Evaluating the Translation of Ambiguity in Classical Chinese Poetry: A Relevance-Theoretic Perspective

Quangong Feng

Zhejiang University

Ambiguity in classical Chinese poetry (CCP for short) is omnipresent. The translation of ambiguity in CCP poses a daunting challenge to translators, and so does its evaluation. This article explores its evaluation from the perspective of relevance theory and holds that a good translation of ambiguity communicates a presumption of optimal relevance which (1) requires a proper balance between processing effort and contextual effect; (2) contributes to the overall poetic effect or artistic state of the translation; (3) helps to better convey or make more manifest the author's intention and sometimes the translator's. Due to many linguistic and cultural differences, optimal relevance in the source text is not necessarily identical with that of the target text. It is found that explicitation of ambiguity is a key method used by translators to achieve optimal relevance though sometimes it results in some loss of poetic effect, which is usually outweighed by less processing effort and/or increased contextual effect.

Keywords: ambiguity, translation, classical Chinese poetry, relevance theory, optimal relevance

Classical Chinese poetry, as gems of Chinese literature, enjoys great reputation both at home and abroad. Its reputation abroad has been mainly earned through numerous translations by a large number of translators, such as H. A. Giles, A. Waley, E. Pound, W. Bynner and B. Watson in the Anglophone world. It is acknowledged that translating CCP poses a number of challenges to translators. One of the most prominent challenges is ambiguity which usually arises from linguistic and cultural differences between Chinese and other languages. Ambiguity abounds in CCP on grammatical, lexical, logical and other levels. The translator has to deal with these ambiguities in one way or another. Different methods in translating ambiguities in CCP may lead to different poetic effects, which is well worth delving into. Thus, it is the major concern of this article to evaluate the English translation of ambiguities in CCP. For this purpose, a relevance-theoretic framework will be used and the following questions are going to be addressed:

1. How are poetic effects to be defined in CCP from the perspective of relevance theory?

Correspondence concerning this article should be addressed to Quangong Feng, School of International Studies, Zhejiang University, 886 Yuhangtanglu, Hangzhou, 310058, China. E-mail: fengqg403@163.com

2. How are ambiguities to be connected with poetic effects in CCP?

3. How is the translation of ambiguities in CCP to be evaluated with the help of relevance theory?

According to Empson (1949, pp. 5–6), "'Ambiguity' itself can mean an indecision as to what you mean, an intention to mean several things, a probability that one or other or both of two things has been meant, and the fact that a statement has several meanings." In a word, ambiguity gives rise to more than one interpretation whether it is intended by the author or not. It is also highly regarded in traditional Chinese literary theory because of its esthetic value. For instance, the concept *yin*（隐）, translated into "concealed excellence" by Guobin Yang, in Xie Liu's *Dragon-Carving and the Literary Mind*（文心雕龙）written about 1500 years ago is quite similar to the concept of ambiguity, as is shown by the following lines, "Similarly, great works of literature possess both concealed and evident excellence. Concealed excellence refers to unstated repercussions of meaning...Concealed excellence lies in layers of meaning（是以文之英蕤，有秀有隐。隐也者，文外之重旨也……隐以复意为工）" (Liu, 2003, pp. 550–551). In other words, ambiguity mainly arises from "unstated repercussions of meaning"（文外之重旨）or "layers of meaning"（复意）and contributes to the "concealed

excellence" (隐) or poetic effects of literary works.

Relevance Theory, Poetic Effect and Ambiguity in CCP

Relevance Theory

Relevance theory is an influential theory of cognitive pragmatics proposed by Sperber and Wilson in their seminal monograph *Relevance: Communication and Cognition*. They hold that an act of ostension or inferential communication carries a guarantee of relevance, and that the principle of relevance makes manifest the intention behind the ostension (Sperber & Wilson, 2001, p. 50). It can be clearly seen that relevance presupposes the fact that every act of inferential communication carries an intention, an informative intention that should be made mutually manifest (communicative intention). In their framework, relevance is measured by two extent conditions: (1) an assumption is relevant in a context to the extent that its contextual effects in this context are large; (2) an assumption is relevant in a context to the extent that the effort required to process it in this context is small (Sperber & Wilson, 2001, p. 125). Here contextual effects result from the interaction between new and old information, which may provide further evidence for or against old assumptions. These assumptions that an individual is capable of mentally representing and accepting as true constitute his or her cognitive environment. To put it in another way, one's cognitive environment is the set of all facts which are manifest to him or her, and it is subjective in nature. So is relevance, that is to say, relevance is always relevant to a specific individual.

