

# Analysis of Chao's Translation of Alice's Adventures in Wonderland

Ge Yu

School of Southwest Petroleum University, Sichuan 610500, China

## Abstract

Yuen Ren Chao, also known as Zhao Yuanren, one of the important founders of modern linguistics in China, was a born linguist, mathematician and musician who contributed to the modern study of Chinese phonology and grammar. Zhao Yuanren is the founder of Chinese language science, the pioneer and promoter of dialect investigation and research in China, the founder of the Mandarin movement, and the first person to use modern linguistic theories and methods to study Chinese language in a comprehensive manner and achieve worldwide fame. In addition, he was also an outstanding translator. This paper mainly studies Zhao Yuanren's translation thought from the perspective of translation standard, the method of translation and the purpose of translation, and analyzes Zhao's translation of Alice's Adventures in Wonderland, from which the application of Zhao Yuanren's translation thought in translation practice is explored.

## Keywords

Zhao Yuanren, Modern linguistics, Translator, Concept of translation, Alice's Adventures in Wonderland.

## 1. Introduction

Mr. Zhao Yuanren (1892-1982) was not only an internationally renowned linguist, but also an outstanding translator. He has made great achievements in both oral and written translation, and he has also made great achievements in translation theory. This paper aims to sort out and expound Mr. Zhao Yuanren's translation thought from three dimensions, such as translation selection, translation standard and machine translation, and highlight his translation contributions, in order to enrich the translation studies in the new era and as a tribute to Mr. Zhao. When Zhao Yuanren is mentioned, I believe many people will be more familiar with his identity as a tutor of the Tsinghua National Academy. At the beginning of the Republic of China(1911-1949), he was employed as a teacher at the Tsinghua University, and was known as one of the four instructors of the Tsinghua Academy of Chinese Learning, together with Liang Qichao, Wang Guowei and Chen Yinke. In fact, Zhao Yuanren was not only highly accomplished in Chinese studies, but also wrote extensively in music and linguistics. Fu Ssu-nien, one of the most influential intellectual figures in twentieth-century China, regarded Zhao as "the father of Chinese linguistics"; Luo Changpei, a professor at Peking University and former head of the Chinese Department of the Southwest United University, said of Zhao "It is he who can be said to have laid the cornerstone of the scientific study of Chinese language."

Zhao Yuanren is also an excellent translator, and based on his linguistic foundation, he has a more perspective understanding of translation and has formed his own unique view of translation, while relatively little research has been done on his translation ideas. Therefore, this paper focuses on exploring the embodiment of Zhao Yuanren's view of translation in Alice's Adventures in Wonderland, hoping to let readers understand Mr. Zhao Yuanren's insights on translation, and to throw bricks to draw in jade, so that more people will pay attention to and study Zhao Yuanren's translation ideas.

This article studies certain issues in this classical piece of verbal art from a translational perspective in China, with special reference to Zhao Yuanren's translation in 1922, which highlights an array of points and helps bring a seemingly comic book under the academic limelight, directing our attention to semiotic issues in terms of metalinguistic foregrounding, witty humor, sensible malapropism, meaningful nonsense, and logical absurdity, etc. that defy translation on different levels of linguistic presentation.

## 2. Zhao Yuanren's General View of Translation

Translation concept refers to the translator's understanding and awareness of translation, or a summary of his or her thoughts after extensive translation practice. Usually, the translation view includes the translator's criteria, methods and purposes of translation, which are summarized by the translator's own experience.

Mr. Zhao Yuanren is a linguist of unparalleled reputation. His observation and research on translation are also mostly from the perspective of linguistics, and it can be said that his view of translation is that of the linguistic school. His ideas on translation are also traditional, in line with those of many translation theorists such as Yan Fu, Lin Yutang, Hu Shi, Fu Lei, Lin Yiliang, Qu Qiubai, and Qian Zhongshu; however, many of his views are modern, obviously drawing a lot of nutritious nutrients from modern linguistics abroad. His translation ideas still have important guiding values for translation practice today and even in the future, and many wonderful translation examples in his translations are worthy to be studied by future generations forever.

Mr. Zhao Yuanren's view of translation, which is considered to belong to the linguistic school, is both distinctly modern linguistic in character and deeply rooted in traditional Chinese translation thought.

### 2.1. Zhao Yuanren's Translation Standards

The May Fourth period was a period of great achievements in Chinese literature, when literary writing styles such as vernacular and dialect were gradually accepted and sought after by the public, and many scholars began to study literary works, but at that time literary translation was much less popular than literary creation. However, at that time, literary translation was much less popular than literary creation. Out of his preference for the work "*Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*", Zhao Yuanren chose to translate it in Beijing dialect in the form of vernacular.

