

# Contrastive Analysis of Graphological Deviation in Chinese and English Concrete Poetry

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**Abstract:** Concrete Poetry is a type of literature that still exists today but less known for people. This research focuses on the effects of graphological deviation in English and Chinese Concrete Poetry, thus compares the disparities produced by the violation of norm language. Furthermore, readers are expected to enhance the profound understanding and appreciation essence of poems by accessing this unconventional language style.

**Keywords:** Graphological deviation; Concrete poetry

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## 1. Literature Review

### 1.1 Concrete Poetry

The Encyclopedia Britannica defines Concrete poetry as “verse in which the typography or lines are arranged in an unusual configuration, usually to convey or extend the emotional content of the words.” In other words, it is a type of visual poetry that relies on the arrangement or placement of words on a page, to form a visual image for the reader which strengthens the meaning and content of the work.

The Swiss poet (Gomringer 1953) published a collection of his works in 1953, each only one word in length. He referred to them as constellations and insisted that it was the positioning of the word on the page that was of more importance than the meaning of the word itself. In that same year, in Sweden, (Fahlstrom 1953) wrote a Concrete Poetry Manifesto; however, he apparently had no knowledge of Gomringer’s work<sup>[1]</sup>.

In Canada, the development of Concrete Poetry has emerged independently in both eastern and western of the country. In the early sixties, poets began to express the needs to revitalise the traditional forms of poetry, which had become inadequate in expressing the realities of North American culture. The impetus to create new forms and develop themes, resulted from a similar dissatisfaction with the traditional literary standards.

In Chinese literary history, Concrete Poetry does not yet have a proper place, as it has been ignored as a literary genre; however, it does originate from ancient times to the

present under visual poetry name. Modern Chinese poets, especially poets from Hong Kong, Taiwan, and overseas, usually pay more attention to a poems’ shape. They have written many concrete poems. They intend to use the form of the poem to attract readers, as they believe that this form of poetry is more expressive than other forms of modern Chinese poetry. Concrete poetry has become more important than ever, as a form<sup>[2]</sup>.

In his book, (Yip 1983), discussed the beautiful formats of poems. He offers the history and the development of Chinese concrete poems, especially in modern times. However<sup>[3]</sup>, the prominence lies in the beauty of the form and image. He puts more energy into the introduction of the poet’s experience and the creation of the background.

(J.M 1998) gives a full introduction of concrete poems, and illustrates them from the aspects of vision, sound, and format. We find that the focus of the concrete poem analysis is on the poetry format.

The language of Concrete Poetry is a real challenge to English, as well as Chinese readers. The violation of conventional usages or rules, out of its artistic or thematic motivation, can lead to the deviation of English and Chinese Concrete Poetry (Leech 2001). Therefore, the deviation constitutes an important part of the particular style of poetry<sup>[4]</sup>.

There are also scholars, who study literary language, and have conducted vast research in this field. For example, in (Wang 2002) book, there are chapters discussing poetic language in Chinese, as well as in English<sup>[5]</sup>. In Wang’s book, he regards Graphological Deviation

as the external feature of poetic language, and believes that the function is to serve and reflect a feature of poetic language.

(Wang 2002) emphasises that the poem is a special language art with a various style and the best form. The poem shape is the basic form of the poem's style, and can demonstrate the poetic writing ability of the poet. English poets have more freedom of style, as English poems usually have an opened poem form.

## 1.2 Graphological Deviation

It is defined as "the violation of the norm of standard and its systematic violation is what makes possible the poetic utilization of language; without this possibility there would be no poetry" (Mukarovsky 1983). According to Mukarovsky, normal uses of language cannot be seen as the expressive and aesthetic power. Deviation is the breaking of rules of which others obey. Poetry, as a genre, is a deviation from ordinary language. Despite the poetic deviation, poetry has its own rules and norms which separate it from ordinary language, and therefore create its own pattern<sup>[6]</sup>.

(Leech 2001) divided deviation into phonological, graphological, grammatical, lexical, semantic, dialectal deviation, deviation of register, and deviation of historical period. He defined Graphological Deviation as a strangeness of written form, as it occurs in sub-area of graphology, such as capitalization, spacing, and punctuation" (2001). In other words, graphological deviation is a way in which words and sentences are arranged as graphs to represent something.

(Short 1999) published an article to examine the use of graphological deviation, as an indicator of a viewpoint in the opening of a novel. In this article, graphological deviation in the novel's opening is seen to be (i) a marker of style shifts that help the reader "navigate" from one narrative level to another and, (ii) a symbolic representation, on the page, of movements, up and down, from one level of narration to another<sup>[7]</sup>.

