

**A Cognitive-Poetic Approach to Translating Typographical  
Iconicity in Pattern Poems**

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**Abstract**

Most poets produce poetic effects through the skilful use of typographical iconicity which provides a stylistic explanation for the effect of meaning lingering beyond the boundary of pattern poems. This article concentrates on the communicative function of typographical iconicity in poetry in order to show why literary language should be seen by the translators from a cognitive-poetic perspective. In so doing, the present article aims to create an awareness of the fact that translating a pattern poem goes far beyond conveying its message; that is, the iconic potential of a pattern poem assumes priority in any translation which intends to be literary.

**Key words:** pattern poems, poetic effects, typographical iconicity, cognitive poetics, literary translation.

**Özet**

Birçok şair yeteneğini, görüntüsel göstergeler (ikonlar) ile resmettiği şiirlerde kullanarak yazınsal etkiler yaratmakta; ve bu etkiler şiirlerde gizli kalmış anlamların ortaya çıkarılmasına biçimsel açıdan katkıda bulunmaktadır. Bu makale, bilişsel-yazınsal yaklaşımların edebi çeviri için önemini vurgulamak amacıyla görüntüsel göstergelerin şiirde oynadığı iletişimsel rolü konu almıştır. Bu şekilde, görüntüsel göstergeler ile resmedilmiş şiirlerin çevirisinde edebi bir nitelik yaratmayı amaçlayan çevirmenlerin önceliğinin anlam aktarımının da ötesinde, görüntüsel göstergelerin aktarımı olması gerektiği açıklık kazanmaktadır.

**Anahtar kelimeler:** resmedilmiş şiirler, yazınsal etkiler, görüntüsel göstergeler, bilişsel yazınbilim, edebi çeviri.

**Introduction**

Contrary to Saussure's ([1916] 1983, p. 59) view that language is fundamentally - if not exclusively - arbitrary (or in semiotic terms, symbolic), considerable linguistic

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the domain of the symbolic mode<sup>1</sup>. Pattern poems, however, are dominated not only by the symbolic mode, but also by the iconic mode where the images create typographical iconicity.

Let us put some flesh on the concept of typographical iconicity. ‘Easter Wings’ by George Herbert (1880, p. 34-35) is one of the best-known examples of typographical iconicity. The poem is presented as a silhouette of wings. The very shape of the poem (i.e. the rising wings of two larks) exhibits the content of the poem in which a human being is described as a lark:

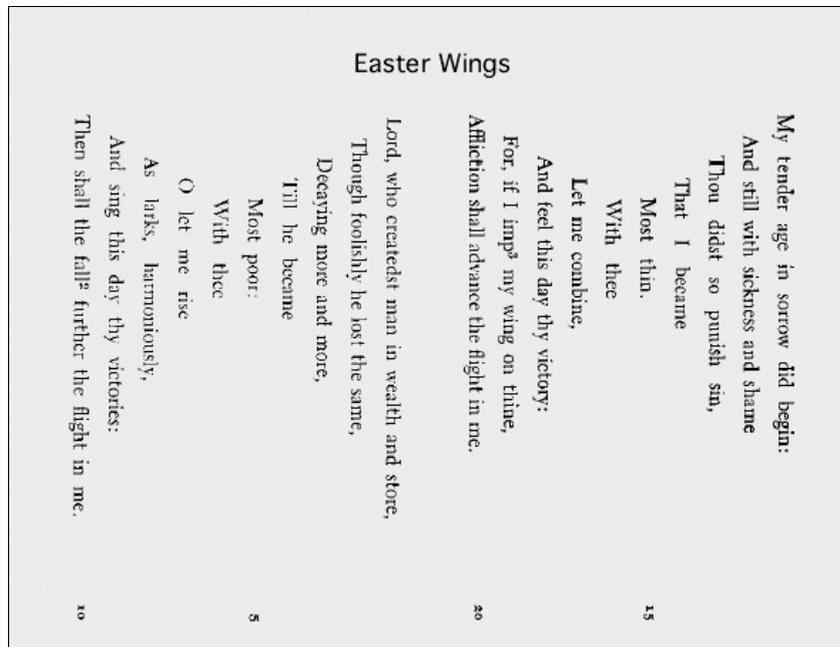


Figure 1. “Easter Wings”

Obviously, the two stanzas are set side-by-side on opposing pages, lengthwise down the page. The reader must turn the book counterclockwise, so that right-hand page is at the top, and the left-hand page is underneath it. The two stanzas thus look like two pairs of wings in mid-flight.