Sperber and Wilson also put forward the "presumption of optimal relevance", that is: (1) the set of assumptions *I* which the communicator intends to make manifest to the addressee is relevant enough to make it worth the addressee's while to process the ostensive stimulus; (2) the ostensive stimulus is the most relevant one the communicator could have used to communicate *I* (Sperber & Wilson, 2001, p. 158). In brief terms, the "principle of relevance" goes like this: "Every act of ostensive communication communicates a presumption of its own optimal relevance" (Sperber & Wilson, 2001, p. 158).

Poetic Effect

In their theoretic framework for relevance, Sperber and Wilson define poetic effect as "the peculiar effect of an utterance which achieves most of its relevance through a wide array of weak implicatures" (Sperber & Wilson, 2001, p. 222), or to say it results from "the accessing of a large array of very weak implicatures in the otherwise ordinary pursuit of relevance" (Sperber & Wilson, 2001, p. 224). Here it is necessary to know what "weak implicatures" are. Implicatures, in contrast with explicatures which are closely related to the propositional or logical form of an utterance, refer to any assumptions that are implicitly communicated. Implicatures of an utterance may vary in their strength. Sperber and Wilson hold that the strongest possible implicatures are those fully determined premises or conclusions which must be actually supplied if the interpretation is to be consistent with the principle of relevance, and for which the speaker takes full responsibility. Strong implicatures are those premises and conclusions which the hearer is strongly encouraged but not actually forced to supply. The weaker the encouragement, and the wider the range of possibilities among which the hearer can choose, the weaker the implicatures (Sperber & Wilson, 2001, p. 199). Roughly speaking, a weak implicature implies two or more possibilities of the interpretation of an utterance. The recovery of implicatures is guided by the principle of relevance. Sperber and Wilson also illustrate the poetic effects of metaphor, and maintain that in general the wider range of potential implicatures a metaphor has, the more poetic the effect and the more creative the metaphor is.

Inspired by Sperber and Wilson's viewpoint on poetic effects, some scholars have further explored this issue from the perspective of relevance theory. For instance, Pilkington (2000) offers a pragmatic account of the effects achieved by the poetic use of rhetorical tropes and schemes in the framework of relevance theory that supports an explanatory account of poetic effects and a new description of literariness. Though poetic effects can be achieved by many aspects of a piece of literary work, Pikington focuses on the poetic effects of metaphor and schemes (epizeuxis, metrical variation, rhyme and alliteration). This, to a certain degree, justifies the evaluation of the translation of ambiguity in CCP mainly from the criterion of poetic effect. Ribeiro (2013) holds that it is not only what is being said that is relevant in a communicative context but also how things are said. The relevance of the way things are said is illustrated by the poetic effects of the repetition of concrete sounds and abstract structure used by poets. Pinder (2021) examines the potential cognitive-pragmatic effects of line divisions within poetic texts from the perspective of relevance theory and contends that the processing of special line divisions may give rise to arrays of

additional cognitive pragmatic effects of a communicatively weak and for some readers poetic nature. Pinder (2021, p. 216) also argues that poetic effect can also be achieved through a wide array of weak explicatures. Thus, it can be safely said that "a wide array of weak implicatures" (Sperber & Wilson, 2001, p. 222) is the major, but not the only, source of poetic effect which is an overall artistic state or esthetic appeal of a literary text.