In the history of translation in China, many famous translators have put forward their own translation standards. For example, by the end of Qing dynasty, the Chinese translator Yan Fu, proposed his famous three facets theory of translation, also can be regarded as his translation standards "faithfulness, expressiveness and elegance". Faithfulness means the translator should adhere to the source text without changing the original spirit; expressiveness stresses that the target readers can understand the interpreted text without confusion; and the last one elegance focuses on the language translator uses that must be regarded as educated by target readers.

Fu Lei, another famous translator in China, put forward his standards "similarity", known as the resemblance of spirit. Qian Zhongshu, proposed "Huajing" (化境) based on his various translation practice, and Xu Yuancong, a translator of Chinese poetry, further developed Lu Xun's theory, suggested three beauty's. These are familiar translation standards or translation principles, from which many new translation standards in China are almost derived.

On the issue of translation standards, Zhao Yuanren was more agreeable for Yan Fu's theory-faithfulness, expressiveness and elegance, but he did not absorb it entirely, instead, he offered his own opinions on Yan Fu's theory and looked at it dialectically, which can be seen in a paper he wrote entitled *Dimensions of Fidelity in Translation*, Chinese name is 《论翻译中信，达，雅的信的幅度》.

In this essay, he gives his own opinion on Yan Fu's theory. He believes that this standard should be observed in most cases, but there are also special cases, which require the translator to be flexible and unconventional. For example, he wrote in *Dimensions of Fidelity in Translation*. "If a person sues someone for calling him. You are a damn fool. And the general public translates it as You are a very foolish person, the degree of elegance is certainly increased, but the degree of faithfulness is reduced, and it may even affect the effectiveness of the lawsuit and even it will also affect the outcome of the lawsuit.

As for "expressiveness", Zhao Yuanren still viewed it in a different way and also put forward his own opinions. He believed that Yan Fu's "expressiveness" was indeed excellent, and it was natural for the translator to express the meaning, but it was also necessary to distinguish the time, place and occasion of translation. Just like in the novel, you can't translate all the characters' style of speech exactly the same, so you can't reflect the difference of each character, you can't mix the rhetoric of the beggar and the landlord's style of speech. If you use this kind of translation, of course you express the exact meaning, but it can be said to be a breach of faith to the novel author.

Zhao Yuanren is most appreciative of Yan Fu's faithfulness. He also regarded being faithful to the source text as the basic condition for translation, and considered it to be the root of translation, and devoted a great deal of space to discussing this in his paper. Here let me show you a brief summary of Zhao Yuanren's discussion on Yan Fu's faithfulness. First of all, he thinks that there are many factors affecting the faithfulness of a translation, so being faithful to the source text or to the author can only be relative, not absolute; as a result, it is sometimes desirable for translators to sacrifice part of the faithfulness to a certain extent in order to take care of the whole text.

In Zhao Yuanren's essay discussed about Yan Fu's faithfulness, expressiveness and elegance, he mentions the following factors that perhaps will affect the faithfulness: language and non-language; context; borrowing language; category; and the tone and syllable of language. He also gives his own examples to explain each of them. In his paper, Zhao Yuanren gives an example: Once I gave a speech to a Japanese audience, and I paused in each small paragraph to indicate the meaning of the segment. Meanwhile, the Japanese translator translates my pause as an onomatopoeic word, and at the same time, he would slowly straighten up with a ninety-degree bow. Does this count as a language? If not, then it is a non-verbal translation of language. From this, it can be seen that Zhao Yuanren believes that language and non-language are also matters that should be paid attention to in translation. At the same time, readers should also understand that language and non-language are interdependent in the whole communicative activity, and some Western scholars have suggested that in a specific situation, the information conveyed by non-language, i.e. physical activities, is much higher than that conveyed by language. After the translation from language to non-language or from non-language to language, there must be inevitable distortion in the progress, but with the translator's full understanding of the relevant information, these distortions can be reduced to a minimum, or even to complete transmission.

As far as the context is concerned, Zhao Yuanren believes that the smallest unit of translation should be a complete sentence, rather than a single word or phrase, because without contextual correspondence, no corresponding meaning will appear. One word or phrase may have many meanings, thus, readers will be confused without the whole context. Moreover, he believes that the most certain context for a word or phrase is the one in which it has been seen once in a certain place. Context is crucial to the faithfulness in the translation, and it is not possible to turn it out of context. Moreover, if there is an example that has appeared, based on the context, the translation should be based on the example that has appeared.

