

A Study on the Translation Strategies of Literary Works from the Perspective of Cognitive Metaphor Theory——Taking *The Aeronaut* as an Example

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Abstract

This study takes the English translation of Shuang Xuetao's novel *The Aeronaut* as its research object. Based on Cognitive Metaphor Theory and adopting a qualitative research approach, it aims to explore the translatability of metaphors in literary works and the cross-cultural transfer mechanisms of folkloric metaphors within Northeast China's industrial context, while summarizing translation strategies for metaphorical imagery in literature. Metaphor is not merely a rhetorical device, but more essentially a cognitive function that plays a vital role in helping people understand and engage with the world. The use of metaphor enriches human experience of the world, and its significance in the development of human civilization cannot be underestimated. The conversion of literary language involves people's cognition of linguistic meaning and the pragmatic effects of deep-seated semantic layers, which lay the foundation for the conveyance of metaphoric meaning in translation. The findings reveal that textual processing is always conducted within specific contextual environments. In the process of metaphor translation, the constraining role of cultural context is most prominent. Therefore, metaphor translation must also take textual context and literary context into consideration. When facing different types of metaphors in varying situations, translators employ distinct strategies. The author categorizes these into three types: Retaining the source domain for bodily universal metaphors, modifying the source domain for culture-specific metaphors, omitting the source domain for incommensurable metaphors. The study on English translation of metaphors in *The Aeronaut* contributes to enriching interdisciplinary perspectives in cognitive metaphor research, while also holding referential value for the translation practice of avant-garde fiction, particularly regarding the English translation of metaphors.

Keywords: Cognitive Metaphor Theory; Literary Works; Translation Strategies

1. Introduction

Metaphor is not only a rhetorical device of language, but also a cognitive tool and way of understanding. It originates from the life experience of cultural groups and is intrinsically related to culture. Since the rise of cognitive linguistics in the 1980s, the theoretical direction of metaphor research has undergone a major transformation, from a traditional rhetoric paradigm to a cognitive semantic perspective. This shift suggests that the essence of metaphor transcends verbal modification and serves as a building mechanism for the human conceptual system. The existence of metaphor is not limited to language expression, but is also significantly reflected in individual actions. In fact, the conceptual structure on which human cognition is based, including thoughts and actions, is fundamentally constructed through metaphorical mapping within a cognitive framework (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980).

As a representative text of avant-garde novels, *The Aeronaut* becomes an ideal sample for observing language examples of cognitive models due to its high-density metaphor network. Cognitive models with metaphorical characteristics will inevitably be reflected in the process of language expression and cognition, and will leave obvious traces in different texts. In literary translation, cross-lingual reconstruction of these traces poses unique challenges, mainly because of the conceptual asymmetry between the source language and the target language. Cognitive metaphor theory provides methodological support for analyzing cross-cultural conceptual mapping in translation. By systematically examining the metaphor processing mechanisms in the English version of *The Aeronaut*, this study reveals the regular path of cognitive model transformation in avant-garde literary translation, thus enriching the interdisciplinary perspective of cognitive metaphor research and providing reference value for the translation of metaphor-intensive texts.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Cognitive Metaphor Theory

The understanding of metaphor has undergone a profound transformation over centuries of scholarly inquiry. The concept of metaphor has a history spanning over two millennia in Western theoretical thought, originating in ancient Greece where it

was primarily viewed within the domains of rhetoric and poetics. In this traditional view, metaphor was considered a stylistic device, a figure of speech used for embellishment or comparison, distinct from literal language. However, the 20th century marked a significant turning point, driven by the “linguistic turn” and the rise of cognitive science, which dramatically altered the scope and definition of metaphor (Guo, 2011). Cognitive Metaphor Theory posits that metaphor is not merely a linguistic phenomenon but, more fundamentally, a cognitive one. It is understood as a mode of thought, a primary means by which humans conceptualize abstract domains in terms of more concrete or experiential domains. This conceptual mapping, rather than just a linguistic substitution, is the core of metaphor according to Cognitive Metaphor Theory. This cognitive function is arguably the most important tool for understanding abstract concepts, citing analyses in diverse fields like poetry, politics, philosophy, and mathematics as evidence for its pervasive nature. The understanding of metaphor has shifted from a purely linguistic or rhetorical phenomenon to a basic cognitive mechanism, which has a profound impact on its research in many fields, including literary analysis and translation. People now think that metaphor is not just a matter of words, but also a matter of thought and action, and it builds the way we perceive, conceptualize and interact with the world (Cao, 2018). This cognitive perspective highlights the important role that metaphor plays in helping people understand abstract concepts by mapping them into more concrete or experienced areas. The use of metaphor enriches human experience and is closely linked to the development of human civilization (Liu, 2005).