Ambiguity in CCP

Ambiguity in CCP operates on many levels and is caused by many factors. It has been classified into seven types by Feng (2022), namely grammatical ambiguity, lexical ambiguity, rhetorical ambiguity, thematic ambiguity, logical ambiguity, intertextual ambiguity and stylistic ambiguity. In this article, ambiguity in CCP is roughly classified into two kinds, namely, unintentional and intentional ambiguity. Unintentional ambiguity in CCP is mainly caused by grammatical differences between Chinese and other languages. Intentional ambiguity is manipulated by the poet purposefully in order to better or more artistically convey his or her intentions, which helps to achieve poetic effects. Both kinds of ambiguity may give rise to poetic effects and can be well explained by relevance theory. For example, in Dao Jia's *Seeking the Hermit in Vain* (寻 隐 者 不 遇), the first line is " 松下问童子 " (literally rendered as "Beneath pine tree ask boy"). The ambiguities in this line mainly derive from the fact that it is unclear who asks or ask, and how many boys (the master's disciples) and pine trees (one or more) are referred to. Chinese grammar allows the subject of personal pronouns to be omitted, especially first person pronouns. Thus, the subject of "ask" could be the author, the author and his friends or some other people. As to the object (童 子) (boy) and the adverbial phrase (松下) (Beneath pine tree), since Chinese has no inflections, there is no exact telling whether " 童 子 " and " 松 " have singular or plural reference. It all depends on the context and the reader's cognitive environment. Thus, in this line we have a range of weak implicatures, generating a strong poetic effect. It is very likely that the author wishes to describe a true hermit in the mountain, and the ideal reader may have the ability to identify the most relevant implicature intended by the author. If the reader wants to fully appreciate the poem, s/he has to make extra processing effort to decide which implicature is more relevant or intended by the author. In this poem, it might be "*I (the author) ask(ed) a boy beneath a pine tree*" because the author journeying alone and a single boy or

disciple will better capture the image of a true and lofty hermit in ancient China according to Chinese hermit culture. When these new assumptions are made, the contextual effect is easily achieved, and this effect may offset the extra processing effort invested in interpreting this line. This satisfies the principle of relevance, which presupposes a dynamic balance between processing effort and contextual effect. Working out the overall poetic effect of a poem usually requires more processing effort, but it is worthwhile if the contextual effect is large enough. This is especially true in interpreting and appreciating CCP. The ambiguities in the above line could be said to be unintentional because they are mainly caused by the flexible grammar of Chinese, yet the poetic effects produced should not be ignored. Intentional ambiguity are usually produced by the use of certain rhetorical devices and other techniques, such as metaphor, pun, allusion, personification, synaesthesia, hyperbole, symbolism, character-splitting (析 字), and image juxtaposition. In a word, most ambiguities in CCP, whether they are intentional or unintentional, give rise to weak implicatures which in turn are the major source of poetic effects of CCP.

According to Gutt (2004, pp. 105–107), a translation is a target language text that interpretively resembles the source text, and the resemblance it shows is to be consistent with the presumption of optimal relevance, which "is presumed to have adequate contextual effects without gratuitous processing effort." In a similar vein, Mateo (2009, p. 12) says, "In relevance theory terms, any TT should convey a presumption of relevance similar to that of the original text." In fact, the concept of optimal relevance suggests a sort of prescriptive approach to translation practice, as seen in the use of words like "is presumed" and "should" by Gutt and Mateo. Thus, it is suggested by the present author that optimal relevance could be used not only as an explanatory tool but also as a criterion to evaluate translations. This article makes an attempt to evaluate the translation of ambiguity in CCP using the criterion of optimal relevance, taking into account the poetic effects produced by the translator's decisions in dealing with ambiguities in CCP and the processing effort required of the target reader. It should be noted that a classical Chinese poem, as a piece of inferential-ostensive communication, communicates a presumption of optimal relevance, and so should be its translation. However, due to displaced contexts, or rather, to the different cognitive environments (accessibility to a set of relevant assumptions) of the source text reader and the target text reader, as well as many linguistic and cultural differences, optimal relevance is not necessarily guaranteed,

that is, a proper balance between processing effort and contextual effect is not always or even seldom achieved in translation. This also, to a certain degree, proves the necessity of applying optimal relevance to evaluate the translation of ambiguity in CCP.

Optimal Relevance: Evaluating the Translation of Ambiguity in CCP

As is mentioned above, not all ambiguities inevitably give rise to obvious poetic effects, especially grammatical ambiguity or "syntactic indeterminacy" (Jiang, 2010, p. 332) caused by the absence of some grammatical elements in Chinese, like tenses, connectives, pronouns, etc. For instance, in Bai Li's *Parting at a Tavern in Jinling* (金陵酒肆留别), the second line is " 吴姬压酒劝客尝 " (literally rendered as "A lady or ladies of Wu invite the guests to taste the newly brewed wine"). Here there is no telling whether there is one or more " 吴姬 " (lady of Wu) because Chinese nouns have no inflectional markers and the context cannot make it clear either. More importantly, both the singular and the plural reference of " 吴姬 " are poetically acceptable in this context and they may be supposed to require equal processing effort on the part of the target reader. To be more specific, this ambiguity does not necessarily result in an obvious poetic effect, although it involves sort of weak implicatures. Thus, in translating the ambiguous " 吴姬 ", the choice of either the singular or the plural form will communicate equally optimal relevance.

