

The Metaphorical Translation of the *A Tribute to King Teng's Tower*—A Case Study of Chat-GPT and Luo Jingguo

ZHU Simin, CHEN Min

University of Shanghai for Science and Technology, Shanghai, China

Chat-GPT brings certain challenges to translators. Based on this, this paper compares the translation of metaphors in *A Tribute to King Teng's Tower* of Chat-GPT and Luo Jingguo. It is found that in the translation of metaphors, Chat-GPT mostly adopts straight translation, and the quality of that is not high, while Luo Jingguo discreetly adopts both straight and metaphorical translation as well as transplantation, and the quality of that is higher. The results of the study show that Chat-GPT performs poorly in dealing with the translation of metaphors, and there is still room for improvement in translating image and accurately expressing connotations.

Keywords: metaphor, translation strategies, Chat-GPT, *A Tribute to King Teng's Tower*

Introduction

A Tribute to King Teng's Tower was written by Wang Bo, an outstanding writer of the Tang Dynasty, who improvised it when he was on his way to Jiaotong to visit his father passing Nanchang, where he participated in the day's festivities. It is an excellent work of ekphrasis, almost the highest achievement of ekphrasis, with magnificent rhetoric, neat speech, and great elegance, containing 40 idioms and 46 allusions. The text can be found in the *Guwen Guanzhi* compiled in the Qing Dynasty.

Chat Generative Pre-trained Transformer (Chat-GPT) is an AI technology-driven natural language processing tool, which is able to carry out conversations by understanding and learning human language, and also interact with people according to the context, truly chatting and communicating like a human being, and even accomplishing tasks such as writing emails, video scripts, copywriting, translating, coding, writing papers, and other tasks (Yang, 2023). Since its introduction on November 30, 2022, Chat-GPT has inspired a great deal of interest and discussion around the world and has brought many troubles and challenges to various sectors. The technology is designed to respond to the user's questions and utilize big data capture technology to integrate the best answers it has captured across the web and feed them back to the user in a very short period of time.

According to the language distribution of language model resources published by Open-AI, a research and development organization in 2022, it can be found that English occupies an absolute dominance in the model language resources while Chinese occupies a very low percentage (Zheng et al., 2023). The amount of resources determines how well Chat-GPT performs in processing problems in different languages. It always performs well in answering English questions but performs poorly in other languages with more errors. For example, at the

ZHU Simin, Master candidate, College of Foreign Languages, University of Shanghai for Science and Technology, Shanghai, China.

CHEN Min, associate professor, College of Foreign Languages, University of Shanghai for Science and Technology, Shanghai, China.

application level, some users say that when asking questions related to *A Tribute to King Teng's Tower*, Chat-GPT always generates incorrect answers, which makes people feel that it's like it was done on purpose. But actually, this is not intentional. It has something to do with its training data and algorithm. *A Tribute to King Teng's Tower* is relatively too long for Chat-GPT to process. There are also netizens who ask Chat-GPT to translate *A Tribute to King Teng's Tower*. The overall result is acceptable, but the translation of some metaphors is inappropriate. Chat-GPT's fast translation speed and certain translation quality assurance put forward a huge challenge to translators.

The Translation of Metaphors

Metaphor is ubiquitous. It is not just a rhetorical device but also an integral part of human consciousness and behavior. Therefore, it should be expressed that human thoughts and behaviors are inseparable from metaphors in terms of their nature. In the 1980s, the famous American scholars Lakoff and Johnson put forward in the book *Metaphors We Live by*: "Whether in language or in thought and action, metaphor is ubiquitous in everyday life, and the conceptual systems on which our thoughts and behaviors are based are metaphor-based..." (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980).

Different cultures have different metaphors due to their different perceptions and experiences. Metaphors consist of vehicles and connotations. In different cultures, there are cases where the vehicles are the same, but the connotations are different. For example, in the West, "dog" is often associated with a positive meaning, for example, "a lucky dog" means "someone lucky", but in China, "dog" is usually associated with negative meanings, such as "goudongxi" which means "someone who is a nuisance". And there are also cases where the vehicles are different but the connotations are the same, such as in a metaphor of "sleeping soundly", the Western metaphor is "sleeping like a log", while the Chinese metaphor is "sleeping like a dead pig". Can metaphors be translated successfully in different cultures? From the perspective of cognitive linguistics, since human beings have the same physiological structure and psychological basis, Ye in *A Course in Cognitive Metaphor and Translation* suggests that "people in all cultures share the experiential basis for understanding the world" (Ye, 2013). Therefore, when translators deal with metaphorical translations, they have to immerse themselves in the experience of the translating language and look for the most appropriate translation, which will activate the associations of the target readers and enable them to accurately comprehend the connotation of the text, and not to produce a sense of unfamiliarity.

