

Translation of Cultural Metaphors from the Perspective of Cognitive Linguistics

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Abstract: In recent decades, the rise of cognitive linguistics has provided a new perspective and method for the interpretation and study of metaphor. Metaphor is not only a linguistic phenomenon, but also a cognitive mode. Metaphor is an important way for human beings to understand themselves and the world. This paper gives a brief overview of metaphor theory in cognitive linguistics. Secondly, because metaphor is closely related to culture, the understanding of metaphor cannot be separated from its cultural environment. Therefore, from a cultural perspective, this paper uses cognitive metaphor theory to explore the translation research and practice of cultural words, and summarizes the translation strategies of cultural words.

Keywords: Cognitive Linguistics, Cultural Metaphor, Translation Strategies.

1. Introduction

Metaphor, a fundamental and intricate linguistic and cognitive phenomenon, serves as a profound means of expressing various phenomena through the artful representation of things. It is not merely a decorative element in language but a powerful tool deeply intertwined with human thought processes. The comprehension of metaphor is a complex interplay between language and human cognition, a dynamic process that reflects the richness of our mental faculties and the cultural contexts in which we are embedded.

Human thinking patterns are not formed in isolation; rather, they are significantly shaped by the social environment in which individuals are immersed. The social, historical, and cultural landscapes in which people live influence the way they perceive, interpret, and make sense of the world around them. Metaphor, as a linguistic and cognitive construct, is a vivid manifestation of these cultural influences. It is a unique way of expression and cognition that encapsulates the essence of a nation's cultural identity, reflecting its deep-seated values, beliefs, and ways of thinking.

In the realm of literature, metaphor plays a pivotal role. It serves as a creative device that enriches the aesthetic appeal of literary works, imbuing them with layers of meaning and emotional depth. By using metaphor, writers can evoke powerful images, create a sense of resonance with readers, and convey complex ideas in a more engaging and accessible manner. Moreover, metaphor in literature is a mirror of a nation's culture, providing insights into its unique traditions, customs, and social norms. It allows readers to explore the cultural nuances and subtleties of different societies, fostering cross-cultural understanding and appreciation.

However, the translation of metaphor in literary works poses a formidable challenge. In an era of rapid globalization, the need for effective cross-cultural communication has become more pressing than ever. As countries and peoples become increasingly interconnected, the exchange of ideas, cultures, and values is essential for building a more inclusive and harmonious world. Cultural words, in particular, are of great significance in this context. They are not only carriers of linguistic information but also repositories of cultural knowledge, often rich in metaphorical connotations.

The translation of cultural vocabulary is not a simple matter of finding equivalent words in another language. It requires a deep understanding of the cultural, historical, and social contexts in which the words are used. The accuracy of cultural vocabulary translation is crucial for ensuring smooth and effective communication between different cultures. A mistranslation of a metaphorical cultural word can lead to misunderstandings, misinterpretations, and a loss of cultural meaning. Therefore, translation has taken on a new level of importance in the globalized world, and the translation of cultural vocabulary, with its abundant cultural information and vivid metaphorical images, has become a central focus in the field of translation studies.

2. Overview of Metaphor Research

In the Western intellectual tradition, the concept of metaphor has a long and storied history. It was first introduced as a term in the realm of rhetoric, marking the beginning of a systematic exploration of its nature and function. The roots of metaphor research can be traced back to the fourth century BC, to the time of the great philosopher Aristotle. His work laid the foundation for the traditional metaphor theory, which dominated the study of metaphor for centuries.

Aristotle and his contemporaries viewed metaphor as primarily a rhetorical device, a means of enhancing the expressiveness and persuasiveness of language. From this perspective, metaphor was considered a linguistic ornament, a way to make language more vivid, engaging, and memorable. It was seen as a phenomenon occurring at the lexical level, where words were used in non-literal ways to create figurative comparisons. For example, in a metaphor like "Juliet is the sun," the word "sun" is used not in its literal sense but to evoke a set of associations and emotions related to warmth, beauty, and centrality, thus enriching the description of Juliet.

However, as scholars delved deeper into the study of metaphor, they began to realize the limitations of the traditional theory. The traditional view of metaphor as a mere rhetorical embellishment failed to capture the full complexity and significance of this linguistic and cognitive phenomenon. In recent decades, the rise of cognitive linguistics has

revolutionized the study of metaphor, challenging the long-held assumptions of the traditional approach.

