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A Study of “Flower” metaphors in Selected Stories by Sun Li from the Perspective of Conceptual Metaphor—Take Yang Xianyi’s English Version as an Example

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ABSTRACT

From the perspective of Conceptual Metaphor Theory, metaphor is not only a linguistic phenomenon, but a cognitive way and thinking tool. This paper is an attempt to study the metaphorical types and translation methods of “flower” metaphor in *Selected Stories by Sun Li* based on CMT. It is founded that the description of “flower” in Yang Xianyi’s translation follows the conceptual metaphors in English, such as “HUMAN IS FLOWER”, “ABSTRACT CONCEPT IS FLOWER” and “SHAPE IS FLOWER”, and Yang Xianyi and Gladys Yang mostly adopt literal translation and free translation to accurately convey the information in the original text. At the same time, cultural factors, translator’s cognitive competence and certain context also affect the choice of the “flower” metaphors translation methods. Hopefully, this research provides references for the metaphor analysis and the “flower” metaphor translation.

Keywords: Conceptual Metaphor Theory; *Selected Stories by Sun Li*; “flower” metaphor translation

1 Introduction

The study of metaphors has a long history. In general, it is defined as one type of word or phrase being used in place of another, thus suggesting the likeness between them. But in *Metaphors We Live By*, Lakoff and Johnson (1980) defined metaphor as a way of thinking, not just a simple rhetorical phenomenon. And they also proposed Conceptual Metaphor Theory. The development of metaphor research has been marked by cognitive linguists offering a new perspective, ushering in a new pinnacle in the study of metaphor.

Many scholars have applied the CMT to English teaching, Chinese-English comparisons, and analysis of literary works, etc. However, there are few researches that combine this theory with the study of Chinese-English translation methods. This paper takes the translation of “flower” metaphorical expressions in *Selected Stories by Sun Li* as the research object, not only because Sun Li is famous for his “poetic novels” and the original text has high literary value, but also this work is translated by Yang Xianyi and Gladys Yang who are outstanding translators in literature. It is of practical significance to systematically analyze the “flower” translation in Yang’s

version. At the same time, this research also studies the factors affecting the metaphor translation methods, which will have a positive effect on the spread of Chinese traditional culture.

2 Literature Review

Conceptual Metaphor Theory and the translation of *Selected Stories by Sun Li* have been studied from different perspectives, which can be summarized as follows:

2.1 Previous Studies on Conceptual Metaphor Theory

Lakoff and Johnson published the book *Metaphors We Live By* in 1980, from that time cognitive metaphor has attracted the attention of linguists and the cognitive research of metaphor has become a hot topic. In *Metaphors We Live By* (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980), Conceptual Metaphor was put forward firstly. And their detailed ideas about conceptual metaphors are mentioned in *The Contemporary Theory of Metaphor* (Lakoff & Johnson, 1993). The proposal of “conceptual metaphor” marks that metaphor research has entered a new field from traditional rhetorical figures and semantic research (Li Yongzhong & Li Chunhua, 2001). In 1999, Johnson and Lakoff (1999) wrote *Philosophy in the Flesh*, which explores how our body experience influences metaphorical thoughts. Johnson also proposed two cognitive structures: image schema and metaphorical structure, which attempts to link image schemas to metaphorical meanings. Later, Fauconnier (1997)'s Conceptual Blending Theory develops Conceptual Metaphor Theory, offering a more comprehensive framework for the interpretation of metaphorical expressions. CMT is now being widely applied to the analysis of literary works, cross-cultural studies, social issues and philosophical studies, etc.

In China, metaphor was generally considered as a branch of rhetoric and few scholars specialized in metaphor until the 1980s. Ye Feisheng (1982) introduced Lakoff's views for the first time, but it did not attract the attention of domestic scholars. After the 1990s, domestic scholars published more and more articles on conceptual metaphors, such as Lin Shuwu and Ji Guangmao. They have brought metaphor research in China into cognitive study of metaphor. Lin Shuwu (1997) summarized foreign metaphor research. Ji Guangmao (1998) effectively analyzed the Western metaphor classification. With the development of conceptual metaphor, many Chinese researchers begin to study the nature of metaphor and made progress. At present, metaphor researches in China have gradually developed in many directions.

2.2 Previous Studies on the Translation of *Selected Stories by Sun Li*

Sun Li's aesthetic style, sincere creative attitude and refined expression have made him unique in the literary world and have attracted the sustained attention from the academic community.

In foreign countries, compared to other foreign scholars, Haruo Watanabe studied Sun Li in greater detail. In “On Appraisal Vicissitude to SUN Li in the Chinese History of Literature—Comparison with Zhao Shuli”, he compared the changing literary status of the two contemporaneous writers from the angle of Chinese literary history (Haruo Watanabe & Jiang Jinwen, 2007).

In China, “After I Read ‘Husband’” in 1943 was the first paper on Sun Li's writing criticism. Since the 1990s, many scholars have attempted to study Sun Li and his works using Western theories of literature, aesthetics, and linguistics. Their researches primarily encompass studies of Sun Li's works, ontological research, comparative analysis, and examinations of his literary standing.

