

Translating Metaphors from a Cognitive Perspective: The Case of "Flowers" in Poetry Imagery

Minhua Rao

School of Southwest Petroleum University, Chengdu 610000, China

ABSTRACT

Imagery is an important element in poetry, the translation of which has traditionally been the main point and difficulty of poetry translation. With the development of cognitive linguistics, cognitive metaphor theory provides a new perspective to study the translation of poetic imagery. Under the perspective of cognitive linguistics, poetic imagery is a conceptual metaphor that maps from the source domain to the target domain, so whether there is a corresponding mapping relationship between two cultures determines how to translate poetic imagery. Flowers are an important creative theme in classical poetry. The translation of flower imagery in ancient Chinese poetry is studied from the perspective of cognitive metaphor theory, and four methods of translating poetic imagery are summarized: direct translation, conversion of vehicle, direct translation with explanation, and translation of meaning without vehicle. These four methods aims at providing reference for the translation of poetic imagery and spreading traditional Chinese culture.

KEYWORDS

Cognition; Metaphor; Poetic Imagery; Flower Imagery.

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1. Metaphor in Cognitive Perspective

The systematic study of metaphor has been carried out since ancient Greece. Aristotle clearly defined metaphor in his *Poetics*, regarding it as a kind of rhetoric, and propose the substitution theory of metaphor. According to him, metaphor is a substitution or comparison based on the commonality between things. Aristotle's theory laid the foundation for the study of metaphor, which was used as a rhetoric for a long time. However, this is "limited to the traditional rhetorical framework, which makes it difficult to explain the underlying mechanisms of metaphor. As the representatives of metaphor research from a cognitive perspective, Lakoff and Johnson proposed a cognitive linguistic perspective on metaphor in their book *Metaphors We Live By*, which symbolized a new era of metaphor study. In cognitive linguistics, metaphor is seen as a way of perceiving things rather than as a superficial phenomenon of language, and Lakoff and Johnson argued that metaphor was "to understand one type of thing by another". In conceptual metaphor theory, metaphor is divided into two levels, namely conceptual metaphor and linguistic metaphor. Conceptual metaphor refers to the "cross-domain mapping in a conceptual system", and linguistic metaphor is the linguistic expression of this mapping. Conceptual metaphor consists of four elements, namely, source domain, target domain, bodily experience, and mapping. These four elements form the basic structure of the conceptual metaphor, which is a mapping from the source domain to the target domain based on bodily experience. Understanding the target domain is based on understanding the source domain, and one or more features of the source domain are mapped to the target domain through cognitive

reasoning, so that the target domain acquires the relevant features of the source domain. For example, in the metaphor of "life is a journey", the source domain is the relatively clear "journey", and people use the experience of the journey to map its characteristics, such as a beginning and an end, onto the target domain of "life", and gain an understanding of life. There must be some similarity which may be inherent or newly created between the source domain and the target domain, or between the vehicle and the tenor. In order to understand the metaphor correctly, it is important to discover the similarity between the source and target domains, or to find the ground that connects the vehicle and the tenor.

1.2. Cognitive Metaphor and Poetic Imagery

Poetry conveys rich meaning in condensed language, and the success of this process relies heavily on poetic imagery. According to Qu Guang, "the writer's subjective sentiments and objects feel each other, thus artistic images called imagery are created with literal meaning and hidden meaning". Objects refer to all objective things with physical forms, while subjective sentiments refer to the poet's subjective consciousness. The so-called "imagery" is not a simple superposition of meaning and image, but the poet's thought processing, embedding the feelings in the objective things, so the imagery generally has a double meaning. In the perspective of cognitive linguistics, poetic imagery is regarded as a metaphor. As mentioned above, conceptual metaphor is a mapping from the source domain to the target domain by means of bodily experience. In poetic imagery, the "image" is the source domain, while the "meaning" is the target domain. With the help of poet's own experience, he maps the characteristics of objective things to his own subjective sentiments, forming a metaphor. For example, ancient poems often use the imagery of "bamboo" to symbolize high moral character, as in the saying, "Before the bamboo emerges from the earth, it has a section, and when it reaches the clouds, it is still vain". The poet draws on his experience of bamboo to map its qualities to those of human beings. The use of imagery as a metaphor can provide guidance to translators in translating imagery. The translators can understand and analyze the imagery from a cognitive perspective, use metaphor theory to explain the creation of the imagery, so as to better grasp the "meaning" that the source imagery is intended to convey, and reconstruct the imagery in the translation.

2. THE METHOD OF TRANSLATING METAPHOR IN POETRY

As mentioned above, in the cognitive linguistic perspective, imagery is a kind of metaphor, so translators can treat imagery as a metaphor when translating it. The relationship between cognitive metaphor and poetic imagery is from the general to the specific. The source domain of imagery is expressed in the form of concrete objects, while the target domain of imagery is the poet's will to express emotions, which cannot be expressed directly. Translators can apply metaphorical translation methods to imagery translation, but they should be specific according to the specificity of the imagery.

