

# An Analysis of Translation Strategies for Space-Time Compressed Images in Tang Poetry

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**Abstract**—Based on the Conceptual Blending Theory (CBT) of cognitive linguistics, by comparative analysis, this paper seeks to explore Chinese-English translation strategies for Tang poetry that possess the compression of the space-time relationship. Different English translation versions of famous Tang poetry such as "On the Tower at Youzhou", "Looking at the Moon and Longing for One Far Away", and "On the Frontier", are taken as examples. After analysis, it is found that the commonly adopted strategies for translating space-time compressed images include simplification or recombination of the compression of the space-time relationship. Simplifying the space-time relationship usually makes the translations' expressions more straightforward, but may cause the loss of meaning, reduction of aesthetic perception and other problems. The recombination of the relationship between time and space can better convey the beautiful artistic conception of the original work. However, if the recombination fails, there are several problems to come about, for instance, the images may be broken, or even the beautiful artistic conception of the original work may be destroyed. The findings may make some contribution to the field of poetry translation and Chinese cultural transmission.

**Keywords**—Conceptual Blending Theory; English translation; compression of space-time relation; poetry

## I. INTRODUCTION

China is a country of poetry, and Tang poetry is a bright pearl in the treasure house of Chinese culture. The use of the space-time relationship to construct the artistic conception of poetry is a customary method used by poets in the Tang Dynasty [1]. The research on the relationship between time and space in poetry has received extensive attention so far. According to different research perspectives, these research works can be divided into the following categories: One is to explore the relationship between Chinese classical poetry and other literary works from the perspective of the space-time relationship [1] [2] [3] [4]. For example, the work of Zhang Hongyun is about the influence of the time and space artistic conception of Tang poetry on Japanese Han poetry [1]. The work of Liu Xinao is focused on the space-time implications of Chuanshan's poetics and its aesthetic effect [2]. Another is specifically aimed at the time and space analysis of one poet's works, such as Li Han explored the time and space consciousness and representation in Li Shangyin's poetry [5], Li Xiaofeng discussed the time and

space beauty of Li Bai's poetry [6]. [1] [2] [3] [4] [5] [6] show that time and space relations are extremely important for ancient Chinese poetry. However, there is still a lack of in-depth study on the translation of the compression of the space-time relationship in poetry at present.

Conceptual integration is a theory that involves space-time relation in cognitive linguistics. According to Prof. Mark Turner's book *The Origin of Ideas: Blending, Creativity, and the Human Spark*, people can build their own unity across time and space, so that they can creatively operate the outside world in their minds and build new and compressed concepts to understand more abstract things [7]. Conceptual integration involves the compression and decomposition of important relationships such as the space-time relationship, which deserves special attention in the English translation of Tang poetry. Conceptual integration theory has been widely used in translation studies and text analysis. Taking English-Chinese idiom translation as an example, under the framework of conceptual integration theory, Li Xinru focused on the understanding of the original text, the expression of translation, modification of translation and other steps [8]. Although she explained the cognitive motive behind the translation phenomenon from the perspective of conceptual cognition, she did not analyze the compression and relationship of conceptual integration in the translation process in details and she didn't summarize the relevant laws. Liu Fan used the concept of concept integration to analyze the Chinese ancient poem 'Jin Se', revealing the method of synthesizing compound metaphors from primary metaphors and usefully exploring the poetic conception from the point of cognitive metaphor construction [9]. Miao Ju and Wang Shaoshuang used the concept integration theory to explain the principles of the translation process, which vividly reflected the complexity, integration, and creativity of the translation cognitive process [10], but they did not study the translation of ancient Chinese poetry. Besides, there is no indication of the impact of compression of the space-time relationship on translation in their paper. These research results have important enlightenment for the study of the translation of the relationship of time and space in poetry.

Based on the predecessors' research, from the perspective of conceptual integration theory of cognitive linguistics, this paper is to take the different English translations of poetry

such as '登幽州台歌 (On the Tower at Youzhou)', '望月怀远 (Looking at the Moon and Longing for One Far Away)', and '出塞二首 其一 (On the Frontier)' as examples and explore the translation strategy of the compression image of time and space relationship in Tang poetry's English translation. The main purpose of this paper is to provide some new enlightenment for Tang poetry translation.

