

TRANSLATION FROM GESTALT PERSPECTIVES

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ABSTRACT

After 1970s, translation studies focus mainly on discourse analysis and text comprehension by conceiving the text as a holistic whole instead of atomistic and fragmentary units (Jinghua Zhang, 2008). To deal with the holistic view in translation, Gestalt principles in psychology of perception is thus adopted. Gestalt principles were initiated by Max Wertheimer (1880-1943), and developed by Wolfgang Kohler (1887-1967), and Kurt Koffka (1886-1941). In this article, Gestalt principles were applied to the analysis of translation works. The image-Gestalt, which refers to the integration of images in translation analysis, and were used to interpret various perceptions of figure-ground phenomena in different translated versions, and seeks to construct a criticism model on translated works. This article started with the introduction of the Gestalt laws by which the interpretation of the English translation of Chinese poems were analyzed, then constructed the model of criticism for translation works with examples.

Keywords: Gestalt principles, translation, Chinese poetry.

INTRODUCTION & GESTALT PRINCIPLES

Max Wertheimer believes that rapid sequences of perceptual stimuli (e.g., rows of flashing lights) will create the illusion of motion, which is known as the phi phenomenon. That is, relationships among individual stimuli units will determine how we interpret what we see, not the individual stimuli per se. (In his time the advocates of structuralism believed that whatever we sense in the outer world, there must be correspondents or counterparts (neurons) within our brain. As is known, motion pictures are typically based on such a perceptual phenomenon, with a series of static images displayed in rapid succession and forming a dynamic visual experience. From the perspectives of Gestalt psychology, whole is greater than the sum of its parts. On the basis of such a belief, Gestalt psychologists developed a set of laws to interpret perceptual organization, and how individual units (background units) can be chunked to form larger ones (figure) in figure-ground perception. From Gestalt perspective, we do not see fragmented particles in disorder when we open our eyes. Rather, we can realize the figure of defined shapes and patterns against the background. The key idea of Gestalt theory is "chunking or grouping," or how we are inclined to perceive or interpret a visual field or problem (where there are separate parts or ingredients) in a certain way. How we group the visual (or auditory) field follows a few concrete laws; namely, similarity, contiguity, closure, proximity, figure & ground. In the following, the gestalt laws will be further elaborated by exemplifying the Chinese classic poems.

1. LAW OF SIMILARITY (dissimilarity)

Similarity refers to how items that are similar in some way tend to be perceived as one. That is, things which share visual characteristics such as size, shape, texture, or color will be seen as of a kind. Such a 'of a kind' can be called a Gestalt, a coherent whole, or an integrated image. Chunking may naturally form in both visual and auditory stimuli. The law of similarity can be illustrated by the Figure 1 below:

SSSSSSSSSS
 AAAAAAAAAA
 MMMMMMM
 EEEEEEEEE

Figure 1: Law of similarity(a)

The example above contains four lines of consecutive letters S, A, M, E, with each appearing as a **single unit** because all of the letters on the same line have **similarity**. Unity occurs because the letters are seen as four rows of S, A, M, and E, rather than several columns SAME. When similarity occurs, an object can be salient if it is *dissimilar* to the others. This is called **anomaly**.

SSSSSSSSSS
 AAAAAAAAAA
 SSSSSSSSS
 SSSSSSSSS

Figure 1: Law of similarity(b)

The figure on the second row involves an A, which becomes a focal point because it is **dissimilar** to the other shapes (S). Note that in the figure with sunburst, the eagle is also dissimilar to the rest of black cones, out of which the eagle becomes salient with the background of sunburst. As to the second one figure with a person jumping, while others are standing still. We may conclude that there is dissimilarity in similarity. The law of similarity and dissimilarity can also be demonstrated by the Chinese poem (and English Translation) below:

江南逢李龜年 (杜甫)

Meeting Likuei-nien in Chiang-nan

岐王宅裏尋常見，
 崔九堂前幾度聞。
 正是江南好風景，
 落花時節又逢君。

How oft in princely mansions did we meet!
 As oft in lordly halls I hear you sing.
 The South with flowers is no longer sweet;
 We chance to meet again in parting spring.