The reading of this poem suggests that its narrator is a human being created by the Lord and that he is (re)presented as a lark which is about to rise on Easter Day. The typographical layout, together with the title, reinforces the themes of flight and resurrection. The vertical form of the two wings both embodies the metaphorical

<sup>1</sup> The term ‘symbolic’ is used in its semiotic sense throughout this article.

meaning of Easter as rising from death and triggers associations with magnificently-winged angels. Since the wing shape is an icon, the reader of this poem needs to bear in mind that

- the wings are placed vertically to display the fact that the larks are rising;
- the rising shape is a result of the reading of the poem's content;
- the short lines such as '[m]ost poor' and '[m]ost thinne' form a pair;
- the third line in the first stanza ('[d]ecaying more and more') corresponds diagrammatically to the decrease in the length of the following lines of the poem;
- some stanzas get shorter (e.g. '[m]ost poor' and '[m]ost thinne') as the narrator describes man's transgressions against the Lord; and these stanzas only begin to expand again as the narrator's will matches the Lord's will, which graphically illustrates the theme through the arrangement of words.

### **Poetic Effects**

The reader of 'Easter Wings' needs to scan the poem in the vertical line-by-line way. On the other hand, the conspicuous symmetry calls for horizontal scanning because the poem shows that the larks are flying across the page horizontally. The visual lingering accompanies a mental processing of the verbal-visual configuration. Although the poem's verbal content is self-evident to a certain extent, it is not merely the verbal meaning, but the iconic representation of a metaphorical rendering of religious faith that tells the narrator's desire to fly with Christ as a result of Jesus' sacrifice, death, and resurrection.

The coexistence of symbolic signification (i.e. verbal mode) and iconic signification (i.e. image mode) always causes 'a cognitive challenge to the reader' (Gross, 1997, p. 24). Therefore, the reader of 'Easter Wings' has to spend significantly more time than would be required for the comprehension of a non-iconic text. The reader needs to switch alternately from (a) the verbal mode to 'the image mode on the cognitive perceptual level, that is, to decode it as an iconic sign' and (b) from the image mode to the verbal mode (Gross, 1997, p. 24). This not only slows down the reader's visual-cognitive processing, but also extends the reading time.

This is why, in many pattern poems, poetic effects 'arise from a disruption of the smooth functioning of cognitive processes' (Tsur, 1992, p. 136) of the reader who is challenged to think more and to spend more mental effort in understanding both the actual wording and the underlying meaning of iconicity. The specific style through which 'Easter Wings' is presented stops the reader in his/her track, asks him/her to forge new connections and to reactivate modes of reading that have little or no place in normal, habitual forms of reading.

Poetic effects further arise from implied messages hidden behind the stylistic arrangement of a literary text and from implicatures which may sometimes be fairly weak (cf. Sperber & Wilson, 1995, p. 194). Poetic effects created by typographical iconicity provide the reader both with implied knowledge and with a certain affective state associated with the poem in question. In 'Easter Wings', the two larks flying across the sky imply that man is expected to follow Jesus, and that Jesus is to lead him to the straight path: the way to heaven. The break down of the poem, which is 5,4,3,2,1 | 1,2,3,4,5 for each verse, creates poetic effects, too. The symmetry is seen in the breaks of the lines with each part mirroring the other. If each verse can be seen as a pair of wings that fold along the line of symmetry, it can also be said that the metrical scheme is indicative of the shape. In this respect, there is a definite order in the poem's meter, which implies the order of God and his plan (Malcolmson, 1999, p. 77). This is an eye-catching arithmetic trick. If one were to take the first five lines and average the meter (each part of the symmetrical whole), one would obtain an average of three (Malcolmson, 1999, p. 77). This would, in turn, imply the trinity of God (Malcolmson, 1999, p. 77).

