

# Study on the Understanding and Translation of Metaphors in a Specific Context

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## ABSTRACT

**The understanding of a metaphor is determined in a specific context. In actual translation, translators devote considerable amount of work to determining specific meanings of metaphors in light of the context. This paper attempts to state the understanding of metaphors in a specific context and put forward the translation techniques of metaphors in a specific context.**

*Keywords: metaphor, context, translation*

## I. INTRODUCTION

The study of metaphor has a long history, and many scholars and linguists have tried to use their own understanding to make various interpretations of metaphor. It can be traced back to the Theory of Contrast proposed by Aristotle in Greece. In the first century, Quintilian in Rome proposed the "Alternative Theory." Both of these theories take metaphor as a rhetorical method. They believe that metaphor is a kind of optional "decoration" and a deviation from normal language. In 1936, Richards proposed the theory of metaphorical interaction in *The Philosophy of Rhetoric*.

It has already begun to turn to the semantic research of metaphor in this period. Since the 1970s, with the turning direction of Western philosophy to linguistic and the rise and development of theories such as semiotics and cognitive psychology, the study of metaphor has also evolved from a single rhetorical level to philosophy, psychology, Multi-level and multi-angle interdisciplinary research on semantics, pragmatics, cognitive science and foreign language teaching. People more deeply realize the important position of metaphor in human cognition and social activities. In particular, metaphor is included in the study of pragmatics as a discourse phenomenon, which has further developed the study of metaphor.

The understanding and translation of metaphors in specific contexts has also become important topics for many linguists and translators. Newmark (2001: 85) believes that metaphorical language accounts for 3/4 of the English language. He pointed out (2001: 113):

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"Metaphorical translation is the epitome of all language translation, because metaphoric translation presents a variety of options for translators: Either convey its meaning, or reshape its image, or modify it, or perfectly combine its meaning and image, and there are a lot of them, and all of these are inseparable from contextual factors and cultural factors. If there is a certain context, the meaning of metaphor will become difficult to understand and become a difficult problem in translation.

## II. CONTEXT AND METAPHOR

### A. Context

Context refers to the actual environment when using language. How to understand context? What factors does the context include? Linguists hold different views on this issue. There are roughly two understandings: broad context and narrow context. Western linguists hold a broad concept of context, such as the British linguist Lyons. Their concepts of context includes both the language environment, that is, the context people speak of, as well as the actual situation when language behavior occurs. It also include the participants' subjectivity factors: gender, age, occupation, education level, personality, etc. In addition, it also includes cultural, social, and political factors (Qi Yucun, 1992); the narrow sense of context only regards the context as the specific environment of inter-deal behavior. Whether it is a broad contextual view or a narrow contextual view, they both have a common core part, namely: context refers to those elements that have a direct impact on the generation and understanding of language and discourse (Xu Wengyu, 1997: 67).

Sperber and Wilson expanded and extended the context in the ordinary sense. Context is dynamic in relevance theory and is a series of hypotheses in the

listener's brain. These hypotheses will be continuously adjusted and expanded in the century's speech communication and supplement. Therefore, the process of the listener's understanding of the discourse can also be said to construct a new context process for each discourse. In the Theory of Relevance, "context" is a very important concept, which is directly related to the relevance of discourse and the effect of context. "The process of selecting the best context is to seek the best relevance of discourse" (He Zhaoxiong, 2000).

### *B. Metaphor*

What is a metaphor? The definition of metaphor is also broad and narrow. Aristotle believes that "metaphor is used as a thing by means of something belonging to something else" (Lin Shuwu, 1997). Matthew (1971) believes that metaphor is a deviation from normal discourse. There are two main types of discourse deviation, one is syntactic deviation, and the other is semantic deviation. Many scholars believe that metaphor is a violation of semantic rules. The production of metaphor is mainly the conflict between literal meaning and context. The resolution of conflict is the process of understanding metaphorical meaning. According to the "interaction theory" of Richards (1936), the production of metaphorical meaning is the result of the interaction between two subject words. The main features of one subject word are mapped to the other subject word, resulting in a change in meaning. Therefore, metaphor is basically a "predicate" phenomenon. However, the opposite view (Reddy, 1980; Bickerton, 1980) believes that metaphor is not a deviation from the selection rules of semantic collocation. Many verbal discourses that do not deviate from the semantic collocation selection rules can be seen in verbal communication activities.