A good poem presupposes optimal relevance, at least to the ideal reader who has a sufficient cognitive environment, namely a set of assumptions about the author, the writing background, as well as Chinese poetics at large. So does a good translation, which should interpretively resemble the original poem, sharing its explicatures and implicatures (Gutt, 2004, p. 105). However, optimal relevance in translation is more complex because it involves more factors that should be taken into consideration, such as the author's intention, the translator's intention, the source and target readers' cognitive environments as well as linguistic and cultural differences between the source language and target language. As to the conveyance of the author's intention, "communicative clues" proposed by Gutt (2004, p. 134) are very important in that they help guide the target reader to the interpretation intended by the author. If a translator has a different intention compared with that of the author when translating a poem, optimal relevance is linked more to or should be measured more by the translator's intention than that of the author. Taking this into consideration, the following criterion will be tentatively proposed to evaluate the translation of ambiguity in CCP: a good translation should communicate a presumption of optimal relevance, which consequently requires a proper balance between processing effort and contextual effect, contributes to the overall poetic effect and esthetic appeal of the translation, and helps to convey or make manifest the author's intention and sometimes the translator's.

In the following part of this article, some typical cases of the translation of unintentional and intentional ambiguities in CCP[1] are used to illustrate this criterion.

Evaluating the Translation of Unintentional Ambiguity

Chinese is a language with very flexible grammar, and this flexibility is best shown in CCP. Generally speaking, a classical Chinese poem has a specific pattern with a fixed number of words in each line, and thus its writing follows the principle of economy to the full. This usually gives rise to grammatical ambiguity, which is not necessarily intended by the author. Unintentional ambiguity is usually connected with the lack of inflection in Chinese, such as tense and aspect, number, and personal pronouns. This kind of unintentional ambiguity makes it the translator's responsibility to search for optimal relevance. "Clarity in understanding the source text is the key to successful translating into a receptor language" (Nida, 2001, p. 129), and if the translator perceives unintentional ambiguity, s/he is expected to resolve it in the translation by explicitation. This kind of explicitation is somewhat compulsory due to linguistic differences.

Above we have discussed an example of number-related grammatical ambiguity in CCP. Let us look at another example. In Ji Zhang's *Mooring by Maple Bridge at Night* (枫桥夜泊), there are the following two lines: " 月落乌啼霜满天，江枫渔火对愁眠 " (literally rendered as "The moon setting, crow crowing, frost filled with the sky; maple tree by the river, fishing light, sleeping facing each other in sadness"). In CCP, it is commonly believed that all descriptions of scenery are to express the poet's emotions. There are many nouns in these two lines, and they are all related to the poet's

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[1] Most examples in this article are the same with those in another article by the author, see Feng (2022). But the focuses of these two articles are quite different, one emphasizing the translation of ambiguity in CCP while the other focusing on the evaluation of the translation of ambiguity in CCP from the perspective of relevance theory.

inner feelings, who was lonely and grieved when he composed the poem in the background of a political turmoil in Tang Dynasty. Let us focus on the word " 乌 " (crow). Neither the grammatical form nor the context makes it possible to decide whether the word refers to a single crow or two or even more. So the translator has to make a choice because in English it must be in either the singular or the plural form. Witter Bynner translates it as "a crow," while Yuanchong Xu's version is "crows." (Pan, 1994, p.97) Although both choices are grammatically acceptable, the poetic effect is quite different. A crow in the frosty sky can be seen as a symbol of the forlorn and depressed author himself, and its very singleness intensifies the desolate quietness of the scene, reflecting the author's inner bleakness. On the other hand, the plural form *crows* is unlikely to produce such an association or symbolic effect. In terms of relevance theory, the singular and plural forms of *crow* involve similar processing effort on the part of the target reader, but the singular form achieves a better contextual effect by better conveying the poet's intention and emotional state. Thus, the singular form *crow* is an arguably better choice and helps to achieve optimal relevance in that it provides a communicative clue that is instrumental in identifying the crow with the poet himself. Of course, the translator could help the reader to thoroughly appreciate this poem and its overall poetic effect by providing some background information about the author and the poem, i.e., by providing further communicative clues for the target reader. As communicative clues, such kind of background information undoubtedly helps enrich the cognitive environment of the target reader.