Cognitive linguistics has brought a new perspective to the understanding of metaphor, emphasizing its role as a fundamental cognitive mechanism. According to this view, metaphor is not just a feature of language but a way of thinking, a cognitive process that allows us to understand and make sense of the world around us. It is a means by which we transfer knowledge and understanding from one domain of experience to another, based on perceived similarities or relationships.

In the 1980s, the publication of *Metaphors We Live By* by American scholars George Lakoff and Mark Johnson marked a significant milestone in the field of metaphor research. This groundbreaking book introduced the concept of conceptual metaphor, arguing that metaphor is not just a matter of language but a pervasive cognitive phenomenon that underlies our everyday thought and action. Lakoff and Johnson proposed that our conceptual system is largely metaphorical, and that many of our abstract concepts are understood and structured through metaphorical mappings from more concrete domains of experience.

For example, the metaphor "ARGUMENT IS WAR" is deeply ingrained in our language and thought. We use expressions like "attack a position," "defend an argument," and "win a debate," which are derived from the domain of war and applied to the domain of argumentation. This metaphor not only influences the way we talk about arguments but also shapes the way we think about and conduct them.

Metaphor is composed of three main elements: the tenor, the carrier, and the metaphorical meaning. The tenor is the subject or concept that is being described or understood, while the carrier is the source concept from which the metaphorical mapping is made. The metaphorical meaning is the result of the mapping, the new understanding or interpretation that emerges when the features of the carrier are applied to the tenor.

The existence of metaphor is truly universal. As Newmark noted, a significant portion of human language, approximately three-quarters, exhibits metaphorical characteristics. This universality is rooted in the similarity of human cognitive structures. Despite cultural differences, humans share basic cognitive processes and experiences, which give rise to common metaphorical patterns. At the same time, the cultural diversity of the world also leads to the emergence of unique and culture-specific metaphors.

These cultural differences in metaphor have important implications for translation. The appropriateness of metaphor translation can greatly impact people's understanding and acceptance of foreign cultures. A successful translation of metaphor requires not only a knowledge of the linguistic forms but also an in-depth understanding of the cultural and cognitive contexts in which the metaphors are embedded.

3. Characteristics of Cultural Metaphor

Metaphor and culture are inseparably intertwined, with metaphors being richly imbued with cultural characteristics. Metaphors across different cultural backgrounds exhibit both commonalities and distinct differences, with the latter often being more pronounced. A profound understanding of these cultural characteristics is an indispensable prerequisite for effective cultural metaphor translation.

3.1. Equivalent Mapping of Metaphorical Conceptual Domains

Human beings are inhabitants of the natural world, and regardless of cultural differences, they share certain common experiences shaped by the external environment. These shared experiences give rise to similar metaphorical expressions, which form the first notable cultural characteristic of metaphor.

In the natural world, certain phenomena are universally observable and understood. For instance, the act of pouring oil on a fire is a physical action with a predictable outcome in both Western and Eastern cultures. In English, the expression "Pour oil on the fire" and its Chinese counterpart "火上浇油" both draw on this common experience to convey the idea of exacerbating a situation. This shared understanding of the cause-and-effect relationship between pouring oil on a fire and the intensification of the fire allows for the mapping of the concrete concept of adding fuel to a fire onto the more abstract concept of making a situation worse.

This equivalence in metaphorical mapping is not limited to this single example. There are numerous other instances where different language cultures share similar metaphorical concepts based on common human experiences. These shared metaphors serve as a bridge between cultures, facilitating communication and understanding by relying on shared knowledge and intuitive associations.

3.2. Unequal Mapping of Metaphorical Conceptual Domains

While there are commonalities in metaphorical expressions across cultures, the influence of cultural experiences on metaphorical mapping often leads to unequal or diverse mappings of conceptual domains.

Cultural values and beliefs play a crucial role in shaping the way people perceive and interpret the world, and this is particularly evident in the way metaphors are constructed. For example, the perception of dogs varies significantly between Chinese and Western cultures. In Chinese culture, dogs are often associated with negative qualities. Terms like "狗眼看人低" "丧家之犬" and "狗仗人势" reflect a generally low-esteem view of dogs, and these expressions are used metaphorically to describe people with similar unappealing traits.