Lakoff and Johnson are credited with the groundbreaking work of Cognitive Metaphor Theory, their theory has also been reviewed and debated. Questions have been raised about their research methods, specific theoretical interpretations, and classification of metaphor types, including structural metaphor, ontological metaphor, and directional metaphor. These criticisms and challenges did not weaken the theory of cognitive metaphor, but instead promoted its continuous revision and improvement, and promoted the further development of the theory. Kövecses (2020) explores complex issues such as the existence of literal language, the interaction between the conceptual and contextual levels of metaphor, and the differences between offline and online metaphor processing, further enriching this field and demonstrating the continued vitality and complexity of cognitive metaphor research. Finally, the cognitive approach advocated by international researchers interprets metaphor as a complex cognitive phenomenon, which is of great significance to communication, psychology and cognition. Its role is not limited to style improvement, but also includes cognitive structure construction and communication efficiency improvement, and even plays a role in genre formation, heuristic exploration, and memory coding (Radetska & Milova, 2025). This comprehensive view of metaphor as a basic cognitive tool provides a solid theoretical framework for analyzing the function of metaphor in literature and the challenges it faces in cross-cultural communication.

The transition from viewing metaphor as a rhetorical device to viewing it as a cognitive function represents a fundamental paradigm shift in the field of metaphor research. Shi (2017) traces this evolution, pointing out that the focus of research has shifted from focusing on the decorative function of metaphor to exploring its conceptual role, and has shifted from analyzing linguistic expressions to examining non-verbal metaphorical thinking and even multimodal presentation. This broadened perspective recognizes the fusion and complementarity of different metaphorical concepts, including rhetoric, cognition, grammar, context, and multimodal forms. The influence of Cognitive Metaphor Theory has gone far beyond the field of linguistics and penetrated into philosophy, cognitive science and even natural science and computer science, making metaphor a ubiquitous and increasingly complex theoretical concept.

2.2 Metaphor of Literary Works

Translation of literary works has long been the core and complex part of the field of translation studies. Unlike the translation of technical or information texts, literary translation must not only accurately convey the meaning at the linguistic level, but also convey aesthetic values, emotional resonance, cultural nuances, and the author’s unique style. Among the many linguistic and rhetorical devices used by the author to achieve these effects, metaphor is particularly important. Traditionally, metaphor has been mainly regarded as a rhetorical device and a decorative decoration on literal language, but the true depth and widespread impact of metaphor on human thinking and communication are increasingly recognized, especially with the emergence of cognitive science and cognitive linguistics. The challenges inherent in translating metaphor, particularly those deeply rooted in specific cultural or folkloric contexts, are significant. Such metaphors often carry layers of meaning, associations, and emotional weight that are not easily transferable to a target culture with different systems and experiences. Cognitive poetics explored by scholars such as Gronas (2010) explicitly uses conceptual metaphors when analyzing literary criticism, reader participation in classic texts, the social use of poetry, and even the mechanisms of the creative process. This perspective holds that literary texts are not just products of language, but structures that can interact with and be processed by human cognitive systems.

Many studies have proved that using cognitive metaphor theory to analyze specific aspects of literary works is of great importance. Similarly, Trites (2014) used cognitive literature theories, including cognitive metaphor theory, cognitive

linguistics, and experiential philosophy, to study how the concepts of growth and maturity are presented in youth literature. The study believes that the human cognitive structure understood through these theories has led to the widespread use of the concept of growth as a metaphor and narrative model in this literary genre. This highlights the fact that basic cognitive mappings not only influence specific language choices in literature, but also broader narrative structures and thematic development. Cognitive stylistic analysis drawing heavily on cognitive metaphor theory can reveal how metaphorical language contributes to the overall effect and meaning of the text. Nasutin (2024) used cognitive metaphor theory to analyze cognitive metaphors in lyrics, identify structural metaphors, ontological metaphors and directional metaphors, and explore their impact on lyrics creation. Although this study focuses on lyrics rather than traditional prose or poetry, it highlights how cognitive metaphor theory can be used to systematically identify and classify the conceptual basis of metaphorical language in various literary forms, revealing how abstract and concrete elements merge to shape narratives and elicit specific responses.