Traditional rhetoric believes that metaphor is a special phenomenon in language use and a deviation from the normal rules of use. Grice (1975: 312) clearly pointed out that metaphors, irony, exaggeration and other linguistic phenomena are the result of the speaker's intentional violation of conversational quality guidelines. However, Sperber & Wilson (1986: 237) believed that metaphors and irony, such as Nazis, were stylistic image expressions, not the performance of the speaker's intentional violation of the rules. They believe that metaphors do not require special interpretation skills and procedures, and are the result of the natural development of general cognitive reasoning skills in verbal communication. The Theory of Relevance classifies metaphor into general discourse, and thus provides the necessary premise for its interpretation.

In addition, the Theory of Speech Act believes that speaking is the implementation of an act, which can be either direct or indirect. Relevance theory believes that metaphor is an indirect speech act, and there must be

some correlation between propositional form and propositional attitude. Therefore, this kind of association can only be obtained by the obedient person using the context to perform royal reasoning.

### *C. Understanding of metaphors in context*

Gibbs (1999: 39-40) believes that metaphor, as a discourse, can be divided into four stages in the temporal continuum of language understanding, namely, the understanding of the literal meaning of the discourse; the recognition of metaphor; the interpretation of metaphor; But generally speaking, the understanding of metaphor is divided into two stages: one is the identification of metaphor, and the other is the derivation of the meaning of metaphor (Shu Dingfang, 2000). Recognition of metaphors is mainly based on their literal meaning and the nature of the context, and in principle such conflicts cannot be eliminated, and can only be eliminated in an expanded and larger context. Such as: Juliet is the sun. We can easily recognize this sentence as a metaphor, because Juliet and sun belong to two completely different categories, and there is almost no similarity between the two. Therefore, to understand the true meaning of this sentence, you need the support of a broader context. If we read or hear this sentence in Shakespeare's "Romeo and Juliet", we will naturally make reasonable inferences about its metaphorical meaning. Therefore, the derivation of the meaning of metaphor depends more on the cognitive environment of the listener.

Grice believes that metaphor is an intentional violation of conversational norms (Levinson, 1983: 147). This only provides a partial basis for identifying metaphor, and does not reveal the nature of metaphor. Relevance Theory believes that metaphor is a part of normal verbal communication. Verbal communication is a purposeful and intentional activity. People understand discourse based on human cognitive assumptions. People's understanding of dialogue is not passively receiving language information. Instead, it seeks relevance on the basis of a shared cognitive environment, so as to infer the meaning of language in a specific context.

## **III. TRANSLATION OF METAPHORS IN SPECIFIC CONTEXTS**

Since metaphor is a cognitive tool in culture, it is "human beings use their experience in one field to illustrate cognitive activities in another field" (Shu Dingfang, 2000), which is equivalent to saying that translation is a The process of transferring the cognitive expression of language in one culture to another culture by the target language, otherwise the translation cannot complete the mission of spreading the national culture, that is, after the translation into the target language, the metaphor of the original language must be restored

Originally, the conceptual meaning of metaphor awakening should not only be equivalent to the conceptual meaning of primitive metaphor, but also the images of metaphor must be equal to each other. The translation of metaphors in specific contexts is even more confusing. Here are some specific methods of translation.

#### A. *Literal translation*

Literal translation refers to the method of preserving the original meaning of the original words in translation and finding the content and form consistent with the premise of not violating the social culture of the original text. Form-especially refers to keeping the original metaphor, image and national and local colors. Simply speaking, literal translation refers to the use of the original expression in the translation. The sentence structure is similar to the original sentence, but it does not exclude certain adjustments at the phrase level.

Although humans have different cognitive styles, they have the same cognitive structure, thus providing the possibility of metaphor realization in translation. Such as:

Away with the cant of measures, not men! — the idle opposition that it is the harness and not the horses that draw chariot along. (让“法治，而不是人治”的话见鬼去吧 — It is the idle self-conjecture of the idler, the carriage is the saddle, not the horse) (Cognitive structure paved the way for metaphorical sentences, hypothesis: it is the system that promotes social development, not people)

In general, the translation of continuous metaphorical sentences or paragraphs can rely on the common cognitive structure of human beings without having to explain it separately, so as not to weaken the expressive effect of the original text. In text translation, the benefit of context is that it creates the thematic meaning of the text, provides an ontology for the projection of metaphor, provides a virtual event, and a cognitive framework. Therefore, it is not necessary to entrust the ontology during translation, which can keep the original text vivid, Image, simplicity, humor, humor and other characteristics (Zhou Hongmin, 2000).

