On Zero Translation in Howard Goldblatt's Translation of *Life and Death Are Wearing Me Out*^{*}

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Abstract—Zero Translation, mainly referring to transference and transliteration, is inverse translation. This study, by way of parallel texts analysis, discussed the application of Zero Translation in the English version of *Life and Death Are Wearing Me Out* translated by Howard Goldblatt, and its enlightenment on transmission of Chinese literature. It is found that Relative Zero Translation is commonly used in translating cultural-specific items, partly due to the huge difference between English and Chinese. Moreover, Zero Translation is complementary to other translation strategies. These translation strategies always work together to facilitate target language readers to better comprehend the source language culture behind the target text.

Index Terms-Zero Translation Theory, Life and Death Are Wearing Me Out, Howard Goldblatt

I. INTRODUCTION

Up to now, Mo Yan is the only native Chinese that has been awarded the Nobel Prize for Literature. After his winning the prize, a number of specialists and scholars started to research on translation of his works as well as the chief translator of his works, Howard Goldblatt, for his translation made it possible for Mo's popularity in the West. However, researchers tend to lay more emphasis on the translating style and cultural perspective, few have associated the translated version and translation strategies involved with the translator's view.

In this context, this paper brings in a new perspective—Zero Translation, and aims to explore how this concept is applied in the translation of *Life and Death Are Wearing Me Out*, one of Mo's masterpieces. Zero Translation, mainly referring to transference and transliteration, is inverse translation. Translators, by employing source language items in target texts, take target language readers to the source language culture, thus enable those readers to explore and experience the source language and culture on their own, with the aid of background knowledge of their own culture. It reflects the subjectivity of translators, and a more equal view of cultural exchanges. In the present study, the author investigates the use of Zero Translation in translation of names, cultural specific items, onomatopoetic words and so on to discuss in detail how Howard Goldblatt applied Zero Translation in translation of the grand work and how the concept sheds light on the transmission of cultures in today's world.

II. LIFE AND DEATH ARE WEARING ME OUT AND HOWARD GOLDBLATT

Life and Death Are Wearing Me Out is the first book recommended by Mo Yan himself as a primer, as it fully represents Mo's writing style and his exploration of "novel consciousness." Elaborating on grave issues including land reforms and peasantry problems, this work is featured by oriental surrealism. In the story, the leading character named Ximen Nao was a landlord, shot and killed unjustly. He experienced the cycle of reincarnation. After each biological death, his physical body was changed consecutively into a donkey, an ox, a pig, a dog, a monkey and finally an infant with a big head. It was through his eyes, or precisely the eyes of different animals that tremendous changes and reforms were witnessed in the rural area of China from the year of 1950 to 2000.

The translator of that novel is Howard Goldblatt, a bilingual sinologist and translator who has dedicated himself to translating and recommending Chinese modern and contemporary novels since 1970s, which has greatly facilitated the transmission of Chinese culture. His proficiency in Chinese has been embodied not only in speaking but also in reading

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and writing. He has published a remarkable amount of translated works, among which seven are translated versions of Mo Yan's works (Lv, 2011). Professor Goldblatt claimed on different occasions that Mo Yan has been his favourite contemporary Chinese writer. In 2008, Mo Yan, together with *Life and Death Are Wearing Me Out*, was awarded the 1st Newman Prize for Chinese literature, thanks to the English version translated by Howard which came out the same year. This work has also been listed among the world-class literature recommended by *Washington Post*.

As Myriam Salama-Carr puts in *Translating and Interpreting Conflict*, the translator's visibility has increased in a very real professional sense then, and translators welcome that visibility, as well they should (2007). Professor Goldblatt has made efforts to reinforce his visibility in the translation with the art of "creative treason". However, as a prudent translator, Professor Goldblatt never abuses domestication to cater to readers despite his reader-oriented tendency. Mo Yan once praised him for his preciseness, "I received more than one hundred letters and numerous calls from Professor Goldblatt...We held discussions repeatedly on just a single word or something I mentioned in my novel that he was unfamiliar with..." (2000, p.170). These remarks reveal that Professor Goldblatt is a responsible translator who regards loyalty to the original work as his unshrinkable obligation. In this paper, Professor Goldblatt's role as a cultural transmitter is focused on and how he employs Zero Translation to help transmit the source language culture is studied.

