

Analysis of Giles' Metaphor Translation in *Strange Stories from a Chinese Studio* in Light of Relevance Theory

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ABSTRACT

Liao Zhai Zhi Yi is deemed to be the peak of Chinese classical novel and is already widely disseminated throughout the world. Herbert Allen Giles was a famous British sinologist and had translated several Chinese works. That's why we choose Giles' approaches to metaphor translation in his translation work *Strange Stories from a Chinese Studio* as the subject and discuss them within the framework of the Relevance Theory, which few people have used to analyze this great novel. Besides, all the examples provided in the paper are comparatively new. We can safely come to the conclusion after all the analysis that, on the whole, Giles did a good job in terms of metaphor translation because he understood the Chinese language perfectly and had great insight into Chinese ancient history and culture. Yet because of the vast differences in the two languages and sometimes of Giles' misunderstanding or misinterpretation, important cultural elements are lost inevitably. Still we can look at how we are able to improve on Giles' version using the Relevance Theory.

Keywords: Giles, metaphor, Relevance theory, *Liao Zhai Zhi Yi*.

1. METAPHORS AND AN OVERVIEW OF METAPHORS IN STRANGE STORIES FROM A CHINESE STUDIO

Different dictionaries have given different definitions about metaphors. The Oxford Dictionary defines metaphor as a figure of speech in which a word or phrase is applied to an object or action to which it is not literally applicable; Baidu translation describes metaphor as a word or phrase used to describe sb/sth else, in a way that is different from its normal use, in order to show that the two things have the same qualities and to make the description more powerful. Definitions may be different in some way, but they all have one thing in common, that is, they all emphasize the similarity between two seemingly different things.

The metaphors involved in this paper are different from those used as rhetoric devices of linguistics. It actually includes the latter but has one more meaning: the mode of thinking. It is a way of metaphorical thinking when people employ one kind of experience or context to another. By metaphorical thinking we mean

that our thoughts can break through the boundaries between different things or different ideas, and seeks equivalent similarities in these seemingly different things or ideas. Rhetoric devices are simply the demonstration of metaphorical thinking in language. Now metaphors have been ubiquitous, even in scientific field, as Yang says, metaphors play an important role in the development of human rational thinking and run through human's understanding of the scientific world, from the naming of things to the extension of word meanings, from the theoretical construction to the interpretation of concepts.(Yang, 2021)

As an immortal literary work, *Liao Zhai Zhi Yi* reflects the social reality comprehensively. The novel is instructive in that it recommends loyalty and doing good deeds and advocates punishments for treachery and violation of the law. Still it is entertaining, for it itself is of high literary achievement.(Peng, 2021) It is even thought to be the peak among all classical Chinese novels. Patrick Hanan, an American sinologist, once pointed out that vernacular Chinese does well in referring to things, while classical Chinese in describing things. The content is usually fully expressed in

vernacular Chinese, while the classical Chinese is always concise and says no more than necessary. Therefore, when we read vernacular Chinese, usually we wouldn't assume the words or sentences have ulterior meanings, while the key to understanding classical Chinese lies in reading between the lines. But what is usually the case is that metaphors are always related to some historical and cultural background. If we do not understand the specific historical and cultural background, we will not know its true meaning, and will inevitably make some misunderstanding and thus misinterpretation. However, it is precisely because of its rich connotations that the subtlety of metaphors is created -- "implicature", also the beauty and poetic feature of the language. To some extent, it is for the same exact reason that metaphor translation becomes the most difficult part among all kinds of translation.

2. INTRODUCTION OF RELEVANCE THEORY AND ITS INTERPRETATION OF TRANSLATION

Based on previous research studies, the Relevance Theory was put forward by Dan Sperber and Deirdre Wilson in 1986, with the core being the Relevance Principle and Communication Mode. The former can be further divided into two principles: The first principle is also known as the cognitive principle, which is: Human cognition tends to satisfy the need of maximal relevance; the second principle is also known as communicative principle. That is, every explicit communicative act conveys the hypothesis of optimal relevance. (Sperber & Wilson, 2003)

There are two important concepts: maximal relevance and optimal relevance, both of which have a close relationship with contextual effects. By maximal relevance we mean the listener can understand the speaker and achieve the maximal contextual effect with minimal cognitive effort, while the optimal relevance means that the hearer achieve enough contextual effect after a certain amount of processing efforts.