Personal pronouns, or rather the absence of personal pronouns, may also cause ambiguity in CCP because they are, more often than not, omitted in Chinese. This causes another kind of grammatical ambiguity, especially when it is not easy to determine to whom the author refers. For instance, in the couplet " 晓镜但愁云鬓改，夜吟应觉月光寒 " (literally rendered as "In the morning look into the mirror but grieve at the change of cloud-like hair at the temples; at night make verses should feel the cold of the moonbeam") written by Shangyin Li, there are four verbs, namely, " 镜 " (look into the mirror), " 愁 " (grieve), " 吟 " (make verses) and " 觉 " (feel), but there is no telling who the real subject is for each verb. David Young's translation is "mornings she looks in the mirror/to see if her hair has changed/evenings she chants sad poems/as the bright moon grows colder" while Xutranslates the two lines as "At dawn I'm grieved to think your mirrored hair turns grey; / At night you would feel cold while I croon

by moonlight" (Xu, 1992, pp. 312–313). Although typical descriptive studies do not allow us to say who is right and who is wrong, Xu's version, undoubtedly, intensifies the love between the poet and his beloved by intentionally alternating the subjects. Xu (1992, p. 313) explains in the commentary written to this poem as follows: "Looking into the mirror in the morning, the poet does not see his own image but that of his beloved, and he does not worry about the grey hair on his head but on hers. Crooning verse at night, he does not feel the chill of moonlight, but it is she who does." This enhances the poetic effect by creating a mysterious and intriguing mood. In view of the fact that this poem is commonly acknowledged as a love poem, Xu's version, giving a more forceful, intense, interesting and explicit expression of the love between the poet and his beloved, is better in that the increase in processing effort required is amply rewarded by greatly enhanced contextual effect. Moreover, the omitted subject could also refer to the poet himself, while Young's choice (she) excludes this possibility. This example also testifies to the fact that poetic effects of a translation are not necessarily reproduced but can also be recreated, and they are not exclusively produced by weak implicatures.

Chen (2006) argues that subject-adding in the translation of CCP could do harm to the esthetic appeal of the original. This argument is, to a certain degree, reasonable, but it is not always tenable. After all, languages are different. Explicitation through the use of personal pronouns is usually necessary to satisfy the norms or habits of the target language, and the poetic effect achieved will not be necessarily inferior, especially when the use of specific pronouns is the best choice among several alternatives. Thus, as long as explicitation of pronouns can achieve optimal relevance, it is a good choice. For instance, a poem written by Wu Rong entitled *Willow Floss* (杨花) goes like this " 不斗秾华不占红，自飞晴野雪濛濛。百花长恨风吹落，唯有杨花独爱风。" It is translated by Weng (1988, p. 15) as follows "Let others flaunt their beauty; let them vie for fame. I prefer to be like snow, to fill the air and fly over the sunny plains. O wind, all flowers hate you, blaming you for their fall. But I love you, I alone!" The added subject or pronouns in Weng's translation like "others," "them," "I," "you" are very interesting and appealing, giving the reader a stronger impression of animism and symbolism. Its contextual effects turn out to become even larger through explicitation of relevant pronouns. Suppose a translator should imitate the structure of the original poem, omitting those implicit or indeterminate subjects in the English translation, the target text would sound rather odd,

and might be unintelligible to the target reader. Thus, it would require too much processing effort without compensating the target reader by affording worthwhile contextual effects.

Unintentional ambiguity also occurs in the case of verbs. In translating from Chinese into English, it is the translator's duty to explicate tense and aspect—compulsory in English, but inflectionally absent in Chinese. For instance, in Zongyuan Liu's *A River Covered with Snow* （江雪）, there is a couplet which goes like this "孤舟蓑笠翁，独钓寒江雪" (literally rendered as "In a single boat a straw-cloaked old man, fish lonely in snow on the river"). Xu (1992, p. 87) translates it as "A straw-cloak'd man afloat, behold! / Is fishing snow on river cold." It seems the present progressive form is better than the simple present tense which some translators choose to use because the former can create a more vivid scene in the reader's mind and can help to build a lofty image of the fisherman, who is the symbol of the author himself. In other words, processing effort being equal, the present progressive aspect may achieve a greater contextual effect than the simple present tense. Thus, Xu's choice of tense and aspect has achieved optimal relevance.

