



An Analysis of Cultural Metaphors in Translation from a Cognitive Linguistic Perspective

Yingying Shi^{1,*}

¹Hunan University of Arts and Sciences, China

Abstract: Metaphor has been studied for centuries, but traditionally it has been confined to the field of rhetoric, and seen as a rhetorical method. However, with the development of modern society and the advancement of cognitive linguistics, some cognitive linguistics researchers believe that metaphor is no longer just a rhetorical and linguistic phenomenon, but also a mode of thinking. The conceptual system of metaphor contains rich and sufficient cultural information, which makes the cognitive activity of metaphor very complex and the translation of cultural metaphors extremely difficult. Therefore, although many Chinese scholars are keen on the study of metaphor and the translation theories of Western metaphor, few of them have applied them in practice, which has led to the lack of guiding translation principles for metaphor.

Keywords: cognitive linguistics; cultural metaphors; translation

Cultural differences are the greatest difficulty in translation, as people have an innate understanding of their own language and can easily understand the sense of the language, but for foreign readers the language can be very bitter and difficult to understand, so interpretation is required when translating. It is important to note that translation is not just a linguistic exercise, but a cultural one as well, so it is important not to focus solely on linguistic translation, but also on cultural thinking. Therefore, metaphors not only have a strong cultural dimension, but can also be used to deepen people's understanding of different languages through the analysis of cultural differences.

1. Cultural characteristics of metaphors

1.1 The same source domain maps to the same target domain

Although human beings have different cultural backgrounds, they live in the same natural environment, and the same environment creates certain similar experiences, and these similar

experiences produce approximately the same metaphorical expressions (Zhang, 2021). For example, the Chinese idiom "to strike while the iron is hot" is expressed in English as "to strike while the iron is hot", and the cultural metaphors they represent are similar. In real life, the concept of striking while the iron is hot is the same in both English and Chinese speaking countries, and this source domain, which is familiar and known to all humans regardless of race or cultural background, can be mapped to the target domain of 'seizing the moment'. Therefore, the same source domain can map the same target domain from one language and culture to another.

1.2 The same source domain maps to different target domains

In the process of mapping objective things through source domains, the same source domain maps out different target domains due to different cultural backgrounds and experiences (Yang & Hu, 2017). For example, in traditional Chinese culture, dogs are very lowly animals, and even "dog" in Chinese culture generally has a strong pejorative meaning, such as "dog slave" and "bereaved dog". In many Western countries, however, the dog represents

Corresponding Author: Yingying Shi
Hunan University of Arts and Sciences, China
Email: 627160340@qq.com

©The Author(s) 2023. Published by BON VIEW PUBLISHING PTE. LTD. This is an open access article under the CC BY License (<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>).

loyalty and hard work. For example, I work like a dog. In this phrase, "dog" is mapped to the more abstract target domain of "hard-working character" in the source domain known in English-speaking countries. When the English phrase is translated into Chinese, if it is translated directly into Chinese as "work like a dog" without taking into account the cultural characteristics of the metaphor in the English phrase, it will be easily misunderstood by the target language readers, who will think that the person who says this phrase is trying to vent his or her dissatisfaction and emotions towards work. Therefore, the same source domain can be mapped differently to the target domain depending on the cultural context in which it is located, and the cultural specificities within it.

1.3 Different source domains map to the same target domain

In fact, different source domains can have the same target domain. For example, the UK is a coastal country, so their language contains many metaphorical expressions related to fishing. For example, the phrase 'Never offer to each fish to swim' is known to the British as the target domain for the phrase 'Don't show off your skills in front of people who know what they are doing'. In traditional Chinese culture, there are expressions that share this target domain, but with different metaphorical expressions (Jia, 2016). In the Chinese 'Ban Men Xiang Xiang', the target domain of the expression is the same as the former metaphor. Therefore, in different cultural contexts, different source domains can map the same target domain, the difference only lies in the way the metaphors are expressed. In the real world, cultural metaphors always carry some cultural traces of the nation and the country.

2. Specific translation methods of cultural metaphors

2.1 Direct translation

People from different backgrounds have similar perceptions and understandings of the same thing, and the metaphors that are mapped out can sometimes correspond exactly, even if they are from

completely different cultural backgrounds, which is what we call direct translation (Gao, 2016). In the case of a direct translation, the cultural metaphor will have full equivalence in the two different languages, both for the ontology and for the metaphor. When translating, the translator usually only needs to find the corresponding metaphor in the target language, e.g. Everybody's business is nobody's business and Eat to live, but not live to eat. (one eats to live, but not live to eat.) and so on.

With the globalisation of the economy and the development of communication methods, and because people from different cultural backgrounds have to communicate on a regular basis, it is inevitable that cultures will interpenetrate each other in the process of communication. Thus, the metaphors that exist in one language are gradually absorbed and accepted in another language, for example, armed to the teeth, the paper tiger and the iron rice-bowl.