III. ZERO TRANSLATION THEORY

A. Development of Zero Translation Theory

Though the concept was first put forward by Professor Du Zhengming in 2000, there has not been a consensus on the denotation and connotation of Zero Translation. Professor Du holds that Zero Translation equals to non-translation, and contends that non-translation reflects a translator's translation purpose, which suggests his own cultural standpoint (2000). Professor Qiu Maoru contends that Zero Translation is caused by the difference of expressing methods and social cultures between source language and target language, defining Zero Translation as "deliberately translating the items in source language without the help of the words and expressions in target language." (2001, p.26) He states that Zero Translation includes transference, transliteration as well as ellipsis. Professor Liu Mingdong classified Zero Translation into Absolute Zero Translation and Relative Zero Translation. According to him, Absolute Zero Translation consists of ellipsis and transference, whereas Relative Zero Translation includes transliteration, sound-meaning combination translation, complementary translation, image translation, literal translation with notes, and adaptation (2002).

It is not until 2011 that Professor Luo Guoqing made a systematic summary and proposed Zero Translation Theory with his academic work *The Study on Zero Translation*. He in this work first came up with the idea of inversion comprehension being the essence of Zero Translation and Zero Translation View, which is regarded as a great innovation in this field. It symbolized a new stage in the development of Zero Translation.

Luo gives a comprehensive definition to Zero Translation. In a narrow sense, Zero Translation refers to transference, which is a process in which a source language item is used in a translated text and with its source language meaning. This form of translation is also called Absolute Zero Translation or Pure Zero Translation. In a broader sense (that is, to "take" target language readers to the source language culture to better understand the translated text), Zero Translation is practice, including borrowing, citation, annotation, pseudo-translation and code switching (Luo, 2011). In essence, Zero Translation is inverse translation. Translators, by employing source language items in a translated text, take target language readers to the source language culture, enable those readers to explore and experience the source language/culture on their own, with the aid of background knowledge of their own culture.

According to Luo, what lies behind different types of Zero Translation strategies is translator's zero translation view (2011, p.21). This view holds that cultures are equal and can be integrated so that they are translatable. No culture should domineer over other cultures. Translators with this view do not always resort to domestication to please target readers, instead, they, when translating cultural specific items, adopt source language items in target texts so that target readers are given a chance to glimpse into the original source language culture and appreciate it for its own sake.

On translators' part, such an effort echoes the appeal made by Lawrence Venuti, that is, to curb the traditional domestication of translation and allow foreign influences to infiltrate translated texts (Venuti, 2008). Venuti argued for a paradigm shift in the way translators consider their role—from invisible to visible. Translators, by employing zero translation strategies in translating cultural specific items, attempt to take target readers to the source culture to have a look rather than make them understand another unique culture only in their most familiar way. This is also in accordance with the need of globalization and cultural exchanges.

B. A Problem and a Suggested Solution

However, despite the fact that Zero Translation theory provides a new perspective to viewing cultural transmission in translation, it is not flawless. Professor Luo states in *The Study on Zero Translation* that the first use of Zero Translation item should be accompanied by some context for readers to digest. But when the Zero Translation item is familiar to readers, it can be used alone without any text (2011, p.54). Then he gives two examples to illustrate his point. One is "A soothsayer, steeped in the art of *feng shui*, advised the clan to invite a family named Ding to live in their midst." by Zhu Tianwen in *Newsweek*, 2002. The other is "清华要控制 MBA 招生规模…" cited from *China Youth Daily* in 2001. The

former is deemed as ineffective Relative Zero Translation for the lack of necessary explanation whereas the latter as effective Absolute Zero Translation for readers are more familiar with the word MBA and no text is needed. As a matter of fact, *feng shui* has already been included in the *Oxford English Dictionary* (OED). "Every new word to be entered into the *Oxford English Dictionary* will generally undergo a ten-year verification, in which the universality and frequency of use is fully considered." said Fiona, the senior editor of OED in an interview with *Global Times* (Zhang, 2014). This shows that a great many native readers of English are capable of using the word *feng shui* with ease, that is, they are reasonably familiar with it. And it seems questionable to reckon zero translation of *feng shui* as ineffective.

Here comes the question: how can a translator judge whether target language readers are familiar with a source language item? Professor Luo did not mention this in his book, which makes his illustration somewhat disputable. The author suggested that some authoritative media (and dictionaries) should be resorted to serve the purpose. In this paper, the author judges whether a Chinese item is familiar to English readers with the help of *Oxford English Dictionary*(OED).