All in all, the translation of unintentional ambiguity is usually governed by the search for optimal relevance, and explicitation is the method most frequently adopted by translators of CCP. Although explicitation reduces the number of weak implicatures (possible interpretations) present in the original, it requires less processing effort on the part of the target reader. Thus, informed explicitation of unintentional ambiguity in CCP is the natural way to achieve optimal relevance.

Evaluating the Translation of Intentional Ambiguity

Intentional ambiguity, mainly due to the use of certain rhetorical devices, is also often seen in CCP, though it is not as omnipresent as unintentional ambiguity. Unlike unintentional ambiguity, nearly all cases of intentional ambiguity contribute to the overall poetic effect of the original poem. Its translation usually requires a thorough understanding of the source text and more processing effort based on the translator's knowledge or assumptions. Thus, intentional ambiguity should be dealt with carefully in translation because optimal relevance in the original will not automatically guarantee optimal relevance in a translation that must use different linguistic devices and reckon with a large gap between the cognitive environments of source and target text readers.

Let us first look at the translation of a pun in CCP. In Yuxi Liu's *Bamboo Branch Song* （竹枝词）, there is a phonetic pun in the lines "东边日出西边雨，道是无晴却有晴" (literally rendered as "Sun in the east and rain in the west, it is not sunny but sunny at the same time"). Here "晴" (sunny) is pronounced in the same way as "情" (love, affection), and the hidden meaning of love （情） between a girl and a gallant man is what this song intends to express. Puns are almost untranslatable in poetry, and so is "晴" in this poem. If its referential meaning (sunny) is translated into the target text without conveying its hidden meaning intended by the pun (love), the intention of the author would be distorted, and the poetic effects of the original poem would be much weakened because this pun serves as what is called "the eye of the poem" （诗眼） and is rich in implicatures. Xu (2012, p. 26) translates this couplet as "The west is veiled in rain, the east enjoys sunshine. /My gallant is as deep in love as the day is fine." Here Xu changes the pun in the source text into a metaphor in the target text, and the weak implicatures in his translation are as abundant and interesting as those in the original. Since the day is both rainy and sunny, is the day "fine" or not? And consequently is the man's love for "me" (the girl in the poem) deep or not? It's not easy to say. This also results in weak implicatures in the translation. It could be said that the processing effort required of the original reader and target reader is similar, and similar contextual or poetic effects are achieved. Since the original pun is (almost) untranslatable, Xu compensates for the loss of the pun by adding an appealing metaphor, which does not reproduce the contextual effects achieved by the source text, but rather creates similar contextual effects in the target text. This is also a way out of the difficulty in translating rhetorical ambiguities in CCP.

A metaphor in CCP is ambiguous if the author does not reveal the similarities between the vehicle and the tenor. And sometimes it is even difficult to identify a metaphor as a metaphor because there are no words that link the vehicle and the tenor. For instance, in Bai Li's *Bidding Farewell to a Friend* （送友人）, there is a couplet "浮云游子意，落日故人情"(literally rendered as "Floating cloud wanderer's heart; setting sun old friend's affection"). This couplet contains two metaphors without any formal linking markers. Some translators explicate the metaphorical relation by adding "as" or "like" as formal markers, some reproduce the formal structure of the original, and some even fail to recognize them as metaphors. In Ji Zhang's *The Chaste Wife's Reply* （节妇吟）, there is a line "知君用心如日月" (literally rendered as "I know your heart is like the sun and the moon") which does not reveal the similarity between the man's love and

the sun and the moon. Both Fletcher and Hart (Lv, 2022, pp. 220–221) explicate the relation by translating it respectively into "I recognize your love as bright as shining sun or moon" and "That your thoughts are pure as moonlight, / Or as the glowing sun at midday / Overhead" respectively. The similarities they explicate are different ("bright," "pure"), which proves the ambiguous nature of many metaphors in CCP. When a poet says one thing is like another, without pointing out the similarities between them, the metaphor is open for interpretation, resulting in a rather wide array of weak implicatures about what similarity or similarities the poet intends to show. In terms of relevance theory, though the poetic effects of the above two translations which explicate some possible similarities in the metaphor, are not as strong as those of the original, they require less processing effort required of the target reader and in this way a sort of balance between contextual effect and processing effort is maintained.

