

On Features and Translation Strategies of Metaphors in *Fighting COVID-19: China in Action*

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Abstract:

A large number of metaphors have been used in the white paper *Fighting COVID-19: China in Action*. According to the classification of metaphors, war metaphors, plant metaphors and architectural metaphors are most commonly used in the white paper. By summarizing the metaphorical translation strategies, this paper concludes that there are four metaphorical translation strategies that are frequently used in the white paper: literal translation, free translation, omission and mixed translation. It can be seen that literal translation is the first consideration in white paper translation, and the cultural characteristics and connotation of the original text should be preserved as far as possible from form to content. In cases where literal translation is not applicable, priority should be given to the accurate transmission of original information, and free translation, omission or mixed translation can be adopted. The differences in metaphorical translation strategies lie in the differences in cultural cognition and language expressions.

Keywords:

Fighting COVID-19: China in Action, Features of Metaphor, Translation Strategies

1. Introduction

In the 1980s, the book *Metaphor We Live By* co-authored by American linguists Lakoff and Johnson promoted the development of modern metaphor theory. It pointed that metaphor is a cognitive tool for human beings to understand and experience the world, and it plays an important role in constructing social and political reality [1]. In addition, metaphor is also an important feature of persuasive discourse, because metaphor activates people's unconscious emotional connections and affects people's beliefs, attitudes and values when looking at things.

After the Chinese government achieved a phased victory in the fight against COVID-19 in 2020, The State Council Information Office released a white paper on China's Action against COVID-19 on June 7 [2,3]. The white paper reviewed China's arduous battle against the epidemic, introduced strategies for coordinating epidemic control and treatment, shared China's victorious experience in fighting the epidemic,

and called on countries around the world to jointly build a community of health for mankind and win the global battle against the epidemic.

The white paper has been published in both Chinese and English versions. In this paper, Tmxmall platform is used to automatically align the two versions of the white paper online and adjust them manually, so as to achieve bilingual Chinese-English alignment at the sentence level, in order to facilitate the identification and comparison of metaphors in the two versions of the white paper. This paper categorizes the metaphors in the white paper and explores four translation strategies that are commonly used in English translation: literal translation, free translation, omission translation and mixed translation.

2. Classification of Metaphors in *Fighting COVID-19: China in Action*

Based on a thorough reading and understanding of the white paper, this paper uses MIP to identify and label metaphorical keywords in the text one by one [4], and concludes nine metaphorical types as shown Table 1 below:

Table 1. Metaphors in Fighting COVID-19: China in Action (Chinese Version).

Metaphor Types	Metaphorical Keywords	Frequency	Percentage
War metaphors	抗击、保卫、战场、攻坚战、阻击战等	198	51.16%
Plant metaphors	蔓延、成果、末梢等	44	11.37%
Architectural metaphors	构建、筑牢、基石、试金石、铭刻等	42	10.85%
Body metaphors	补血、减负、活力、燃眉之急等	40	10.36%
Journey metaphors	进程、前行、历程、逆行、十字路口等	20	5.17%
Machine metaphors	车轮、停摆、开足马力、深挖潜力等	13	3.36%
Exam metaphors	大考、考验、成绩等	11	2.84%
Life metaphors	甩锅、拉网、补短板、存量清零等	10	2.58%
Natural metaphors	黑夜、光明、魔鬼、阳光、风雨等	9	2.31%
Total		387	100

As can be seen from the table, war metaphors, plant metaphors and architectural metaphors appear most frequently in the white paper *China's Action against COVID-19*.

2.1. War Metaphors

In the white paper, “war” is used as the source domain and “fighting COVID-19” as the target domain, forming the metaphor of “fighting COVID-19 is war”. The words such as “抗击”, “保卫”, “攻坚战”, “阻击战”, “总体战”, “保卫战”, etc., are frequently used in war metaphors, highlighting that mankind's response to COVID-19 is a grave war. The Chinese government has put the lives and safety of the Chinese people first, acted boldly and made comprehensive arrangements. Thanks to the concerted efforts

of millions of medical workers, workers in various fields and people across the country, we have achieved a major victory in the fight against the epidemic.

2.2. Plant Metaphors

The white paper uses plant metaphors repeatedly, with the word “蔓延” expressing the speed and scope of the epidemic. “成果” is the source domain, while the target domain is “China has made major achievements in fighting the epidemic”. The use of the metaphor of “末梢” highlights the Chinese government's ability to make overall plans and rational arrangements for epidemic prevention and control. “投桃报李” comes from The Book of Songs: Daya: Yi, which refers to friendly exchanges or gifts. The target domain of “投桃报李” is that “China is a country that advocates friendship and peace”.