Regarding borrowed words, Zhao Yuanren's thesis cautions against the phenomenon of forked branch borrowing, which means that when a foreign word is used, it has multiple meanings, but each time we use it, we only take the first meaning, and there is no other meaning to correspond to the later meaning, which Zhao Yuanren cannot stand with it. Due to the length of this paper, I will not go into the other aspects.

## 2.2. Zhao Yuanren's approach to translation

Carroll's *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* is one of the best examples of the literary nonsense genre. The paper mainly regards nonsense as a rhetoric device for humour and amusement and seeks to examine Carroll's nonsense creation devices mainly at the lexical level, and at the same time explore the strategies the Chinese translator Zhao Yuanren adopts in his translation. The paper finds out that there is a direct correlation between Carroll's devices of nonsense creation and Zhao's strategies in translating them. The strategies Zhao adopts show his creativity and experimentation in dealing with the seemingly untranslatable elements of humorous nonsense to achieve fidelity to the essence of the original work. In reconstructing Carroll's nonsense, Zhao adheres as closely as he could to reproduce the comic effect of the original by different means of creation. In this sense, his translation is creative fidelity.

The Chinese translation of Zhao Yuanren's *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* has many determiners that are translated by the prepositional method. The prepositional translation method is applicable to two cases: one is when a single or multiple adjectives modify the same noun; the other is when the definite article is short in length, such as the shorter definite article clause modifying the antecedent.

Since the beginning of translation, translation methods have been continuously improved by translators, and in the modern world, there are mainly three popular translation methods: the method of dissimilation, the method of naturalization, and the method of mixing of dissimilation and naturalization. In his translation practice, Zhao Yuanren did not stick to a certain method, but applied it flexibly, striving to present what the original work wanted to express completely. He sometimes applied literal translation method, sometimes took free translation method, sometimes combined the two, and added words, among other methods. All of these methods are perfectly reflected in his first book, *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*. Let us take a look at his translations and see how he used these methods to perfection.

Example 1:

Source text: 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!

Translation by Yuanren Zhao(Chinese Version):

小鳄鱼，  
 尼罗河上晒尾巴。  
 片片金光鳞，  
 洒点清水罢。  
 笑眯眯，  
 爪子摆得开叉开。

一口温和气，

欢迎小鱼儿来。

little crocodile.

Sunning the tail on the Nile.

Flakes of golden light scales.

Sprinkle some water on it.

Smiling.

The paws swing open and open.

A gentle breath of air.

Welcome to the little fish.

The Crocodile by Lewis Carroll tells, very briefly, of a crocodile who sneakily attracts fish and then swallows them with a big smile on his face. The original English text itself is a limerick, composed by the author based on the popular didactic poems of the time, mainly to satirize Don't be lazy and do nothing made by the English poet Ai Watts. It is not easy to translate the rhythm of the original text. The words and phrases are quite simple and easy to understand, but since it is a limerick, the translation should also have a flavor of this, with symmetry and rhyme. Zhao Yuanren, while trying to stay close to the meaning of the original text, kept refining it and carefully pondered it so that the translation would reproduce the rhythmic characteristics of the original text. The first two sentences of the original text are pressed with the sound of L, and the last two sentences are pressed with the sound of aws. The first two lines are opposite to 巴(ba) and 罢(ba), both the two are pressed with the sound of ba, and the last two lines are opposite to 开(kai) and 来(lai), pressed with the sound of ai. The first two lines 巴 and 罢 are opposite to each other, and the last two lines 开 and 来 are opposite to each other. Zhao Yuanren's translation of this part is a mixture of literal translation, free translation, and both literal and free translations. The effect of the translation is precisely the same as that desired by Eugene Nida's Dynamic Equivalence Theory.

Example 2:

Source text:

"You can draw water out of a water-well," said the Hatter; "so I should think you could draw treacle out of a treacle-well--eh, stupid?"

"But they were in the well," Alice said to the Dormouse, not choosing to notice this last remark.

"Of course they were," said the Dormouse,--"well in."

Translation by Yuanren Zhao(Chinese version):

那帽匠道：“水井里既然有水，糖浆井里自然有糖浆——咄，这么笨！”

阿丽思当没听见这末了一句话，她又对那惰儿鼠问道：“但是他们自己已经在井里头罽，怎么还吸得出来呢？”

那惰儿鼠道：“自然他们在井里头——尽尽里头。”

The hatter said, "Since there is water in the well, there is naturally syrup in the well of syrup - duh, so stupid!"