IV. APPLICATION OF ZERO TRANSLATION: A CASE STUDY

A. Application of Zero Translation to Principal Character's List

It is well-known that the most prominent feature shared by Chinese names and English names is the sequence of given name and family name. Contrary to that of English people, Chinese people normally have their family names positioned right before the given names, which always carry some special expectations or significance. Most of the characters' names created in this novel conform to this principal, that is, family name plus given name, and some examples of principal characters are listed in Table 1.

TABLE 1	
西门闹	Ximen Nao
蓝解放	Lan Jiefang
白氏	Ximen Bai
迎春	Yingchun
吴秋香	Wu Qiuxiang
蓝脸	Lan Lian
黄瞳	Huang Tong
西门金龙	Ximen Jinlong
西门宝凤	Ximen Baofeng
黄互助	Huang Huzhu
黄合作	Huang Hezuo
庞虎	Pang Hu
王乐云	Wang Leyun

As shown above, Howard Goldblatt adopted Relative Transliteration by adopting Hanyu Pinyin directly in translating the characters' names. As Luo Guoqing pointed out in his book *The Study on Zero Translation*, in C-E translation, using Hanyu Pinyin, the Chinese phonetic alphabets, to transcribe Chinese characters should be termed as a kind of Relative Transliteration rather than Transliteration, for "Hanyu Pinyin represents accurately the pronunciation of Chinese characters despite some distinctions between Pinyin and International Phonetic Alphabet" (2011, p.22). For example, it is hard to match equivalent phoneme in English to initials like "zh", "ch", "sh", "j", "q", "x" and finals like "ian", "iong" in Chinese. Also spelling and pronunciation like "yuan", "xian" cannot be found in English, either. Based on the above differences, for English readers who already know Hanyu Pinyin, such relative transliteration facilitates them to be closer to the source language culture with little difficulty.

Nevertheless, those new to the Hanyu Pinyin system may get into trouble when trying to pronounce and memorize these names. In view of this, Howard Goldblatt attached "A Note on Pronunciation". As he holds the opinion that most letters in the Chinese Pinyin system are pronounced roughly as in English, only the main exceptions are listed (see Table 2). In this way, he leads the English readers to Chinese contexts and help them understand Chinese items as well as Chinese culture.

TABLE 2		
C (not followed by h)	ts as in its	(Ma Liang <u>c</u> ai)
he	<i>u</i> as in <i>huh</i>	(Huang <u>He</u> zuo)
ian	yen	(Lan Lian)
le	<i>u</i> as in <i>luh</i>	(Wang <u>Le</u> yun)
qi	Ch as in cheese	(Wu <u>Qiu</u> xiang)
х	Sh as in she	(Wu Qiu <u>x</u> iang)
zh	J as in jelly	(Huang Hu <u>zh</u> u)

B. Application of Relative Translation to the Characters' Names and Appellation

In translating characters' name and appellation, the translator used Relative Zero Translation. In some cases, he added

the literal meaning right after the relative transliteration to emphasize the character's special trait, identity, or the hidden meaning of the name. In other cases, he translated the name directly into Pinyin, enabling target readers to comprehend fully with the help of the context. Look at the following examples:

- (1) Source Text: "西门闹" (Mo, 2012, p.3)
- Translated Text: "Ximen Nao, whose name means West Gate Riot" (Goldblatt, 2012, p.3)
- (2) Source Text: "蓝脸" (Mo, 2012, p.11)
- Translated Text: "Lan Lian, or Blue Face" (Goldblatt, 2012, p.13)
- (3) Source Text: "西门金龙" (Mo, 2012, p.12) Translated Text: "Ximen Jinlong, or Golden Dragon" (Goldblatt, 2012, p.14)
- (4) Source Text: "西门宝凤" (Mo, 2012, p.12)
- Translated Text: "Ximen Baofeng, or Precious Phoenix" (Goldblatt, 2012, p.14)
- (5) Source Text: "蓝解放" (Mo, 2012, p.16)
- Translated Text: "Lan Jiefang–Liberation Lan" (Goldblatt, 2012, p.19)
- (6) Source Text: "互助" (Mo, 2012, p.17)
- Translated Text: "Huzhu-Cooperation" (Goldblatt, 2012, p.21)
- (7) Source Text: "合作" (Mo, 2012, p.17)
- Translated Text: "Hezuo-Collaboration" (Goldblatt, 2012, p.21)

Analysis:

With the literal translation placed right after the translation item, these examples are considered as good practice on Relative Zero Translation. Example (1) points out the leading character's personality trait. The word " \mathbb{H} ", which is the core of the name, refers to the quality of being dynamic and noisy in Chinese. It draws a conclusion on all the torture and chaos Ximen Nao has experienced during his circle of reincarnations. So the translator utilizes the English word "riot" as a semantic equivalence of " \mathbb{H} ". Example (2) shows the relation between Lan Lian's name and his appearance. Examples (3) to (7) reveal the nature and conditions of society through the characters' names. It's easy to see that when these characters' names first appear in the main text, additional information provided by literal translation plays a significant role in promoting the apprehension of readers and avoiding the missing of cultural features.