Contextual pun, as a kind of rhetorical device in CCP, operates on the textual level, and refers to a poem which seems to say one thing, but actually means another (Feng, 2018, p. 151). It is the communicative context or the writer's personal experiences that reveals what the poet really intends to express by writing the poem. So it is necessary for the translator to add some background information in paratexts in order to enrich the cognitive environment of the the target reader and help them to grasp the real intention of the poet. Zhi Cao's *Seven Sorrows* (七哀) is a typical example of contextual pun, and Xu's translation goes like this (1992, pp. 113–114):

Softly on the tower streams of light play;
It seems the moon is loath to move away.
For here is beauty wilting, tender sighs,
Telling of a tender heart in pain, which cries.
May we ask who is there so full of ruth?
A wife in name, a widow, ah, in truth!
"You are far, far away for o'er ten years;
I am alone, alone and oft in tears.
"You're like the dust drawn upward on the way;
Like mud in dirty water still I stay.
One sinking, the other swimming we remain.
If ever, when are we to meet again?
"Would that I were the wind from the southwest,
That I could rush across the land to your breast!
From your embrace, if you should shut me out,
Where should I go? Where should I roam about?"

If we know little about the poet Zhi Cao in the Three Kingdoms (220–280 A. D.), his intention will escape us because all that we can gather from the translation is that it describes his sympathy for a lonely wife, whose husband has been absent for years. This proves what Xie (2011, p. 205) has argued, "What matters is often the invisible or absent context, the presence and presupposition of what is not said in and beyond what is said." This is because ancient Chinese poets usually express their intentions in an indirect way, and indirectness or implicitness (含蓄) is highly valued in Chinese poetics. Xu (1992, p. 114) has done a good job in conveying the real intention of Zhi Cao by adding a commentary in which he explains and comments like this:

During the reign of his father he [*Zhi Cao*] was the prince in favor; after his father's death he was banished from the capital by his brother. That is the reason why his poetry became melancholy and sorrowful after he was 29. If we compare his *Lament (Seven Sorrows)* with Pi Cao's *Song of the North*, we find that both describe a lonely wife longing for her absent husband. In Pi Cao we only see the poet's sympathy with the woman separated from her husband by a long war; in Zhi Cao, the abandonment of the woman alludes in effect to his own banishment and the comparison between "dust" and "mud" applies not only to husband and wife but also to the two brothers. In other words, Pi Cao's poem is an objective description of a woman's sorrow while Zhi Cao's expresses his subjective or personal feelings. So we may well say his poetry surpasses his brother's in depth and strength.

Only when a communicative clue in the form of such kind of paratextual information is given or known does the contextual pun of this poem become effective to the target reader. Thus, Xu's commentary provides the key to understanding the intention of the poet, a commentary that serves as a communicative clue which helps to enrich the cognitive environment of the target reader. It can be safely said that the contextual effect of Xu's translation (including his commentary) is large enough to justify the additional processing effort required by reading and processing the paratextual information. Thus, Xu's translation interpretively resembles the original and achieves optimal relevance as a whole. In fact, there are many other poems like this one, such as Ji Zhang's *The Chaste Wife's Reply* (节妇吟), and Qingyu Zhu's *Sending to Zhang Ji Before Imperial Examination* (近试上张水部), Ji Zhang's *Reply to Zhu Qingyu* (酬朱庆馀). They are all contextual puns which often feature a woman or a girl who stands for the poet himself in order to conceal his real intentions that are often unsuitable to openly express. Conveying the poet's intention usually requires the addition of some paratextual information to serve as a communicative clue to enrich the target reader's cognitive environment. Such

kind of paratextual information adds both explicatures and implicatures that invite the target reader to associate it with the translated poem and help make the poet's real intention more manifest, no matter what it is. It should be noted that Boase-Beier (2011, p. 42) prefers maximal relevance to optimal relevance in literary texts and translation, and paratextual information indeed helps to achieve optimal relevance. If the contextual effect achieved is well worth the cognitive effort required, then maximal relevance becomes optimal relevance, too.