## II. CONCEPTUAL INTEGRATION THEORY

Conceptual integration theory is also called Conceptual Blending Theory (CBT). It is a theoretical framework for exploring meaning construction of information integration that was established in 1996 by a group of American scholars such as Fauconnier and Turner. This theory is the development of the theory of mental space. Fauconnier first proposed the concept of 'mental space' in 1985, which is a conceptual package constructed for people to partial understanding and purposes in the process of thinking and talking. Its formation is inseparable from people's daily life behaviors, thinking, and feelings. Conceptual integration is a series of cognitive activities in which human beings integrate information input in different mental spaces into a new conceptual structure by mapping each other and selectively extracting some of their meanings. Fauconnier and Turner proposed a four-space theory: two input spaces, one generic space, and one blending space. The corresponding part between the two input spaces is mapped across space, and the common, usual and abstract organization and structure of two input spaces are formed as a generic space. The corresponding elements of the two input spaces have been mapped into the blending space in which there are interactions of some interrelated mental activities, such as 'composition', 'completion' and 'elaboration', creating an emergent structure. Meanings are completed in the emergent structure [11].

The basic goal of conceptual integration is to compress a concept within the range of human cognitive ability (perceived experience) by simplification [12]. The essence of conceptual integration is the integration of vital relations. The vital relation refers to the relationship that the components contained in different mental spaces often participate in. Because the connection within input spaces depends on relationships and it is the relationship that connects different mental spaces to form a cognitive network. Hence the relationship is an essential part. The important relationships between mental spaces are mainly represented by cause-effect, space-time, identify relation, part-whole, characteristics, category, intention relationship [13]. Time and space are indispensable relationships in conceptual integration. When people deal with the concept of a large time span, the number of events in a time period is compressed to obtain some landmark events. When people deal with the concept of a large space span, they input the things in multiple physical spaces into the integrated network, thus realizing the mental integration of concepts in multiple physical spaces. It should be noted that the space in space-time compression is not equivalent to the mental space.

Conceptual integration plays an important role in human learning, thinking, and life. People rely on conceptual integration to understand the meaning, innovate and invent

new things and create a colorful conceptual world. The theory has a universal guiding significance for the construction and understanding of the meaning and has a mechanism for interpreting many linguistic phenomena such as analogy, metaphor, pun, euphemism, Chinese two-part allegorical sayings, humor, and so on. In addition, the concept integration theory can provide a new theoretical perspective for literary translation, especially poetry research, from the perspective of symbolic meaning in translation, the relationship between the original text and translated text and other aspects [13]. These characteristics of conceptual integration theory make it very suitable for analyzing the compression of the space-time relationship in Tang poetry and its translation.

## III. THE COMPRESSED IMAGERY OF THE SPACE-TIME RELATIONSHIP IN TANG POETRY AND ITS TRANSLATION

In this paper, in order to explore the translation strategy of the compression image of time and space relationship in Tang poetry translation, 'On the Tower at Youzhou', 'Looking at the Moon and Longing for One Far Away', 'On the Frontier' and their translations are selected as examples.

'On the Tower at Youzhou' is a short poem wrote by Chen Ziyou, a poet of the Tang Dynasty. This poem expresses the poet's loneliness and sadness because there is no like-minded person. The language of this poem is vigorous, unrestrained and infectious and it has become a long-lasting famous poem. In this poem, the compression of time and space relations mainly exists in the first two sentences, that is, '前不见古人, 后不见来者'. In Chinese, both the '前 (front or past)' and the '后 (back or future)' have a double meaning, which refers to the orientation of space and the order of time. In the poem, it refers to the front, the back and the implicit poet in the space-time environment where the poet is. The ancients and the comers respectively belong to the past and the future of time, and they are not in the same space-time environment where the poet is. By compressing time and space, the ancients who are in the past, the poet at present and those who are in the future have entered the same time and space in this poem, and the visual effects of this poem have been greatly strengthened.