More and more studies have begun to directly apply cognitive metaphor theory to metaphor translation studies, providing insights into the cognitive process involved and the strategies adopted by translators. This approach holds that metaphor translation is not just a language transfer, but a process of processing conceptual mappings across languages and cultures, which often involves interlingual asymmetry (Massey & Ehrensberger, 2017). Teng (2023) examines the English translation of poetic images, especially flower images, in China poetry from the perspective of cognitive metaphor theory. The study regards poetic image as a cognitive metaphor that maps the source domain to the target domain, and believes that translation strategies depend on whether there is a corresponding conceptual mapping in the target culture. Based on this, the study identified five translation methods: literal translation, literal translation with explanation, image replacement to express meaning, provincial attention, and transliteration with explanation. This study provides specific examples of how cognitive metaphor theory guides strategy choices based on conceptual relationships between source and target domains and cultural differences. There seems to be differences in focus. China research represented by the abstracts provided shows a strong interest in the theoretical discussion of cognitive metaphor theory in the Chinese academic context, including discussions on its development and criticism (Liu, 2005). The research also shows that cognitive metaphor theory has been extensively used in the English translation of China literary works as well as the Chinese translation of English works. It conducts a detailed analysis of specific literary techniques such as images and character titles, and clearly emphasizes the unique cultural connotations and challenges of language challenges (Teng & Yang, 2023).

Qi and Liang Qiu (2025) used cognitive metaphor theory to analyze the English translation of images in China's classic poem *A Moonlit Night on the Spring River*, focusing on the translation strategies of structural metaphor, ontological metaphor and directional metaphor. The research results show that there are different strategies for each metaphor type. Structural metaphors may need to be literal translated or interpreted based on cross-cultural mapping. Ontology metaphors benefit from human's universal understanding of entities and can usually be literal translated. Orientation metaphors require reconstruction of the connection between spatial orientation and emotional connotation. This detailed analysis demonstrates how classifying metaphors based on cognitive metaphor theory can guide the selection of appropriate translation strategies to promote cross-cultural transmission of poetic meaning.

Therefore, the literature review reveals a clear trajectory in metaphor studies, moving from a rhetorical to a cognitive understanding, with cognitive metaphor theory providing a powerful framework for analyzing metaphor's role in thought, language, and literature. While traditional Translation Studies has addressed metaphor translation, the application of a comprehensive cognitive theory is a more recent development. Studies applying cognitive metaphor theory to translation highlight the cognitive processes involved, the impact of cultural and conceptual differences, and inform the development of strategies that go beyond linguistic substitution to address the underlying conceptual mappings. Research on literary metaphor translation from a cognitive metaphor theory perspective, particularly for Chinese-to-English translation of novels and their culturally specific elements, is an active and developing area, providing a strong foundation for the current study on *The Aeronaut*. The existing literature confirms the significance of cultural context and metaphor type in determining translation strategies and supports the exploration of strategies based on retaining, modifying, or omitting the source domain, particularly when dealing with culturally embedded metaphors.

3. Introduction of *The Aeronaut*

This study takes the English version of Shuang Xuetao's novel *The Aeronaut* as the research object, and aims to explore the translatability of metaphors in literary works from the perspective of cognitive metaphor theory. It attempts to explore the cross-cultural transformation mechanism of folk metaphors with the industrial background of Northeast China, and based on this analysis, summarizes effective translation strategies for metaphorical images in literature. Although cognitive metaphor theory emphasizes the universality of some basic conceptual mappings based on common human experience, it also recognizes that culture and experience have a significant impact on the specific conceptual metaphors prevalent in specific languages or

groups (Sun & Zhou, 2020). This interaction between universal cognitive principles and specific cultural examples is particularly important when considering the cross-cultural transformations inherent in translation. The subjectivity of metaphorical discourse reflects the speaker's perspective, emotions and understanding, and is also an area explored within the framework of cognitive metaphor theory, which adds another layer of complexity to its analysis (Peng & Lin, 2021).