2.2 Annotation over direct translation

When the source domain in the original text cannot be mapped to the same target domain in the target utterance because of the different cultural background, the translator needs to take certain measures to deal with the source domain, such as adding notes after the direct translation to facilitate the reading and understanding of the target language readers (Liao, 2015).

For example, the English statement is: It was Friday and soon they'd go out and get drunk.

The English phrase is: It was Friday and soon they'd go out and get drunk. Note: Friday is payday in the UK.

In the example sentence, Friday is the payday in Britain, but there is no such metaphor in China, so the translator added the meaning of Friday in Britain afterwards, without explanation, the reader of the translated language would not understand why the British would go out to eat and drink on this day.

Another example: The English statement is: While it may seem to be painting the lily, I should like to add somewhat to Mr. Alistair Cooke's excellent article.

Translation: I should like to add somewhat to Mr. Alistair Cooke's excellent article, although it may seem to be painting the lily, with much effort. Note: In England the lily is a symbol of nobility, chastity and beauty.

As the lily is a symbol of nobility, beauty and chastity in the eyes of the West, colouring the lily would naturally be a futile exercise. By doing so, the annotation not only achieves the purpose of cross-cultural communication, but also preserves the imagery of the metaphor in the original text and never promotes a real and in-depth understanding of the culture in the metaphor by the target language readers.

2.3 Substitution

The same metaphorical thinking can lead to different metaphorical expressions because they are influenced by different values, geographical and human factors and religious beliefs, so that different source domains can be mapped to the same target domain (Wang, 2011). In this regard, the translator can replace the cultural concepts in the original language with those of the target language, thus making it easier for the readers of the target language to have a better and deeper understanding of the metaphorical expressions. For example, "second" is translated as "three" to make the word more fluent; and two heads are better than one. These metaphors in the source and target domains are identical in meaning, although their metaphors and ontologies are completely different.

2.4 Intended translation

Because of the existence of certain cultural metaphorical expressions that vary greatly between peoples and countries, it is sometimes difficult for the translator to achieve both the purpose of cross-cultural communication and communication and the purpose of preserving the original metaphorical imagery (Zhang, 2010). Therefore, the translator should retain the important metaphors and adopt the paraphrasing method, trying to retain the main thematic meaning of the original text and translate the metaphorical images of the culture in a meaningful way, so as to facilitate the understanding

of the original text by the target language readers.

For example: To teach a fish how to swim. or nothing in the world is impossible if you set your mind to do it. Some of these phrases contain traditional Chinese folk sayings and some contain cultural metaphors unique to Chinese culture. If you insist on using the direct translation method, there is a great possibility that the translation will lose its original readability.

Another example: You know my loneliness is only kept for you, my sweet songs are only sung for you. In translating these sentences, the sentences often carry a deep meaning (Zeng, 2010), if translated directly, the original meaning of the sentences will be greatly destroyed, so the choice of paraphrasing can be better for the target language readers to read.

3. Conclusion

Cognitive linguistics believes that metaphor is not only a phenomenon of language behaviour, but also a means of cognition and a way of thinking for human beings to perceive the objective world. As a vehicle of culture, metaphors are rich in cultural features. Therefore, a deep understanding of the cultural characteristics of metaphors is a basic prerequisite for good translation of cultural metaphors. In addition, when translating cultural metaphors, translators need to start from a cognitive perspective, analyse the potential cultural elements in the metaphors, and choose appropriate translation methods according to different cultural characteristics, so as to promote better acceptance by readers of the target language.

Acknowledgement

This research was funded by Hunan Social and Science Philosophy Project: Metaphorical Discourse and Its Translation in Traditional Chinese Medicine (19JD48).

Conflict of Interest

The authors declare that they have no conflicts of interest to this work.

References

- Zhang, M. (2021). Translation Methods of Metaphors from the Perspective of Cognitive Linguistics. *Literature Education(Next)*, 01, 152–153.
- Yang, Z., & Hu, J. (2017). Research on metaphorical translation from the perspective of cognitive linguistics. *Journal of Hehe College*, 8(09), 185–186.
- Jia, Z. (2016). An exploration of translation of cultural metaphors from the perspective of cognitive linguistics. *English Square*, 09, 69–70.
- Gao, J. (2016). Research on translation of metaphors in the perspective of cognitive linguistics. *Reading and Writing (Journal of Education and Teaching)*, 13(05), 7–8.
- Liao, J. (2015). A study of cultural metaphor translation from the perspective of cognitive linguistics. *English Square (Academic Research)*, 01, 24–26.
- Wang, J. (2011). Metaphorical translation from the perspective of cognitive linguistics. *Journal of Liaoning Institute of Education and Administration*, 28(02), 83–85.
- Zhang, R. (2010). A brief discussion on metaphorical translation from the perspective of cognitive linguistics. *Overseas English*, 09, 172–173.

How to Cite: Shi, Y., & Fan, L. (2023). An Analysis of Cultural Metaphors in Translation from a Cognitive Linguistic Perspective. *Journal of Global Humanities and Social Sciences*, 4(1), 33–36.
<https://doi.org/10.47852/bonviewGHSS2023040108>