A Study on the Translation Strategies of Metaphors in Song Ci from the Perspective of Conceptual Metaphor

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This article employs the theory of conceptual metaphor to conduct a thorough analysis and exploration of translation strategies for the metaphors in Song Ci. Ci, a treasure in ancient Chinese literature, makes frequent use of metaphor. Its unique form of expression and abundant artistic effects often create difficulties in translation. This study selects some representative metaphor examples from Song Ci to explore the patterns and strategies in the translation process. The study reveals that in face of the metaphors in Song Ci, translators need to comprehensively apply strategies such as retaining the metaphor, replacing the metaphor, and translating the literal meaning to ensure the quality of translation while restoring the aesthetic charm of the original metaphor.

Keywords: conceptual metaphor, Song Ci, metaphor translation strategies

Introduction

As one of the treasures of ancient Chinese culture, Song Ci has extremely high historical and artistic value. Ci is one of the representatives of China's unique artistic style, endowing ancient Chinese poetry with distinct style, charm, and features. Due to its cultural characteristics and artistic essence, Song Ci not only represents the charm of ancient Chinese literature but also serves as an important carrier and symbol of Chinese traditional culture.

Metaphor is a unique means of expression for poets to express love, depict scenery, convey emotions, and tell stories, endowing poetry with profound connotations and aesthetic charm. However, the translation of metaphors has always been a difficult issue for translators during the process of translating Song Ci. It is crucial to strike a balance between fully reflecting the profound meaning and style of the original text and making it understandable and acceptable to the target audience.

In current research on Song Ci, there are plenty of studies concerning the metaphors in Song Ci, but relatively fewer dedicated to translation strategies. Particularly, studies that summarize and dissect translation strategies of Song Ci metaphors from the perspective of conceptual metaphor are scattered and sparse.

This paper attempts to use the theory of conceptual metaphor as a foundation to explore the specific metaphor translation strategies in Xu Yuanchong's (2011) translation of *300 Song Lyrics*. The aim is to have a

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positive impact on the further research of Song Ci translation and pave new paths for the worldwide dissemination of Song Ci.

Conceptual Metaphor and Metaphor Translation Strategies

Conceptual Metaphor

Metaphor, as an integral part of our thoughts and language, has long been a subject of intense research in the fields of linguistics and cognitive science. Traditional metaphor research focuses on the study of rhetorical functions of metaphors. As an important school of metaphor research, the theory of conceptual metaphor offers a new perspective for our cognition and language.

Lakoff and Johnson (1980) pointed out in *Metaphors We Live By* that metaphors are not only present in language expressions but also permeate our thoughts and activities. In a unique way, metaphors allow us to use more familiar and concrete concepts to understand and perceive abstract concepts that are otherwise hard to comprehend directly. This is done through the so-called mapping from the source domain to the target domain. Therefore, conceptual metaphor deem metaphors as the cross-domain mapping from a concrete domain to an conceptual domain (Li, 2008).

The source domain and target domain make up the two core elements of conceptual metaphor. The source domain is typically concrete while the target domain tends to be abstract. The occurrence of conceptual metaphor involves systematic, localized, and asymmetrical mapping between the source domain and the target domain. The mapping process is always structural, preserving and transferring the conceptual structure from the source domain to the target domain as a whole. Moreover, this mapping process is selective—not all features of the source domain are mapped to the target domain. For instance, in the metaphor "time is money", numerous concepts related to "money", such as "saving", "spending", "wasting", "investing", etc., are mapped onto the concept of "time" to help understand and manage "time". We better understand and grasp the abstract concepts of the target domain through the mapping.

Metaphor Translation Strategies

When translating metaphors, we will face some problems, among which the two most important are as follows. First, language is experiential, and the differences in human experience structures result in linguistic differences, so the metaphors of different nations correspond to each other or not. For example, both the English and Chinese nations have metaphors about "love is journey", as they have experiences of "love" and "journey" in their lives. However, due to different cognitive experiences of color "red" or animal "dog", the corresponding metaphors are lower. Second, translation cannot be separated from the text, and the context has a greater constraint on it, especially for literary translation, where cultural factors have a great influence.