As identified in the literature review, cognitive metaphor translation research has overlooked region-specific industrial-folk metaphors. Shuang Xuetao's *The Aeronaut*—with its dense network of Northeastern China's rust belt symbols and folk taboos, makes it an ideal case to test cognitive metaphor theory's applicability to culturally embedded avant-garde fiction. Shuang Xue Tao's story collection *The Aeronaut* stands as a seminal text of "New Northeastern Literature". Set against the industrial decline of Shenyang's Tiexi District in the 1990s, it reconstructs the collective memory of Northeast China's rust belt transition through the intertwined destinies of two working-class families, the Gaos and the Lis. Core symbols like "rust-eaten gears" and "smokeless chimneys" function both as tangible relics of industrial space and as metonymies of collective trauma.

This study selects the work for three pivotal reasons: First, its innovative heavy-industrial-lexicon metaphorization—using "rust-eaten gears" to signify interpersonal alienation or a "boiler pressure valve" to symbolize emotional thresholds—emerges from the workers' collective unconscious. The binding of cultural signifiers (industrial objects' physical traits) to signifieds (lived experience) creates a regional cognitive model untranslatable through Western metaphor frameworks. Second, Jeremy Tiang's English translation exemplifies cultural transference fractures: when "cupola furnace" loses its connotation of communal nostalgia, or "afflicts" fails to convey the cognitive weight of "妨" in folk taboos, it exposes fault lines ideal for testing conceptual integration theory. Third, the text's pioneering multimodal metaphors—like Li Mingqi's parachute descent described as "a body adrift like a paper kite," fusing industrial gravity with existential weightlessness—offer quintessential material for visual-linguistic translation analysis.

Crucially, the systemic integration of Northeastern folk symbols—such as "winter-hibernation" embodying survival wisdom in extreme cold, or the familial ethics encoded in "*kang* heated beds"—targets blind spots in metaphor translation. These symbols lack cognitive equivalents in Western frameworks, leading to semantic petrification in translation. Such gaps directly resonate with this study's core inquiry: resolving cultural-cognitive ruptures in cross-linguistic metaphor transfer. Thus, the text's intrinsic properties and irreplicable status as a regional cultural artifact necessitate its selection.

Is metaphor translatable? And to what extent it can be translated has long been a subject of ongoing debate within academia regarding translation practice. Metaphor possesses commonalities at the linguistic level, which enables the feasibility of metaphor translation (Tan & Ge, 2005). For instance, in the text, when Li Mingqi describes his own physical constitution as having "骨头轻" ("light bones," literally), the Chinese use "轻" ("light") to construct an orientational metaphor, which corresponds perfectly with the ontological understanding of "light bones" in English, achieving a cross-cultural mapping (Shuang, 2017).

However, as a cognitive processing method and thinking framework, metaphor is inseparably linked to the cultural-cognitive experiences of the source and target language communities. According to M.B. Dagut's research, the translatability of a source-language metaphor depends primarily on its underlying cultural background and the associated semantic connotations (Dagut, 1976). In other words, the key to achieving high-quality translation lies in whether target-language readers can, through the semantic associations evoked by the source metaphor, establish a corresponding cognitive connection at the conceptual mapping level. This allows target readers to grasp the metaphorical core based on the universal concept of "energy blockage". Based on the above discussion, metaphor possesses a certain degree of translatability, but does this imply that cross-cultural conversion is achievable across all dimensions?

This paper will explore the scope and limitations of metaphor translatability in different language environments from the perspective of cognitive semantics and cross-cultural communication. Based on the research results of cognitive linguistics, people from different cultural backgrounds have similar cognitive patterns in the process of perceiving and understanding the world. This common cognitive framework enables different ethnic groups to generate similar conceptual systems when recognizing objective phenomena. Metaphor is not only a language tool, but also a basic way of thinking in human universal cognitive activities. Its transformation between different language systems depends on the existence and stability of this basic cognitive structure. Because of this, cross-language translation and analysis of metaphors can be based on this cognitive commonality, thereby achieving a certain degree of cultural and meaning transmission. From a cross-cultural perspective, cultural conceptual metaphors encountered in bilingual conversion involve deep-rooted cognitive and cultural differences between language systems, which objectively create potential obstacles for translators to express such metaphors. With the continuous strengthening of global cultural exchanges, the deepening of cultural penetration, and the gradual integration of cultural elements, members of society have gradually reached consensus on many core issues. Although cultural differences

can still lead to understanding biases and conflicts between different ethnic groups, individuals from different cultural backgrounds can often share certain “basic metaphors” thereby promoting cross-cultural understanding and communication.