As for the Chinese scholars, (Qin 1987) indicated that written has some relationship to pronunciation. To some extent, the phonological deviation reflects the graphological deviation. For example, in *Pygmalion* (1912), George Bernard Shaw used graphological deviation language to embody the dialectal characteristics of dramatic personae such as e's (=he is), bo-ooots (=boots).

In (Feng 1992) and (Feng 1993), he discusses some of the Deviation forms, features and functions and specific forms of Deviation in collocation. Although he limits his discussion to collocation deviation in Chinese lan-

guage, some common features about graphological deviation and poetic language can be found between different languages.

## 2. Theoretical Background

In (Wang 1990), he divided deviation into surface structure and deep structure, and emphasises that the former include phonological, graphological, syntactic, and lexical deviation; the latter include rhetorical devices, such as metaphors<sup>[8]</sup>.

From Wang's study, Graphological Deviation can be classified as a sub-area of graphology, as can be the shape of the text, the type of print, grammatics. Here, we will focus on the three sub-areas.

The shape of text, especially the shape of the poem strikes us as unusual, due to its unconventional shape<sup>[9]</sup>. The shape of literary poetry can be designed in an unconventional way, so that it may be suggestive of a certain literary theme. Let us look at the poem below:

### Easter Wings

Lord, who createdst man in wealth and store,  
Though foolishly he lost the fame,  
Decaying more and more,  
Till he became  
Most poore:  
With thee  
O let me rife  
As larks, harmoniously,  
And sing this day thy victories:  
Then shall the fall further the flight in me.

My tender age in sorrow did beginne  
And still with sicknesses and shame  
Thou didst so punish sinne,  
That I became  
Most thinne.  
With thee  
Let me combine,  
And feel this day thy victorie:  
For, if I imp my wing on thine,  
Affliction shall advance the flight in me.

(George Hebert, 1633:174)

If we look closely, we will find that the last letter of each line is e. Sometimes, the expression of this type of poem depends much on what the poem looks like.

Writers choose to express their ideas by way of manipulation of the type of print, which includes italics, bold print, capitalization and decapitalization. In the following sentence of a poem, the features of capitalization and decapitalization could be recognized as a kind of graphological deviation.

Me up and does  
Me up at does  
out of the floor  
quiet Stare

a poisoned mouse  
 still who alive  
 is asking what  
 have i done that  
 You wouldn't have

(E. E. Cummings, 1958:32)

In this poem, the title becomes a part of poem. The writer uses the words, "Me" and "You" in strong contrast with "i". He has breached the rule of capitalizing only the first letter <sup>[10]</sup>.

Grammetrics is the way to divide grammatical units into lines and stanzas, to achieve an intended effect. Let us use the same poem to illustrate grammetrics:

Me up and does  
 Me up at does  
 out of the floor  
 quiet Stare  
 a poisoned mouse  
 still who alive  
 is asking what  
 have i done that  
 You wouldn't have

(E. E. Cummings, 1958:32)

This poem is composed of 8 lines and 26 words. Although the poem contains words which we use in daily life, it is not easy for us to understand the meaning of the poem, due to the incomplete sentences. Through the manner of expression, one can perceive the falling down feeling of heartbreak <sup>[11]</sup>.

From Wang's classification, the reader has a clear view of the sub-area of graphological deviation. Based on this study, graphological level can be regarded as the realization of language in its written form. Graphological variation is the chief means of producing 'eye-catching' effects.

### 3. Justification of the Study

Since Concrete Poetry is still relevant today and not merely an outdated literary form, this subject is chosen by the author for her research and study. The study focuses on the effects of Graphological Deviation in English and Chinese Concrete Poetry, and it also compares the similarities and differences in English and Chinese concrete poetry produced by graphological deviation. Without knowledge of these issues from the perspective of Graphological Deviation, it is difficult or impossible to have a deep understanding and appreciation of the essence of these poems. From this research, we can find there are numerous studies on this topic; however, few have made

a comparison between effects of English and Chinese Concrete Poetry from the perspective of Graphological Deviation; therefore, it will be of some academic value to explore this field.

#### 3.1 Effects of Graphological Deviation in English and Chinese Concrete Poetry

##### ● Foregrounding

The word, "foregrounding" originates from a Czech word, and was first used by the Prague school. In the 20th century, the concept of foregrounding was widely used.

When we discuss foregrounding and deviation, we must consider what may cause them. In this study, we can find poets use unconventional expressions to achieve this certain effect.

(Mukarovsky 1983) has stated, "The purpose of foregrounding in standard language is to draw the reader's attention in the theme; whereas, in poetic language, foregrounding, is not for language communication, but for the expression that is speech act itself, the function of poetic language consists in the maximum of foregrounding of the utterance".

According to (Leech 2001), he declares that the unique creative innovations of poetry are what we must chiefly have in mind, when discussing foregrounding. From the study, it is evident that through using the graphological deviation in English and Chinese concrete poems, foregrounding can be achieved.

