



# The Translation of Conceptual Metaphors in Government External Communication Texts – A case study on the 2022 Chinese Government Work Report

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**Abstract.** Metaphor is a common cognitive activity in our daily lives, thoroughly permeating our conceptual system. As a political text, the government work report is closely intertwined with the use of metaphors due to its rigorous writing style and easily comprehensible expressions. Therefore, the study of metaphors in government documents is of great importance. Additionally, accurate translation is indispensable for government work reports to effectively convey official information to the outside world. This essay analyzes the translation strategies used in the official translation, studying its implications for translating conceptual metaphors in external government communication. With a focus on China's diplomacy, this essay explores the significance of conceptual metaphors and their translation for the external spread of countries worldwide.

**Keywords:** Conceptual Metaphor; Government Work Report; Metaphor Translation

## 1 Introduction

Lakoff and Johnson (1980) proposed the theory of conceptual metaphor which marks the change of metaphor research from the rhetorical level to the cognitive level. The theory holds that metaphor is a mapping from a concrete source domain to an abstract target domain, with the former being the original domain and the latter being the target domain<sup>[8]</sup>. The theory of conceptual metaphor in cognitive linguistics suggests that the process of metaphorical understanding involves people using their existing knowledge and experience to understand abstract concepts and things through the similarities between the two domains.

Traditional metaphor studies did not associate metaphor with the human cognitive and thinking system but considered it to be individually created by literati such as writers and poets, existing only in literary works and serving the function of beautifying language<sup>[3]</sup>. In contrast, the theory of conceptual metaphor believes that everyone can create metaphors and apply them to everyday contexts. Metaphors have been widely used in fields such as technology and medicine, for example, the brain is metaphorized

as a computer, and DNA is metaphorized as a selfish gene. Metaphors are also ubiquitous in daily life. For example, to express that people have nothing to do, we will say they have one's hands complete. When an athlete falls down, the coach will say to another athlete, "You help me up", using the metaphor of "help up" to mean replacing others. There is also some slang containing conceptual metaphors. we usually say "keep one's head above water" to express the meaning of avoiding disaster and troubles. Therefore, the theory of conceptual metaphor emphasizes the use of metaphor, considering it to be pervaded daily life and a way of thinking rather than a purely linguistic phenomenon.

In the political text, conceptual metaphor is a ubiquitous writing skill used by the author to improve the quality of the text. A government work report is a kind of political text in which many of the specialized terms and abstract concepts describe political actions that are often difficult to perceive, making them difficult for non-professionals to understand. However, reports have a broad audience, and in order to ensure that the audience correctly understands their meaning, effective methods must be adopted in writing. Among these methods, metaphors play a vital role. Metaphors are an effective cognitive tool that uses intuitive, concrete, and tangible source domains to express abstract target domains, thereby creating a bridge between the author and the reader, helping to reconstruct the meaning of government work reports, establishing a metaphorical fact, and achieving the purpose of promoting political ideas and conveying political information. Through the use of metaphors, complex issues can be simplified, and abstract concepts can be made concrete. Without metaphors, government documents would lose their vitality. For example, during the epidemic, the belief to overcome COVID-19 was fully demonstrated through the use of conceptual metaphors, especially the war metaphor. The war metaphor projected the concept of "war" into the event structure of the nationwide fight against the pneumonia epidemic, constructing the conceptual representation system of "the fight against pneumonia is a "war"<sup>[9]</sup>. It can be seen that metaphors play a crucial role in the political context.