In contrast, in Western cultures, dogs are highly regarded as loyal companions and symbols of hard work. The expression "I work like a dog" uses the concept of a dog's industrious nature to metaphorically represent someone who works diligently. If a translator were to simply translate this expression literally as "像狗一样地工作" without considering the cultural context, Chinese readers might misinterpret it as an insult rather than a compliment, highlighting the importance of understanding cultural differences in metaphorical mapping.

Furthermore, different source conceptual domains can also point to the same target conceptual domain. For example, due to its geographical location as a maritime nation, the English language is replete with nautical-related metaphors. The expression "Never offer to teach fish to swim" is a common saying in English, where the source concept of a fish's natural ability to swim is used to convey the idea of not trying to teach someone something they are already proficient at.

In Chinese culture, the metaphor "班门弄斧" serves a similar purpose. Here, the source concept of showing off one's

ax - wielding skills in front of the master carpenter Lu Ban is used to express the same idea of being presumptuous in front of an expert. Despite the differences in the source concepts, both metaphors share the same underlying target concept, demonstrating how different cultural experiences can give rise to unique yet equivalent metaphorical expressions.

3.3. The Conceptual Domain of the Source Language Does Not Exist in the Target Language

The conceptual domain of some metaphors and the metaphorical meaning it implies have distinct national characteristics and are unique to a certain culture, reflecting the unique connotation of its national culture. It is difficult to find the corresponding concepts and metaphorical meanings in another national culture, which results in the so-called cultural default phenomenon. Many metaphors in English and Chinese languages are unique to their respective cultures and have no consistent or similar expressions in other cultures and languages. Most of these metaphorical words come from thinking patterns, literary works, historical culture, religious beliefs, customs and other aspects. Because the development process of the English and Chinese nations in these aspects is quite different, the cultural vocabulary metaphors produced also rarely intersect.

Metaphors from traditional Chinese culture, such as "唱红脸", "跑龙套", "老油条", "半路出家", "三头六臂", etc., cannot find the corresponding metaphorical meanings and carriers in the English concept. And some unique expressions in English, such as "a frog in the throat", "a bee in one's bonnet", etc., also lack the corresponding relevant metaphors in the Chinese culture. Secondly, some vacancies are completely caused by different beliefs. Many English metaphors come from the Bible stories and contain Christian cultural elements, such as "thirty pieces of silver" refers to the money obtained by betraying others, "a kiss of death" refers to the behavior that is seemingly friendly but actually harmful, and these cannot find completely corresponding concepts in the Chinese culture. And the metaphors related to Buddhist culture in Chinese, such as "泥菩萨过河, 自身难保", etc., it is also impossible to fully achieve the equivalent understanding of metaphor in English speaking countries.

There are many such examples, such as "东施效颦", "借花献佛", "回光返照", "滥竽充数", "掩耳盗铃", "马后炮", "跑龙套", "空城计", "鸿门宴", etc. in Chinese. And "Adam's apple" (man's prominentia laryngea), "Achille's heel" (the only fatal weakness), "Noah's ark" (refuge), "olive branch" (peace), "Pandora's box" (the source of all evils), "Shylock" (miser), etc. in English.

Metaphorical words whose conceptual domain of the source language does not exist in the target language are not uncommon in Chinese and English languages. Due to the lack of experience and understanding of each other's cultural backgrounds between the two nations, it is difficult to generate metaphorical associations between the carrier and the metaphorical meaning. In addition, the language and culture of one's own nation also have no similar metaphorical expressions with similar connotations. Readers of different national cultures need to immerse themselves in the target language culture and fully understand and combine the cultural background of these metaphorical words in order to truly understand the metaphor.

4. Translation Strategies of Cultural Metaphor

Translation is actually the transfer of information from the source language to the target language by the translator through the translation. Whether the translation can accurately and completely convey the information of the source language and achieve the purpose of national cultural exchange depends not only on the subjective cognitive ability and cultural literacy of the translator but also on the translation strategies adopted by the translator. In specific translation practice, different translation strategies will make the translation present different contents and styles, and the feelings and influences on the translation readers will also be different. Therefore, the translator needs to adopt different translation strategies according to different translation purposes and the expected effects. Specifically, in the translation practice of metaphorical cultural vocabulary, both the cultures and cultural vocabularies of the English and Chinese nations are full of metaphors. It can be said that metaphor is the basis for the formation of cultural vocabulary. Therefore, to handle the translation of cultural vocabulary well, the translation of metaphor must be handled well first.