(8) Source text: "黄瞳" (Mo, 2012, p.9)

Translated text: "Huang Tong" (Goldblatt, 2012, p.11)

Analysis:

Huang Tong is described in the novel as a "young scamp" who "had yellow hair, yellow eyes, giving the impression he entertained evil thoughts". Through lines Chinese readers can easily connect his appearance with his name "黄瞳" as "Yellow Eyes" and tell that he is a negative figure. In translation, the translator adopted Relative Zero Translation and gave no explanation to "Huang Tong" since the following sentences in the source text explained clearly this character's physical features. Embedded in the context, this example is effective and concise.

C. Application of Zero Translation to Chinese Culture-specific Items

Cultural-specific items are scattered throughout this original version of *Life and Death Are Wearing Me Out* and no equivalents can be found for them in English. Even to make them understood by English readers is by no means easy. Goldblatt applied relative zero translation skillfully, enabling target readers to figure out the meaning with the help of either the linguistic context or the concise explanation given by the translator.

(9) Source Text: "什么干儿子、干兄弟, 屁!" (Mo, 2012, p.100)

Translated Text: "'Dry' son! 'Dry' brother! Shit!" (Goldblatt, 2012, p.119)

Analysis:

"干" in these Chinese expressions represents close relations between people, not the state of being dry. "干爹" or "干 娘" in Chinese refers to a nominal father or mother who actually has no duty on fostering their "干儿子" or nominal son. Such a relationship is Chinese-characteristic. The translator did not translate them into "nominal son" or "nominal brother", instead he borrowed the basic meaning of "干" and combined it with "son" and "brother", such sense loans created apparently ridiculous terms " 'dry' son" and " 'dry' brother". The quotation marks used here suggest this is no simple literal translation. The use of relative zero translation is ingenious since (together with the context) it reflects the nature of such a relationship—which, involving neither blood ties nor fostering, is not reliable at all.

(10) Source Text: "一个惯于装神弄鬼的风水先生马智伯" (Mo, 2012, p.13)。

Translated Text: "Ma Zhibo, a *feng shui* master who was given to putting on mystical airs" (Goldblatt, 2012, p.14).

Analysis:

As aforementioned, *feng shui* has been included in OED and widely used in English-speaking countries. It is defined as "(in Chinese thought) a system of laws considered to govern spatial arrangement and orientation in relation to the flow of energy (chi), and whose favourable or unfavourable effects are taken into account when siting and designing buildings." Its closest equivalent in English is "geomancy." Instead of translating "风水"into "Chinese geomancy", the

translator applied relative transliteration, reflecting his respect towards source language culture.

(11) Source Text: 女人们盘腿打坐在我家炕上(Mo, 2012, p. 99)。

Translated Text: The women's hindquarters wore out the mats on our sleeping platform, the *kang* (Goldblatt, 2012, p.118).

Analysis:

The *kang*, commonly seen in the North of China, is "a heatable bed made of earth or brick." Howard Goldblatt briefly translated it as "sleeping platform" and attached its Pinyin, providing readers with a sufficient context to fully comprehend the term.

(12) Source Text: "你就是观音菩萨下道场." (Mo, 2012, p.526)

Translated Text: "...you're the *Guanyin* Bodhisattva come to earth." (Goldblatt, 2012, p.524) Analysis:

In OED, the definition for the transliterated word *kuan yin* is "the goddess of compassion in Chinese Buddhism". *Guanyin (the* Pinyin form for *kuan yin)*, together with the context "Bodhisattva", makes the term accessible to English readers. So it is among one of the effective examples of Relative Transliteration/Relative Zero Translation.

(13) Source Text: "他善拉京胡, 能吹唢呐." (Mo, 2012, p.28)

Translated Text: "He's quite a musician, plays both the two-stringed *erhu* and *suona*." (Goldblatt, 2012, p.33) Analysis:

The definition of *erhu* is found in OED as "a Chinese two-stringed musical instruments held in the lap and played with a bow", but there is no definition for *suona*. As a traditional Chinese musical instrument, *suona* enjoys less popularity than *erhu*, either in China or around the world. In view of this, the translator is advised to attach "a Chinese horn" to "*suona*", which will facilitate target readers in understanding this unique cultural item.