In order to translate such a poem as 'Easter Wings', the translator needs to know in what ways iconicity creates poetic effects and how these effects influence the way the source-text reader receives the text. If one of the aims of translating an iconic text is to attain literariness, the main concern for the translator turns out to be recreating the affective layers of iconicity rather than purely translating the message of the text. At this point, the key question is this: how can the translator recreate the poetic effects produced by an original pattern poem? I seek answers to this question by referring to cognitive poetics which, I think, can relate the iconic style of a pattern poem to its perceived effects.

### **A Cognitive-Poetic Approach to Translating Poetic Effects in Pattern Poems**

Cognitive poetics is 'all about reading literature': mental processes involved in reading are related to cognition, and the craft of literature is linked to poetics (Stockwell, 2002, p. 1). It offers an understanding of the issues of literary value through a clear view of text and context relationship. It explicates 'cognitive theories that systematically account for the relationship between the structure of literary texts and their perceived effects' (Tsur, 2002, p. 279).

Cognitive poetics works out to find 'hypotheses drawn from the various branches of cognitive science to relate, systematically, poetic effects to poetic structures with which they have been regularly associated' (Tsur, 1996, p. 55). A cognitive-poetic approach to literary translation provides translators with the knowledge of two important

concepts - foregrounding and defamiliarization - which create an awareness of the fact that translating a pattern poem goes far beyond conveying its message; that is, its iconic potential assumes priority in any translation which intends to be literary.

Foregrounding includes a variety of stylistic effects that include the phonetic level (e.g. alliteration, rhyme), the grammatical level (e.g. inversion, ellipsis), the semantic level (e.g. metaphor, irony), and/or the typographical level (e.g. the unusual configuration of lines). Reading a pattern poem is a dynamic experience based on a process of renewing attention to create and pursue the relationship between figure and ground. Figure and ground, the two concepts that form the basis of foregrounding, are important psychological patterns. The perception of figure and ground in a visual field involves '*selection from attention*' (Stockwell, 2003, p. 15, emphasis in the original). Any stylistic device that catches the reader's attention can be seen as figure (i.e. attractor). Figure is 'a self-contained object or feature in its own right, with well-defined edges separating it from the ground' (Stockwell, 2003, p. 15). In typographic foregrounding, the creative arrangement of the lines acts as a figure (e.g. the larks in 'Easter Wings') which is foregrounded against the background of the poem's verbal content.

A cognitive-poetic approach to translating a pattern poem requires the translator to make certain aspects of the poem salient by foregrounding. To apply Havránek's (1964, p. 80) words to the context of translating pattern poems, the literary translator needs to foreground the lines of a pattern poem in such a way that 'this use itself attracts attention and is perceived as uncommon, as deprived of automatization, as deautomatized' since typographical iconicity is rarely used in everyday writing or daily correspondence. The interrelation between the iconic style in the foreground and the symbolic signs in the background should also be present in the translation of 'Easter Wings' because the information given by either mode of representation remains insufficient. Although the initial cues about the textual meaning may be verbal, neither mode can stand alone in this poem. That is, the iconic and verbal modes compensate each other's deficits, sorting out the insufficiencies.

These points have shown that only the mutual existence of a pattern poem's content and style results in a complete and comprehensible text. For instance, in order to foreground the iconic style of 'Easter Wings', the translator needs to arrange the distribution of the lines in such a way that the verbs which refer to a process of diminution should occur each time the length of the line shrinks. In the original text, these verbs are: 'lost' (line 2), 'decaying' (line 3), 'became poore' (lines 4-5), 'became ... thinne' (lines 14-15). The translator should also take into account that when the width of the verse line increases in the original poem, verbs belonging to a semantic field indicating increase and growth are used: 'rise' (line 7), 'further' (line 10), 'combine' (line 17), 'imp' (line 19), 'advance' (line 20).

