
Xu Jianzhong
Au total, il s’agit d’un ouvrage bien pensé et bien structuré qui relève de témoignages
d’hommes et de femmes de métier et qui met bien en lumière les apports de la réflexion
parlée dans l’étude des processus de traduction. Reste à savoir si la méthode de raisonne-
ment à voix haute (réflexion parlée) conduira, dans le cadre d’une traductologie fondée
scientifiquement, à l’élaboration de modèles à valeur explicative, qui demeure faible
aujourd’hui compte tenu de la représentation limitée des corpus et des groupes témoin.

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Motivations Underlying Literary Language, Beijing, Foreign Language Teaching

A Semiotic Approach to Literary Translation – with Emphasis on Motivations Underlying Lit-
erary Language, which is a revised and updated version of Jiang’s doctoral dissertation that
represents an attempt to establish a compelling case to show the relevance of semiotics to
translation studies. While Dinda L. Gorlee’s Semiotics and the Problem of Translation
(1994) is marked by a theoretical orientation, not much concerned with practical problems in
translation, Jiang’s monograph displays a fine balance between theory and practice, with its
main thrust focusing on motivations underlying literary language. Taking semiotic theory as
its underlying rationale and motivation as its thematic concern, this study examines, mainly
by way of practical analysis, literary translation at three levels: phonological, syntactic, and
semantic, all of which are considered in relation to the pragmatic contexts concerned.

Semiotics, with its great epistemological and methodological values to social sciences, is
of great significance to translation studies, including literary translation studies. With the
aim of making a systematic investigation of literary translation from a semiotic perspective,
this monograph consists of five chapters: Chapter 1 attempts a critical survey of quasi-
semiotic and semiotic approaches to translation (literary translation included) in the world;
Chapter 2 examines the semiotic differentia of literary language, which points to the
semiotic characteristics of literary translation; Chapters 3, 4 and 5 explore at three different
levels the motivations underlying linguistic choices in literary language, and the ways to
preserve them in the target text. This book also tries to provide pointers for further research
since there is much that remains to be done.

Jiang’s book, on the one hand, has tried to explore from the theoretical perspective the
possibility of account for the range of phenomena commonly considered as literary transla-
tion in terms of motivations and, on the other hand, to apply from the practical point of
view the theoretical insights gained from semiotic theory to the examination of literary
translation, both as process and as product.

Jiang has also tried to make a fairly systematic account of literary translation with in-
spirations from semiotics, which is taken both as the underlying theoretical basis and meth-
odological resources. The underlying motive is to attempt to make some contributions to
the establishment of translatology (or the science of translation) that “is still in its infancy”
(Gutt 1991:191).

What Jiang has not attempted to do is to show how possible problems in literary trans-
lation could be analyzed or solved with the help of semiotics. Such an undertaking is at
present impossible. It is impossible because literary translation is a rather complex process
subjected to the influence of many variable parameters, such as whether the translation
should be source-text-oriented or target-text-oriented, or whether a given original should
be adapted for some practical or pragmatic purposes. More significantly, semiotics is by no
means an omnipotent tool, far from being capable of accounting for all translation problems. Any attempt to apply it to literary translation can only succeed to a certain extent, for many translation problems lie outside its theoretical and/or analytical scope.

This monograph tries to make the following contributions to literary translation studies:

a) It is a pioneering attempt to investigate literary translation in terms of motivations underlying literary language;

b) It puts forward a distinction between socio-cultural (communal) motivations and contextual (personal) motivations, a distinction that enables us to see more clearly the nature of literary language and of problems of literary translation;

c) Through practical analyses of contextual motivations, which have been very much neglected by semiotics (including literary semiotics), it points out that contextual motivations function to turn linguistic forms per se into “signs,” establishing additional or complementary signifying relations, which generate literary significance over and above the prepositional meaning, and which the literary translator should fully take into account;

d) It not only demonstrates the usefulness and advantages of applying semiotics to literary translation, but reveals the limitations of semiotics when applied to literary studies.

However, it must be noted that, although the underlying theoretical basis of this study is claimed to be semiotics, some linguistic terms are employed for the analyses of translation examples. This is mainly due to the limitations of the semiotic model itself. Semiotics is of great theoretical relevance and methodological value to translation (including literary translation), but it does not provide us with enough analytical apparatus in analyzing concrete problems. Parenthetically, the relationship between linguistics and semiotics is sometimes involute or tangled and, in reality, some terms (e.g. “referential meaning,” “paradigmatic relation,” etc.) are used in both disciplines. Another point to be noted is that semiotics is generally trichotomized into semantics, syntax and pragmatics. In this book, however, the pragmatic aspect is originally incorporated into the other two. In other words, all examples are analyzed in a pragmatic environment. Due to its exploratory nature this study has tried to deal with a fairly wide range of translation phenomena, which implies some of them have only been touched upon. So it is our hope that this research will serve as a modest spur to induce other scholars to investigate in greater depth the numerous facets of literary translation along the motivational orientation.

In sum, this monograph is well-founded, with comprehensive theoretical discussion and insightful practical analysis. It is a timely contribution to translation studies by providing an in-depth and systematic analysis of semiotic characteristics of literary translation.

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REFERENCES