When dealing with the translation of cultural metaphor, the translator should take the cognitive research on metaphor in the previous text as the basis for understanding metaphorical cultural vocabulary, and then combine the relationship between metaphor and culture and the relationship between metaphor and translation to select specific translation methods, so as to make the translation achieve the same or as consistent as possible effect in terms of rhetoric, semantics and the feelings and influences on the translation readers as the original text.

4.1. Literal Translation

The literal translation method is applicable to the completely equivalent cultural vocabulary in English and Chinese, that is, the cultural vocabulary whose carrier and metaphorical meaning are exactly the same or basically the same. Although there are great differences between the English and Chinese nations in language, thinking, culture and other aspects, there are also some commonalities among them. Expressing these commonalities through language forms some completely equivalent cultural vocabulary. The carrier of the equivalent cultural vocabulary is the object image known to both English and Chinese readers. Due to the common cultural background and similar metaphorical cognitive methods shared by English and Chinese, the English and Chinese nations will have the same or similar associations and metaphors for the same carrier and endow the same cultural vocabulary with the same or similar metaphorical meanings. For this kind of cultural vocabulary, the translation method of literally translating the carrier can be adopted. While completely retaining the carrier of the source language, the metaphorical meaning can be accurately expressed, which only retains the cultural characteristics and vivid images of the source language, but also does not increase the difficulty of understanding for the target language readers. The metaphorical meaning implied by the carrier is easily accepted and understood in the target language culture.

For example, the expression "to add the fuel to the flame" and "火上浇油" share the same conceptual domain and metaphorical meaning. Both convey the idea of making a bad

situation worse by adding something that intensifies it. In such cases, literal translation can be used to preserve the original metaphorical expression while accurately conveying its meaning.

Another example is "armed to the teeth." The literal translation "武装到牙齿" not only retains the vivid imagery of the original expression but also effectively conveys the idea of being fully and extremely well - armed. This translation is not only faithful to the source language but also easily understandable to Chinese readers, as it taps into their shared cognitive understanding of the concept of being well - equipped.

Literal translation is beneficial in that it preserves the cultural flavor and authenticity of the source language. It allows the target language readers to experience the original metaphor as it was intended, without losing the unique nuances and associations that make the metaphor meaningful. At the same time, it also helps to promote cross - cultural understanding by highlighting the commonalities between different cultures.

4.2. Literal Translation and Metaphorical Meaning

When dealing with cultural vocabulary that has a unique metaphorical meaning in the source language and may not be immediately understood by the target language readers, the strategy of literal translation plus metaphorical meaning can be employed.

This approach involves first translating the metaphorical expression literally and then providing additional explanation or annotation to clarify its meaning. This is particularly useful when the source language metaphor is deeply rooted in the cultural, historical, or literary context of the source culture and has no direct equivalent in the target culture.

For example, the expression "He's another Shylock" is a reference to the character Shylock from Shakespeare's *The Merchant of Venice*. Shylock is a well - known figure in Western literature, representing a greedy and ruthless moneylender. If this expression is simply translated literally as "他是又一个夏洛克", Chinese readers who are not familiar with Shakespearean literature may not understand the intended meaning.

To address this, the translator can add an annotation after the literal translation, such as "夏洛克是莎士比亚的著作《威尼斯商人》中的一个刻薄吝啬的商人." This additional information helps Chinese readers to understand the metaphorical meaning of the expression, namely that the person being described is similar to Shylock in terms of being mean and stingy.

This strategy allows the translator to preserve the original metaphorical expression while also ensuring that the target language readers can fully understand its meaning. It helps to bridge the cultural gap by providing the necessary background information and context for the metaphor.

4.3. Replacement

The translation strategy of replacing the original conceptual domain means replacing the conceptual domain in the source language cultural metaphor with another conceptual domain in the target language, but the expressed metaphorical meaning is exactly the same or basically the same as that of the source language.

Due to the differences in the national cultures and

metaphorical cognitions of English and Chinese, sometimes the same or similar metaphorical concepts will be produced for different things or phenomena, and the same metaphorical concept will be expressed by different conceptual domains in the two language cultures, and the resulting cultural vocabulary will also express the same or similar metaphorical meanings by different conceptual domains in their respective languages. There are many such cultural metaphors in English and Chinese, and their expressed metaphorical meanings are basically the same, but the borrowed conceptual domains are quite different. In this case, the translation method of replacing the conceptual domain can be adopted.