Another example:

Granddad'd pretended all along it was he that was wanting to go away to the great building — the government place, where he'd be with so many other old fellows having been best of everything. (爷爷一直装得像自己要走，搬到政府办的那幢大砖楼去，好像在那他能和许多老人住在一起享清福似的)

The great building—the government place is inappropriately translated as “nursing home”, although it does refer to a nursing home, but if we pay attention

to the style of the sentence, we can find that this sentence comes from a boy, And children generally do not know the term nursing home, so the original author used the great building — the government place here for this reason. In this case, we will try to use the words of kids of the original author to express the words in the translation as authentically as possible. That is, it is more appropriate to translate it directly into "a big brick building run by the government." (Yuan Xiaoning, 2004)

#### B. *Metonymy*

Metony (metonymy translation), also known as metonymy, is a rhetorical method in the translation that a word or phrase is replaced by another word or phrase that is closely related to it.

Due to the differences between Chinese and Western cultures, the language used as the cultural carrier is naturally subject to the two cultures, so that the two ethnic groups will use different metaphors when expressing the same concept. In the process of translation, the metaphorical body of the metaphor in the original language can be appropriately changed, and the metaphorical image familiar to the target language readers can be used. Such as:

That theory does not hold water. (The features of the container are mapped onto the theory) Literal translation: That theory cannot hold water. Metonymy: That theory is untenable. (Human characteristics are mapped to theory)

What he knows is only to delve into books. (the characteristics of digging land are mapped to the behavior of reading, which is a metaphor for the hardships and persistence of reading) Literal translation: He only knows how to dig books. Metonymy: He only knows about nibbling books. (The characteristic of strenuous eating is mapped to the behavior of reading, to metaphor the hardship and perseverance of reading)

In this case, we cannot transfer the cognitive methods in the original text to the target language intact, so there is a conflict between the two cognitive methods. In order to make the translation language understood smoothly, we have to use the cognitive of the target culture Way to replace the cognitive style of primitive culture (Zhou Hongmin, 2000).

#### C. *Free translation*

According to Baidu Encyclopedia, free translation (paraphrase; liberal translation) refers to translation based on the general meaning of the original text, without word-for-word translation (different from "literal translation"). Usually used when translating sentences or phrases (or larger groups of meanings), free translation is also mainly used when the original and translated languages reflect huge cultural

differences. From the perspective of intercultural language communication and cultural exchange, free translation emphasizes the relative independence of the target language cultural system and the original language cultural system. A large number of examples show that the use of free translation reflects the differences in ecological culture, linguistic culture, religious culture, material culture and social culture of different language ethnic groups. Free translation is more able to reflect the language characteristics of the nation. It is a translation method or translated text that not only maintains the original content and but also maintain the original form.

Since some conceptual metaphors are unique to a certain ethnic group, with strong national and local cultural characteristics, free translation should be used. The method of metaphorical free translation is to first understand the surface structure of words, and then use the customary form of translation Fully demonstrate the metaphorical meaning and deep meaning of the original metaphor. Such as:

*As disasters go, this one was terrible, but not unique, certainly not among the worst on the roster of U.S. air crashes. There was the unusual element of the bridge, of course, and the fact that the plane clipped it at a moment of high traffic, one routine thus intersecting another and disrupting both... so there is that detail. And there was the aesthetic clash as well—blue and green Air Florida, the name a flying garden, sunk down among gray chunks in a black river.... Still, there was nothing very special in any of it, except death...*

This is a passage from *The Man in the Water*. In the context of an air crash in Washington, the article extols an unknown hero who gave himself up to save others. The full text is refined and simple, and the context is solemn and solemn. How to determine the contextual translation of The aesthetic clash? Based on the solemn context throughout the original text, the author cannot use the expression "colorful collision scene" when summarizing the tragic scene of the plane crash. The broken stones sink into the dark river together, creating a huge visual contrast, thereby giving the reader a sense of incongruity in color, thereby increasing the tragic atmosphere. Therefore, the contextual meaning of the word is "very inconsistent color" (Yuan Xiaoning, 2004). In translation, the correct understanding of words should rely on the context to the greatest extent, rather than relying on isolated words to the greatest extent (Nida, 1999: 148).

#### IV. CONCLUSION

Metaphorical language abounds in the original text, regardless of its novelty and obsolescence, it is a cognitive phenomenon. This determines that translation is not a straight-line operation of simple language

conversion, it needs to be converted from one psychological space to another, and the filling and connection of psychological space is the common result of cognitive structure, cultural psychology, and contextual factors. In the translation, either the metaphorical image in the target language should be used to replace the metaphorical image of the original text, or only the meaning of the metaphor of the original text can be conveyed, or both the image of the original text and the meaning of the original text can be reproduced. This is also the objective law of translation in all linguistic forms, but metaphor translation is particularly prominent.

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