Flowers are an important subject in poetry in both ancient and modern times, and their cultural connotation and emotional spirit are very rich. There are a lot of flower imagery in both English and Chinese cultures. Due to the common experience of human beings, English and Chinese cultures share a common understanding of some flower imagery, while due to the different types of flowers caused by geographical factors and the different connotations of flowers caused by cultural factors, there are differences in the understanding of some flower imagery between English and Chinese cultures.

The following paper will take flower imagery as an example and propose four methods of translation of imagery based on the translation methods of metaphor.

2.1. Ideal Situation

2.1.1. Direct Translation

The reciprocal mapping of metaphorical conceptual domains corresponds to the direct translation in imagery translation. Some metaphors originate from people's universal experience of the world, and these metaphors have the same content form and cultural connotation in the source and target languages, so direct translation can be used.

ST:玉容寂寞泪阑干，梨花一枝春带雨。（白居易《长恨歌》）

TT:Her jade-white face crisscrossed with tears in lonely world, Like a spray of pear blossoms in sprain rain imperled.（许渊冲）

English and Chinese cultures associate flowers with beauty or female appearance, for example, peonies are used to refer to beauty in both Chinese and English cultures. In traditional Chinese culture, peony is often used as a metaphor for a woman of beautiful appearance and respectable status. In Western culture, peony is also used to describe a woman, for example, in *Tess of the D'Urbervilles*, there is a use of "peony mouth" to describe the lips of a girl. The two cultures share a common understanding of the mapping of "flower-beauty", so the flower imagery in the poem can be directly translated.

ST:日暮东风怨啼鸟，落花犹似坠楼人。（杜牧《金谷园》）

TT:At dusk the flowers fall in the eastern wind just, Like Green Pearl tumbling down and birds mournfully sing.（许渊冲）

The Chinese often use falling flowers to express the feeling of vagabondage, and in English, flowers are also used to allude to the fate of people, for example, "push up the daisies" refers to people being buried after they die. The image of falling flowers is usually translated directly, because metaphorically speaking, both in the Chinese and English contexts, people map the process of blossoming and falling flowers to life, linking falling flowers to the death of life. The mapping relationship of "falling flowers-death" exists in both Chinese and Western cultures, and the direct translation method can be accepted by readers of the target language.

2.2. Non-ideal Situation

2.2.1. Conversion of Vehicle

Different cultures may use different vehicles to express the same tenor, i.e. the source domain is different but the target domain is the same. In this case, in order to maximize the metaphorical meaning, the translator replaces the vehicle in the source text with a vehicle familiar to the target language readers, reconstructing the mapping relationship between the source domain and the target domain in the translator's space. For example, the same concept of "the emergence of new things in large numbers" is expressed by "like bamboos" in Chinese, but "like mushrooms" in English. Therefore, the translator needs to replace the vehicle of bamboos with the vehicle of mushrooms.

ST:城中桃李愁风雨，春在溪头荠菜花。（辛弃疾《鹧鸪天》）

TT:Peach and plum blossoms in the town fear wind and showers, But spring dwells by the creekside where blossom wildflowers.（许渊冲、许明）

The last two lines seem to contrast the peach and plum in the city with the shepherd's purse in the country, but in fact they show the writer's disgust with the bustling life in the city and his praise for the simple life in the country. Chinese readers can easily map the "freshness and simplicity" of the shepherd's purse to the country life. For the target readers, shepherd's purse is a relatively unfamiliar object, so the translator does not choose to translate it directly, but translate it into "wild flowers",

specifying that the flower grows in the countryside, so that the target readers can more easily understand the mapping of "flower - country life".

ST: 槛菊愁烟兰泣露，罗幕轻寒，燕子双飞去。（晏殊《蝶恋花》）

TT: Orchids shed tears with doleful asters in mist grey. How can they stand the cold silk curtains can't allay? A pair of swallows flies away.（许渊冲、许明）

In the example sentence, the writer expresses his bitter feelings of missing through the three imagery of chrysanthemums, orchids and swallows. The chrysanthemum imagery here reflects the writer's mood, and the translator translates it as "aster" instead of "chrysanthemums". Although aster and chrysanthemums belong to the same family, they belong to two different genera. In other words, aster is not a common image of chrysanthemum in classical Chinese poetry, but aster, which is found in temperate regions, especially in North America, is a more familiar object to the target language readers.

2.2.2. Conversion of Vehicle

The third method is a combination of metaphor and ground, i.e., direct translation plus interpretation in imagery translation. Source and target languages can convey similar mapping relations by conversion of vehicle. However, some mapping relationships in the source language cannot be transferred to the target language in this way, and a large part of this gap is due to the fact that the source language conceptual metaphor is based on its specific history and culture. In such cases, the translator can translate the source vehicle directly and then plus clear explanation.