## **2 Translation strategies of conceptual metaphors commonly used in government work reports**

The rich metaphorical expressions in Chinese add wings to foreign propaganda texts. The current Chinese-English translation of diplomatic metaphors in China often suffers from the obstacle of emotional transmission caused by misplaced metaphors, missing metaphors, and reproduced imagery, which may lead to ambiguity and even distortion in the country's diplomatic activities<sup>[10]</sup>. Therefore, the metaphors in external communication texts need to be translated with appropriate standards. Like conceptual metaphors, translation is also a thinking activity. In the process of metaphorical translation, the translator should faithfully convey the metaphors' emotion, pay attention to the processing of the four elements of conceptual metaphor, and properly connect the cognitive process of conceptual metaphor and the relationship between the source language and the target language. From cognitive perspective, metaphors' mapping condition is various, which makes the ways to translate are diverse<sup>[1]</sup>. Through the analysis of the

English translation version of the 2022 Chinese government work report, its translation strategies such as “retaining conceptual metaphors,” “conveying metaphorical meanings and removing metaphorical ontologies,” and “removing conceptual metaphors” are mainly used in the process of metaphorical translation.

## 2.1 Retention of conceptual metaphors

When the translated language shares conceptual metaphors and their metaphorical expressions with the source language, the translator transposes the conceptual metaphors and their metaphorical expressions from the source language to the translated language so that the mapping relationships and imagery presented by the metaphors in the source language are preserved.<sup>[2]</sup> When the target language and the source language have similar cultural connotations, the translator can directly translate the metaphors, so that the audience of the translation can experience the same cultural experience as the source language. Two examples are the following sentences:

(1) 各方面要共同努力, 装满“米袋子”、充实“菜篮子”, 把 14 亿多中国人的饭碗牢牢端在自己手中。

Translation: Everyone must work together to ensure that the country’s “rice bag” and “vegetable basket” are well-filled, and that we have a secure food supply for more than 1.4 billion Chinese people.

The “rice bag” and “vegetable basket” in Example 1 refer to the daily food problem of the people, which means that China will increase the development of the food industry, so that the people will not have to worry about food, oil and salt. The words “米袋子” and “菜篮子” in Chinese and “rice bag” and “vegetable basket” in English both refer to containers for food, and they both have similar metaphorical meanings, i.e., they are metaphors for food as a whole or food policy. It can be concluded that when the metaphorical mechanisms of the source language and the target domain are similar, the method of retaining metaphors can be directly adopted to maximize the translation audience to experience the same cultural experience as that of the source language.

(2) 大力拓宽就业渠道, 注重通过稳市场主体来稳就业, 增强创业带动就业作用。

Translation: We will work to broaden the employment channels, promote employment stability by keeping the operations of market entities stable, and harness the role of business startups in boosting employment.

The “rice bag” and “vegetable basket” in Example 1 refer to the daily food problem of the people, which means that China will increase the development of the food industry, so that the people will not have to worry about food, oil and salt. The words “米袋子” and “菜篮子” in Chinese and “rice bag” and “vegetable basket” in English both refer to containers for food, and they both have similar metaphorical meanings, i.e., they are metaphors for food as a whole or food policy. In example 2, the channel is mapped to the employment mode and form, and its meaning is to increase employment by expanding the employment mode, both in Chinese and English, the word channel is gradually derived as “the way to do something”, and its mapped target domain has a similar meaning, so the report directly translates channel as channel. From the above

examples, it can be concluded that when the metaphorical mechanisms of the source language and the target domain are similar, the method of retaining metaphors can be directly adopted to maximize the translation audience to experience the same cultural experience as that of the source language.

## 2.2 Conveying metaphorical meaning and removing metaphorical ontology

Metaphors are not only subject to the speaker's understanding of meaning, but also to social factors that constrain the speaker, including political beliefs, cultural identity, etc.<sup>[6]</sup>. Some metaphors in the translation process may lead to a mismatch of imagery between the source language and the target language if translated directly. In order to accurately convey the meaning of the source language, the strategy of translating the metaphorical meaning and removing the metaphor itself can be adopted. An example is given below:

(3) 地方政府及有关部门要建立健全工作机制, 加强资金调度, 确保退税减税这项关键性举措落实到位, 为企业雪中送炭, 助企业焕发生机。

Translation: We must ensure that the critically important policy of tax refunds and cuts takes full effect, in order to provide enterprises with timely assistance and help them generate fresh vitality.