This paper chooses to compare the translation obtained by the emerging Chat-GPT technology with Luo Jingguo's translation, aiming to analyze the similarities and differences in the adopted approaches in dealing with metaphorical translation as well as how the quality of the final translation is, with a view to providing future scholars with certain references in analyzing the translation capability of Chat-GPT and studying the large number of metaphorical translations in *A Tribute to King Teng's Tower*.

Comparison of Metaphorical Translation of *A Tribute to King Teng's Tower* by Luo Jingguo and Chat-GPT

As an emerging technology, Chat-GPT performs well in translating *A Tribute to King Teng's Tower*; not only can it give a quick translation, but also the translation is overall concise and clear, preserving the style of the original work. However, when it comes to metaphors, Chat-GPT performs not so well. The English-Chinese version of selected *Guwen Guanzhi* contains an English translation of *A Tribute to King Teng's Tower*, compiled

by Prof. Luo Jingguo of the English Language Department at Peking University. The translation is elegant and accurate, readable and enjoyable, and of high academic value. The translation not only helps domestic readers master English, but also introduces classical Chinese prose to Western readers and those who love Chinese literature and poetry. Therefore, this paper analyzes the metaphorical translation strategy from the perspective of Luo Jingguo's translation.

Wang Bin (2010) points out that the translation of metaphor refers to how to translate metaphor as a rhetorical device (a phenomenon that can produce cognitive mapping, including homophony and multiple meanings of words, etc.), and that metaphorical expression is the object of translation rather than the method of translation. There are various ways to translate metaphors, which are mainly manifested in metaphorical translation, transplantation translation, and straight translation. For all kinds of metaphorical content, the translator must choose the corresponding metaphorical translation method, grasp the core of the metaphor, clear metaphorical connotation, find a suitable match in the translation language, and strive to make the metaphorical translation understandable to target readers at a glance, no sense of unfamiliarity, and to ensure that the original style remains unchanged, as well as the use of the image. Translators can produce appropriate translation based on their own understanding. If necessary, they can take the method of provincial translation, which can make the translation concise and precise, so that the readers will not be vague about the content.

Metaphorical Translation

Metaphorical translation is the analogical interpretation of the source language's cultural communication patterns by that of the target language. The distinctive feature of metaphorical translation is the equivalence of linguistic communication functions, which is expressed by means of naturalized translation (Wang, 2010). Metaphorical translation has higher standards for translators, requiring them to find appropriate correspondences in the target language on the basis of the clear meaning of the source language, and to weigh every word carefully, so that the translated text not only maintains the style of the source language but also retains the original image, and facilitates the readers of the target language to understand the translated text and further experience the philosophy and experience of other cultures.

Example 1: 物华天宝，龙光射牛斗之墟。

Luo: And its products are nature's jewels. The radiance of its legendary sword shoots directly upward between the constellations Niu and Dou.

Chat-GPT: A land of beautiful natural treasures, where the dragon's light shines over the site of the Cowherd and Weaving Maid.

This sentence contains an allusion that the purple light in ancient China was regarded as an auspicious omen. At the beginning of the Jin Dynasty, purple light was often seen between the two stars of the Niu and the Dou. Proficient in astronomy said that the purple light was the light of some swords shining up to the sky. Then people started to look for the swords. Eventually the swords were dug out of the ground which then turned into two dragons when put into the water. Therefore, "longguang" does not refer to the light of the dragon, but to the dazzling light emitted by the two swords of Longquan and Tai'e, and "Niu" and "Dou" are the names of the stars. Chat-GPT did not clarify the connotation of "longguang" but just simply translated it as "dragon's light", which is incorrect. When translating "Niu" and "Dou", Chat-GPT chose to translate it as the stars of the Cowherd and Weaving Maiden. However, in the culture of the target language, there is no myth of the cowherd and the weaving maiden. Luo Jingguo's translation, however, uses constellation, which is in line with the Chinese translation of

astrological constellations and can stimulate the target language readers to associate it with the Western doctrine of constellations.

Example 2: 酌贪泉而觉爽，处涸辙以犹欢。

Luo: One keeps his integrity even if he has drunk the water of the spring of Avarice and is cheerful even as he is confronted with misfortune.

Chat-GPT: Drinking from a greedy spring, one feels refreshed; dancing in the dry ruts, one can still find joy.