D. Application of Zero Translation to the Unit of Measurement

To reflect the genuine life of Chinese People, Mo Yan employed Chinese unit of measurement rather than units of international units system. Goldblatt resorted to Relative Zero Translation/Relative Transliteration to preserve the local flavor of the source text, as shown in the following examples:

- (14) Source Text: "俺要走了,离家还有十五里呢." (Mo, 2012, p.34)
- Translated text: "My home's fifteen *li* from here, so I'd better get going." (Goldblatt, 2012, p.41)
- (15) Source Text: "...十斤红糖, 十斤白糖." (Mo, 2012, p.226)
- Translated text: "...ten *jin* of brown sugar and ten *jin* of refined sugar..." (Goldblatt, 2012, p.250) (16) Source Text: "一角,两角,三角硬币..." (Mo, 2012, p.526)
- Translated text: "One *jiao*, two *jiao* and three *jiao* coins..." (Goldblatt, 2012, p.524)

Analysis:

In the OED, "*li*" is defined as "a Chinese unit of distance, equal to about 0.5 km", and *jiao* as "a monetary unit of China, equal to one tenth of a yuan." These two words now is comparatively familiar to English people, so they can be used alone as Relative Zero Translation items. No definition of *jin* is found in the OED, which suggests this unit of measurement is not so widely known among western readers. The translator applied Relative Zero Translation to it, believing target readers can figure out its meaning easily with the help of context.

E. Application of Zero Translation to Onomatopoetic Words

Onomatopoetic words phonetically imitate, resemble or suggest the sound of things or actions, which increase the appeal of language. Onomatopoetic differs between languages since the symbolic properties of a sound in a word are restricted in part by a language's own phonetic inventory. After examining the translation of onomatopoetic words throughout the novel, the author finds the translator applied Zero Translation where the equivalents or similar items were unavailable or where the source language item suggested the uniqueness of a thing or an action.

(17) Source Text: "轻轻一抖,便发出哗哗啷啷的声响。" (Mo, 2012, p.19)

Translated Text: "So all you have to do was shake it gently for it to produce a *huahua langlang* sound." (Goldblatt, 2012, p.22).

(18) Source Text: "...并同时喊出了'哈咧咧咧——'" (Mo, 2012, p.125)

- Translated Text: "...and shouted as one: 'Ha lei-lei-lei-2"(Goldblatt, 2012, p.147)
- (19) Source Text: "想不到单干, 竟使我成了个人物。哈哈, 哈哈哈哈。" (Mo, 2012, p.102)

Translated Text: "I make a name for myself by being an independent farmer. *Ha ha, ha ha ha.*"(Goldblatt, 2012, p.121)

Analysis:

Readers are able to recognize these translation items as onomatopoetic words with them printed in italic and words like "sound" and "shout." On the one hand, the translations of onomatopoetic words here well preserve the characteristics of Chinese language. On the other hand, English readers may find it interesting and attractive when trying to imitate the pronunciation with the help of the note of pronunciation given by the translator at the beginning of the book. Therefore, the above examples of Relative Zero Translation can be deemed as effective.

V. CONCLUSION

This paper, after expounding on Zero Translation in the English version of *Life and Death Are Wearing Me Out*, has made some findings: First, Relative Zero Translation has been adopted for most of the cultural-specific items. Among all the relative zero translation tactics, relative transliteration and relative transliteration plus explanation are used commonly. Borrowing, a variation of zero translation, is also applied. In most cases, zero translation strategies work together with literal translation and liberal translation to provide sufficient context for the target readers to understand better. Second, only part of cultural-specific items are translated with zero translation or borrowing, which poses little difficulty for the target readers, only a handful of them, which are unique and do not have equivalents in English, are translated with relative zero translation strategies are complementary. When applied appropriately, it will, for one thing, facilitate target readers in understanding the text deeper and appreciate the unique flavor of the source language, and for another, assist the cultural transmission of source language culture.

This is what zero translation view is about: translation, in essence, is two-way communication based on equality, crossing both languages and cultures. No culture could domineer over another. Under the guidance of such a view, a translator helps readers enter the world of the source language, showing his deep respect for the source language culture and equal cultural communication.

It is a pity that the present study is only confined to zero translation at lexical level, not involving syntactic or textual level. Future researches may attempt to probe into zero translation at these two levels to get a deeper understanding on zero translation and the cultural transmission process involved.

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