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## *Language and Spatiotemporal Frames, Paper 2*

### **Translating space from Chinese to English: A Case Study of Cao Wenxuan's Bronze and Sunflower**

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# Translating space from Chinese to English: A Case Study of Cao Wenxuan's *Bronze and Sunflower*

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## Abstract

Translated children's works from English to Chinese have flooded China unprecedentedly since the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. However, there is a discrepancy in the translation of Chinese children's works into the English language. This is maybe because western scholars are still largely ignoring Asian texts for young readers. Therefore, the research aims to fill the gap in the scholarship by studying the translated *Bronze and Sunflower*, which is a renowned work written by the Chinese first Hans Christian Anderson winner Cao Wenxuan, from the aspect of narrative space. A qualitative approach is adopted to compare the similarities and differences of narrative space between the source text and the target text. The samples will be taken from Cao Wenxuan's *Bronze and Sunflower* and its English translation. The textual analysis is illuminated through the narratological framework, which is based on three-layered space: The topographic level, the chronotopic level and the textual level. The study explores how narrative space is constructed in the process of translating *Bronze and Sunflower*. It is hoped that the findings of the study will show how space is created in a different language, and that the translator prefers to change the narrative space rather than keeping the same spatial structure in the target text.

**Keywords:** Space, narrative, *Bronze and Sunflower*, translation, children's literature

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## Background

Translated children's works from English to Chinese have flooded into China since the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. However, there is a discrepancy in the translation of Chinese children's works into the English language. This is possibly owing to that western scholars are still mainly ignoring Asian texts for young readers (Stephens 2013; Nelson and Morris 2014). Children's literature, in this study, refers to "books released by the juvenile or junior division of a publisher and intended for children from prekindergarten to about sixth grade" (Nilsen, Blasingame, Donelson and Nilsen 2013: 3). Since the end of the nineteenth century, numerous English translated children's works have flooded into Asian countries unprecedentedly. Gradually, western children's

works became the mainstream, while Asian children's tales have lacked appreciation. Moreover, very few English children's books translated from Asian languages can be seen in bookstores overseas, few reviewed by influential literary journals. What is striking in these translated books is that the quality of the translation varies. Some books are translated so roughly that readers do not want to finish reading the books (Yao Minji 2016). Some receive superlative reviews, namely, the English translation of *Bronze and Sunflower* (2015), whose author Cao Wenxuan won the 2016 Hans Christian Anderson Award - the world's top prize in the field of children's literature.

The field of children's literature translation studies has had implications from the aspect of a narrative voice (McGillis 1991; O'Sullivan 2005), in ethics (Oittinen 2000) and in polysystemic theory (Shavit 1981; Pascuafebles 2014). Little attention has been paid to the impact of translation in the narrative space. This is due to the apparent preference for a temporal narrative, which is considered to play a more prominent role in western narratology. However, the narrative space is a vital focus for Chinese narratology, whereas Western narrative centers on time (Zhang Shijun 1999; Wang Ying 2016). In view of this, different narrative customs may bring change or even distortion to the reconstruction of narrative space in the target language. Hence, the guiding question here needs to be discussed: How would narrative space be translated from one language into another?

## Narrative Space in Translation

The combination of narrative theory and translation studies is increasingly obtaining attention. From the late 1970s onward, translation study has been a new discipline. It has experienced cross-discipline combinations, namely Ernst-August Gutt's relevance theory, Katharina Reiss and Hans Vermeer's Skopos theory, Itamar Even-Zohar and Gideon Toury's Polysystems theory, and so forth. However, little attention has been paid to the narrative approach in translation studies. Some scholars such as Venuti and Baker begin to exert more attention on this inter-disciplinary work. Baker (2006) directly initiates the inter-disciplinary notion of the narrative approach and translation theory. She draws narrative theory from social and communicative sciences rather than from narratology. In this regard, Baker defines translation as a form of (re)narration that constructs and does not represent the events or characters in the target language.

In this study, the paper focuses on narrative space from Gabriel Zoran's model, which is believed to be the most practical and theoretical model up to now (Long Diyong 2015; Chen Tian 2019). Zoran elaborates that narrative space is a constructive process in which readers participate and react actively. He distinguishes three different levels in structuring space in the text as a three-layer model of space in a narrative: The topographical level, the chronotopic level, and the textual level. According to Zoran, the topographic space is the highest level of reconstruction for its independence of both "the temporal structure of the world and sequential arrangement of the text" (Zoran 1984: 316), in, for example, the city and the village. The term *chronotopos* refers to the entire complex of space and time together (Bakhtin 1978). Zoran defines the structure and organization of chronotopic space as "the movement and the action of the narrative" (Zoran 1984: 318). A case in point is that in the room, character A is doing the homework while character B is watching TV. The textual level "encompasses the structure which is imposed on space by the fact that it is formed within the verbal text" (Zoran 1984: 319). That is, different orders in space would affect the arrangement of the text continuum. For instance, the spatial image moves from the internal to the external or vice-versa.

## Method

The study employs a qualitative study of the narrative space in *Bronze and Sunflower*, examining the similarities and differences of narrative space between the source text and target text. The data are extracted from the

Chinese *Bronze and Sunflower* authored by Cao Wenxuan and its English version, translated by Helen Wang. Examples about narrative space are randomly selected by Zoran's Three-layered model; the topographical level, the chronotopic level and the textual level.