##### ● Create imagery

Imagery is a visually descriptive or figurative language, especially in a literary work. (Wang 2002) has stressed that the most important function of poetry is to help create imagination in people, as well as to explore intelligence <sup>[12]</sup>.

When we think about the 20 Chinese and English Concrete poems, we clearly outline, from the graphological deviation form, that the creation of complex and multi-layer images is achieved. The words and sentences in poems have composed a picture of animals, as well as have broadened the power of imagination.

##### ● Create Ambiguity

(Leech 2001) has said, "The whole significance of poem pivots on this ambiguity, which of course could not have arisen if the poem had used conventional capitalization and punctuation." <sup>[13]</sup>

Based on his view and analysis in this study, we can conclude when the poet suggesting a feeling of being unsure about something or to make the reader wonder about the true meaning (but not really be sure about the true meaning), ambiguity produced.

### 3.2 The Similarities and Differences in English and Chinese Concrete Poetry which Produced by Graphological Divation

From the perspective of psychology and linguistics, a process of human minds to reflect objective reality. To be specific, it is a process of our minds to do analysis, synthesis, and judgment. People of different cultures have similar ways of perceiving the world, for example, through visuals. Poets often employ shape of text to resembling animals or other physical objects from the reality world; thus, this deviation carry on objective meaning than abstract. In this case, reader will assimilate specific information instead of blur. The same phenomenon can be found in both English and Chinese concrete poetry <sup>[14]</sup>.

On the other hand, if we make a closely research, we will discover that the traits of Chinese characters can explain the deficiency in type of print. From (Zhang 2017), the graphological deviation in Chinese characters should conform two regulations, which are originated from ancient times: reflect of reality world and for the convenience of handwriting. For example, 流水瀑布 is the imitation of the waterfall; 蘇 - 苏 has shown the deviation from traditional Chinese character to a simplified one. In general, Chinese poets will not employ type of print in poetry, due to the inside language rules.

### 4. Methodology

A suitable theory is essential for a scientific study. This paper is based on (Wang 1990) classification of graphological deviation. He emphasises that graphological deviation can occur in any sub-area of graphology, such as in the shape of the text, the type of print, or in the grammetrics.

In Wang’s opinion, the poems strike people as unusual as a result of their specific shapes, which resemble physical objects. Through manipulating the type of print, such as by using italics, bold print, capitalization, and recapitalization, the idea will be expressed. Grammetrics refers to incomplete lines or stanzas of the poem which create a strong, pulling-forward effect.

The English poems are mainly chosen from the works of E.E.Cumming, William Carlos Williams, Roger McGough, and John Hollander. The Chinese Concrete Poetry is mainly taken from the works of Zhan Bing, Li Qingsu, Wen Kai, and Bai Ling. The data comprise a total of 10 English Concrete Poetry and 10 Chinese ones. The selection of research materials is based on the following principles: each poem has at least one type of graphological deviation; the length of each poem is less than 200

words or characters.

To achieve the purpose of the research, this paper will take a quantitative approach to make an analysis. The data analysis in this study will follow 2 steps:

(1) Quantify the sub-classification of graphological deviations in the selected English and Chinese Concrete poems, using the theory of Wang Shouyuan.

(2) Quantify the effects in sub-classification of graphological deviation of selected English and Chinese Concrete poems.

**Table 1.** Graphological deviation in English and Chinese concrete poetry

	English poetry	Chinese poetry
Shape of text	7 (Figure 11/12/13/14/15/18/20)	9(Figure 1/2/3/5/6/7/8/9/10)
Type of print	3 (Figure 12/17/20)	0
Grammetrics	7 (Figure 11/12/13/14/18/19/20)	8 (Figure 1/2/3/5/7/8/9/10)

**Table 2.** The effects of sub-classification of graphological deviation in English concrete poetry

	Shape of text	Type of print	Grammetrics
Foregrounding	7	3	7
Create images	7	3	7
Create ambiguity	0	3	7

**Table 3.** The effects of sub-classification of graphological deviation in Chinese concrete poetry

	Shape of text	Type of print	Grammetrics
Foregrounding	9	0	8
Create images	9	0	8
Create ambiguity	0	0	8

From data, it is evident that none of type of print be used in Chinese concrete poetry; the shape of text cannot create ambiguity in both English and Chinese concrete poetry. To achieve the purpose of the research, this paper will also take a qualitative approach to ensure that the research is objective. This paper contains statistics of the three sub-areas of Graphological Deviation in English and Chinese Concrete Poetry and the three types of effects. A qualitative analysis can make it clearer: the possible reasons of the results, to explore the poets’ intention behind the effects.

Overall, this study is contrastive, and involves the combination of quantitative and qualitative methods.

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