For example, "the apple of one's eye" literally means the apple in someone's eye, but actually it is metaphorically "something or someone is very precious, very important and makes people take good care of it". The carrier used in English is "apple" and "eye". There is a metaphorical word in Chinese that also expresses this metaphorical meaning, which is "掌上明珠", and the carriers used are "明珠" and "掌" respectively. If it is literally translated as "眼中的苹果", Chinese readers cannot generate similar metaphorical concepts and do not understand the metaphorical meaning of this word. If the method of literal translation plus annotation is adopted, the translation will appear cumbersome. There happens to be a metaphorical word in Chinese that expresses the same metaphorical meaning, so it is advisable to replace the carrier of the source language and translate English into "掌上明珠". Although there are differences in the carriers in English and Chinese vocabulary, it can make Chinese readers understand the metaphorical meaning that English wants to express and retain the connotation and aesthetic sense of the source language.

4.4. Free Translation

The translation strategy of free translation means that when translating the metaphor of cultural vocabulary, only the metaphorical meaning expressed by the source language metaphor is translated in the target language, and neither the vehicle is literally translated nor replaced, but its metaphorical meaning is translated. The uniqueness and difference of the English and Chinese national cultures often result in some cultures and metaphors being unique to one of the cultures. The vehicle used in the metaphor in the cultural vocabulary, the way of metaphorical cognition, and even the expressed metaphorical meaning are also unique to this culture and language, and there is no corresponding metaphor, vehicle or metaphorical meaning in another culture, that is, the situation where both the vehicle and the metaphorical meaning are different. In this case, the free translation strategy of discarding the vehicle and retaining the metaphorical meaning can be adopted.

For example, "你难道不知道吃人家嘴软, 拿人家手短的道理?"

Translation: "Don't you know that people expect favors to be returned?"

The above example "吃人家嘴软, 拿人家手软" is a metaphorical expression with Chinese cultural characteristics. There are Chinese folk sayings in it. If literal translation is adhered to, the readability of the translation will be lost. Therefore, explanatory free translation is more conducive to helping the target language readers understand.

5. Conclusion

Metaphor, as a complex and multi - faceted phenomenon, has been redefined by cognitive linguists as not merely a linguistic device but a fundamental way of thinking about and understanding the world. It serves as a powerful vehicle for cultural exchange, carrying with it the rich tapestry of a culture's values, beliefs, and worldviews.

The cultural characteristics of metaphors are both diverse and profound. While there are some universal aspects of metaphor that are shared across cultures due to the commonalities in human cognitive structures, the differences in cultural experiences, values, and historical developments lead to a wide variety of unique and culture - specific metaphors. These cultural - specific metaphors are the essence of a language's cultural identity, encapsulating the unique ways in which a particular culture perceives and interprets the world.

Cultural metaphor is indeed the crystallization of a language, representing the highest level of language use and cultural expression. It contains a wealth of cultural connotations that are essential for understanding a culture's history, traditions, and social norms. When translating sentences and words containing metaphors, it is crucial to have a comprehensive understanding of the cultural differences between the source and target languages.

The translator's task is not only to translate the literal meaning of the words but also to capture the underlying metaphorical meaning and cultural significance. Different translation strategies, such as literal translation, literal translation with added explanation, replacement, and free translation, need to be carefully selected based on the specific characteristics of the metaphor and the cultural context.

Each strategy has its own advantages and limitations. Literal translation can preserve the cultural authenticity of the source language but may be difficult for the target language readers to understand if the metaphor is too culture - specific. Literal translation with added explanation can help clarify the meaning but may disrupt the flow of the text. Replacement can make the translation more accessible but may lose some of the original cultural flavor. Free translation can effectively convey the core meaning but may sacrifice the literal form of the metaphor.

In conclusion, successful cultural metaphor translation requires a delicate balance between preserving the cultural identity of the source language and making the translation understandable and acceptable to the target language audience. By carefully analyzing the source text, understanding the cultural background, and choosing the appropriate translation strategy, translators can play a vital role in promoting cross - cultural communication and understanding. Through accurate and effective translation of cultural metaphors, people from different cultures can gain deeper insights into each other's ways of thinking, values, and traditions, thus contributing to a more harmonious and inclusive global community.

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