

A Study of the Translation of Metonymy in Tang Poems from the Perspective of Cognitive Linguistics

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Abstract: The translation of Tang poems has played a vital role in the “Going Global” of Chinese culture. Used profusely in Tang poems, metonymy bear rhetorical forces that enhance poetic quality and aesthetic values while equally stimulating readers’ imagination. The article investigates the translation strategies of metonymy in Tang poems from the perspective of cognitive linguistics and discovers the differences in linguistic representations in different linguistic environments.

Keywords: Tang poems written in Sichuan; Metonymy; Metonymical translation; Cognitive linguistics

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1. Introduction

As an important part of Chinese classical poetry, Tang poetry is the pinnacle of Chinese classical literature, and the poems of the Tang Dynasty are the most classic, being “the concentrated embodiment of Chinese traditional philosophy, aesthetics and poetics” (Yang Xiumei & Bao Tongfa 2009:60). The Tang poems are rich in metonymic rhetoric, and there are also a large number of cultural imagery based on metonymic thinking, such as animal imagery and plant imagery (Plateau 2013), which enhances the beauty and enriches the mood of Tang poetry, but also brings challenges to the translation of the poems. The combination of cognitive and

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translation research into the modern period has not only helped translation ontology research to develop to a higher level, but also opened up the ground for the applied research of cognitive science and cognitive linguistics.

2. Status Quo of Research on Metonymy in Poetry

Tang poetry contains a large number of metonymy and metonymy rhetoric, and is imbued with traces of the poet's cognitive operations of metaphor and metonymy on the external world. Based on a severe critique of the traditional philosophy of Western Objectivism and Chomsky's transformational generative grammar, Lakoff and Johnson (1980, 1999) abandoned the traditional dual theory of empiricism and rationalism and creatively proposed a third philosophical path, i.e., neo-empiricism, which they later called embodied realism. The philosophy of experience emphasizes the experiential nature of the mind. The philosophy of experience emphasizes the experiential nature of the mind, the unconscious nature of cognition, and the metonymic nature of thinking, thus forming "a new non-objectivist philosophical trend" (Sun Yi; 2012: 115). Based on the basic viewpoints of experiential philosophy and cognitive linguistics (such as experience, interaction, categorization, metaphor, metonymy, understanding etc.), Chinese scholar Wang Yin puts forward a cognitive translation concept, and takes the lead in explaining the idea of constructing a cognitive translation theory, trying to formulate a "cognitive linguistic model of translation" from a macro perspective (2005: 17; 2012: 18). The first one is the "cognitive linguistic model of translation" (2005: 17; 2012: 18). This translation model emphasizes that, in essence, translation is a cognitive activity, a cognitive act in which the translator, a cognitive subject, interacts with the external world in multiple ways. Similarly, metonymy also provides a good research perspective for the translation activity of special cross-linguistic communication.

3. Metonymic Translation Strategies of Tang Poems

(1) Separate reproduction of source language metonymy

For the translation of metonymy in Tang poems, translators can adopt the literal translation method in the target language and present the source metonymy in the translation again. There are many examples in the corpus where the source metonymy is reproduced separately in the translation by two translators, which are discussed in the following two examples and their corresponding translations.

“孤帆远影碧空尽，唯见长江天际流。”（李白《送孟浩然之广陵》）

His lessening sail is lost in the boundless azure sky, Where I see but the endless

River rolling by. (Translated by Xu Yuanchong)

The word “孤帆” in the source text is a match between linguistic representation and metonymic meaning in the context of the poem. The literal meaning of “孤帆” constitutes the concept of source domain in the ideal cognitive model of the source language, and in different contexts, it can generate different contextual meanings, i.e., it can be mapped to different target domains in the same ideal cognitive model. In ancient times, “帆”, as an important part of “船”, was a prominent feature of sailing ships. The poet Li Bai used “孤帆” to refer to the boat that Meng Haoran was on, which belongs to the metonymic type of PART FOR WHOLE in Thing and Part ICM. In the translation, “sail” and “孤帆” can form different mapping relationships in different contexts, that is, they can refer to different objects. That is to say, the objects mapped by the two source domain concepts, which exist in the source language and the translated language respectively, have the same prototypical features in the perceptions of the readers of the original language and the readers of the translated language.

(2) Separate reproduction of metonymic labels in the source language

The metonymic marker is the object referred to by the metonymy, which is the metonymic meaning of the metonymic expression in the poem of entering Sichuan of the Tang Dynasty. Another way to translate metonymy in Tang poems is to hide the source, metonymy in the target language and present the metonymic labels separately, i.e., to discard the source metonymy and use the corresponding items of the source metonymy to translate. This operation path belongs to a kind of liberal translation and is more often adopted by the two translators.