Logical ambiguity refers to the implicit or indeterminate nature of logic between different words, phrases, clauses or sentences in a poem (Feng, 2022, p. 9). Sometimes it is unintentional, since Chinese (a language of parataxis) often omits logical connectives. Sometimes it is intentional and poems based on image juxtaposition belong to this intentional kind. Zhiyuan Ma's *Tianjingsha—Autumn Thought* (天净沙·秋思) is a typical example of image juxtaposition. It goes like this " 枯藤老树昏鸦，小桥流水人家，古道西风瘦马，夕阳西下，断肠人在天涯 " (literally rendered as "Dry vine, old tree, crows at dusk; little bridge, running water, village; ancient road, west wind, bony horse; the sun setting in the west; a heart-broken traveller is at the end of the earth"). Weng's prose-styled translation is as follows (1985, pp. 101–102):

> Crows hovering over rugged old trees wreathed with rotten vine—the day is about done. Yonder is a tiny bridge over a sparkling stream, and on the far bank, a pretty little village. But the traveller has to go on down this ancient road, the west wind moaning, his bony horse groaning, trudging towards the sinking sun, farther and farther away from home.

As can be seen above, in Weng's translation there are many prepositions, adverbs and participles added, such as "hovering over," "wreathed with," "yonder," "over," "on," "down," "trudging towards," and "away from," which together create a vivid mental scene. This sounds natural in English. However, it restricts, to a certain degree, the reader's free imagination by making fixed the spatial relations between these nouns. For instance, Weng says crows are "hovering over" the trees, but the original poem does not say this. It is also possible that they are flying around or perching in the trees. Most probably it is such kind of image juxtaposition that Ezra Pound liked about CCP, inducing him to create English poems of a similar structure by simply putting nouns together like "Rain; empty river; a voyage" etc. As a matter of fact, it is a controversial issue whether the logical relations between the nouns in this poem should be explicated or not. Huang (2003) takes the side of formal equivalence and argues that they should not be explicated since he believes a completely literal translation achieves a better poetic effect. Others take the opposite view and think highly of Weng's explicated translation. In terms of relevance theory, there is some tension between processing effort and contextual effect when it comes to explicating possible logical relations in translation. Formal equivalence has the potential to give rise to large poetic effects because it reproduces the wide array of weak implicatures in the original, but it is also risky in that the processing effort needed is too large for the target reader to invest, and consequently the reader might fail to understand the translation.

Here the translator's purpose in translating CCP comes into play. If the translator aims to introduce a kind of new technique for writing poems (image juxtaposition), s/he will probably reproduce the formal characteristics by flouting the rules of English grammar and using what is called "disjointed translation" (Jiang, 2010, p. 339). If s/he aims to make the translation easier to read and appreciate by more general readers, explicitation is usually preferred. In other words, optimal relevance in translation is not exclusively determined by the author's intention: it is also influenced by the translator's intention in translating the poem. As to the translation of many other similar lines in CCP, it should be judged by a flexible standard, that of optimal relevance, taking into consideration both the poet's as well as the translator's intentions.

Conclusion

Ambiguity in CCP has a wide range of types and it usually exerts a positive influence on the poetic effect of the original poem. Due to linguistic and cultural differences between Chinese and English, the translation of ambiguities in CCP poses a big challenge to translators. Wagner (1979, p. 56) maintains, "Ideally, the translation should be no more and no less ambiguous than the original." In other words, reproducing the ambiguity or keeping it intact is the best choice, at least theoretically. However, in reality explicitation is usually preferred by most translators in dealing with ambiguities in CCP, which usually involves less processing effort by the target reader. This article aims to explore the possibility of evaluating the translation of ambiguities in CCP in the framework of relevance theory. It proposes a tentative standard, that of optimal relevance. This standard takes into consideration key factors such as a proper balance (dynamic

in nature) between processing effort required of the target reader and the contextual effect(s) generated, the contribution of ambiguity to the overall poetic effect of the translated text, the function of explicitation in conveying the poet's intention in a displaced context.

It is argued that a good translation of ambiguity in CCP should communicate a presumption of its own optimal relevance, which is not necessarily identical with that of the original. CCP translators often make explicit the unintentional or intentional ambiguities occurring in a poem so as to reduce the processing effort required by the target reader. Without such explicitation, a translated poem might be unintelligible, especially in the case of unintentional ambiguity. Thus, informed explicitation (including adding some paratextual information) is indispensable to achieve optimal relevance in the translation of ambiguities in CCP. It should be noted that optimal relevance as a criterion to evaluate the translation of ambiguity in CCP is subjective in nature, especially regarding the assessment of processing effort and contextual effect involved. If possible, some quantitative or experimental researches could also be done to evaluate the translation of ambiguity in CCP in the future, which would, to a certain degree, compensate for the subjective nature in evaluating it from the perspective of relevance theory.

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