For '前不见古人, 后不见来者' in 'On the Tower at Youzhou', there are many translations:

- Xu Yuanchong's translation: Where are the great men of the past; And where are those of future years? [14]
- Herbert A. Giles's translation: My eyes saw not the men of old; And now their age away had rolled. [15]
- Liu Junping's translation: Ere me, I see not the ancients; Behind me, I perceive not the descendants. [16]
- Weng Xianliang's translation: Men there have been, —I see them not. Men there will be, —I see them not. [17]

In Xu Yuanchong's translation, the translator uses 'Where' to express the spatial orientation, and use 'past' and 'future' to express the temporal order, successfully

reorganizing the space-time relationship compression of the original poem and making the poet, the past saints, future saints enter the same time and space, so it better expresses the artistic conception in the original poem. The image retained in Herbert A. Giles's translation is quite different from the image in the original poem. However, the ancients in the past and the poet at present still enter the same time and space through the action of 'saw not', so the space-time relationship compression in the original poem has been preserved to some extent by recombination. In Liu Junping's translation, '前 (front or past)' is directly translated into 'ere' from the perspective of time, thus weakening the overall concept of time and space where the poet is and simplifying the compression of time and space in the original poem. Although this simplification is much clearer, it makes it difficult for the ancients, the comers coming from the future, and the poet at present to enter the same time and space. Consequently, the visual effects in the original poems have been greatly weakened. In Weng Xianliang's translation, the ancients were represented as people who used to be here, and the comers were imaged as the people who will be here in the future. Then through the expression that I can't see them, these images entered the same environment of time and space. Therefore, this translation represents the compression of time and space in the original poem through recombination, which better expresses the interleaving sense of space and time.

'Looking at the Moon and Longing for One Far Away' is a pentasyllabic (or five-syllable) regulated verse wrote by Zhang Jiuling, a poet of the Tang Dynasty, which expresses the poet's nostalgia for friends in the distance. The whole poetry language is natural, delicate and touching with a fusion of feelings with the natural setting. In this poem, the compression of time and space relations also mainly exists in the first two sentences, that is '海上生明月，天涯共此时'. The poet and his friends are far away, and the bright moon rising from the sea may not have risen in the horizon of friends from a distance. Therefore, the poet, friends, and the bright moon rising from the sea are not in the same time and space, while these images are compressed into the same time and space in this poem, so that readers can image the situation where the poet and his friends far away together enjoy a scene of a bright moon.

For '海上生明月，天涯共此时' in 'Looking at the Moon and Longing for One Far Away', there are several translations:

- Xu Yuanchong's translation: Over the sea grows the moon bright; We gaze on it far, far apart. [14]
- W. J. B. Fletcher's translation: The clear moon uprises, new-born from the sea. This hour is the same through the bourne of the skies. [18]
- Witter Bynner's translation: The moon, grown full now over the sea, Brightening the whole of heaven, Brings to separated hearts. [18]
- Tang Yihe's translation: The bright moon was rising above the sea. The two of us share this euphoric hour at earth's corners by thousands of Li. [19]

In Xu Yuanchong's translation, the translator has portrayed the poet and his friends concealed in the original poem as 'us', and translated '天涯共此时' into that 'we gaze on moon bright far, far apart'. Compared with the original poem, the translation also makes the poet, the distant friends, and the rising moon of the sea into the same time and space through space-time compression. Therefore, this translation has better reorganized this space-time relationship compression, showing the beautiful artistic conception of the original poem. In the W. J. B. Fletcher's translation, '天涯共此时' was translated literally as 'This hour is the same through the bourne of the skies.' In the process of space-time compression, some media are indispensable. The bright moon is widely used to express longing for someone in Chinese culture. Therefore, the poet and his distant friends are related to the bright moon in the original poem. In Western culture, the moon is not mainly used to express a yearning for friends. Therefore, this translation obviously simplifies the compression of time and space of the original poem, which causes some problems such as lack of meaning and reduction of the beauty sense. In the Witter Bynner's translation, the translator visualizes the poet hidden in the original poem and the distant friend as 'a separate heart', and translates '天涯共此时' into 'Brightening the whole of heaven, Brings to separated hearts'. Compared with the original poems, although the translation lacks the image of '天涯', it still compresses the poet, the distant friends and the rising moon of the sea into the same situation of time and space, so it can be considered that the translation also successfully reorganized the compression of the space-time relationship. In Tang Yihe's translation, the poet and his friends in the original poem were visualized, and the poet, distant friends, and the bright moon were space-time compressed into the same environment through 'share this euphoric hour'. Thus, the translation although has some flaws in the detail processing, such as the transliteration 'Li (里, length unit in Chinese)' for the rhyme, but still through the reorganization of the space-time relationship compression, presents a scenery where the poets and his friends at the distant 'earth's corners' miss each other and together enjoy a full moon.