As Mukarovsky (1964, p. 19) suggests, in poetic language, foregrounding ‘achieves maximum intensity’ to the extent of pushing the verbal content into the background ‘as the objective of expression and of being used for its own sake, it is not used in the services of communication, but in order to place in the foreground the act of expression’. This is because the function of literary iconicity ‘is not to make us perceive meaning, but to create a special perception of the object [or concept] - it creates a “vision” of the object [or concept] instead of serving as a means for knowing it’ (Shklovsky, 1965, p. 18). Therefore, any form of art such as a pattern poem ‘exists’ to make the reader

recover the sensation of life; it exists to make one [the reader] feel things, to make the stone stony. The purpose of art is to impart the sensation of things as they are perceived and not as they are known. The technique of art is to make objects “unfamiliar,” to make forms difficult, to increase the difficulty and length of perception because the process of perception is an aesthetic end in itself and must be prolonged (Shklovsky, 1965, p. 12).

According to the view above, foregrounding spurs defamiliarization (i.e. *ostranenie*, making strange). Many critics suggest that the major function of pattern poems is to alienate the reader (cf. Tsur 1996). Through defamiliarization, the translator can also achieve to represent the source text’s subject matter in an unfamiliar way and to estrange the reader from aspects of the ordinary language. What the translator needs to realize is that defamiliarization enables literary translation to convey meanings with an intricacy and complexity that ordinary language does not normally allow.

Defamiliarization in ‘Easter Wings’ makes the reader undergo a three-phased process. First of all, the poetic style impresses the reader and captures his/her attention. Secondly, typographic foregrounding estranges the reader, forces him/her to slow down, allowing time for the feelings to develop into interpretative efforts. Thirdly, these efforts facilitate the derivation of rich implicatures. According to Miall and Kuiken (1994, p. 397), after this stage, the reader carries on enriching his/her interpretations ‘to find or to create a context’ in which the defamiliarized aspects of the poem can be placed.

If, as Miall and Kuiken (1994, p. 398) note, this is the ‘central part of the constructive work required of the reader of a literary text’, the central task of the literary translator is to recreate the iconic source-text’s style in order to trigger emotions in a way that makes the iconic mode a constructive part of the target reader’s reading process. This not only restores the iconic dimension of reading a literary translation, but also locates it in a contradictory relationship with the reader’s automatic reading practice. Put differently, by defamiliarizing the signs and by deautomating the reading process through which those signs are decoded, the translator manages to remind the target-text reader of the visual aspect of literary translation.

### Two Pattern Poems in Translation

This section aims at addressing the problems of translating typographical iconicity and offering some strategies that can be used in literary translations.

#### *The Translation of ‘Swan and Shadow’*

‘Swan and Shadow’ was written by John Hollander (1983) who is an American poet and literary critic. As the title also suggests, the form of a swan and its shadow constitute the main theme of the poem. The poem shows that the swan’s image gradually comes out on the page; and as the poem proceeds, it slowly changes into its shadow until it fades away, in a more or less the same way that the reflection of a real swan passes out of sight into the water. There is no punctuation in the poem, and the capital letters tell the reader when a new idea or sentence begins. The poem illustrates a distinct form of typographical iconicity since it looks like a painting. The reader is expected by the poet to perceive the main theme of the poem through the icon of the swan (Hollander, 1983, p. 75):