The data are analyzed in the following steps: First, the study identifies different space levels in the source text. Second, the examples in the target text are examined by comparing and contrasting the levels with the intended meaning in the source text. Third, the examples are further analyzed at the topographical level, the chronotopic level and the textual level to identify similarities and differences of narrative space between the source text and target text.

## Findings and Discussion

The analysis of selected versions of *Bronze and Sunflower* revealed the narrative space in translation, which has been altered to some extent, while at the same time, the versions have constructed another spatial world. By focusing on the narrative space from aspects of Gabriel Zoran's three-dimension space model (1984), the study finds that the translator prefers to remove some descriptions of space in the process of translation.

On the Topographic level, the text expresses the topographic structure by means of direct description, providing a clear map of the world. The map is based on the places found in the entire text, namely Damaidi, the reed marsh, sunflower fields and so forth.

Units of space (Chinese version)	Units of space (English translation)	Translation procedures
油麻地 ( <i>You Ma Di</i> )	Youmadi	Phonetic transliteration
芦苇荡 ( <i>Lu Wei Dang</i> )	The reed marsh	Literal translation
葵花田 ( <i>Kui Hua Tian</i> )	Sunflower fields	Literal translation

Table 1. Units of space at Topographic level

The above table collects units of space at the Topographic level from both the Chinese and English versions of *Bronze and Sunflower*. All the names of these places are retained in the target text, whereas their translation procedures are different. 油麻地 (Youmadi) is a kind of phonetic transliteration that shows the rendering of the sound of one language with the words of another language. In this regard, the original pronunciation of the word is preserved, which does not bear any clear connected connotations. Hence, the translation through 油麻地 (Youmadi) does not fill in the semantic blank left by the phonetic transliteration. Differently, the translator directly translates 芦苇荡 (the reed marsh) and 葵花田 (Sunflower fields) literally, which keeps the semantic meaning but loses the original sound. Irrespective of which type of translation procedures the translator adopts, the names of places are kept to contour a map of the structure in the narrative.

At the Chronotopic level, the translation focuses on the entire complex of space and time. A case in point is the space marked by *Bronze and Sunflower*. In the Chinese text, Cao Wenxuan froze frames at the moment; the girl named Sunflower cried in the Cadre School while the boy Bronze watched her near the wall of the Cadre School. Names and titles are particular devices available to translator or interpreter for (re) framing narratives. In the translated text, Helen Wang retained this frame by retaining the location of two characters' names. This strategy is called labeling, which focuses on using "lexical item, term or phrase to identify a person, place, group, event or any other key element in a narrative" (Baker

2006: 122). It is surprising that Helen did not merge the paraphrases but kept the original chronotopic structure. Maybe the translator and author, to some extent, reached a consensus in framing motion, and rested in the narrative.

At the textual level, there is a scene in the Chinese language version, where Sunflower is walking to the river. The description follows the order Sunflower-river-sunshine-sky-sky (see figure 1), while in Helen's English translated version, it changes into Sunflower-river-sky-sky-sun (see figure 2).

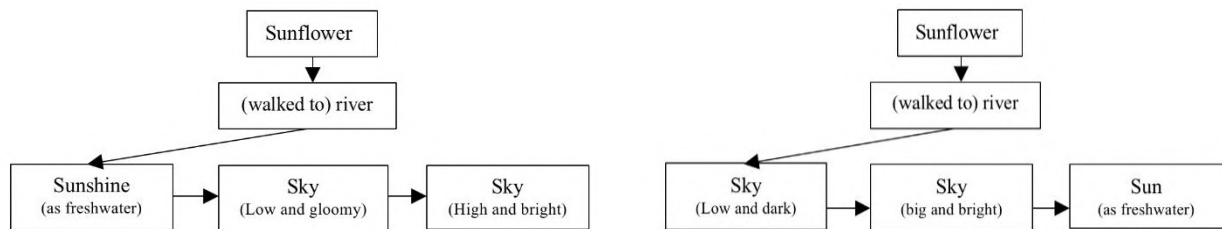


Figure 1. The sequence of space in Chinese version Figure 2. The sequence of space in the English version

The translator controls the information flow of these space elements and shows a different arrangement of movements in this sequence. Further, different information flow presents the distinguished logic relationship between Chinese and Western narratology. In Figure 1, the author describes the scene from the sunshine to the sky, showing a large space in front of the little girl Sunflower, whereas the translator arranges the order by the lineage of time: The sky was low and dark when the rainy season was over. Nevertheless, now, it was bright, and the sun seeped across the sky like freshwater. In this regard, the translator favors using a timeline to rearrange the structure.

## Conclusion

The paper, centering on constructing a world in another language, mainly discusses the translation of narrative space. Drawing on that, the study of translating narrative space in the children's fictional work *Bronze and Sunflower*, based on Gabriel Zoran's narrative space, showing the differences and similarities between the source text and target text. According to Gabriel Zoran's theory, the study here mainly focuses on the different units of space at the topographical level, at the chronotopic level and at the textual level. The study finds that the translator keeps most of the space elements in the target text but changes the linear arrangement of these in order to organize messages at the text level.

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