'On the Frontier' is a famous four-line poem with seven characters per line, and this frontier poem conveys the wish of the poet Wang Changling that the monarch will appoint a good general and calm down the frontier war as soon as possible, so as to make people live a stable life. The compression of space-time relationship mainly exists in the first sentence in this poem, that is, '秦时明月汉时关'. The bright moon and frontiers of the Qin and Han Dynasties, and the bright moon and borders in the environment in which the poet is located, are not at the same time and space. Through compressing time and space, the poet allows them to enter the same time and space, which makes the readers feel an interlacing sense of time and space.

For '秦时明月汉时关' in 'On the Frontier', there are several translations:

- Xu Yuanchong's translation: The moon still shines on mountain passes as of yore. [14]

- Witter Bynner's translation: The moon goes back to the time of Qin, the wall to the time of Han. [18]
- Tang Yihe's translation: The Moon of Qin Dynasty still shines over the mountain pass of the Han Dynasty. [19]
- He Zhongjian's translation: It's the same bright moon as in Qin, the same boundary pass as in Han. [20]

In Xu Yuanchong's translation, the translator deleted the images that Qin, Han and other non-native Chinese speakers are hard to understand, but his translation 'The moon still shines on mountain passes as of yore', still contains the moon and the border at present and the moon and the border in the past. Therefore, the compression of the space-time relationship in the original poem is still preserved through the translator's reorganization. In the Witter Bynner's translation, the original poem was directly translated into that 'The moon goes back to the time of Qin, the wall to the time of Han'. The moon and the borders of the Qin and Han dynasties, which were originally compressed of time and space into the same time and space, and the bright moons and borders in the environment where the poets lived, became connected with each other through a simple temporal order. Therefore, this translation simplifies the compression of the relationship between time and space in the original poem. Tang Yihe ignores the bright moon and borders in the poet's environment and compresses the concept of the moon of the Qin Dynasty and the border of the Han Dynasty in his translation. The translator reorganizes the compression of time and space. However, the translation's meaning is completely different from the meaning of the original poem. The bright moon of Qin Dynasty and the border of Han Dynasty has no connection with the bright moon and the border in the author's environment and has lost connect with '万里长征人未还' in the following text, so the recombination of time and space in this translation is obviously a failure. He Zhongjian makes the moon and the border in the poet's environment connect with the bright moon of the Qin Dynasty and the border of the Han Dynasty through the simple analogy relationship of 'the same' in his translation, simplifying the compression of time and space in the poem. This kind of processing makes the translation more understandable, but it lacks the interlaced sense of time and space in the original poem, which through the compression of time and space.

#### IV. CONCLUSION

The time and space relationship in Tang poetry has always been a hot topic in linguistics and literary studies, at the same time, the translation of this relationship is also a difficult point in translation studies. Based on the theory of conceptual integration in cognitive linguistics, this paper makes a comparative analysis of some poems and their translations, which possess the compression of the space-time relationship, such as 'On the Tower at Youzhou', 'Looking at the Moon and Longing for One Far Away', 'On the Frontier'. In summary, the study shows that there are two main strategies to translate poems that possess the compression of the space-time relationship. One is the to

simplify the compression of space-time relationship, and this strategy is applied in Liu Junping's translation of 'On the Tower at Youzhou', the W.J.B.Fletcher's translation of 'Looking at the Moon and Longing for One Far Away', the Witter Bynner's translation and He Zhongjian's translation of 'On the Frontier'. This kind of processing can make the expression of the translation more straightforward, but it will cause problems such as lack of meaning and reduction of beauty. Another strategy is to reorganize the compression of the space-time relationship. Other translations analyzed in this paper use this translation strategy. This kind of treatment can better present the beautiful artistic conception in the original poem, but there is also the possibility of failure of reorganization, such as the translation of Tang Yihe in the 'On the Frontier'. The failure reorganization of space-time relationship compression will lead to problems such as image fragmentation, artistic destruction and so on. On the whole, reorganization is a better strategy when we translate poetry that possesses the compression of the space-time relationship. In order to avoid the failure of reorganization, this translation strategy requires translators to understand the compression of space-time relations in the original poem and has the ability to make space-time compression in the target language.

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