4. Translation Strategies of *The Aeronaut* from the Perspective of Cognitive Metaphor Theory

Hu Zhuanglin categorizes cognitive metaphors into three types: ontological, structural, and orientational cognitive metaphors (Hu, 2011). In the English translation of *The Aeronaut*, a rich system of metaphorical expressions is observed. Faced with different types of metaphors across contexts, the translator employs diverse strategies. The selection of strategies is determined by three interrelated factors: the type of cognitive metaphor (ontological, structural, orientational); the degree of cultural embedding (low, medium, high); and the contextual function of the metaphor (narrative, expressive, or cultural-transmissive) in the text.

4.1 Preserving the Source Domain

Ontological metaphors grounded in universal bodily experiences are prioritized for source domain retention, as they rely on shared cognitive mappings across cultures. Low cultural load metaphors retain the source domain, leveraging universal experiential knowledge. For narrative function, source domain retention ensures plot coherence.

ST1: 1979年，李明奇第一次来高家时，高立宽十分光火，并不是因为李明奇当时穿了一条喇叭裤，系着一条花皮带。

ST Romanized: 1979 Nián, lǐmíngqí dì yī cì lái gāo jiā shí, gāolikuān shífēn guānghuǒ, bìng bùshì yīnwèi lǐmíngqí dāngshí chuānle yītiáo lǎbā kù, xizhe yītiáo huā pīdài.

TT1: That morning in 1979 when Li Mingqi first showed up at his doorstep, Gao Likuan bristled, and not just at the boy’s outlandish attire—although his bell-bottoms and flashy leather belt certainly didn’t help.

Analysis: “光火” (literally: flames ignite) metaphorically depicts rising anger. The translator directly uses “bristled” (hair standing on end), preserving the ontological source domain of an animal’s physiological reaction to anger/fear. Chinese and English cultures share cognitive experiences of “anger triggering physical responses”, fully conveying emotional tension and achieving cognitive equivalence. Anger is a physical reaction’ explains why retaining the source domain works: both ‘光火’ and ‘bristled’ map anger to bodily arousal, illustrating cross-cultural structural isomorphism in emotional metaphors.

ST2: 但是他酒量大，不闹事，心灵手巧，也知道时局变了，就像发大水，虽然啥都没了，一地的泥巴，可也是新的机会。

ST Romanized: Dànshì tā jiǔliàng dà, bù nàoshì, xīnlíng shǒuqiǎo, yě zhīdào shí jú biànle, jiù xiàng fā dà shuǐ, suīrán shá dōu méiliǎo, yī dì de níbā, kě yěshì xīn de jīhuì.

TT2: Even so, he could hold his liquor and never caused problems. He was alert and skillful with his hands, and he knew that the times had changed. As he saw it, the floodwaters had just receded, leaving a swath of bare soil. Here was his opportunity.

Analysis: The Chinese uses “floodwaters receding to expose soil” to metaphorize the orientational relationship between destruction and rebirth. The translation preserves the source domain, resonating with the cross-cultural consensus of “land becoming arable after disaster”, aligning target readers’ cognitive path to “opportunity” with the source text.

ST3: 不过别看我就一只眼，可是看得清楚，我啊，去也白去，河里游的扔马路上，一步也走不了。

ST Romanized: Bùguò bié kàn wǒ jiù yī zhī yǎn, kěshì kàn dé qīngchǔ, wǒ a, qù yě bái qù, hé lǐ yóu de rēng mǎlù shàng, yībù yě zǒu bùliǎo.

TT3: I may only have one eye, but I can see clearly, and I know there’s no point in me going. Why ask a fish to walk on land?