Tobias (2009) proposes that metaphors are widely used in literary creation and play a decisive role in displaying style, constructing themes, and conveying emotions. Peter Newmark (2001) proposed seven strategies for dealing with metaphors, including complete preservation, replacement, transformation, omission, preservation of the source language metaphor, addition of explanation, and reduction of metaphor. Toury (1995) summarizes them into four forms, namely: translating the same metaphor; translating with another metaphor; translating in a non-metaphorical way; and handling metaphor with form 0 (i.e., not translating). Schaffner (2004) summarizes the universal metaphor translation strategies as the three main strategies of substitution,

paraphrasing, and omission. Yu Gaofeng (2011) categorizes metaphor translation strategies from a cognitive perspective into five categories: direct translation, implied translation, simile translation, metonymy translation, and preserving the metaphor with added connotation.

Yousswfi (2009) focuses his research on a comparative analysis of the use of metaphors in the selected poems of Hafez and its English translation, to investigate whether the metaphorical expressions in poetry were accurately translated and understood. Shunmugam (2007) explores the strategies adopted by translators and their effects through an analysis of three sets of English translations of Malay poems on the theme of love. Zhang Guanglin and Xue Yahong (2009) examine the translation strategies for metaphors from the two perspectives of domestication and foreignization, with the domestication strategy including literal translation and metaphor replacement, and the foreignization strategy including retaining the metaphor, annotation and free translation. Chen Xue and Zhao Yan (2016) discuss the reasons and effects of choosing different metaphor translation strategies based on the cognitive nature and cognitive results of metaphor translation. Sun Libing (2018) analyzes the instances of metaphors in Xi Jinping's speeches from a cognitive perspective and explores the metaphor translation strategies in political discourse. Xu Jiali (2022) divides metaphors into structural metaphors, ontological metaphors, and orientational metaphors based on Lakoff and Johnson's categorization and carried out a critique on the translation of metaphors in Song Ci.

Analysis of Metaphor Translation Strategies in Song Ci

As a representative form of Chinese literature, Ci contains a lot of information and implies profound meanings and artistic conceptions, making its translation work a challenge. The core goal in translation should be to retain the aesthetics and moods of the original Ci as much as possible, and to ensure that its expression in the translation is close to the original text and conforms to the habits and rules specific to the target language. This study explores strategies for translating metaphors based on *300 Song Lyrics*, translated by Xu Yuanchong.

Retaining the Metaphor

Retaining the metaphor can be divided into two types: fully translating the source metaphor and partially translating the source metaphor.

Fully translating the source metaphor

Example (1)

ST: 故人何处？可惜<u>春将暮</u>。（曹组《点绛唇 云透斜阳》）

TT: Where is my old friend?

How I regret <u>spring will soon end</u>!

In traditional Chinese culture, spring often symbolizes the beginning of life and the vibrant youth period, while "暮" represents the setting sun or, so to say, the end, implying the passing of time and the aging of life. Therefore, "春将暮" can be understood as youth is coming to an end or beautiful times are going by. Here, it implies two meanings: the first is the passing of time, and the second is the passing of life. This metaphor is filled with strong sentiments of sadness and regret, expressing the poet's deep longing for old friends and his regret for the passage of time. "Spring is almost over" is a universal cognition shared by all ethnic groups and

languages, thus direct translation allows the readers of the target language to perceive its connotation and retains the style and mood of the original text.

Partially translating the source metaphor

That is, the source metaphor is directly translated, but not completely translated word for word. Instead, the relatively unimportant parts are eliminated that do not affect the conveyance of the meaning of the source text, making the language concise and easier for readers to read.

Example (2)

> ST: 桃溪不作从容住，<u>秋藕绝来无续处</u>。（周邦彦《玉楼春 桃溪不作从容住》）
>
> TT: We did not live long with ease on Peach Blossom Stream;
>
> <u>The severed lotus root can't be united again</u>.

"秋藕" implies separation because autumn is the season when the lotus root breaks. "绝来无续处" further shows this atmosphere of despair, suggesting the breakdown of a relationship or friendship, or the sadness of the characters' separation. The lotus root being interconnected even when broken is often used as a metaphor for lasting feelings even in separation. However, in this case, the phrase "绝来无续处" further conveys the desperation of irrecoverability when both feelings and connections are broken. Here, the autumn lotus root is used as a metaphor for the poet's deep pain in his heart for what he has lost and the regret of not being able to recover. "Lotus root" is a common metaphor in traditional Chinese culture, such as "藕断丝连", which could already mean "separation". The "autumn" season can make the mood deeper, but it is not necessary. As the readers of the target language have little cognition about this metaphor, it is sufficient to translate only "lotus root" to express connotation and reduce the potential difficulty in understanding or misunderstandings.