The poet remembers Mr Lee, a musician and singer, performing his art in the princely hall, several times a few years ago when the regime was still reigned, and now, while the regime declines, the poet still sees Mr. Lee performed in lordly halls in Chiang-nan, where flowers blossom. Therefore, the poet feels the flowers no longer sweet, and both of the poet and Mr. Lee are alike as analogous of similarity law defined above. The law of similarity-dissimilarity can be manifested by 1) the places of performing are dissimilar in that one is in the princely mansions, the other lordly hall, and yet similarity lies in the fact that Mr. Lee still oft performs his art, 2) Line 1 and Line 3 are actually similar in a sense that both lines shows the feelings of the poet, with Line 1, pleasant, but Line 3, sorrowful, 3) Line 1 and Line 3 end

with rhyme [-eet] (meet and sweet), whereas Line 2 and Line 4 [-ing] (sing and spring). All in all, we observe the dissimilarity in similarity.

2. LAW OF CONTINUATION

As indicated by phi-phenomenon, continuation occurs when the eye is compelled to **move through** one object and **continue** to another object based on the stimulus in the figure. As most people can easily see, from the figure below, that the syllables CON, TI, NU, A, TION, of the word “continuation” broken up into five syllables, and a continuation of the pronunciation is perceived without actually perceiving the movement of pronunciation, as the viewer's eye will naturally follow the syllables with the additional dash signs “-”.

CON-TI-NU-A-TION

Figure 3: Law of continuation

採桑子 (辛棄疾)

少年不識愁滋味，愛上層樓。愛上層樓，為賦新詞強說愁。
而今識盡愁滋味，欲說還休。欲說還休，卻道天涼好個秋。

While young, I knew no grief I could not bear;

I'd like to go upstairs.

I'd like to go upstairs.

To write new verses with a false despair.

I know what grief is now that I am old;

I would not have it told.

I would not have it told,

But only say I'm glad that autumn's cold.

--(By Tr.Xu)

Before we recognize the Continuation gestalt, we must first examine Chinese Line 1, where the four segments can be conceived as two groups: static vs. dynamic, as annotated in the end of each line below:

少年不識愁滋味， → static

愛上層樓。 → dynamic

愛上層樓， → dynamic

為賦新詞強說愁。 → dynamic

而今識盡愁滋味， →dynamic

欲說還休。 → static

欲說還休， → static

卻道天涼好個秋。 → static (equivalent)

We can also find the similar status of each line in English translation:

While young, I knew no grief I could not bear; →static

I'd like to go upstairs. →dynamic

I'd like to go upstairs. →dynamic

To write new verses with a false despair. → dynamic

I know what grief is now that I am old; → dynamic
 I would not have it told. → static
 I would not have it told, →static
 But only say I'm glad that autumn's cold. → static

Therefore, the first four lines display: static →dynamic →dynamic →dynamic, whereas the last four lines: dynamic→ static → static →static. What has it got to do with Continuation Law? There seems to be an irony in the first four lines in that the first line [static], is salient among others (dynamic), which means, like the logic of theory of relativism, that the dynamic states of Line 2, 3, and 4, actually highlight Line 1 as moving, though static nominally. Such logic also applies to the relative relationship between Line 5 and Line 6, 7, and 8. However, the last four lines clearly reflects the Continuation law, as readers can easily sense the [dynamic] of Line 1. Note that Line 8 is a dummy reply in that it actually says nothing, thus denoting [static].

3. LAW OF PROXIMITY

According to the law of proximity, things near each other seem to be perceived as a group. The most elementary Gestalt factor of perceptual organization is proximity. The first figure below does not display any proximity as the squares are not near each other with regular pattern, but random, thus Proximity cannot be formed as a Gestalt, whereas the second and third figures, so close to one another, thus readily forming a group.

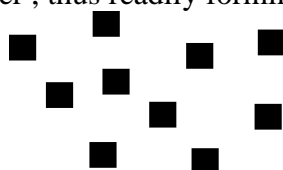


Figure 4: Law of proximity (a)

(The nine squares above are placed without proximity. They are perceived as **separate shapes**.)