ST: 采菊东篱下，悠然见南山。（陶渊明《饮酒（其五）》）

TT: I pick fence-side chrysanthemums at will, And leisurely I see the southern hill.（许渊冲）

Flowers are often used in poetry to map the writers' character. For example, chrysanthemums are elegant, hardy, and do not compete with other flowers, and they are often used by country poets as a metaphor for their noble character. In the source text, the poet uses the character of chrysanthemum as a metaphor for his own aspirations. Only when the translator conveys the sense of seclusion and purity represented by chrysanthemum to the target readers can they understand the inseparable connection between chrysanthemum and the poet's character. Chinese readers can map the characteristics of the chrysanthemum to personal character based on their cultural and historical knowledge, while target readers cannot form this mapping in their minds due to their lack of background knowledge. The translation adds the words "at will" to express the poet's leisurely and relaxed mood, which helps readers better understand the source text.

ST: 待到重阳日，还来就菊花。（孟浩然《过故人庄》）

TT: When the Double Ninth Festival comes round, I will come for chrysanthemums again.（许渊冲）

Flower imagery associated with specific social customs exists in both English and Chinese cultures, but this mapping relationship is generally missing in the other culture due to the difference between English and Chinese cultures. The chrysanthemum is associated with the Double Ninth Festival, but this mapping relationship does not exist in Western culture, so a direct translation with explanation is more appropriate for such imagery. The translator has adopted a direct translation of the imagery of chrysanthemum, but since the target readers lack relevant cultural experience, it is difficult to link chrysanthemum with the Double Ninth Festival, so the translator has added "for" to explain the customs of chrysanthemum viewing on the Double Ninth Festival, helping the target readers to reconstruct the mapping relationship between "chrysanthemum and Double Ninth Festival".

2.2.3. Translation of Meaning without Vehicle

As mentioned above, due to cultural differences, the mapping relationship of the source text cannot be transposed into the translation by conversion of the vehicle, so the direct translation with explanation can be adopted. However, sometimes the vehicle of the source text may have an opposite meaning in the target language culture, so both direct translation and direct translation with explanation may cause misunderstanding among the target language readers, which requires the translator to discard the vehicle and translate the meaning directly.

ST:烟花巷陌，依约丹青屏障。（柳永《鹤冲天》）

TT:In the singsong houses and brothels, I keep a rendezvous behind painted screens。（杨宪益、戴乃迭）

Flowers are also used in Chinese culture as a metaphor for a woman who works in brothels, hence there are the expressions like "seeking flowers and asking for willows" and "the streets of flowers and willows". While in Western culture, flowers are mostly associated with positive and active feelings. When translating such flower imagery, the translator cannot find a suitable object to replace it, and because of the contradiction in meaning, direct translation will cause difficulties for readers to understand, so translation of meaning without vehicle is most appropriate. In Example 7, the word "烟花" does not refer to fireworks, but to the whore, and the word "烟花巷陌" refers to a place for pleasure. Instead of translating the specific object, the translator chooses to translate the metaphorical meaning of fireworks. Although this treatment does not transpose the mapping relationship into the translation, it conveys the emotion of the original work and does not cause misunderstanding among readers.

ST:晚来一阵风兼雨，洗尽炎光，理罢笙簧，却对菱花淡淡妆。（李清照《采桑子》）

TT:The wind and the rain came suddenly in the evening. They washed up the heat of Summers's rays. Having played the sheng-huang for a while, I did a little make-up before the mirror。（茅于美）

In Chinese culture, water chestnut flower originally refers to the flowers of the plants of water chestnut genera. In ancient times, mirrors were made of copper, and their shadows under the sunlight resembled water chestnut flowers, so people called the mirror water chestnut flower. In Chinese context, water chestnuts have a positive connotation, and the poets often describe the scene of picking water chestnut in a boat to show the simplicity of rural life, and the use of water chestnut flower to refer to copper mirror is also to highlight its exquisite. In contrast, in English culture, water chestnuts are less often eaten and cause many trouble, thus carrying a negative meaning. In other words, there is no correspondence between the English and Chinese cultures regarding "water chestnut flower -- bronze mirror", and the meaning of water chestnut flower in the two cultures is contradictory. Therefore, it is inappropriate to translate directly, instead, the metaphorical meaning should be directly translated without the object.

3. CONCLUSION

From a cognitive linguistic perspective, imagery can be seen as a conceptual metaphor that maps from an source domain to a target domain. Considering imagery as a metaphor allows one to understand imagery by using the structure of metaphor and its production mechanism, providing a new perspective for analyzing and translating imagery. The mapping relationship of imagery metaphors may also be different in source and target language cultures due to the different physical experiences of source and target language readers. Accordingly, four methods of translating imagery are proposed: direct translation, conversion of vehicle, direct translation with explanation, and translation of meaning without vehicle. Taking flower imagery as an example, the mapping

relationship of flower imagery in the two cultures provides a basis for the application of different imagery translation methods. Summary

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