Analysis: The source text constructs “maladaptation” through the survival structure of a fish out of water. The translation fully preserves the source domain, conveying identical cognition via the same structural metaphor, organisms cannot survive outside their native environment. Humans universally experience “aquatic life suffocating on land,” achieving metaphorical functional equivalence without conversion.

ST4: 没想到李明奇腾空而起，面袋一样摔在窗户根底下。

ST Romanized: Méi xiǎngdào lǐmíngqí téngkōng ér qǐ, miàn dài yīyàng shuāi zài chuānghù gēndǐ xià.

TT4: Unexpectedly, Mingqi arced through the air, crash landing under the window like a sack of flour.

Analysis: “面袋” (flour sack) metaphorizes the physical properties of a heavy, soft body (ontological metaphor). The literal translation “sack of flour” preserves the source domain of “inanimate heavy object falling.” Flour sacks are common imagery in both Eastern and Western cultures, enabling readers to identically perceive “clumsy, uncontrolled descent” with no cognitive loss.

ST5: 想到自己五大三粗，心眼比针鼻还小，就眨了眨那只独眼，叹了口气。

ST Romanized: Xiǎngdào zìjǐ wǔdàsāncū, xīnyǎn bǐ zhēn bí hái xiǎo, jiù zhǎle zhǎ nà zhǐ dúyǎn, tànle kǒuqì.

TT5: He saw how a big, tall man like himself could have a heart smaller than the eye of a needle, and he sighed, blinking with his single eye.

Analysis: Chinese uses the minuscule trait of “针鼻” (eye of a needle) to metaphorize narrow-mindedness. The translation preserves the source domain “eye of a needle”. Both concretize abstract measurement into a tiny aperture. The universality of ontological metaphors allows target readers to directly trigger the cognitive association of “extreme pettiness.”

4.2 Modifying the Source Domain

Structural metaphors with culture-specific conceptual systems often require source domain modification to preserve core mappings while adapting to target cultural schemas. Medium cultural load metaphors require modification to align with target cultural references. For expressive function, modification enhances emotional resonance in the target language.

ST6: 如果那男人只是绣花枕头。这让高雅春很是担心，所以前几次相亲她都跟着去，一看对方是绣花枕头，当场就给搅和黄了。

ST Romanized: Rúguǒ nà nánrén zhǐshì xiùhuā zhěntou. Zhè ràng gāoyǎ chūn hěn shì dānxīn, suǒyǐ qián jǐ cì xiāngqīn tā dōu gēnzhe qù, yī kàn duìfāng shì xiùhuā zhěntou, dāngchǎng jiù gěi jiǎohuo huánge.

TT6: If the guy was just a pretty face—a lousy pillow in a nicely embroidered case—she’d halt proceedings immediately.

Analysis: The Chinese “绣花枕头” is a structural metaphor (object structure mapping human quality), emphasizing “splendid exterior, rotten core.” The translator modifies it to “a lousy pillow in a nicely embroidered case,” more comprehensible in English culture. It preserves the core metaphorical structure but changes the specific imagery, achieving equivalent cognitive transfer. This structural metaphor relies on culturally specific object-quality mappings. The modification to ‘lousy pillow in a nicely embroidered case’ aligns with cognitive metaphor theory’s emphasis on preserving conceptual mappings while adapting the vehicle to target cultural familiarity.

ST7: 她只觉得这个爸虽是一家之主，其实内心简单，两枚糖衣炮弹就击穿了心扉。

ST Romanized: Tā zhǐ juéde zhège bà suī shì yījiā zhǐ zhǔ, qíshí nèixīn jiǎndān, liǎng méi tángyī pàodàn jiù jí chuānle xīnfēi.

TT7: She believed that although he was the head of the household, his inner workings were simple, and this gift would be all it would take to win him over—as Chairman Mao said, a candy-coated bullet to pierce his heart.

Analysis: “糖衣炮弹” concretizes abstract corruption into a physical object (ontological metaphor). The translation uses “candy-coated bullet,” as “bullet” is more commonly associated with danger metaphors in the West. This better aligns with English readers’ cognitive experience of “covert threat,” mapping the same target domain.

ST8: 你这边火上房了，她那边歪在炕头睡着了。

ST Romanized: Nǐ zhè biān huǒ shàng fǎngē, tā nà biān wāi zài kàngtóu shuǐzhele.