Figure 5: Law of proximity (b)

As below, when the letters are given close proximity, unity (a word) is formed. While they continue to be separate letters, they are now perceived as **one group (PROXIMITY)**.

 K L N T
 N **PRXIMITY** S
 S P P
 BV V N N S Y

Figure 6: Law of proximity(c)

The 8 letters of PROXIMITY above form a *unified whole* (the shape of a word) because of their **proximity**.) From the proximity, we speculate that the external world is basically without fixed patterns, and it becomes a pattern only when one perceives it to be based on

both the property of the stimulus and the cognitive frame of reference of the perceiver. See the analysis of a poem based on the law of proximity below:

卜算子 (蘇東坡 黃州定慧院寓居作)

缺月挂疏桐，
漏斷人初靜。
時見幽人獨往來，
縹緲孤鴻影。

驚起卻回頭，
有恨無人省。
揀盡寒枝不肯棲，
楓落吳江冷。

From a sparse plane tree hangs the waning moon;
The water clock is still hushed is man.
Who sees a hermit pacing up and down alone?
Is it the shadow of a swan?
Startled, he turns his head.
With a grief none behold.
Looking all over, he won't perch on branches dead.
But on lonely sandbank cold.
--by Tr. X.Y.Z.

The Law of proximity underlying the translation of the above poem is manifested in 1) the spell of loneliness in Line 1, by [a sparse plane tree], and [the waning moon], 2) in Line 3, [a hermit] and [alone] causes proximity, 3) Line 1 and Line 3 collaborate to form a deep spell of loneliness, 4) Such image also exists in both Line 2 and Line 4, as indicated by [a man] and [a swan], 5) the words used in this translation such as [sparse, waning, hushed, alone, shadow, startled, grief, none behold, won't perch, dead, lonely, cold] help form the theme of [loneliness] and form an image of it in the minds of readers, based on the law of proximity. Further, local proximity and global one in the above translation can also be found, with the local proximity in [sparse-waning], [hushed- man], [hermit-alone], shadow-a swan], [startled-turn], [grief-none behold], [all over-dead], lonely-cold, whereas with the global proximity, [Line 1-Line 2], [Line3-Line 4], [Line 5-Line 6], and [Line 7-Line 8]. Or even proximity on more global paragraph levels, with [Line 1, 2- Line 3, 4], [Line 3, 4, - Line 5, 6], [Line 5, 6-Line 7, 8], and further with [the first 4 lines- the last 4 lines]. Though the translator of the poem may not have a strong sense of the law of proximity, it is just the casual encounter of such arrangement that makes a difference and creates a profound sense of [loneliness] in the mind of readers.

4. LAW OF CLOSURE

Law of closure refers to the fact that in perception people tend to complete contours and ignore gaps in figures to enclose spaces, which indicates, as the term Gestalt implies, that our mind will add missing elements to complete a figure to form a gestalt. More specifically, Closure occurs when an object is *incomplete* or a space is not *completely enclosed*, as shown in the figure of [a panda] below. However, the incompleteness must be kept optimal, and either too much or too little will make less difference. The underlying mechanism of Closure

is still a result of our perceptual functions; we tend to fill in the missing information given that enough of the shape is shown. This law does not just fit in the perception of concrete figures but also does in the abstract concepts, vague images, or even emotional feelings. And only through this can the creation of quality piece of poems become possible. Simply put, though parts of a certain figure are missing, we can still group elements together or to interpret forms as complete. The law of Closure can be illustrated below: (Wagner, 2005).



P \wedge N D A

Figure 7: Law of closure

(Although the panda above is not complete, enough is present for our perception to complete the shape. In its extension by the author, The spelled Word “P\wedge NDA”, is easily perceived as “PANDA”, with the closure effect created by the surrounding letters as well as the picture of panda. When the *viewer's perception completes a shape*, **closure** occurs.