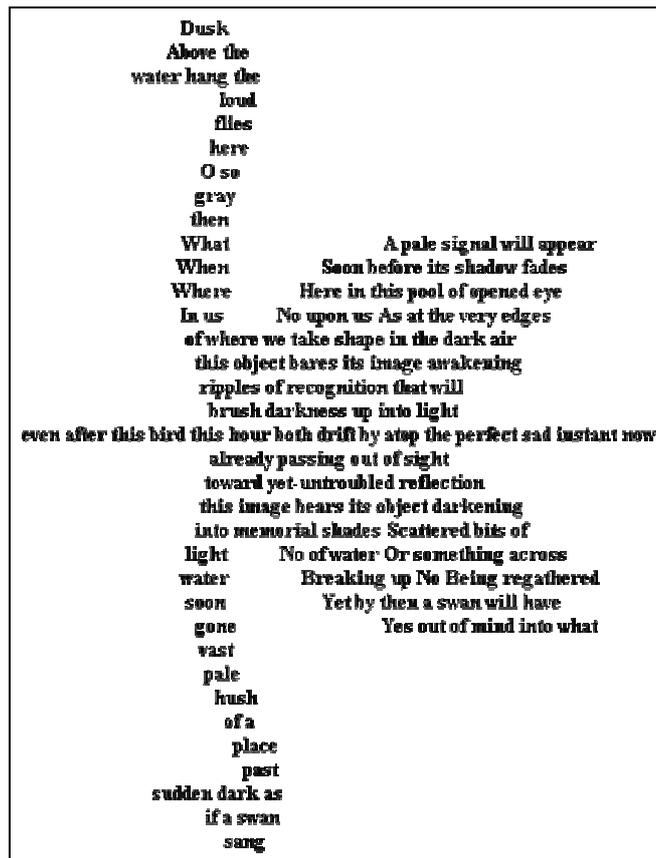


Figure 2. “Swan and Shadow”

The difficulty in translating ‘Swan and Shadow’ would stem not only from conveying the actual meaning, but also from the necessity to recreate the actual shape which the poet has intended for the source-text reader to see. If the purpose of translating this poem is to provide the target-language reader with the same effect which the original poem has on its own reader, then the translator needs to reproduce the actual shape of a swan.

Since the title of the poem (‘Swan and shadow’) indicates the very presence of a swan, the creation of any other sea animal such as a duck would not be appropriate in the translation. Last but not least, if the words located in the upper part of the translation depict the image of a swan and those in the lower part of the translation create an image which is different from that of the swan, this will also be inappropriate. The translator of this poem, hence, needs to bear in mind that

- it is of primary importance to recreate the shape of a swan;
- the line, ‘even after this bird this hour both by atop the perfect sad instant now’, forms a bridge between the two halves of the poem (i.e. the swan’s actual appearance and the fading of its reflection).

Following is the poem’s Greek translation made by Venetia Kyritsi (2002, p. 97):

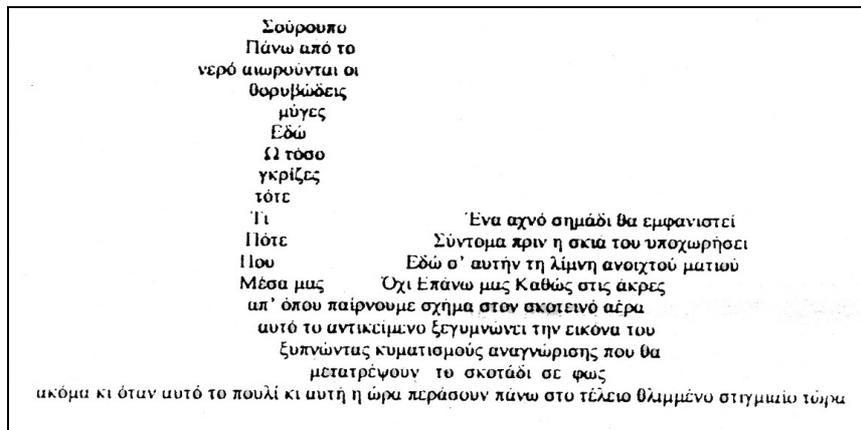


Figure 3. Kyritsi’s Translation of ‘Swan and Shadow’

Kyritsi achieves to estrange the target-text reader who is accustomed to the acquired, automatic reading practice. However, as she also points out in her self-criticism, ‘the shape of the translated poem resembles somehow the shape of the original, but the effect is not same. The head of the *swan*, for example, looks more like the head of an *ostrich* and its neck seems to have been eaten away at some places’ (Kyritsi, 2002, p. 97, my emphasis). Another criticism that could be levelled against the Greek translation of ‘Swan and Shadow’ is that the translation illustrates the swan, but not its shadow.