TT8: A crisis could be raging, and she’d still be asleep on the heated platform of the kang bed-stove.

Analysis: The ‘炕’ is not merely a ‘bed-stove’ but a cultural signifier of Northeastern communal living (family members sharing warmth in harsh winters). While the translation ‘heated platform of the kang bed-stove’ simplifies its material form, contextual cues implicitly convey its social function, mitigating cultural loss through narrative context. The English source domain “crisis raging” employs a war metaphor. “Raging crisis” suits the Western tradition of war narratives, modifying the motivator. Fire metaphors in English denote concrete disasters but lack the extended meaning of urgency.

ST9: 高立宽说，得去一个月，见天儿关在屋子里讲马克思列宁，晚上大门都上锁，你行？

ST Romanized: Gāolikuān shuō, dé qù yīgè yuè, jiàn tiān er guān zài wūzǐ lǐ jiǎng mǎkèsī lièníng, wǎnshàng dàmén dū shàng suǒ, nǐ xíng?

TT9: And that was how Gao behaved when he had his freedom. It stood to reason that, cooped up in the cadre school, he would get bored and sneak out for a drink, leading, inevitably, to trouble.

Analysis: This dialectal metaphor roots temporal continuity in the visible cycle of ‘heaven’, reflecting the industrial working class’s reliance on natural rhythms. The translation ‘cooped up’ shifts to a spatial metaphor but loses this cultural link—highlighting the challenge of translating region-specific cognitive models tied to local livelihoods. The source domain “见天儿” is a time metaphor based on celestial motion. The target domain “cooped up” is a spatial confinement metaphor from animal husbandry. “见天儿” emphasizes the time dimension of confinement. English “coop up” originates culturally from poultry farming, evoking spatial oppression but losing the time dimension.

ST10: 她怕她爸，就像是八哥看见猫，再怎么抖机灵也是没用的。

ST Romanized: Tā pà tā bà, jiù xiàng shì bāgē kànjiàn māo, zài zěnmē dǒu jīling yěshì méi yòng de.

TT10: She was scared of her father and, like a mynah bird confronted with a cat, knew that no amount of talk would help the situation.

Analysis: Chinese “抖机灵” contains an orientational metaphor (“抖” implies dynamic struggle). The translator concretizes the abstract action into the scenario “mynah bird confronted with a cat,” replacing “抖机灵” with the bird’s “feather-fluffing behavior” before a predator. This uses the shared experience of “vertical-positional struggle” to achieve metaphor conversion, preserving the core meaning of “futile resistance.”

ST11: 从十几岁起，就在灵魂深处闹革命，把高立宽的所有东西都扫地出门，终于长成了一个和高立宽完全不同的男人，这个不同的程度怎么说呢，就像 X 和 Y 的不同。

ST Romanized: Cóng shí jǐ suì qǐ, jiù zài línghún shēn chù nào géming, bǎ gāolikuān de suǒyǒu dōngxī dū sāodìchūmén, zhōngyú zhǎng chéngle yīgè hé gāolikuān wánquán bùtóng de nánrén, zhègè bùtóng de chéngdù zěnmē shuō ne, jiù xiàng X hé Y de bùtóng.

TT11: At that young age, he’d staged a revolution deep in his soul and swept everything to do with Gao Likuan out the door.

Analysis: Chinese uses mathematical symbols “X/Y” to construct a structural metaphor (abstract difference = algebraic symbols). The translation deletes this source domain, replacing it with action metaphors “revolution in soul” and “swept out the door.” The cognitive mapping through algebraic symbols is entirely substituted.

ST12: 高立宽说，怪不得五千米都没摔死你，原来是个鼓上蚤。

ST Romanized: Gāolikuān shuō, guàibùdé wǔqiān mǐ dōu méi shuāi sǐ nǐ, yuánlái shìgè gǔ shàng zǎo.

TT12: No wonder falling from five thousand meters didn’t kill you; you’re a flea on a drum.