There are many studies on Sun Li and Conceptual Metaphor Theory, but there are fewer studies that systematically explore metaphor translation in Sun Li's novels on the basis of Conceptual Metaphor Theory. Therefore, this study will employ CMT as the theoretical foundation to analyze the “flower” metaphors translation in Sun Li's novels.

3 Conceptual Metaphor Theory

In traditional rhetorical studies, researchers believe that metaphor is a rhetorical phenomenon in which one word is used to replace another. However, with the development of cognitive linguistics, cognitive linguists have raised questions about rhetorical metaphors: why do metaphors appear and why do humans use

metaphors in literary works? Obviously, rhetoricians cannot answer these questions, but cognitive linguists have given their answers. From the cognitive perspective, Metaphor can be seen as a connection between humans and the outside world, helping us better understand the nature of language and the world, and metaphor is conceptual in nature, not linguistic. Just as Lakoff (1980) also pointed out that “the essence of metaphor is to use one thing to understand and experience another”, he used the three basic concepts of “target domain”, “source domain” and “mapping” to describe the cognitive process of metaphor.

Specifically, we map the source domain of simple and concrete concepts onto the target domain of unfamiliar or relatively abstract concepts. The mapping process plays a crucial role in understanding the world. There is a formula that can help us better understand the mapping process of conceptual metaphors: A is B, in which B is the source domain and A is the target domain. CMT uses the experience of B to explain the target domain A. In the example of “TIME IS MONEY”, people employ the knowledge about the simple entity, “MONEY”, to explain the abstract concept “TIME”, so that the importance of “MONEY” is mapped to the concept of “TIME”. Human beings can employ their cognition and experience to understand other abstract things, which also shows that physical and cultural experiences greatly influence what people see, what people think, and what they do.

Lakoff and Johnson divided conceptual metaphors into three categories according to the origin domain: ontological metaphor, structural metaphor and orientational metaphor. Ontological metaphors refer to the use of some entities or their characteristics to map some abstract concepts such as “THOUGHT IS WATER”. In this example, the source domain “water” is used to map the invisible and intangible abstract noun “thought”. The structural metaphor is to construct another concept with ambiguous structure, ambiguous definition or complete lack of internal structure through one clearly structured and well-defined concept. In *Metaphors We Live By*, they took ARGUMENT IS WAR as an example. Orientational metaphor is a kind of image schema metaphor. People project other abstract concepts, such as emotion, physical condition, and social status into specific orientation concepts, forming a language that expresses abstract concepts with the words of orientation, for example, MORE IS UP. The following part will use the CMT to analyze the mapping process of the “flower” metaphor in *Selected Stories by Sun Li* and its English translation methods.

4 The Analysis of “Flower” Metaphor Translation in *Selected Stories by Sun Li* on Conceptual Metaphor Theory

Although there are differences between English and Chinese languages, both cultures have a long history of flower cultivation, which has given rise to some metaphors related to “flowers”. This part analyzes how the “flower” metaphors in the original text are translated into English.

4.1 “Flower” Metaphor Translation

Since flowers have different appearance characteristics and growth habits, the metaphorical meanings of “flowers” are quite rich.

4.1.1 HUMAN IS FLOWER

In the above we mentioned that ontological metaphors refer to seeing something more abstract as an entity. A flower is a plant and it is a typical entity. Therefore, “HUMAN IS FLOWER” is an ontological metaphor.

Example 1

ST: “我的妹妹是黄花少女!” 黎大傻的女人说。(Sun Li, 1999: 199)

TT: “My sister is pure,” cried Stupid’s wife.(Sun Li, 1999: 198)

The use of flowers to describe women is a very common metaphor that people use in their daily lives. To begin with, flowers are biologically interpreted as the reproductive organs of plants, and women play an important role in human reproduction. From this point of view, there is a common likeness between flowers and women. Secondly, flowers usually present to human beings their beautiful forms and rich colors, and women also have the characteristic of beauty which increases the possibility of using flowers to describe women.

In the ancient Han, unmarried women in dressing like “yellow flowers”, and they used yellow color on the forehead or face painted into a variety of patterns. They also cut yellow paper into various patterns to paste. At the same time, “yellow flowers” often refers to chrysanthemum. Chrysanthemums, known for their resilience to frost and cold, are often used as a metaphor for one’s integrity. In Example (1), “黄花少女” refers to Man’er. Stupid’s wife believes that her sister, Man’er, is a simple and innocent girl and is not what others say she is. She defends her sister’s reputation in front of many people. Yang Xianyi and Gladys Yang translated “黄花少女” into “pure”, which employed free translation. If direct translation is used here, it may cause confusion to the target language readers. Although English readers may also use flowers to describe women, they are not clear about the meaning of “黄花” in Chinese culture, so translators have given a reasonable way of dealing with it in the context, which is in line with the context and does not cause reading difficulties for the readers. In the sentence, this metaphor in the original text is translated into a non-metaphorical form, which conveys the correct semantics to the target language readers but loses the metaphorical aesthetics.