《無題》（相見時難別亦難）（李商隱）

相見時難別亦難，
東風無力百花殘。
春蠶到死絲方盡，
蠟炬成灰淚始乾。
曉鏡但愁雲鬢改，
夜吟應覺月光寒。
蓬山此去無多路，
青鳥殷勤為探看。

It's difficult for us to meet and hard to part;
The east wind is too weak to revive flowers dead.
The silkworm till its death spins silk from lovesick heart;
The candle but when burnt up has no tears to shed.
At dawn I'm grieved to think your mirrored hair turns grey;
At night you would feel cold while I croon by moonlight.
To the three fairy hills it is not a long way.
Would the bluebird oft fly to see you on the height!

The law of Closure can be examined on sentence levels; that is for each of the TT sentences, there is a trace of the law of Closure, we may start by specify what is unsaid (incomplete information) of each TT line below:

Line 1: It's difficult for us to meet and hard to part;

What is unsaid → *'Our encounter is of profundity'*

Line 2: The east wind is too weak to revive flowers dead.

What is unsaid → *'The deep sorrow cannot be reduced by external environment.'*

- Line 3: The silkworm till its death spins silk from lovesick heart;
What is unsaid → *'Persistence of love, everlasting affection.'*
- Line 4: The candle but when burnt up has no tears to shed.
What is unsaid → *'Persistence of sorrow, everlasting sense of loss.'*
- Line 5: At dawn I'm grieved to think your mirrored hair turns grey;
What is unsaid → *'A worry of the outlook ruined by lovesickness.'*
- Line 6: At night you would feel cold while I croon by moonlight.
What is unsaid → *'A strong desire to keep young for the romance love.'*
- Line 7: To the three fairy hills it is not a long way.
What is unsaid → *'The romance love is like in the ivory tower.'*
- Line 8: Would the bluebird oft fly to see you on the height!
What is unsaid → *'The persistence of pain from lovesickness.'*

As is shown above, the Closure effect can be demonstrated through incompleteness of information in each line, the result of which is to highlight the sentiment of the lyric hero in the poem. Now that the lyrical hero is so sad, and even when facing the late spring scenery, makes her sadness removed. In late spring, "numerous flowers are weakened by east wind", what is suggested is that the lyric hero is weakened by both the impossible romance love and the spring flowers. In short, the Closure effect that forms the image of a deep sense of love and its resulting sorrow is accomplished by incomplete information all over the lines.

5. FIGURE AND GROUND (This law may underlies any other laws)

This law can actually be considered as basic law among others. This law refers to the fact that our eyes differentiate an object from its surrounding area, a form, silhouette, or shape is naturally perceived as **figure** (object), while the surrounding area is perceived as **ground** (background). Using unusual figure/ground relationships can add interest and subtlety to an image, which idea sheds new lights in both creating and translating poems. The figure below shows two fish (black and white) with each an eye of opposite color; white fish with black eye, black with white against each other.

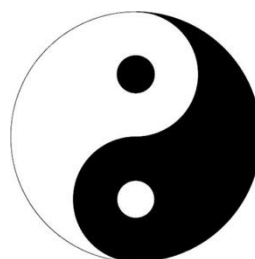


Figure 8: Law of figure-ground relationship

(In this image, the figure and ground relationships **change** as the eye perceives the form of a white fish or the silhouette of a black fish.) To promote the effect of figure-ground, the contrast between them must be relatively sharper. From the perspective of perception, the green will be perceived as greener, if it is made against color red, and vice versa. In the same vein, if the theme is to be highlighted in the poem creation and translation, it must be made salient with proper background, and sometimes it will be even more intriguing that figure and background relationship is interchangeable on the basis of mood changes of readers. The following analysis clearly displays such a phenomenon.

孟郊 – 遊子吟

MENG Jiao – A Traveller's Lament

慈母手中線，
遊子身上衣；
臨行密密縫，
意恐遲遲歸。
誰言寸草心，
報得三春輝？

A loving mother busied herself with needlework
On clothes for a son who was going away;
On the eve of his departure she sewed thread after thread,
Worrying that his return would be delayed and late.
How could the love of grass only inches tall
Ever reciprocate spring after spring of sunshine day after day?