Replacing the Metaphor

Replacing the metaphor means retaining the form of the metaphor, but replacing the source metaphor with a metaphor that the target language readers can understand, avoiding misunderstandings caused by cultural and cognitive differences.

Example (3)

> ST: 塞下秋来风景异，<u>衡阳雁</u>去无留意。（范仲淹《渔家傲·秋思》）
>
> TT: When autumn comes to the frontier, the scene looks drear;
>
> <u>Southbound wild geese</u> won't stay e'en for a day.

In this sentence, the surface meaning is about wild geese, but the real meaning is about people. There is an old legend that geese fly south in autumn and stop at Huiyan Peak in Hengyang. However, the target language readers may not be familiar with Hengyang, and a direct translation may be difficult to understand. Therefore, the translator replaced "Hengyang" with "southbound" to still convey the meaning of "geese flying south". Geese are afraid of the cold wind in the desert, so they fly in groups to warmer places. In this poem, the poet describes the desolation and loneliness of the autumn frontier, and the geese have left without paying any attention, while the soldiers stationed here are expected to stay and win the battle to return home.

Translating the Literal Meaning

For those parts of the source text that are culturally distant from the target language and difficult for target language readers to understand through metaphors, translate their literal meaning, allowing target language readers to understand the meaning that the source text intends to convey directly.

Example (4)

ST: 三度别君来，此别真迟暮。（苏轼《生查子·诉别》）

TT: Thrice I have bidden you goodbye;

This time we're old with sorrow.

"迟暮" literally means "the sky is getting dark, the sun is setting", and it is often used as a metaphor to depict a person' old age or aging state, comparing life to a day, with old age being like the setting sun, representing the gradual diminishing of life's energy, the decline of vitality and strength, and the approach of death. This is a metaphor without cultural differences, and target language readers have cognitive experience of it, so the translator chooses to abandon the metaphor and translate the literal meaning, i.e., "we're old with sorrow".

Example (5)

ST: 桃源望断无寻处。（秦观《踏莎行·郴州旅舍》）

TT: Peach Blossom Land idealis beyond the sight.

"Peach Blossom Land" is "桃花源", taken from Tao Yuanming's "桃花源记", and it metaphorically refers to an ideal place of peaceful life. The term "Peach Blossom Land" contains the connotation of the excellent work "桃花源记", which is difficult for target language readers to understand, so the translator added "idealis" behind it to help readers appreciate its connotation.

Example (6)

ST: 渐行渐远渐无书，水阔鱼沉何处问。（欧阳修《玉楼春·别后不知君远近》）

TT: The farther you go away, the fewer your word;

No letter-bearing fish in water wide is heard.

"水阔鱼沉" means: the water is so vast that the fish have sunk to the bottom, how can one find them? It is used as a metaphor here for "people disappearing in the vast world and the world of countless things, difficult to find and nowhere to inquire". Ancient China had the legend of "fish and geese delivering letters", so it is also a response to the preceding "无书". The translator follows the source text metaphor and translates the literal meaning of "水阔鱼沉", further emphasizing the literal meaning of "无书" by adding "no letter-bearing" before "fish", helping target language readers understand the connotation without knowing the legend, and vividly conveying the sorrow of a woman living alone, thousands of miles away from her lover, wanting to find her lover and exchange letters but can't find a way.

Adding Explanatory Information

Adding explanatory information means adding additional information based on the translation of the source text metaphor to help readers of the target language understand better.

Example (7)

ST: 带缓罗衣，香残蕙炷。（晏殊《踏莎行·细草愁烟》）

TT: Her girdle is too loose her silken dress to tie;

<u>The incense burned up inch by inch will die</u>.

"蕙" means "fragrant herb". "炷" symbolizes "burning". The sentence means "the fragrance still lingers on the incense burned with Hui". The sentence uses "burning incense" as a metaphor for "a dull heart". The ash of the incense burned in a censer is compared to the poet's sorrowful intestines and wistful melancholy. "Burning incense" exists in many cultures, so the translator directly translates it as "incense", but "蕙" is a unique term in ancient China and it is difficult to determine which specific fragrant herb it refers to, so the translator simply omits it. Additionally, the translator added "inch by inch", which shows the common feature of "burning incense" and "sorrow", i.e. progressing in small increments, emphasizing the slow burning of the incense until it fades away, during which time there is a faint sense of sadness and endless melancholy. "Will die" can be understood as the incense burning out, or as the melancholy that wraps around one's heart fading away, leaving endless room for imagination.