Alice did not hear this last sentence, she asked the lazy mouse again: "But they are already in the well themselves herring, how can they still suck out?"

The inert mouse said, "Naturally they are in the well - as far as they can go."

In this original English passage, well is used in two meanings, once as a noun, which means a wellhead, a hole, and once as an adverb, which means the degree. It is not difficult to understand the meaning of the original text, and one should be able to translate the text with a little bit of

thought. What is difficult is that Zhao Yuanren uses a pun here to translate, and 尽 (jin) and 井 (jing) correspond to each other, which makes the translation wonderful and interesting to read. In fact, in the preface of Zhao Yuanren's translation of Alice's Adventures in Wonderland, he made it clear that the translation of puns is generally not easy to apply and depends on luck, but he used it a lot in the translation of this book, which shows the depth of his Chinese language skills, and it is no wonder that people who study translation must first master the Chinese language, otherwise it is difficult to express the desired effect.

Children's literature, as a special genre, needs to be distinguished from adult literature and treated in a special way in the translation process. The purpose theory of the German functional school provides a strong theoretical basis for translators. In the process of translation, translators should first follow the "law of purpose", always put children's young readers in the first place, and choose appropriate translation strategies and methods, and strive to present the translated works in interesting and lively words. Only in this way can we create literary works that are loved by children and young readers. Mr. Zhao Yuanren's translation is humorous, evocative, and linguistically fluent, and it restores the charm of the original work again while taking into account the type of children's readers and the translation, making it an enduring translation masterpiece.

### 2.3. The purpose of Zhao Yuanren's translation

As an advocator of the New Literature Movement, Zhao chose to translate the famous fantastic novel in vernacular Chinese, which was virtually a linguistic experiment for the New Literature. He fulfilled the seemingly impossible mission and his version has been most popular till now. While the taste of Nonsense Literature which Zhao favored in Alice's Adventures in Wonderland, was ignored or changed in its two Chinese imitators: Shen Congwen's Alice's Adventures in China in 1928 and Chen Bochui's Ms. Alice in 1931.

The purpose of Zhao Yuanren's translation is mainly found in his translator's preface to Alice's Adventures in Wonderland and in his Dimensions of Fidelity in Translation (《论翻译中信, 达, 雅的信的幅度》). Zhao Yuanren always advocated that translation should be helpful for the translator, and foreign things should be adapted for Chinese use. In other words, unlike Qian Xuantong and Wu Zhihui, who believed that Chinese characters must be abolished without any room for maneuvering in order to develop Chinese education, Zhao Yuanren found the merits of Chinese characters and thought that they could be improved only accordingly.

The type of texts translated by Zhao Yuanren is mostly western science and technology texts, and it is thought that the purpose is to transmit western scientific knowledge to China and improve the scientific and cultural quality of the nation. Further, he wanted to promote the interests of science among the Chinese people, to attract the Chinese people to learn science, to practice science, and to revitalize China with science. Secondly, the purpose of Zhao Yuanren's translation was to enable the Chinese people to develop an interest in English because of funny works and other works translated by him, and then people will spontaneously learn English in order to read the original funny books. This can be seen in the preface to his translation of Alice's Adventures in Wonderland. To sum up, there are two goals that Zhao Yuanren wants to achieve. The first is to promote scientific and cultural knowledge and improve the scientific and cultural quality of the nation, which is the same as the promotion of science and education today; the second is to arouse people's interest in learning English and to set off a fever of English learning.

The book itself is a fairy tale book in England, which means that its intended readers are children and teenagers, and this should be noted when translating it. Children's reading ability is different from the adults'. 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. In this paper, Zhao Yuanren clarifies his own ideas on translation, he believes that although expressiveness and elegance are important, they cannot be used as fundamental criteria, and the most important should be the faithfulness. "But speaking of the requirement of elegance, although it is a long point most of the time, but if the original text is not elegant, should the translation must be elegant?" "But if a novelist depicts the differences in the personalities of various characters in terms of diction, and if a translator speaks everyone's words with the same fluency and style of sentence making, then it is achieved the expressiveness, but it loses faith in the original meaning." The Alice's Adventurous Wonderland, a fairy tale of children, had already been translated in classical Chinese before the appearance of the Zhao's version, which did not make much of a splash at that time, and Zhou Shuren wrote an article criticizing the old translation as simply a messy translation. This shows that when we translate, we also need to pay attention to the readership, otherwise it is a waste of effort. The reason why Zhao's translation of the Alice's Adventurous Wonderland has endured is that Zhao Yuanren's meticulous work on the translation is inseparable from his own words in the translation preface. As for the puns and doggerel in the original work, the book Studies on the Translation of Zhao Yuanren has some papers devoted to these puns and doggerel. The article On the Translation of Puns and Humor in the Translation of Zhao Yuanren's Alice in Wonderland - Based on Drabastita's Pun Translation Theory, co-authored by Zhang Meilun and Zhang Qing, takes puns as the starting point and discusses how Zhao's translation of Alice reproduces the source text based on the analysis of Drabastita's pun translation theory. First of all, before introducing this article and its intrinsic meaning in more depth, we need to understand the theory of pun translation.