“桂魄初生秋露微”（王维《秋夜曲》）

“名花倾国两相欢”（李白《清平调三首》）

“虏骑闻之应胆慑”（岑参《走马川行奉送封大夫出师西征》）

“宛转蛾眉马前死”（白居易《长恨歌》）

The four metonymic expressions above reflect different types of metonyms. The metonymic type of “桂魄” is POSSESSED FOR POSSESSOR, which refers to the moon. This is related to Chinese culture and myths and legends. In Shang Shu, it is said that the moon is “POSSESSED” where there is no light. In Youyang Miscellany, it is written that “there is a laurel in the moon, 500 feet high, under which a man often hacked it, and the tree was created with it.” Later it was called the laurel in the moon (Yu Shouzheng; 2005: 404).

Therefore, in the Chinese context, people give a certain attribution among

“魄”，“桂” and the moon, and both are regarded as the appendages of the moon. “The combination of “桂魄” not only enriches the set of natural celestial linguistic representations of the moon, but also gives it a certain cultural connotation, which is a good example of metonymic association between the Chinese people and the social and celestial worlds. However, this metonymic usage has no equivalent in English. If we follow the second means of the first path to deal with “桂魄”, we can combine the English expressions of “桂” and “魄” in the form of “laurel” and “soul”, and then we can examine the underlying cultural connotation. The combination of the English expressions corresponding to “laurel” and “soul”, and then the cultural connotation behind it, seems to be feasible, but the combination of “laurel” and “soul” is not suitable for the verb “to be born” and may be misunderstood by readers. In this case, the best choice is for the translator to discard the source metonymy and reproduce the meaning of the metonymy separately. Xu Yuanchong translated it as “the crescent moon”, while Harris translated it as “the moon”, which can keep the formal simplicity of the translated poem and convey the original message to a certain extent. However, the disadvantage of this method is that it dissolves the culturally loaded information expressed by the source metonymy, resulting in the loss of metonymic meaning in the translation process.

(3) Co-presentation of source language metonymy and target language metonymy

Many metonymic expressions in Tang poems are linguistic and cultural phenomena with Chinese characteristics, mostly from myths and legends and historical allusions, or from objects practiced by people of the same community in their lives. This is the result of the Chinese people’s conceptualization of their experience of interaction with the outside world, which is in turn characterized through language. Taking the the following examples and translation:

“鱼更已薄未更衣”（王维《秋夜曲》）

She will not change her dress though her silk robe is thin. (Translated by Xu Yuanchong)

Her light silks have grown too thin, but she hasn’t changed her clothes. (Transalted by Harris)

“地崩山摧壮士死”（李白《蜀道难》）

The crest crumbled, five serpent-killing heroes slain. (Translated by Xu Yuanchong)

But the earth fell apart, the mountain collapsed, brave men lost their lives. (Transalted by Harris)

“若非群玉山头见”（李白《清平乐三首》）

If not a fairy queen from Jade Green Mountains proud.(Translated by Xu Yuanchong)

If you don't see her on the peak of Clustered Jade Mountain.(Transalted by Harris)

The fifth article of “罗” in Shanghai Dictionary Publishing House's Ancient Chinese Dictionary (1999: 2022) is “Ancient silk fabric name”, and the original meaning of “轻罗” refers to light silk fabrics, which are suitable for summer clothing. In the poem, Wang Wei uses the metonymy relationship of “MATERIAL CONSTITUTING AN OBJECT FOR THE OBJECT” to refer to the main character's thin clothes. In Constitution ICM, the Metonymy generated by the relationship between raw materials and objects is often considered as the type of metonymy PART OF A THING FOR THE WHOLE THING, but according to “boundedness” proposed by Peirsman and Geeraerts (2006), the two metonymy types are distinguished by the fact that there is no boundary between the source material and its constituents (unbound), while there is a clear boundary between the components and the thing.

By presenting the source metonymy and the target metonymy together, the translator has successfully dealt with the cultural omission of the target language caused by the cultural specificity of the source metonymic item, i.e., the translator has achieved in-text compensation by presenting the interpretive component of the target metonymy in the translated language.

4. Conclusion

The method of adjusting source metonymy and target metonymy determines that the translator can adopt the linguistic forms corresponding to the lexical and syntactic categories of the source language items at the target language level, and these conversions are only the external manifestations of the translator's cognitive operations; the essence of metonymy translation is the result of the translator's cognitive operations at the conceptual level in the process of understanding the source language metonymy items and exemplifying the translated text. The translations of metonymy in Tang poems or other literary texts are not simple conversions at the level of language symbols or rhetoric, but are the result of the translator's deeper thought processing. The findings of this study also show that translation has a natural cognitive property, and the cognitive investigation of metonymy translation in Tang dynasty poems can help us reach and even peel back the mysterious part of the cognitive iceberg of translation that is hidden underwater.

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