



To Dump a Pun, or Recreate the Fun?

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The PUN is among the most widely used of rhetorical devices. It appears in a whole range of writings, from such stylised texts as *Ulysses*, through children's literature such as *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*, to more general texts, such as newspaper articles and, in particular, headlines. I once came across an editorial on cross-strait relations, which began as follows:

大陸海協會常務副會長唐樹備上星期訪台，與海基會副董事長兼秘書長焦仁和舉行會談，結果可說相當成功……原來恐怕這次可能談得起火起煙，弄成一鍋‘焦糖’，實際卻談得如膠似漆，簡直像一鍋‘糖膠’。

The word play on ‘唐’，‘焦’，‘焦糖’ and ‘糖膠’ is very interesting to Chinese readers, in particular Putonghua speakers. Unfortunately, if poetry is what gets lost in translation, the prospect for puns is even less promising. Here is the translation supplied by the same newspaper the following day:

Tang Shubei...Chiao Jen-ho....Some had feared that the talks would be fuming like a cauldron of burning Jiaotang (caramel), but they turned out to be as sweet as a pot of Tangjiao (syrup).

I am totally sympathetic with the anonymous translator who was probably overworked and underpaid. Considering the tight deadlines faced by news translators, I would have had no objection to a free translation completely omitting the pun. Even a word-for-word semantic translation supplemented by some explanation, such as “‘chiao-tang’ is homonymous to the Chinese term for ‘burnt caramel’”, would have been more acceptable. What I find baffling is that the translator should have opted for transcription, without any elaboration of the context, and thus produced a

nonsensical mis-representation for the general reader. Similarly, the translator seems to take for granted that English readers know that ‘Chiao’ (Wade-Giles) converts directly into ‘Jiao’ (Hanyu Pinyin), thus linking the two names, which is absurd.

The puns in question are undeniably difficult to translate, and there is no standard way of translation. However, after some deliberation, I have come up with a couple of suggestions for ‘recreating’ the word play:

- (1) Some had feared that Tang and his counterpart might *tangle* with each other and wouldn't give way, but it turned out that they *tangoed* all the way.
- (2) Some had feared that the two parties would *exchange fire* (or hit the roof/hit out at each other/part company). Instead they got on like *a house on fire* (or hit it off together/went into partnership).

It is unwise to stick to the original wording in such a passage, since information and efficient communication are more important than source-text identity for the editorial of a middlebrow newspaper. The average newspaper reader in English should be able to appreciate that it takes two to tango, and alliteration, rhyming and phrasal verbs should appeal to them as familiar features in journalistic discourse.

Of course, any suggested translation is for reference only as there is no ‘model answer’ for any source text, and I would welcome more suggestions from readers of this article.

Excerpted from Dr Elsie Chan's article under the same title. Dr Chan is currently Lecturer with the Division of Language Studies at the City University of Hong Kong.

別字辨正



相信大家下筆為文時，偶爾不慎寫了別字而不自知。別字與錯字不同，錯字指筆畫錯誤，別字則指構詞錯用了另一個字，例如“草~~查~~人命”寫成“草~~管~~人命”，“發人深~~查~~”寫成“發人深~~醒~~”。例一是因為字形相近，例二則由於音同而錯用。別字大多出於音同。粵語同音字很多，加上不少成語和詞語，其中一字換上一個同音字後，未必就解不通，因此別字的問題並不罕見。過往《文訊》曾為大家辨析一些常見的別字。為了讓大家對別字更敏感，遣詞用字更準確，由這一期起，《別字辨正》會定期刊出。右面一段文字有四個別字，大家能否一眼認出？

“妄顧他人安全是導至交通意外的主因。有些駕車人士自恃膽色和技術過人，在公路上任意超車，引致意外頻生。要減少交通意外，除了加強執法外，還要勸喻司機自律守法，兩者配合，才可收相輔相承之效。”

。這個成語指兩件事物互相補充配合。之意。
 相輔。是輔助的意思，‘成’在這裏有成全、配合之意。
 相輔相承。‘相輔相承’應為‘相輔相成’。
 相輔相成。‘相輔相成’應為‘相輔相成’。
 相輔相成。‘相輔相成’應為‘相輔相成’。
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