critical question is whether it is first and foremost a work of children's literature. Then, the question of how to translate a work for children emerges. Is it different from translating for adult readers? The Finnish scholar Riitta Oittinen (2000) sets forth the question of translating "for whom?" She argues that adults are obviously different from children. Children are not miniature adults, but "speaking animals belonging to the magical fantastic world" (Oittinen 2000, 49). So, when translating for children, the translators should take readers' wishes and capacity into account and respect the features of this group (Oittinen 2000, 69). Oittinen also discusses the binary concepts of rewriting/domestication. In fact, she asserts that all translation activities involve rewriting, and the activity of changing the original language into the target language itself is domestication. Oittinen declares that her research is not intended to set up some norms but to understand the process of translating for children, that is: "how shall we communicate with children through translation?" (Oittinen 2000, 6). Now that translators translate for children, they must be loyal to their readers. The process involves the loyalty principle put forward by Nord (1997, 123).

In regard to the translation of *AW*, Oittinen first discussed its relation to *The Nursery Alice*, in terms of narrator, the relationship between dreamland and reality, and the reader types addressed. After that, she analyses the three complete Finnish versions from the perspective of the construction of time, translation, and child image. The first version was

published in 1906 when Finland was still under the control of Russia. Finnish literature was still in its inchoate period, badly needing to absorb literary genres from other languages and cultures – in other words, "Finland needed Foreignization" (Oittinen 2000, 135). In fact, this is a very common phenomenon in cultural and literary studies, where translation activities are usually very active when national literature is still in its inchoate period (Bassnet 1993, 142; Even-Zohar 1979).

Oittinen also discussed the characterization of Alice, asserting that Swan's translation seems to be different from the original in that Alice does not want to be "an old woman," even after attending school. In Swan's translation, this "old woman" becomes "an old wife," the concept of which refers to the status of women at that time, being that all women should get married. Generally speaking, there are elements of domestication as well as foreignization in Swan's translation. The domesticated elements can be seen from the fact that the story seems to take place in the countryside of Finland, and the main characters are also Finnish. The foreignized elements include the introduction of Alice's story into Finland, and of a new genre.

Oittinen's discussion involves many subtle translation problems, such as the original author's gender prejudices. However, due to the subtleties and complexities of the issues in this book, Oittinen does not give an impressive discussion of these characteristics, although she mentions the features relating to the issues of narrator, dreamland, and the ambivalent status of the book. In this book I will discuss the construction of the characterization and its connection with the transitivity patterning of the clauses as representation with Alice as participant, along with the obscure relations between dreamland and reality.

There are also some scholars studying the translation of proper names in *AW* and their communicative effect entailed in the translation strategies

on the readers. It is worth mentioning Nord's article (2003), in which she investigates eight translated versions of *AW* in German, French, Spanish, Brazilian Portuguese, and Italian, and discusses the forms and functions of their translations. She subdivides the proper names into three types: explicit reference to the real world in which the original author and addressee live (e.g. Alice, her cat Dinah, the historical figure William the Conqueror); implicit reference to the real world in which the original author and addressee lived (e.g. the three names Elsie, Lacie, and Tillie refer to the three Liddell sisters Lorina Charlotte, Alice, and Edith Matilda, respectively); and reference to the names of the fictional characters. Nord points out that an important function of proper names is to indicate "in which culture the story happens" (Nord 2003, 182). Her research indicates that these eight translators used different translation strategies to deal with the proper names, and these may have different communicative effects for readers of the translations. In translating proper names, Nord also noticed another problem – footnotes. She points out that these footnotes are metatexts, which are referential in nature (Nord 2003, 195). The footnotes in *Alice in Wonderland* can make readers understand the appellative function of the original text. However, they may have a destructive effect on the translation of puns and humour. What is more, what readers face are two texts. It is a referential function for one of the two texts to explain these proper names, while the other text explains why it is not referential in nature. With these two texts functioning in the translation process, the communicative effect is sure to be changed (Nord 2003, 195). However, Nord argues that whether footnotes should be added or not depends on the readers' receiving abilities. For adult readers, it would be more interesting to be able to read two texts, whereas for child readers, one text is enough. So in the data Nord collected, footnotes and translator's commentary only exist in the translations for adults.

As a brief summary, studies of translations of *AW* are discussed in this section, through which it can be seen that the linguistic and cultural approaches complement each other in that they both have shortcomings in the study of the translation of *AW*, a seemingly simple but actually complicated work of art. This means that a holistic approach should integrate the linguistic structures and also their function into the picture, giving full consideration to the prama-semiotic effects produced by the linguistic aspects in their context. Taking into consideration the fact that *AW* has long been regarded as a dream fantasy in which a magical dreamland was created by the language that leads nowhere when the dream is over, the characterization plays a crucial role in the fantasy, as asserted by Wilson (1983, II) (which will be discussed in chapter four, section 4.2.4). This research will focus on the characterization of Alice in translation by adopting a descriptive-explanatory stylistic approach to exploring whether the transitivity patterns constructed around the protagonist in the translation have been damaged or distorted, and hence their semiotic influences.

3. A Descriptive-explanatory Approach

The language of texts cannot be analysed by means of exploring just one feature of the text, such as the phonology or grammar. What's more important is that a description is expected to account for the ways in which texts operate in particular contexts and as a part of a communication process between the writer and reader. Therefore, an overall systematic description and investigation of the linguistic mechanism functioning in the original text are needed in the present research in terms of the language constructing the characterization of Alice, the protagonist in the fiction and the fantastic dream world. Similar steps will also then be taken on the translation in a comparative method in order to find out whether the characterization and the