2.3. Architectural Metaphors

In addition to the extensive use of war metaphors and plant metaphors, architectural metaphors appear repeatedly in the white paper. For example, “构建”, “筑牢”, “基石”, “筑墙” are the source domains. When mapped to the target domains, they constitute the metaphorical image of "China's fight against the epidemic is like building a solid foundation, which is indestructible", reflecting the strategies and strength of the Chinese government in fighting against the epidemic. The source domain of “众志成城” is that “unity is as strong as the city wall”, which is mapped to the target domain to form a metaphorical image of "unity can overcome any difficulties". These architectural metaphors highlight the cohesiveness of the Chinese people in uniting and working together to fight the epidemic.

3. Translation Strategies for Metaphors in *Fighting COVID-19: China in Action*

As one of the forms of official political discourse, the white paper of the Chinese government is responsible for the external publicity and the expression of China's position. A large number of metaphors appear in *Fighting COVID-19: China in Action*. Appropriate metaphorical translation strategies are needed to accurately and objectively convey the content of the original text. Based on Peter Newmark's metaphor translation strategies, this paper summarizes four typical metaphor translation methods in the English version of the White Paper, and analyzes the reasons influencing the metaphor translation strategies.

3.1. Literal Translation

Literal translation is to retain the same conceptual metaphor in the translation as in the original. Human beings have the same physiological mechanism and thinking commonness, and people in different cultural backgrounds have similar communication experience and cognitive experience in the world.

The similar cognitive experience determines that the same image may contain similar cultural features and connotations in the domain of source and target languages. In the English version of the white paper, a lot of literal translation strategies are used to retain the same figurative image. It not only accurately conveys the attitude of the Chinese government, but also embodies the artistic beauty of language. Take the following sentence for example:

Example 1: 面对前所未知、突如其来、来势汹汹的疫情天灾，中国果断打响疫情防控阻击战。

Translation: Facing this unknown, unexpected, and devastating disease, China launched a resolute battle to prevent and control its spread.

Example 2: 阳光总在风雨后。

Translation: The sun will always shine again after a storm.

Example 3: 对中国是一次危机，也是一次大考。

Translation: It is both a crisis and a major test for China.

In example 1, the translation retains the image of “战争” in the original, which is literally translated as "battle". People all over the world have a common cultural understanding of "battle", that is: battle is the life-and-death struggle with the enemy. Therefore, the literal translation can make the target readers intuitively feel the dilemma China was facing at that time, and the determination and firmness of the Chinese government in fighting the epidemic. In example 2, “阳光” and “风雨” are the source domain, which map "victory" and "dilemma" in the target domain respectively. Both of them are natural metaphors. Readers of different cultures have similar experience of nature, so this sentence can be literally translated as "The sun will always shine again after a storm". The translation is highly consistent with the original text from form to content.

In example 3, the words “危机” and “大考” are literally translated as “crisis” and “test” respectively. In English, “crisis” means “a time of great danger, difficulty or confusion when problems must be solved”, which is exactly in line with the image of China's predicament in the face of COVID-19. In English, the idioms such as “put SB/STH to the test” and “stand the test of time” have the cultural image of “receiving the test”, which is highly consistent with the cultural image to be conveyed in the original text. China sees the epidemic as both a crisis and a test of the Chinese government's capacity.

3.2. Free Translation

Due to the cultural differences between China and the West, not all Chinese figurative images have similar images in English context. In order to better the conceptual meaning of the original text, it is necessary to abandon the form and retain the transmission of meaning. It is proper to adopt free translation to achieve metaphor translation. For example:

Example 4: 让党旗在防控疫情斗争第一线高高飘扬。

Translation: lead the people in implementing the decisions made by the central Party leadership.

Example 5: 缓解居民燃眉之急。

Translation: for other residents' pressing needs.

Example 6: 医务工作者白衣执甲、逆行出征。

Translation: Medical workers rose to the challenge.

In example 4, “党旗高高飘扬”，“斗争第一线” are mapped into the target

domain of “the leadership of the Communist Party of China” and “all places of epidemic prevention and control”. In English culture, it is difficult for target readers to connect the original domain with the target domain in this sentence. In this case, free translation is undoubtedly a wise choice.

In example 5, “燃眉之急”, a Chinese saying, is a vivid expression of the urgent needs of residents. Due to cultural differences, the target language readers lack the cognition of the Chinese saying, so this saying is translated into “pressing needs” to avoid the error of information transmission.

In example 6, “白衣” refers to civilians. “甲” refers to a kind of war armor. The metaphor expresses that the majority of medical workers have overcome all difficulties, put themselves at the risk of their own lives, and made important contributions to epidemic prevention and control. There is no relevant metaphor image in the target language, so it is freely translated as “Medical workers rose to the challenge”. It not only retains the conciseness and clarity of the original text in form, but also conveys the courage of Chinese Medical workers to face challenges bravely.

3.3. Omission

Due to the differences of cultural and linguistic expression in different parts of the world, the metaphors in the original text can be omitted in translation in order to avoid repetition or redundant images. In this way, the translation can not only faithfully express the meaning of the original text, but also make the translation concise and clear, and eliminate the cultural cognition gap of the target language readers.