In the translation of 'Swan and Shadow', the arrangement of letters and words is expected to create an image that offers the meaning visually. Thus, the translator of this poem needs to combine the visual and literary impulses: to tie together the experience of these two areas into an aesthetic whole. In order to do this, the translator should be able to make a graphic organization which is based on the following:

- Shape: The translator of a pattern poem needs to pay attention to the shape of the letters because the shape of the letters of a certain type family (e.g. Times New Roman) is very different from that of any other type family (e.g. Helvetica).
- Size: Size is a vertical measure. The translator may need to change the size of the target-text letters in order to adapt the image created by the target-language words to the original image created by the source-language words.
- Weight: Type may be bold, light, extra light or extra bold or any shade of grey. It may sometimes be a necessity for the translator to change the type from bold to extra light (or visa versa).
- Posture: The translator needs to decide whether a word or phrase is to be set in a type that is roman (upright) or italics (slanted).
- Colour: A text is normally set in grey. But in some translations, the translator may have to use a different colour in order to foreground the original poem's iconic style in a way which will best enable the target-text reader to associate the visual icon with the poem's message.

The major elements of graphic organization indicate that it is not always sufficient to choose the most appropriate target-language words in the translation of typographic iconicity. The translator also needs to adjust the shape, size, and even the colour of the target text with a view to creating the same image demonstrated in the source text. If, for instance, Kyritsi had enlarged the font size of the individual letters rather than shrinking them and had used a larger type family, the neck of the animal would have seemed longer. In such a case, there would not have been a criticism that the neck of the swan was exposed to typographic erosion in the translation.

#### ***The Translation of 'La Cravate et la Montre'***

'La Cravate et la Montre' was written by Apollinaire (1947) who invented the French adjective *surréaliste* and challenged the dogmas of the early 20th century society. Clothing was then seen as a hierarchical symbol because the higher-class people or the so-called civilised people preferred tight-fitting clothing. The poem's style is free and there are no rhymes. The 'tie' section of the poem indicates a verbal-iconic contradiction between the image of a tie and the verbal message which calls on the higher classes to take it off. In the 'watch' section, the numbers on the clock are not represented



Therefore, the reader of the ‘tie’ section is expected to read the uppercase letter of the tie, go down, and follow the words to the bottom left, then go back to ‘tu veux bien’. On the other hand, the reader of the ‘watch’ section needs to bear in mind that

- there are specific sets of words at each hour;
- in position one, we have ‘[m]on coeur’ (my heart); ‘les yeux’ (the eyes) is placed in position two; in position three, we have ‘l’enfant’ (the child) which represents the third person in a family; and in the last position, we have ‘le vers dantesque luisant et cadavérique’ (and the Dante-esque poetry shining and cadaver-like) which occurs at the eleventh hour;
- the hands of the watch are the cyclical symbol, inevitably coming back to the hour; however, this cycle represents not a day but a lifetime, starting in the early stages with a heart, eyes, and a child;
- the hands travel around the clock, and we presently witness them at 11:55.

‘La Cravate et la Montre’ illustrates that iconicity is in the eye of the beholder: the perception of an imitative form depends on the reader’s capacity to see connections, to perceive similarities between the meaning of the poem and the formal means used for its expression. Thus, reproducing the poem’s iconicity is a challenge for the translator and requires him/her to possess the talent of capturing the defamiliarizing effect of the original and to be able to apply foregrounding with the highest degree of similitude in the target language.