Example (8)

ST: 无情不似多情苦。<u>一寸还成千万缕</u>。（晏殊《玉楼春·春恨》）

TT: My beloved feels not the grief my loving heart sheds;

<u>Each string as woven with thousands of painful threads.</u>

"一寸" refers to "one inch of sorrowful intestines/emotions", or "the poet's one inch of fragrant heart". "千万缕", i.e. "千丝万缕", metaphorically refers to countless separation regrets. "一寸" and "千万缕" are both tangible and concrete entities that people can perceive. The emotions that are built upon these two apparent entities are abstract and intangible, and are people's inner experiences. The poet uses this metaphor to better depict the complexity and depth of emotions. The two representations cleverly present a somewhat knotted state of sorrow, highlighting the complexity and mystery of emotions. This metaphor based on physical shape allows readers to better perceive and understand the emotional state of the poet, thus generating deeper resonance. "一寸" can have multiple interpretations, the translator translated it as "each string" to match the later "thread". In addition, the translator retained the metaphor of the source text "千万缕" and translated it as "thousands of thread", but added the word "painful", implying that these thoughts are painful emotions.

Converting to a Simile

Convert to a simile by adding words like "like" or "as" to the source text's metaphor, turning the metaphor into a simile and reducing the cognitive burden on the target language reader.

Example (9)

ST: 衰杨古柳，几经攀折，憔悴<u>楚宫腰</u>。（柳永《少年游·参差烟树灞陵桥》）

TT: The ancient willows fade,

Their twigs oft broken by those friends who part;

They languish <u>like the waist of palace maid</u>.

"楚宫腰" is a metaphor for "willow", as the King of Chu had a fondness for slim waists, hence the nickname "楚宫腰" for "slim waist". The sentence implies that the decayed old willow tree, after several climbs and breaks, is now as thin and emaciated as the waist of palace maid. The poet projects the image feature (slim figure) of "楚宫腰" onto the shape feature of the tree, thereby showing the slim and emaciated

state of the willow tree. Xu Yuanchong translated it as "like the waist of palace maid", retaining the metaphorical object, and added the word "maid" to make it easier for the target language reader to understand, while obscuring the meaning of "Chu", thus making appropriate modifications without destroying the connotation intended by the original text. Furthermore, he added the word "like" to turn the source text's metaphor into a simile, making it easier for readers to understand and reducing their cognitive burden.

Omission

Example (10)

> ST: 欲去又还不去，明日落花飞絮。飞絮送行舟，水东流。 （苏轼《昭君怨·送别》）
>
> TT: You linger though you must go,
>
> Flowers and willow down will fall tomorrow.
>
> They will see you boat off, laden with sorrow.

Based on the context, delete part of the metaphor that will not affect the reader's understanding, making the translation more fluent.

"飞絮" is a metaphor and symbol of farewell emotions. Flying catkins are light, drift, and formless, just like people's thoughts and emotions, which are intangible and uncatchable, yet present everywhere and able to spread endlessly. As if it can understand human sentiments, it represents the voice of those who are parting, sees off the departing boat with the wind, expressing people's profound emotions and endless reluctance. In the preceding sentence, the word "飞絮" is translated as "willow down", in the latter, the metaphor is directly deleted and replaced with "they", leaving the subject of the sentence ambiguous and highlighting its connotation and artistic conception.

Conclusion

This thesis takes the conceptual metaphor as a research perspective to delve into the translation strategies of Song Ci metaphors. In the practice of translating Song Ci, the use of translation strategies such as retaining the metaphor, replacing the metaphor, translating the literal meaning, adding explanatory explanations, converting to a simile, and omission not only ensures the transmission of the poetic and aesthetic essence of the original text, but also enables target language readers to better understand and appreciate Song Ci.

Song Ci is an important part of China's ancient cultural and artistic heritage, embodying the spiritual core of Eastern art. However, unique cultural features and profound metaphorical images often pose great challenges to the translation of Song Ci. How to accurately and vividly translate the metaphorical images of Song Ci into forms that the recipients of the target language culture can understand is the focus of this paper.

By taking Xu Yuanchong's translation of *300 Song Lyrics* as an example, we see that different translation strategies have a huge impact on the delicate metaphorical images in Song Ci. In different situations, choosing different translation strategies can more effectively grasp the metaphorical images of the source text and convey the artistic charm of Song Ci to target language readers. The research of this paper not only has important implications for deepening our understanding of the theoretical and practical application of Song Ci metaphors, but also provides many useful strategies and methods for solving the translation problems caused by cultural differences between China and the West.

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