In *Fighting COVID-19: China in Action*, omission is also adopted in translation.

Take the following sentences for example:

Example 7: 为企业“补血”、“减负”、“拓空间”。

Translation: All these efforts will cut burdens on enterprises and stimulate their growth.

Example 8: 用血肉之躯构筑起阻击病毒的钢铁长城，为病毒肆虐的漫漫黑夜带来了光。

Translation: They built a Great Wall against the virus, bringing light and hope to the nation at a dark time.

Example 9: 和平发展、合作共赢的历史车轮依然滚滚向前。

Translation: Peace, development, and win-win cooperation will prevail.

In example 7, “补血” and “减负” belong to anthropomorphic metaphors, and “拓空间” belongs to architectural metaphor. These three Chinese phrases vividly express the measures taken by the Chinese government to revitalize enterprises after the epidemic. The translation of this sentence does not translate, but it does not affect the expression of the original meaning.

In example 8, the phrase “血肉之躯”, a body metaphor, is not translated in English version of the white paper, but the target language readers can easily understand the reference to medical workers. The phrase “钢铁长城”, belonging to building metaphor, is translated into “Great Wall” without translating the modifier “钢铁”. As

a world cultural heritage, the history and culture of "Great Wall" has widespread cognition all around the world, in addition, the "Great Wall" itself contains the meaning that iron is solid, so the omission of "长城" does not affect the expression of the original text, which makes the translation more concise.

In example 9, the sentence "历史车轮依然滚滚向前" contains two kinds of metaphors: vehicle metaphor and journey metaphor. It expresses that the world will continue to move forward under the general trend of peace, development and win-win cooperation. "历史车轮" is not translated into English in the white paper; instead, the subject "peace, development, and win-win cooperation" emphasizes the key elements of history.

As can be seen from the above three examples, proper use of omission in the metaphorical translation can make the target text concise and clear, and avoid misunderstandings caused by cultural cognitive differences among target readers.

3.4. Mixed Translation

Sometimes a sentence contains more than one metaphor. Due to the different types of metaphor, the target readers have different understandings of the cultural images of metaphors. Therefore, a sentence may be translated by using multiple translation methods at the same time. In the white paper *Fighting COVID-19: China in Action*, there are quite a few mixed translation, for example:

Example 10: 疫情是魔鬼，我们不能让魔鬼藏匿。 Translation: The virus is a devil, and we must hunt it down.

Example 11: 抓紧补短板、堵漏洞、强弱项。 Translation: Swift actions must be taken to address problems, plug loopholes, and reinforce weak links.

Example 12: 搞“脱钩”，“筑墙”，“去全球化”，既割裂全球也难以自保。

Translation: Decoupling, erecting walls and deglobalization may divide the world, but will not do any good to those who themselves are engaged in these acts.

In example 10, the first half of the sentence is literally translated into "The virus is a devil". The translation is highly consistent with the original in both form and content. The last half of the sentence adopts the free translation. In English, the phrase "hunt down" means: If you hunt down a criminal or an enemy, you find them after searching for them. This can accurately convey the meaning of the original text.

In example 11, both of free translation and literal translation are adopted. There is no corresponding image of "补短板" in English culture, so it is translated into "address problems" by free translation, which is helpful for target readers to understand. The literal translation of "堵漏洞", "强弱项" is because there are corresponding words "loophole" and idiom "the weak link" in English culture. It can not only correspond to the original in form but also retain the cultural features and connotation of the original so that the target readers can understand the cultural image of the original.

In example 12, the origin of "脱钩" is the separation of hooks between train cars, which is a metaphor for disconnection. In English, there is no such phrase; therefore, target readers may be confused by adopting literal translation. Instead, the free translation as "decoupling" can accurately express the meaning of the original text. "筑墙", "去全球化" are translated into "erecting walls and deglobalization", which

not only retains the unique cultural image of the original text, but also conveys the connotation of the original text.

Therefore, there are various translation strategies for metaphors in the white paper, and appropriate translation methods should be selected according to the specific context and target readers' cognitive.

4. Conclusions

As one of the official literary forms, the authority and accuracy of Chinese government white papers are self-evident. This paper takes the Chinese-English version of the white paper *Fighting COVID-19: China in Action* as an example to analyze the types of metaphors in the white paper, and analyzes the translation strategies of several commonly used metaphors. To sum up, the translation strategy of metaphors in the white paper depends on whether there is a correspondence between the cultural images in the source domain and the target domain. If there is a correspondence, literal translation should be preferred, so as to retain the "original flavor" of the original text in both form and cultural images. On the contrary, free translation, omission or mixed translation strategies should be adopted to ensure the accurate transmission of the original information rather than formal expression.

Conflicts of Interest

The author declares that there is no conflict of interest regarding the publication of this article.

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