Later, Gutt, Wilson's student, applied Relevance Theory to translate studies, and thus the Theory of Relevance Translation was put forward. Gutt (1991) held that "seeking for the optimal relevance" should be the guideline for translation activities. The degree of relevance depends on two factors: processing effort and contextual effect. Under equal conditions, the smaller the processing effort, the stronger the relevance; the greater the contextual effect, the stronger the relevance.

Thus we can say the birth of relevance theory has shifted the focus of translation studies from "translation equivalence" to "thinking process". (Long & Cai, 2020) The famous translator Zhao Yanchun (2001) believes that "In view of the dynamic cognitive relevance characteristics of translation behaviors, Relevance

Theory has the strongest explanatory power for translation phenomena so far."

3. GENERAL PRINCIPLES FOR TRANSLATING METAPHORS

Newmark is the leading figure in metaphor translation studies. In his book *Approaches to Translation*, he pointed out that metaphor translation is the epitome of all language translation, because metaphor translation presents the translator with different options: to convey its meaning, to reshape its image, to modify the original image, or to make a perfect combination of its meaning and image. All these options are so closely related to the context and the culture. What is typical about metaphors is that they are peculiar to a certain culture and thus subject to cultural background. Differences in cultural backgrounds will surely act upon the language cognition, which may cause the translator to be unable to accurately express the connotations or artistic conceptions of metaphors in another language. Thus while we are doing the translation, we should first place the metaphor in the native culture of the source language to grasp its cultural connotations and some hidden meanings and still we have to bear in mind that another important feature of metaphor is its indirectness. Metaphors all have metaphoric images, and these images are used to refer to some hidden information, which are the real intentions or what the author really wants to say. It's already difficult to get the author's real intentions in Chinese classical works. When these images are put into another language and we expect the target language readers to react with similar reading experience and still get the information without deviation, which sounds like an impossible task. That's why it is no exaggeration to say the translation of metaphors is the most difficult part among all translation tasks.

Generally speaking, we should bear in mind the following three points while doing metaphor translation.

3.1. Retention of metaphoric features

When translating metaphors, translators should try their best to retain the form. In other words, both the meaning and images of the original text should be preserved. So the western readers can achieve similar contextual effects and have similar reading experience. Any practice whether we totally abandon the images or don't translate the images properly will end up going in the wrong direction of "retention of metaphoric features".

3.2. Similar associations or connotations for the images of the metaphor in the two languages

This means the images of the metaphor in the TL should be related to the original in cultural connotations. There should be no deviation in the understanding of the connotations of the metaphor after translation.

3.3. Making up for the lack of relevant cultural information

If the metaphors contain rich national culture and language culture, the translator should express these connotations. Translators should assume first the context through cross-cultural communication, so that any humanistic feelings and national culture contained in the metaphors can be reflected in the translation. The translation should be consistent with the original text in terms of artistic conceptions, so as to ensure that the readers of the translation and the readers of the original are connected in their thoughts. This principle requires the translator not only to have a systematic understanding of the meaning of the metaphor, but also to ensure that the metaphor of the translation can reflect the cultural connotations.

The following are specific examples taken from this novel and Giles' translation work. We try to analyze them using the framework of Relevance Theory to see how Giles did his job of metaphor translation and how we could improve on his version.

