

A Study of Metaphor Translation from the Perspective of Cognitive Linguistics - On the Lines of *Why Women Kill*

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Abstract:

Metaphor can be found everywhere in our life. It is not only a linguistic phenomenon, but also an important means of thinking, which involves in human cognitive process. Metaphor not only reflects reality, but also constructs reality. Not only can it make our thoughts reflected in a vivid and interesting way, but also influence and construct our thoughts. It urges people to take action to explore other cultures. This paper analyzes the Chinese translation of metaphors in the lines of the overwhelming successful American TV opera *Why Women Kill* from the perspective of cognitive linguistics, which opposes studying vocabulary as isolated and emphasizes the role of encyclopedia knowledge framework in cognitive category. This paper further proves that the translation process is not only a process of code conversion, but also concept mapping and category reconstruction.

Keywords:

Metaphor, Translation, Cognitive Linguistics, Why Women Kill

1. Introduction

As is revealed in the book *Metaphor We Live*: metaphor is a way for people to understand one thing through another [2]. It is the basic means for human beings to "survive". With this basic cognitive ability, people can talk about and think about abstract concepts and phenomena in daily life [3]. The nature of metaphor is a cognitive mechanism. Metaphor is not only a rhetorical device and a linguistic phenomenon, but also a part of a national culture. It reflects the way of human thinking and how people interpret the world [4]. Due to cultural similarities and differences, people in China and the United States may think alike or totally differently.

In 2019, *Why Women Kill*, an American TV opera, went viral on Chinese media. Even though it has a score of 64% on the rotten tomato, Chinese audience love it so much that it gets so high a score of 9.3 in Douban, which is the most influential TV and movie critic website in China. *Why Women Kill*, some fans called it "why women slay", which embodies three distinguished characters, of different ages, from different

families, living in the same house. It attracts the Chinese audience with its theme "the greatest love story ends in murder". As the play was released, it "exploded" the Chinese media. Chinese audiences have had a heated discussion about it, from the title of the play to its lines. Although the official translation of the play is 《致命女人》, 致命 means lethal, literally translation of the Chinese title is *Lethal Women*. Netizens translated the opera title in various versions, as follows: 女人为什么杀人(word for word), 杀老公(kill husbands), 她杀(she kills), 血腥玫瑰(bloody roses), 杀戮玫瑰(roses kill), 女人不惑(Women not confused), 刀尖女神(goddess of the sword point). All these title translation reflects the differences in values and ways of thinking between Chinese and American people. The reason why this TV drama has been such a great success both in word-of-mouth and ratings in China falls on two: for one thing, the story itself is foreign to Chinese audience; for another thing, the lines in the drama are well designed, "golden sentences" are frequently spoken. Many classic lines appeal to the Chinese audience, which should give credits to the successful and indispensable efforts of the translators. Because of similar cognitive mechanism, the omnipresent metaphors can be recognized, understood and translated.

2. The Experiential Similarities of Language

Conceptual metaphor regards the process of constructing metaphorical meaning as the mapping between two conceptual domains, that is, the mapping from source domain to target domain. Cognitive linguistics holds that conceptual system and reasoning model are derived from our neural and cognitive mechanisms [2]. Therefore the basis of cognitive conceptual metaphor falls on our body experience. In other words, the interaction of our body, brain and environment builds the cognitive foundation for our reasoning and metaphor. Cognitive linguistics supports the universality of human concepts and languages, which is mainly based on human body and brain to experience and learn to understand the formation of concepts through languages. Although different languages from different cultures choose to express such abstract concepts as emotion with different intention descriptions, they cannot escape the experience philosophy framework determined by our body and its interaction with environment. These experiences play an important role as the source domain of conceptual projection in the process of passive use of metaphor mechanism of getting close to the body, getting far from the things [4]. At the same time, as the basic cognitive domain, these experiences have the universality of involving the personal experience, and are the basis of expanding the concept to the abstract domain. On the other hand, different social and cultural environments may form different conceptual mapping paths, which are embodied in their own languages.

2.1. Hidden Metaphorical Projection

In the abstract conception domain, the difference of projection is much greater than the similarity, which makes it difficult for translation from one language to another. At this point, there is only one option: to convey the cultural information of the source language. In order to make the target language readers understand the source language smoothly, the translators should apply the principle of conforming to the target language and cultural conventions.

Example (1) Misery loves company.

一起比惨，痛苦减半。

It is not translated as “同病相怜” as in the dictionary, but into two four character Chinese phrases, with the meaning of self mocking humor. Generally speaking, in Chinese, the subject of love is often humans, while in this sentence, the subject is the emotion of misery. For the Chinese audience, to understand “mystery loves mystery”, they may ask why it is “love” and what benefits will others’ misfortunes bring to themselves? Misery itself cannot love, it is people who can. But people do know that if you are miserable, I am miserable and everyone is miserable, all of us will naturally feel more comfortable, because we have company. This sentence can also be understood as “misery loves misery.” only the former is refers to one’s own misfortune, the latter is others’ misfortune. When the two miseries meet each other, naturally they will compare “you are more miserable or I am more?” Since they are all pathetic, they feel comforted. Now we know “misery loves company” means: people who are suffering are comforted by the knowledge that other are also unhappy.