If the purpose of translating ‘La Cravate et la Montre’ is to achieve the original’s aesthetic effect, the key task of the translator can be characterised as constructing, in the target language, a text entity (involving linguistic and visual effects) that gives the target-text reader the possibility of (i) facing the same reading challenge which the source-text reader has, (ii) experiencing the same rhetorical effects, (iii) making the same links between images, concepts and propositions, and (iv) finding the same solutions as the reader of the source text does. At this point, let us analyse how ‘La Cravate et la Montre’ is translated by Férot (2004)<sup>2</sup>:

The painful tie you are wearing oh civilised one,  
take it off if you wish to breathe well  
what fun we are having  
hours  
my heart  
eyes  
the child  
Agia  
the hand  
Tireis  
week

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<sup>2</sup> The English translation is on-line at [http://www.everything2.com/index.pl?node\\_id=1258779](http://www.everything2.com/index.pl?node_id=1258779)



It is clear that Greet is successful in locating the target-language words in such a way that this location itself foregrounds the very shape of the tie and the shape of the watch. The reader is able to see the verbal-iconic contradiction that takes place in the tie section. The implied meaning that time is running out is also accessible in Greet's translation because the translator manages to portray, through the words, that the hands of the clock are set at 11.55.

Literary representation of iconicity is not just purely linguistic, but also cognitive in Greet's translation. Typographical iconicity models the target-text reader's cognitive processes by which intuitive interpretations are formed into expressible meanings. The cumulative effect of the translated poem's iconic potential enables the target-text reader to treat the poem as the embodiment of the opinions and intentions of its creator. This indicates that both foregrounding of the original poem's iconicity and defamiliarization of its subject matter give rise to a kind of target-text reading which is an attempt to derive - from stylistic cues - the cognitive state of the poet with the set of attitudes, beliefs, and intentions that influence it. In such a way, it is possible to trigger responses on the part of the target-text reader whose dynamic role continues as long as he/she is provided with the opportunity of interacting with the poetic effects.

## **Conclusion**

Pattern poems make use of symbolic signs to form 'an iconic-pictorial-supersign' (Gross, 1997, p. 16). As Leech and Short (1981, p. 79) suggest, 'the iconic force in language produces an enactment of the fictional reality through the form of the text'. This 'enactment', they maintain, brings into being a whole new perspective 'as readers, we do not merely receive a report of the fictional world; we enter into it iconically' (Leech & Short, 1981, p. 80). In other words, when form mimes meaning, as it does in pattern poems, the effect on the reader is not just limited to that of the perception of the bare iconic force. In addition, this process may tap into the cognitive, and for some scholars, by default, emotive, experiential world of the reader, pulling him/her, into what Leech and Short (1981) refer to as the 'dramatic performance', a role inextricably laden with emotive layers that provide the reader with the ways of constructing particular interpretations and of deriving implicatures. In such cases, the translator's central task should be 'to preserve, as far as possible, the range of possible responses' (Hatim & Mason, 1990, p. 11) and to make the target-text reader go through an aesthetic experience which is an account of real cognitive processes triggered when the translated poem is read.

Strategies for translating pattern poems should be furnished with a cognitive-poetic approach which requires the literary translator to start with translating the style rather than the content. An understanding of style as conveying implicit meanings and

sometimes rather weak implicatures equips the literary translator with the legitimate right to use his/her creative potential in the act of translation. Translation is a sort of reproductive art where the creativity of the translator goes into action. Translational creativity becomes significant in the translation of iconicity because, as Neubert (1997, p. 19) suggests,

[i]n the course of achieving something new, mediators [translators] have to resort to novel ways of encoding an old message. They are forced to creativity because the means of the TL [target language] are not identical with those of the SL [source language]. [...] To arrive at an adequate TL version, new resources have to be tapped. In these efforts, creativity plays a prominent role. Creative uses of the target language are the result of the various problem-solving strategies applied to any piece of SL text.

To conclude, this article argues that the two significant problem-solving strategies for literary translation, which a cognitive-poetic approach brings forward, are foregrounding and defamiliarization. Thus, it is strongly suggested that the literary translators need to bear in mind the creativity-producing potential of foregrounding and defamiliarization in the translations of typographic iconicity.

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