Analysis: “鼓上蚤” (a flea on a drum—Chinese folk metaphor for someone with superb lightness skill) structurally metaphorizes weightlessness via “an insect jumping unstably on a drum surface.” The translation modifies it to “flea on a drum.” Though slightly adjusting the imagery, it preserves the core source domain of “a tiny creature moving agilely on a vibrating surface.” Readers in both languages can understand “extraordinary lightness” through this structure, achieving metaphorical function transfer.

4.3 Deleting the Source Domain

Oriental metaphors lacking cross-cultural equivalence may necessitate omission if their spatial logic fails to resonate with target readers. Highly culture-specific metaphors balance retention of core signification with explanatory context to bridge cognitive gaps. For cultural transmission, strategic modification preserves cultural essence while ensuring intelligibility.

ST13: 唯一的问题是，赵素英性格慢，高立宽性格急，结婚之前不知道，结婚之后才发现，实在太慢，两根电线杆子能走半个小时。

ST Romanized: Wéiyī de wèntí shì, zhàosùyīng xìnggé màn, gāolikuān xìnggé jí, jiéhūn zhīqián bù zhīdào, jiéhūn zhīhòu cái fāxiàn, shízài tài màn, liǎng gēn diànxiàn gānzǐ néng zǒu bàn gè xiǎoshí.

TT13: The only problem was Suying’s slow nature—she could spend half an hour walking between two telegraph poles.

Analysis: The structural metaphor uses spatial distance to map temporal duration, implying extreme slowness. The translation deletes the metaphorical mapping, retaining only literal description. English lacks a parallel structure to convey “slow movement through prolonged spatial traversal,” necessitating omission to avoid cultural dissonance. The deletion of the spatial-temporal metaphor reflects cognitive metaphor theory’s insight that unshared conceptual mappings (Chinese ‘spatial extension → temporal duration’ vs. English direct temporal description) necessitate prioritizing target-domain meaning over source-domain form.

ST14: 高立宽肚子里有货，能分出两三点。一摸肚兜，硬邦邦，便知道里面有货。

ST Romanized: Gāolikuān dùzǐ li yǒu huò, néng fēn chū liǎng sān diǎn. Yī mō dùdōu, yìngbāngbāng, biàn zhīdào lǐmiàn yǒu huò.

TT14: Gao Likuan may have had a facial deformity, but his bearing was respectable—his shoulders were broad, his face was square—and though he couldn’t speak as well as the professor, he could muster a couple of talking points when absolutely necessary.

Analysis: Chinese “肚子里有货” (having goods in the belly) is an ontological metaphor (concretizing knowledge as physical objects within the abdomen). The translation deletes the “abdominal container” source domain, using the abstract expression “muster talking points.” The carrier “belly” and its metaphorical logic are stripped away. Due to differences in cultural systems and literary traditions between Chinese and English, the imagery carried by metaphors is difficult to directly replace. Constrained by contextual factors, the focus of metaphor translation often shifts to conveying the inherent meaning of the original domain (Shu, 2000). Free translation can transcend linguistic form constraints, transmitting core information through semantic conversion to recreate the metaphor’s essence. Deleting the target domain from the source language sometimes better aligns with target readers’ cognitive habits.

5. Conclusion

Cognitive metaphor theory opens up a new perspective for literary translation practice. Taking the English translation of Shuang Xuetao’s *The Aeronaut* as an example, this study systematically examines the cross-cultural transformation mechanism of metaphors and other culturally loaded metaphors in the industrial context of Northeast China within the framework of cognitive metaphor theory. The research results show that the translatability of metaphor and the choice of translation strategies fundamentally depend on the cognitive basis and depth of cultural embeddings of the source domain in the target culture. In specific translation practice, translators must also consider other relevant factors, such as cultural differences and differences in the cognitive level of metaphor. For metaphors that can directly map to the target language readers cognitive concepts, literal translation can be adopted, while for metaphorical images with obvious cultural imprints, they must be handled in conjunction with specific cultural background and context. In order to successfully promote Chinese culture around the world, it is necessary to more deeply identify and interpret the cultural connotations carried by metaphorical images in the source text. In the process of metaphor translation, cultural context plays the most prominent role. Text processing is always carried out in a specific context, so metaphor translation must also take text context and literary context into consideration. When translating, translators should flexibly use various strategies to ensure that metaphorical images can be smoothly understood and accepted by the target audience, thus providing strong support for the global dissemination of China culture.

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