

Plenary Talk

Chunshen Zhu

'Pushing Hands': Getting translation down to a fine (martial) art

In Tai Chi, one of the most philosophic and intellectual form of Chinese martial arts, pushing hands as a sparring technique is practiced between two people with hands remaining in dynamic contact. In doing so, one is expected to 'give up' one's presuppositions in order to achieve maximum relaxation, agility, and vigilance so as to 'listen' (*tingjing*, 'listen to the energy flow') and respond to an advancing flow of energy from the other party through a crucial 'point of contact' and in a *budiu buding* ('neither separating nor confronting') way. Such responsive 'listening' and adhering to each other keep a dialogic rather than confrontational interaction going between the practitioners. The exercise is designed to sharpen one's sensitivity and to develop one's capacity for accommodating, containing, absorbing and deflecting the momentum of the energy from the other.

Following the thought-provoking cross-semiotic analogy of translation as kung fu (John Minford, 1997), I shall here characterize translation, which inevitably brings two languages into intimate contact if not violent combat, more specifically as 'pushing hands' between the source and the target language driven by each other's 'articulate energy' (Donald Davie, 1955). The process is initiated by an advancing flow of energy from the source language which is instantiated, realized, and confined in a finite text, i.e. the source text. In response to this 'foreign' energy, the target language, through the agency of a translator, mobilizes its articulate potential stored in the form of an open repertoire of syntactic resources to ensure a *budiu buding* state of contact, so as to follow the flow of the oncoming energy and to accommodate, absorb, and contain it in the formulation of a new text. Through multi-media exemplification and critical analysis, we will argue that the flexibility and agility of the articulate energy a language demonstrates in this game of pushing hands comes from its textual function of information structuring, which is sustained by its lexicogrammatical system as 'a theory of human experience' (M.A.K. Halliday, 1999). Also, we will demonstrate how, on a micro level, following the movement of information focus as the 'contact point' can help maintain a *budiu buding* mode of translation to capture, accommodate, and contain the oncoming energy as the source text unfolds, and redirect it into an emerging target text.