4. METAPHOR TRANSLATION IN STRANGE STORIES FROM A CHINESE STUDIO IN LIGHT OF RELEVANCE THEORY

4.1. Literal Translation

已而斋寝，恍惚见一官僚，搢笏而入。
(《老龙船户》)

While he was in ecstasy, Lo! an official entered, holding a tablet in his hand. (“*The Boatmen of Lao-Lung*”)

Here the translator adopts the literal translation, I think the westerners would understand the literal meaning of holding a tablet in his hand, but would be quite puzzled as to why that official should be doing that. Originally, the main purpose of the tablet is to record the emperor's orders or wills when those ministers met the emperor. It's mainly for memo purposes. Later on those tablets mainly became decorative articles, and depending on the different rankings, tablet can be made from bamboo to jade or even ivory. Still, when the author mentions “搢笏”, his real purpose is not simply to mention the fact that the official is holding something in his hand while he enters, but that he is dressed properly and quite probably in his uniform. So the translation of “holding a tablet in his hand” doesn't make much sense here since it doesn't

convey the author's intentions well. I think Giles should add a footnote to explain it more clearly.

4.2. Literal Translation (or Transliteration) with Footnotes

We resort to this approach when the images are too important to be omitted, but there exist some difficulties in understanding the images for the target language readers.

卧看牛女《狐嫁女》

He had watched the Cow-herd and the Lady...

Footnote: The Chinese names for certain stars: Aquilae and Lyrae. (“The Marriage of the Fox's Daughter”)

The westerners have similar connotations in terms of constellations and this translation plus the footnote is clear and sufficient enough for the TL readers to achieve adequate contextual effects.

相传山上遍地皆黄金，观音、文殊犹生。(《西僧》)

The people there also think the China is paved with yellow gold, that Kuan-yin and Wen-shu are still alive.

Footnote: For Kuan-yin, see No. XXXIII. note 7. Wen-shu, or Manjusiri, is the God of Wisdom, and is generally represented as riding on a lion, in attendance, together with Pu-hsien, the God of action, who rides an elephant, upon Shakyamuni Buddha.. (“Arrival of Buddhist Priests”)

Here Kuan-yin and Wen-shu are both important cultural symbols in China. Maybe different cultures have different interpretations of these two bodhisattvas. Chinese people generally believe Kuan-yin stands for compassion and Wen-shu stands for wisdom. Thus when Pu Songlin wrote “观音、文殊犹生”, he was indicating China was like the paradise: People could get rich easily because there were gold everywhere; people could expect to have their dreams come true and become smart because there are Kuan-yin and Wen-shu to help them. Here the images are too important to be omitted and simply the literal translation will not be enough for target language readers to derive the original information intended by the author, hence literal translation with the footnote.

4.3. Paraphrase with Footnotes

Sometimes metaphors strike the translator as important but they would make no sense at all to the target language readers or couldn't be understood with ease when just translated literally, in which case we will first paraphrase the metaphor in a more comprehensible way and then add footnotes to make the author's

intended information more comprehensive. That is when the third approach comes into play.

上坐十余官，都不知何人，惟关壮缪可识。
《考城隍》

...and there they found some ten officials sitting at the upper end, all stranger to Mr. Sung, with the exception of one whom he recognized to be the God of War.

Footnote: *The Chinese Mars. A celebrated warrior, named Kuan Yu, who lived about the beginning of the third century of our era. He was raised after death to the rank of a God, and now plays a leading part in the Chinese Pantheon. ("Examination for the Post of Guardian Angel")*

Here the translator seems considerate and provides the footnote which gives more explanation of this historical figure in Chinese history. But his explanation is far from enough. “关” is the surname for this warrior while “壮缪” is the posthumous title given to him by a later emperor. “壮” indicates somebody has the ability to lead the army, but he doesn't give full play to it, while “缪” suggests someone has an undeserved reputation. From the above explanations, we can see “关壮缪” is a controversial figure in Chinese history. In this case, the translator either leaves out those hidden information deliberately or he himself doesn't know so much detailed information. And the result is Giles didn't give adequate information for western readers to achieve similar contextual effects as the Chinese readers. Western readers thus may assume the author was in favor of “关壮缪” but the Chinese readers may assume otherwise, for the author here deliberately used this derogatory name “关壮缪” of Kuan Yu instead of other possible names.