The relevant concepts of puns are as follows. A pun is also called a subtle pun, which means that in a certain language environment, the multiple meanings and homophonic conditions of words are used to intentionally make an utterance have a double meaning, where the words are here but the meaning is there. Drabastita's translation theory of puns is designed to meet the practical needs of translation research, and he classifies the translation strategies and methods of puns in an informative and comprehensive way. Zhao's translation of the Book of A is heavily based on this, and as I mentioned above, Zhao Yuanren's treatment of puns is all in favor of the strategy of acceptability, all in order to be able to make the translation potentially acceptable in the target system as a valuable piece of translated literature.

Hu Shi had always admired Zhao Yuanren's vernacular and phonetic standard, and he also appreciated the translation of Alice, saying, "This book is really well translated! Not only was the title of the book drawn up by Hu Shi, but Hu Shi was also responsible for the initial contact between Zhao Yuanren and the largest publisher of the time, the Commercial Press. Zhou Zuoren, Zheng Zhenduo and others strongly recommended the book from the perspective of childishness. As soon as the translation was published, Zhou Zuoren wrote an article in the Morning Post Supplement: "As far as the child himself is concerned, there is a need for such imaginative works at a time when his imagination is developing..... Therefore, I recommend this book, *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*, to adults who are not in a fully modernized mood, and especially to those who are or will be parents and teachers, people's parents and teachers of the adults to see - if they find it interesting, I celebrate the fact that he has the qualification to make these people for others." The Morning Post supplement was one of the four major supplements of the time and had a fairly wide readership. Zhou Zuoren later also included the translation in his own collection of essays, *A Garden of One's Own*. Zheng Zhenduo also spoke highly of the book: "Here the author writes about the psychology of children with all the dreams in their heads, fluttering and misleading, if sensible, and comical and grotesque, an



incomparably outstanding masterpiece." All these reviews objectively gained more readers for Zhao's translation and promoted its wider dissemination and acceptance.

Zhao Yuanren's fresh and natural translation of an admittedly difficult English story on words into Chinese became an instant classic that won the applause of many. Over the past ninety years, other translations of *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* have been produced, but the faithfulness and charm of Zhao's translation has remained untouched. The secret of the success of Zhao's translation lies first in its scientific dialectical concept of "faithfulness, expressiveness and elegance", and secondly in his decisive choice of the vernacular language to "reproduce the information of the source language in the nearest and most natural equivalent." (Eugene Nida). Thirdly, Zhao Yuanren's extensive knowledge and lastly, his flexible translation skills.

### 3. Conclusion

Zhao Yuanren not only made extraordinary achievements in Chinese studies, but also was a translator who occupies an important position in the history of translation in China. His translation ideas are in line with those of many Chinese translators such as Yan Fu, Fu Lei, Qian Zhongshu and others. His flexible and unconventional view of translation is the essence of his continuous translation practice. Zhao Yuanren's concept of translation is still very important for guiding translators in translation practice, and his translation methods are also worthy of study and research by translators.

As the famous American translator E.A. Nida said, "Translation means translating meaning", the process of translation is always the process of paying attention to meaning. Mr. Zhao's discussion of meaning has provided a new perspective for translation theory and practice. Zhao Yuanren made use of structuralist research methods to investigate dialects and dialectal sounds, and as mentioned earlier, his concern for meaning is mainly based on the depiction of linguistic structures. In "The Meaning of Language and Its Acquisition", he declares that "meaning exists independently and autonomously, much like music." Zhao's view of meaning is still structuralist in nature, a static view of meaning, focusing on lexical meaning, grammatical meaning, and logical truth, but it has elements of modern meaning, and we can still derive from it We can still get a lot of useful inspirations for translation research and practice.

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