

JIANG, X. H. (2003): *A Semiotic Approach to Literary Translation – with Emphasis on Motivations Underlying Literary Language*, Beijing, Foreign Language Teaching and Research Press, 215 p.

Xu Jianzhong

Volume 49, Number 4, December 2004

URI: <https://id.erudit.org/iderudit/009800ar>

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.7202/009800ar>

[See table of contents](#)

Publisher(s)

Les Presses de l'Université de Montréal

ISSN

0026-0452 (print)

1492-1421 (digital)

[Explore this journal](#)

Cite this review

Jianzhong, X. (2004). Review of [JIANG, X. H. (2003): *A Semiotic Approach to Literary Translation – with Emphasis on Motivations Underlying Literary Language*, Beijing, Foreign Language Teaching and Research Press, 215 p.] *Meta*, 49(4), 949–950. <https://doi.org/10.7202/009800ar>

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

ROGER GOFFIN

Université Libre de Bruxelles. Bruxelles, Belgique

JIANG, X. H. (2003): *A Semiotic Approach to Literary Translation – with Emphasis on Motivations Underlying Literary Language*, Beijing, Foreign Language Teaching and Research Press, 215 p.

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

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

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

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

What Jiang has not attempted to do is to show how possible problems in literary translation could be analyzed or solved with the help of semiotics. Such an undertaking is at present impossible. It is impossible because literary translation is a rather complex process subjected to the influence of many variable parameters, such as whether the translation should be source-text-oriented or target-text-oriented, or whether a given original should be adapted for some practical or pragmatic purposes. More significantly, semiotics is by no

means an omnipotent tool, far from being capable of accounting for all translation problems. Any attempt to apply it to literary translation can only succeed to a certain extent, for many translation problems lie outside its theoretical and/or analytical scope.

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

- a) It is a pioneering attempt to investigate literary translation in terms of motivations underlying literary language;
- b) It puts forward a distinction between socio-cultural (communal) motivations and contextual (personal) motivations, a distinction that enables us to see more clearly the nature of literary language and of problems of literary translation;
- c) Through practical analyses of contextual motivations, which have been very much neglected by semiotics (including literary semiotics), it points out that contextual motivations function to turn linguistic forms *per se* into "signs," establishing additional or complementary signifying relations, which generate literary significance over and above the prepositional meaning, and which the literary translator should fully take into account;
- d) It not only demonstrates the usefulness and advantages of applying semiotics to literary translation, but reveals the limitations of semiotics when applied to literary studies.

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

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

XU JIANZHONG

*Shaanxi University of Science and Technology,
Xianyang, Shaanxi, China*

REFERENCES

- GORLEE, D. L. (1994): *Semiotics and the Problem of Translation*, Amsterdam-Atlanta, GA.
GUTT, E. (1991): *Translation and Relevance*, Mass, Basil Blackwell.

CUSIN-BERCHE, F. (2003): *Les mots et leurs contextes*, Paris, Presses Sorbonne Nouvelle, 202 p.

Fabienne Cusin-Berche est connue bien au-delà du cercle des linguistes grâce au remarquable *Mots du management* (1998), fruit d'un long travail d'observation et d'analyse, théorisé d'abord sous la forme d'une thèse, puis remanié – mais non vulgarisé – pour faire comprendre au milieu des affaires l'importance de la langue et de son emploi dans les entreprises. Il