The idiom of “雪中送炭” in Example 3 originates from the song Fan Chengda's “Sending charcoal in snow and mustard”, which says, “It is not necessary to send charcoal in snow, but to pretend the scenery to be a poem. This verse was later extended to help others when they are in difficulties. In this phrase, sending charcoal in the snow is mapped to giving policy support to a company when it faces difficulties. In English, however, there is no corresponding allusion to a similar concept. A direct translation of “sending charcoal in snow” would cause ambiguity. Therefore, the report adopts the approach of retaining the metaphor and removing the metaphor, and translates it as “provide enterprises with timely assistance” to ensure that readers understand the source language correctly.

## 2.3 Removing conceptual metaphors

Metaphors do not always make sense, and in political texts, metaphors may sometimes be used simply to enhance the tone and preserve form<sup>[5]</sup>. Metaphors are often removed without translation to conform to the idiom of the target language. Consider the following example sentence:

(4) 坚定实施扩大内需战略, 推进区域协调发展和新型城镇化。畅通国民经济循环, 打通生产、分配、流通、消费各环节, 增强内需对经济增长的拉动力。

Translation: Expanding domestic demand and promoting coordinated regional development and new urbanization to promote unimpeded flows in the economy, we will remove all impediments to smooth production, distribution, circulation, and consumption and see that domestic demand plays a bigger role in driving economic growth.

The “战略” in Example 4 can be categorized as a war metaphor, and a direct translation of it as strategy would lead to a redundant lexical meaning. This metaphor has been removed from the translation, and no information is lost in the source language.

### 3 Insights

The current role of the report is transformed to disseminate important domestic information to foreign countries and shape the image of China. Its accurate translation is the basis for foreign media and the public to have a correct understanding of China's foreign policy and international image<sup>[4]</sup>. As a very common writing device in reports, its translation's accuracy largely affects the text's translation quality. Therefore, the translation study of conceptual metaphors fully implements the strategy related to Chinese culture going abroad. With the help of accurate translation, the role of conceptual metaphors is given full play to help readers better understand the report, which helps to enhance the country's international communication ability and strengthen our international discourse power.

Metaphorical translation maps certain general features of the source domain onto the target domain, i.e. the subject matter of the political literature, which enhances the semantic meaning. For example, the metaphor of "war" characterizes "anti-corruption", which highlights the seriousness of the corruption phenomenon and the arduousness of the task of "anti-corruption", and better reflects the determination and strength of the Chinese government in combating corruption<sup>[7]</sup>. Therefore, in order to better play the role of metaphors in such texts, the translation modes of conceptual metaphors need to be diverse. With metaphors involving people's personal experiences, their translation is very complicated. The essence of conceptual metaphor is the mutual mapping of the original domain and the target domain. The relationship between the two domains will have different expressions depending on different life and cultural experiences. This requires translators to pay attention to the cultural information and political meaning of the source language when translating metaphors, to adjust the translation means according to the linguistic and cultural differences and to use various translation techniques such as direct translation, paraphrasing and provincial translation to fully convey the meaning expressed by the metaphors.

### 4 Conclusion

Conceptual metaphor is a universal and special cognitive phenomenon that focuses on the transfer of two concepts, which are closely related to people's life experiences and cognition. It can enhance people's cognitive ability of things through the mutual mapping of two concepts. In texts, conceptual metaphors can make semantic expressions more concise, easy to understand and objective. This makes government outreach texts very favorable to the use of conceptual metaphors to express abstract policies. As the government's foreign external text represents China's diplomatic image, translators need to comprehensively examine the translation of conceptual metaphors, try to avoid

the lack of metaphorical meaning and deviation, retain the convergent target connotation, and present an excellent translation to the target language readers, which plays an active role in the diplomatic image and a country's culture going abroad.

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