As mentioned earlier, the figure-ground contrast is the key to the reflection of the theme. Firstly, Line 5 and Line 6 highlights the figure-ground contrast, with figure [the love of grass], and the figure [the spring of sunshine]. Second, in Line 6, the figure-ground relationships can be found in between [spring after spring] and [day after day], which suggests the nature of maternal love, endless and resourceful, with the maternal love as figure, whereas the spring and sunshine background. Next, as implied in Line 1, a figure-ground relationship between what is said (e.g., busied with needle work) and what is not said (the maternal love to her son) can also be found. Such phenomenon can best be interpreted by projection and introjection in psychology. How do you prove the maternal love, as it cannot be uttered? We can tell from what is done and for whom it is done. And how hard it is done naturally corresponds how deep the ties. Then in Line 3, [the eve of departure] corresponds to the [thread after thread], both expressions serve as background, and the deep sense of sorrow attached to it is the figure. Such figure-ground effect does offer good framework for translators.

6. LAW OF COMMON FATE

In Gestalt principle of organization, the effect that units of perceptual field that move or function in a similar manner will be perceived as a whole, regardless of their relative positions. Specifically, if two units are not in proximity but moves in synchronicity, then these two units will be perceived as a group. The figure below shows the common fate through arrow signs moving rightward or leftward, what moves in the same direction shares the common fate (C differs from O in moving direction). The law of common fate can be illustrated below:

$$\begin{array}{cccc} C & \rightarrow & C & \rightarrow & C & \rightarrow & C & \rightarrow \\ O & \leftarrow & O & \leftarrow & O & \leftarrow & O & \leftarrow \\ C & \rightarrow & C & \rightarrow & C & \rightarrow & C & \rightarrow \\ O & \leftarrow & O & \leftarrow & O & \leftarrow & O & \leftarrow \end{array}$$

Figure 9: Law of common fate

The law of common fate can also be demonstrated by the Chinese poem (and English Translation) below

清平調 (三首其一) --- 李白
(Chin-Ping tone (1/3) – Li, Bai, 701-762, Han Dynasty)

雲想衣裳花想容，
春風拂檻露華濃。
若非群玉山頭見，
會向瑤臺月下逢。

As I see the clouds, I think of your dress, and the flowers, of your look,
As spring breeze strokes window panes, and the dew grows thick.
If I did not meet you on the summits of jade mountains,
I must have met you on the moonlit heaven.

The above poem manifests the law of common fate in several respects. First, the cloud and breeze (in line one) as well as flowers and dews (in line two) move in the same direction; that is, the visual image of the theme of the poem “*missing the beloved*” can be reflected by the expressions: as I see the clouds moving in the sky, and as I feel the breeze stroking. Such a manifestation of common fate can also be seen by the expressions: as I see the flowers, and as the dew grows thick. In terms of ‘figure-ground’ perception, the cloud and the flower in line one, and the breeze and the dew in line two serve as ground, whereas the last two lines serve as figure. Besides, the *jade mountains* in line three and *the heaven* in line four also serve as ground, and the action of ‘meet’ in both lines serve as figure, which is also a manifestation of the common fate.

The Gestalt Laws and the Resulting Model

In effect, the Gestalt laws introduced above may, in most cases, be interwoven and manifested in one single poem. It will not be uncommon to see more than one Gestalt laws underlying a single poem. That is, laws of similarity, proximity, continuity, closure, figure-ground, and common fate may all appear in a single literary work. To take the poem “Tien Jin Sa - Meditation in Autumn” by Ma for example,

天淨沙-秋思 --馬致遠
(Tien Jin Sa - Meditation in Autumn -- Ma, Tz-Yuan, 1250-1324 B.C. Yuan Dynasty, China)

枯藤 老樹 昏鴉，
小橋 流水 人家，
古道 西風 瘦馬。
夕陽 西下，
斷腸人在天涯。

The withered ivy, the old tree, and the listless crow,
The tiny bridge, the flowing water, and the little family,
The ancient path, wind from west, and the lean horse.
In the west go down the setting sun,
Afar roves the discouraged.