This sentence contains two allusions, one is “tanquan” and the other is “hezhe”. The former is the name of a spring in Shimen, Nanhai County, during the Eastern Jin Dynasty, and legend has it that drinking from the spring will make one greedy. Wu Zhiyin did not believe this when he heard it when he went to his office and wrote a poem after drinking from the spring, which roughly said that a pure person in heart would not become greedy by drinking this water, and he really did not get greedy when serving as an official in this place. The allusion “hezhe” is related to Zhuang Zi, who was very angry when he wanted to borrow grain and the supervisor at that time refused to do so immediately, but had to wait until after the tax was collected. Chat-GPT translates “tanquan” as “greedy spring”, which does not allow the target language readers to make corresponding associations, while Luo Jingguo translates it as “spring of Avarice”. The form of the phrase “the spring of Avarice” is very similar to the concepts of “the tree of wisdom” and “the tree of life” in Western culture. This also seems to add some symbolism to the Chinese word “greed” (Wang, 2009). Such metaphorical translation can activate the relevant associations in the cultural context of the target language readers, which makes them understand the text more accurately. In translating “hezhe”, both translations omit the complex background story. Chat-GPT chooses the straight translation method; the final translation is inaccurate and does not express the metaphorical meaning of “hezhe”. Luo Jingguo’s translation succinctly expresses “misfortune”, which allows the target language reader to understand the meaning right away.

Transplantation Translation

Transplantation translation, which is also often referred as foreignized translation, moves the metaphorical expressions in the original text straight into the target language, retaining the imagery structure schema of the original expression (Wang, 2010). This method of translation requires a high level of translation. The translator must polish the translation carefully and at the same time keep the style of the original text. They should not only detect the metaphors in time, but also translate the hidden contents vividly. Even though there may be no corresponding imagery in the target language culture, the imagery and metaphors in the original text are kept, which can give the target language readers a new way of thinking and means of expression.

Example 3: 腾蛟起凤，孟学士之词宗；紫电青霜，王将军之武库。

Luo: Also present at the gathering are Master Meng, whose literary gracies as imposing as a dragon soaring and a phoenix dancing, and General Wang, who has weapons as sharp as the famous swords “Purple Lightning” and “Blue Frost” in his armory.

Chat-GPT: With the flying of dragons and rising of phoenixes, the words of scholar Meng and the martial skills of General Wang are revered.

This sentence contains two allusions, “zidian” and “qingshaung”. *Ancient and Modern* notes: “The Great Emperor of Wu (Sun Quan) had six swords and the second one was called zidian”. *Xijing Zaji* said: “The blade of the sword which Gaozu (Liu Bang) chopped the white snake often carried frost and snow”. The sentence means that in the armory there are sharp swords like zidian and qingshuang. Chat-GPT did not translate the “zidian and

qingshaung” at all but combined the literacy of Master Meng and the military talent of General Wang together, and the original text compares Meng’s literacy as if he is like rising a phoenix with a dragon’s scaly head. The translation directly treats the part of “rising dragon and phoenix” as an accompanying phrase, which is not correct. Luo Jingguo’s translation, on the other hand, has completely translated the two images of “zidian” and “qingshaung” and the allusions of them. Although this makes the text longer, these two images contain allusions and have unique cultural connotations. Keeping the images intact in the translation can better convey Chinese culture to the target language readers and make them more aware of Chinese history.

Example 4: 舍簪笏于百龄，奉晨昏于万里。

Luo: I am determined not to accept the offer of a lifelong government position by wearing a hair dress and holding a tablet before the chest as court officials do. Rather, I will travel thousands of li to go home to wait on my parents, paying respect to them morning and evening.

Chat-GPT: He left his hairpin and writing tablet at the age of one hundred and joined the service of the far-off thousand-mile frontier.

In this sentence, “zanhu” refers to being an official, and “chenhun” refers to the author’s parents. Chat-GPT adopts the literal translation method, which translates the literal meaning of “zanhu” without considering the connotation behind it. The meaning is completely incorrect even though the sentence is short. On the other hand, Luo Jingguo not only translates the meaning of “zanhu”, but also covers all the connotations behind it. When translating “chenhun”, he clearly points out the connotation of serving parents, which is a very accurate translation and allows the audience of the target language to understand what the original text really wants to express. Therefore, in order to translate accurately, the translator must understand the meaning behind the metaphor thoroughly, which is difficult for machine translation, such as Chat-GPT to do when taking context into consideration and translating metaphors.

Straight Translation

The translation of metaphors is not a translation of the text in the strict sense, but the use of whitewashed language to explain the pragmatic meaning of the original metaphorical expression. The choice of this method is the simplest and least laborious, and translators use it the most (Wang, 2010). The translator can simply translate the literal meaning without having to scrutinize the connotation of the source language. Although the translation is fast and concise, the original style of the text cannot be preserved, and the metaphors contained in the text are directly omitted. Therefore, people cannot think in the way of the source language and culture. Thus, the metaphorical intention cannot be conveyed.