Next look at the words. With the two meanings mentioned above as well as the meaning and functions of “misery”, it is more appropriate to translate this sentence into two Chinese phrases. In the first phrase, the translator chooses to supplement “human”, the emotional subject of misery, but does not directly point out the image of “human”, only implies it through “comparison”, to tell the audience it's a tragedy. In the second phrase, to clarify the effect of misery, the translator keeps misery as the subject, and the meaning of “people feel comforted” is expressed by “pain halved”. As for why “halve” is used instead of “reduce”, on the one hand, the corresponding context, that is, the behavior of “compare misery” is between two people, on the other hand, it may also be for rhyme. (惨 *can* → 半 *ban*) . In a word, the translator is not confined to the original text and wisely chooses the verbs “比” and “减” to maintain the original meaning and also achieve the effect of dark humor, which conform to Chinese thinking and expression habits.

Example (2) I, uh, I desperately need to use the facilities.

我非常需要去 “飞流直下三千尺” 。

The poem “飞流直下三千尺” refers to the waterfall “rush down three thousand feet from the cliff”. Simone’s husband said this when he wanted to go to the toilet at a party. “Use the facilities” is the polite way to say to go to the toilet, which is the same as the “answer a call of nature”. This translation quotes a very popular Chinese poem to express going to the toilet with great grace. It is humorous and also shows Karl’s civilized practice in public. Chinese audience will also appreciate the cleverness and appropriateness of the translation from the praise of the other people present: “He even makes taking a piss sound fancy.” Audience can feel the subtlety and the vivid humor of the translated version.

From the above examples, we can see that Chinese translation presents the conceptual projection path of the source language, with the purpose of transmitting the source language information as much as possible.

2.2. *Explicit Presentation of Metaphors*

Metaphor is not only derived from the common cognitive experience of human beings, but also rooted in national experience cognition; it is not only based on human body experience, but also permeates national values. We usually use more familiar and concrete concepts to understand relatively unfamiliar and abstract concepts.

The following two examples are related to money. People love money, its easy to understand the implied meaning.

Example (3) Rob: Penny for your thoughts.

罗伯：你在想什么呢？

Beth Ann: I was just... thinking about...silly things.

贝丝·安：我只是……在想一些傻事。

Example (4) Sheila: Here's my two cents, all right? Spend them wisely.

希拉：这是我的看法，听好了。

Cent and Penny are both a fractional monetary unit

Rob and Beth Ann are having dinner together. Beth Ann is in a trance. Rob says to her, "penny for your thoughts." the literal translation is "I'll give you a penny for your thoughts." The person who says "a penny for your thoughts," wants to know what the listener is thinking about and is showing interest through a symbolic offer of payment. It is also commonly used when someone seems to be deep in thought or troubled by an idea, as a polite way of giving the person an opportunity to express his or her ideas or concerns.

"My two cents" means the same as "penny". Here, the translator regards it as a kind of self modest use of "my opinion", which is often used as an opening or closing statement to express personal opinions. In example (4), Beth Ann complained to her neighbor Sheila that she dressed her well, while her husband but didn't pay attention to her. Sheila gave her an idea, saying "here's my two points, all right? Spend them wisely." then she put forward her specific suggestions to Beth Ann.

Example (5) Again with the crazy eyes, hah?

又用你的哈士奇眼睛瞪人是吧？

Example (6) Baby sister, men never change.

小妹妹，狗改不了吃屎。

There are many Chinese phrases about dog, some of them are derogatory, some the opposite. In Example (5), Husky's eyes can easily relate to Chinese audiences the features of the dog. Jade has a beautiful face, charming blue eyes, so does husky. Chinese audience can imagine Jade's facial expression without looking at the scene of Jade being angry. In the eyes of Chinese audiences, Husky is an expert in "demolishing" the house. People love and hate them, just like they feel the same about Jade. Therefore, the expression of Husky's staring at people sounds familiar to the audience and so suitable for the situation, which can arouse the audience's resonance.

Example (7) I have spent my entire life putting off things that I thought there'd be time for later. Open doors don't stay open forever.

我这辈子一直都在推迟做那些我以为之后会有时间做的事情。但敞开的门不会一直开着。

Karl said this to Simone to tell her pursue what she loves, that opportunities will not always appear just like the doors will not always stay open. Door may get closed. People's life is short and limited. One should be good at grasping the opportunities and be brave to seize the opportunity to do what one wants to do. Therefore, literal

translation 敞开的门不会一直开着 is good. But it will be better translated as “但人生是有限的”, which can also arouse the audience's reflection on life.

3. Conclusions

The translation of metaphors in the above lines showing the following essential characteristics: firstly, metaphor is a thinking phenomenon; secondly, metaphor is based on personal experience; thirdly, metaphor is used by ordinary people in daily life, not confined to a few “talents”; finally, metaphor is an indispensable way of human thinking and reasoning [1]. Thus the target language should not only convey the cultural information of the source language to the audience to the maximum extent, but also enrich the target language when metaphorical expressions are used in the film and television. Only through this way, the target readers can readily understand the vivid metaphorical expression. Translated version should abide by the expression habit of the target language and be able to activate the corresponding conceptual domain of the source language to start the corresponding conceptual projection path, so as to achieve the purpose of resonating in the target language readers and also conveying the cultural characteristics of the source language.

Conflicts of Interest

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