4.4. Paraphrase While Substituting Images

When we are searching for the most appropriate equivalent of the image of the metaphor in the SL, usually a culturally-loaded word or phrase is more suitable, due to the better empathy shared by the readers from a certain culture. Newmark once said, “For impact and for neatness, but not for accuracy, a TL cultural equivalent of a SL cultural term is always more effective than a culturally free functional equivalent.” (Newmark, 2001)

“羁旅之人，谁作曹丘者？”（《娇娜》）

“who will play the Macenas to a distressed wayfarer like myself?” (“Miss Chiao-No”)

“曹丘” is a guy in China's Han Dynasty. He was someone who liked to recommend people with talents. Once he got to know Ji Bu, he admired him so much. From then on, he would sing high praise of Ji bu

whenever he talked with people. In the western culture, there existed a similar figure called *Macenas*, who always spared no efforts to help people. When Giles replaced “曹丘” with “Macenas”, western readers could understand with ease what the author was trying to convey in a way that satisfy the maximal relevance because they can achieve the maximal contextual effect with the minimal cognitive efforts. However there does exist the risk of misunderstanding if some western readers assume the author really knew about “Macenas”. Still, western readers get much less cultural elements out of Giles' version than from the original text and this is a great loss for lovers of Chinese literature or history.

4.5. Paraphrase While Omitting Images

Because of quite different historical and cultural heritages, sometimes there exist no similar cognitive concepts in the target language and we can only leave out these specific images of metaphors while doing translation.

马由是稍稍权子母。《罗刹海市》

Ma from that time occupied himself with scales and weights, with principle and interest, and such matters. (“*The Lo-Cha Country and the Sea-Market*”)

“子母”originally refers to the son and the mother. Later on “权子母” is used to refer to dealing with principle and interest, and still later, it means dealing with money and doing business. Here Giles abandoned the original images of son and mother and only retained the images of principle and interest, still he added more information to make the meaning even more explicit. If he had done it otherwise, the westerners would have such a difficult time in relating “son” and “mother” to money and doing business.

侯曰：“今日虽蒙覆庇，生平实未识荆。乞示姓字，以图衔报。”《刘全》

“*You gentlemen are very kind,*” said Hou, “*but I haven't the honour of your acquaintance and should be glad to know to whom I am so much indebted.*” (“*The Pious Surgeon*”)

“衔报” is short for “衔环以报”（衔：hold something with the mouth or with the beak, used usually with the animals; 环：bracelet; 以：to; 报：repay），which means to repay the favor you have once received. It is said that Yang Bao once rescued a tarin in Yinshan Mountain when he was young. Later on that tarin held a jade bracelet to repay him, wishing him to be a high-ranking official life after life.

We can see from the two examples that both the original images are omitted. This is due to the great differences in the cultural background. Thus the translator is trying to ensure the readers could have less

processing efforts in understanding what the author is trying to convey, but undoubtedly, some cultural elements are bound to be lost in the process.

笑君双瞳如豆，屡以金货动人。《王桂庵》

I couldn't help smiling at the great eyes you were making at me, all the time trying to tempt me with money. ("The Boat-Girl Bride")

“双瞳如豆” literally means one's eyes are as small as the beans, used to show people are short-shorted and easily make light of others. Here the translator may have made a mistake in saying “the great eyes”, causing the failure of communication.

5. CONCLUSIONS

In terms of metaphor, we can conclude after all those analysis that if we can retain both the form and the meaning of metaphors in a way that conveys the author's intentions well in the target language. It is the most satisfying result. Yet in reality, that is rarely the case. Usually, translators have such a terrible time struggling to choose between form and content. There are usually five approaches for metaphor translation: literal translation, literal translation (or transliteration) with footnotes, a paraphrase with footnotes, paraphrase while substituting images, and paraphrase while omitting images.

From the above mentioned examples, we can see Giles used paraphrase most in terms of metaphor translation, and he is wanting to make his translation easy for western readers to understand. Giles mainly resorted to the domestication method and his translation work is readers-friendly, putting readability and smoothness as the top priority and sometimes even abandoned the essential principle of faithfulness, so there is much room for improvement. Yet on the whole, Giles did a good job in terms of metaphor translation because he understood the Chinese language perfectly and had great insight into Chinese ancient history and culture. Because of his intense passion and contribution in disseminating Chinese literature and Chinese culture at large, we should always respect him.

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