Example 5: 四美具，二难并。

Luo: It is not an easy thing to have four excellent things all at once, that is, good weather, beautiful scenery, full enjoyment and heartfelt happiness, and it is even more difficult to have a generous host and honored guests.

Chat-GPT: Both the landscape and the music are exquisite, and both are difficult to surpass.

In this short sentence of six words, “Four Beauties” and “Two Difficulties” have their origins. The “Four Beauties” is from Liu Kun’s *Answer to Lu Chen’s Poem* which refers to music, food, writing, and language. “Two Difficulties” in this article is an adaptation of the “Four Difficulties” in Xie Lingyun’s *Preface to a Poem on the Collection of the Prince Ye of Wei*, which refers to the difficulty of obtaining a wise master and an honored guest. This sentence means that these wonderful situations (propitious time, beautiful scenery, enjoyment, and pleasure) exist at the same time and these two types of characters (wise masters and honored guests), which are

difficult to be present at the same time, also appear at the same time. The translation of Chat-GPT is inaccurate, neither expressing the image of the “Four Beauties” nor the meaning of the “Two Difficulties” and the translation does not achieve the purpose of making it clear to the target language readers. Luo Jingguo’s translation, on the other hand, elaborates the “Four Beauties” and the “Two Difficulties” so that the target language readers can have a clear understanding of them.

Example 6: 勃，三尺微命，一介书生。

Luo: I am an insignificant scholar of a low official position...

Chat-GPT: Bo, with his humble three-foot frame and status as a mere scholar...

The term “sanchi” in this sentence refers to the belt that is tied around the waist. In *The Book of Rites—Yuzao*, it is written: “The gentry’s belt is three feet long for a scholar”. Zheng Xuan, a Confucian scholar and scripture master at the end of the Eastern Han Dynasty, explains: “The gentry is the hanging part of the belt”, referring to the part that hangs down. The length of the belt hanging down depends on the high or low rank and the higher the rank the longer the belt hanging. For the rank of scholar, the length of the belt hangs down is three feet. Wang Bo described himself as a “scholar”, so he called himself “sanchi”. The term “weiming” refers to the rank of officials in the Zhou Dynasty. According to *The Book of Rites—The System of Kings*, there were nine levels of official titles, the highest of which was “Nine Ming”. For example, the highest rank was “Nine Ming” and the lowest rank of cabs did not have any “ming”. Therefore, when Wang Bo said that he had a “weiming”, he meant that he had a low official rank. Chat-GPT has simply translated all the images in the sentence, and it is a mistake to translate “sanchi” as three feet high. Chat-GPT’s translation of the phrase “weiming” is also a mistake, as it omits the implied meaning of “low official rank”. On the other hand, Luo Jingguo’s translation is complete and accurate, and the sentences are simple and clear.

Conclusion

The tool Chat-GPT is still in the spotlight. Although it can quickly grab massive amounts of information and integrate it, the role of humans in translation is still irreplaceable. In the end, Chat-GPT is nothing more than a machine translation, and machine translations still need human beings to review and modify them. While machine translation is fast, its quality cannot be guaranteed. In a limited time, the speed of human translation is not as fast as machine, but the quality of human translation is guaranteed. This requires translators to utilize machine translation more efficiently, and moreover, they should constantly enrich their knowledge of metaphors in order to be able to do well in complex metaphorical translation. Otherwise, the advantages of human translation will not be highlighted.

References

- Lakoff, G., & Johnson, M. (1980). *Metaphors we live by*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Wang, B. (2010). Translation of metaphors and metaphorical translation. *Journal of Xi'an International Studies University*, 18(4), 91-96.
- Wang, Q. (2009). A study on the techniques of Luo Jingguo’s English translation of *A tribute to King Teng’s tower*. *Journal of the College of Northwest Adult Education*, 11(5), 65-68.
- Yang, Y. (2023). Public relations and ChatGPT. *PR Magazine*, 19(5), 185-190.
- Ye, Z. N. (2013). *A course in cognitive metaphor and translation*. Beijing: Peking University Press.
- Zheng, Y., Ding, Y., Zheng, Y., Zhang, M., Wang, X., Zhang, B., ... Rao, G. (2023). Multi-disciplinary changes and challenges spawned by ChatGPT-like artificial intelligence (conversation by writing). *Journal of Tianjin Normal University (Social Sciences)*, 50(3), 49-63.