the inter-relationship among the eight scenes--withered ivy, old tree, listless crow, ancient path, west wind, lean horse, setting sun, the discouraged man, and the faraway place—not

only manifest the figure-ground law, as mentioned earlier, but they may also reflect the law of similarity and dissimilarity (e.g., the adjectives ‘withered, old, listless, ancient, west, lean, setting, discouraged, faraway places’ all imply the same thing: total isolation and desolation); the spatial relationship among the visual images may also reflect the law of proximity (e.g., the relative spatial relation between the ivy and the tree, between the little bridge and the flowing water, between the path and the west wind, and even between the setting sun and the discouraged man); the development of visual images within each line may also reflect the law of continuity (e.g., in line one, the withered ivy → the old tree → the listless crow → ...gradually developed into deeper sense of isolation and desolation, so is the small bridge → the flowing water → and the little family → ...); the law of continuity may at the same time suggest the law of closure; that is each line of the poem forms a gestalt that denotes desolation and isolation (e.g., in line one, the withered ivy, the old tree, and the listless crow help readers form the visual image of isolation and desolation, which is not directly specified in the line); the inanimate objects followed by animate objects in line one and line two manifests that law of symmetry (e.g., the ivy - the tree – the crow, the bridge – the water – the family, and the path - the wind – the horse in line one, line two, and line three, respectively); lastly, the relative movement of the inanimate objects and animate objects in each line may reflect the law of common fate (i.e., the ivy - the tree, and the bridge – the water share the common fate, so are the crow, the family, and the horse.) Such a multiple dimensional interpretation in terms of the perception laws also applies to the other poems mentioned in the paper.

Apparently, these seven laws are interdependent and mutually referenced, with one denoting another. The question is: Can we judge the quality of a poem along with its translation in terms of the number of Gestalt laws? Or more specifically, Can we judge the quality of a poem along with its translation on the basis of the number of laws on lexical, sentential, and discourse levels? This refers to the controversial issue: Can the evaluation of poetry be quantified? This is an open-ended question, interested readers or researchers may give it a try. One possible solution is, firstly to create a multi-dimensional frame, with a specification table in which Gestalt laws in the column, while levels of words, sentences, paragraphs (discourse) in the row, and calculate the count of each law appears. See the tentative table below:

Table 1: Two-way Specification for evaluating translation of poems

	Word	phrase	sentence	paragraph
Similarity				
Continuity				
Proximity				
Closure				
Figure-ground				
Common fate				

There could be different weights on certain laws. For, example, Closure is supposed to be the important effect in poetry and its translation, so give it “2” times of its count as points, while Continuity, just for instance, can be given only “0.5” weighing score, as it is less important, and so forth. With such a table in hand, one may be more readily to evaluate the poem in hand, which, I believe, can be a great guideline for poets, translators, and readers.

Weighing the laws

Admitted that the dramatic effect created by different Gestalt laws may vary, but they may result in one thing in common: the figure-ground gestalt. However, the role of 'figure' and the role of 'ground' can be interchangeable; figure may become ground, so may the ground become figure, which is largely determined by the relative differentiation of the stimuli (any decoding unit of the text). As Thomas Lavalée (1953-2001) put it, what is involved in the perceptual distinction between figure and ground is "relative differentiation." He states:

...Partially overlapping good shapes both in music and the visual arts may blur each other so as to

form a lowly differentiated background. Irregularly distributed lines and dots make a rather poor

shape; but, as we shall see soon, when they occur on a shape, they render it more differentiated

relative to other similar shapes and tend to shift it in the figure direction...

Therefore, the relative strength of the figure-ground gestalt formed by different gestalt laws may vary. To take the law of symmetry and the law of proximity as examples, the former seems to outweigh the latter in forming the 'figure,' so the former is of more momentum value than the latter. In this regard, if a translated version adopts law of symmetry, rather than the law of proximity, to highlight the 'figure' the original poet suggests, then it should be considered as superior. To substantiate the model, it is of paramount importance to clarify the gestalt laws introduced earlier in the paper, and highlight their individual contribution to the formation of figure-ground gestalt. To borrow the ideas from the field of mechanics, these gestalt laws can be roughly and arbitrarily classified into: static laws (simplicity, similarity, and proximity) and dynamics laws (closure, symmetry, contiguity, and common fate). The static laws can be regarded as weak version, whereas the dynamic laws as strong version (though this subjective categorization is subject to empirical review). However, such a categorization is not without a reason. According to Labov (1972), verbs in the text that indicate straightforward activity or movement tend to foreground their referents as figures, while static nominal expressions or predicates tend to relegate their referents to the background. This does not mean that static nominal expressions or predicates can only form background whereas verbs indicating activity can only form figure. There are cases in which the opposite is also true because in the course of perception, the shift from figure to ground requires only minimal effort. This can best be elaborated by Thomas Lavalée. He states:

..I argued that poets may rely on our habitual figure-ground organizations in extra-linguistic reality,

and exploit our flexibility in shifting attention from one aspect to another so as to achieve certain

poetic effects by inducing us to reverse the habitual figure-ground relationships...

Weak and Strong Versions of Gestalt laws

The distinction between the weak version and the strong version laws helps to evaluate the quality of different translations of a literary work (e.g., a poem), especially when there is relatively low differentiation between figure and ground in the source text, and different translators of the text may subconsciously adopt certain gestalt laws (some use weak laws, while others use strong laws) to create the designated theme through the target text. It is not

uncommon for readers of a literary work to have equivocal understandings or reflections, nor is it uncommon for the same reader of the same literary work to have different understandings in different times. One plausible explanation is that different figure-ground gestalts may emerge as a result of different gestalt laws. Thus, it is both constructive and instructive to evaluate the translated works by different translators on the basis of the weak or strong versions used to elaborate the themes of the source text. Again, this is not to argue that translators adopt strong gestalt laws may be superior to those use weak ones (though it is most often likely to be so). Of the weak gestalt laws, simplicity can be considered essential in that expressions with fewer words (predicates, lines, or paragraphs) are always superior to those with otherwise more words (predicates, lines, or paragraphs), especially in the literary works of poetry. So in our present model, law of simplicity (the weak version) can be used as the first criterion of assess the quality of the literary work. The similarity law and the proximity law in the weak category are not as basic, and are subject to the effects of those in strong category (e.g., symmetry, or common fate), so these two can be considered auxiliary as compared with simplicity law. As to the strong version, the symmetry law (as often overlapped with the law of common fate) can be considered pivotal, because this law involves minimal imagining effort as compared with the closure law and the contiguity law. Thus a tentative model of translation criticism may involve the consideration of 1) the kind of strong versions (Closure or Common fate laws are weighed), and weak versions (law of simplicity is weighed), 2) the kind of combination of both strong and weak versions, and 3) the kind of inclusiveness of the laws in the same category.

5. CONCLUSION

Figure-ground relationship created by laws of perception, as proposed and elaborated by Gestalt psychologists, is an inspiring and significant element of the way people organize reality, inclusive of the literary works (e.g., the poetry in the present study). Figural perception, as salient from the background, at any single instant largely depends on patterns of sensory stimulation as influenced by the gestalt laws mentioned in the present study, and the mental set of the perceivers. It is likely that the translators project their own personal affective states (emotion or feeling) onto the translated work by creating the images based on certain gestalt laws to serve their purpose, especially when the source text is of low differentiation, thus facilitating the shift of figure-ground perception. Therefore, not only writers of literary works (e.g., poets) but also the translators may make the best use of people's habitual figure-ground organizations and create the desired images. The present study seeks to propose a model in which gestalt laws are categorized into strong and weak versions, which are used to analyze and compare different translated versions of the source text, hoping to render an in depth framework for both aesthetic and academic purposes. The analysis of translated works via this model (as based on Gestalt principles) is not without limitations; the classification of different laws in the study is somewhat arbitrary, and requires further empirical review. Besides, there is high degree of overlapping among the gestalt laws (e.g., in some cases, law of simplicity may also imply law of similarity or law of symmetry). It is probably a flaw to make the text justify the laws, but it is also inspiring to adopt this model in probing the potential effects created by different orders of words, phrases, sentences, or paragraphs in terms of the kind of gestalt laws involved (e.g., the effects created by different allocations of temporal and spatial message, or by different inverted structures, as based on the law of closure, or else.) Applications of the model in future studies may also include the analysis of the styles of translators by examining their most frequent adoption of certain gestalt laws in order to add flavor to the whole process of analysis and aesthetic appreciation.

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