4.1.2 ABSTRACT CONCEPT IS FLOWER

Example 2

ST:那分别就像有的花可以开在风平浪静的水面上，有的花却可以开在山顶的岩石上，它深深地坚韧地扎根在土壤里，忍耐得过于旱，并经受得起风雨。(Sun Li, 1999: 285)

TT: But those loves were as different from each other as flowers that bloom on the unruffled surface of a placid lake and those which grow atop a mountain cliff--- digging deep tenacious roots into the soil, able to withstand drought and wind and rain. (Sun Li, 1999: 284)

Flowers are synonymous with beautiful things. Although this meaning is not directly spelled out in the dictionary, in ordinary life people think that flowers are beautiful and represent goodness. When seeing beautiful flowers, people will also associate them with pure love. So, in many parts of the world, there is a connection between flowers and love. The seed of a flower is the germ of love between two people. As time passes, the growth of the flower is the accumulation of feelings between lovers, and the final blooming of the flower is the companionship of lovers. This is a typical ontological metaphor, which is “LOVE IS FLOWER”. The mapping between flower and love can be seen in the following table:

Source domain	Mapping	Target domain
seeds	→	the germ of love
growth	→	the accumulation of feelings
blooming	→	the companionship of lovers
withered flowers	→	broken relationship

There is no direct indication of what exactly the flower refers to in the original sentence, but in the English translation, Yang chooses to express the implied meaning directly, replacing the original metaphor with simile. In the Chinese context, the author believes that readers can infer the meaning of “flower” from the context, so he does not directly express the metaphorical meaning of “flower”. However, due to the simplicity and directness of the English language, not stating the implied meaning of “flower” directly may cause trouble to the English readers and may make the context semantically incoherent. Therefore, Yang uses the simile “Love is a flower” here to replace the metaphor, which semantically conveys the same meaning as the original text, but lacks the metaphorical form.

Example 3

ST:她就说：“做着活有什么心花呀？谁能像你们呀？”(Sun Li, 1999: 73)

TT: “Why should I wear myself out?” retorted Xiaowu. “We can’t all be busy beavers.” (Sun Li, 1999: 72)

In this sentence, this usage of “flower” is not found in the dictionary. This is also a typical ontological metaphor. “心花” is a dialect in Hebei, China, which refers to “all kinds of thoughts and ideas.” “Flowers” in reality are considered to have a variety of colors and types. Therefore, in this dialect, people’s various thoughts are compared to “flowers”. That is “THOUGHT IS FLOWER”, which maps the source domain “flower” to the target domain “thought” to illustrate the abundance of ideas.

Instead of using literal translation or explaining too much about the meaning of this dialect, Yang Xianyi and Gladys Yang chose to employ free translation to convey clearly to the readers what the author ultimately wanted to say. They take into account the fact that this idiom is not used in English culture. And if too many explanations are made, it will obscure the meaning, which will cause reading difficulties for readers. Considering the different languages and culture of Chinese and English, free translation is a better choice.

4.1.3 SHAPE IS FLOWER

The type of “SHAPE IS FLOWER” is used a lot in our daily lives and is also an ontological metaphor. It is derived from the basic meaning of “flower” and is also the simplest type of extended meaning, such as “浪花、烟花、雪花” in Chinese. Such words have been completely integrated into people’s daily life and have become the conventional usage, no longer requiring any innovation or change. It is for this reason that people often ignore the metaphorical meaning contained in such words. In “SHAPE IS FLOWER”, the shape of the flower is mapped to the target domain.

Example 4

ST:这家人住在一个高山坡上，那女人我也见到一次背影儿，倒是长得不错，穿一身干净蓝衣服，头发梳得光光得，在后面盘成一朵圆花。杨卯儿被她迷住了。(Sun Li, 1999: 233)

TT:I got a look at her from behind once, and it’s true she wasn’t bad-looking. Dressed in clean blue homespun, nicely combed glossy black hair with a bun in the back---Yang Mao was enchanted. (Sun Li, 1999: 232)

In real life, most of the flowers people see are round or close to round. So in the original text, the author used “圆花” to describe the shape of the hair in the back of the woman, which also implied the delicacy of the woman. But in the English translation, Yang Xianyi did not use the image of “flower”, but “bun” in English culture, which can also express the meaning of “圆”. But what the English translation has lost is the implied meaning of “花”. Even if the translator used “nicely combed glossy black hair” to try to fill the gaps in meaning, part of the meaning has been lost due to cultural differences, which is also a difficulty in metaphor translation.

4.2 Factors Influencing “Flower” Metaphor Translation in Selected Stories by Sun Li

Metaphor translation can be affected by a number of factors. This part focuses on the three most obvious factors influencing “flower” metaphors translation, including cultural factors, translator’s cognitive competence and certain context.

4.2.1 Cultural Factors

Language is the carrier of culture, and the difference in the way English and Chinese languages are used is an obvious manifestation of cultural differences. These differences play an important role in the choice of the methods of metaphor translation. People from different cultural backgrounds usually have different cultural experiences and thus have different ideas about the same experience or image, forming their unique cognitive styles. In Example (1), “黄花少女” is an idiom unique to Chinese culture, but “黄花” has no specific meaning in English culture. If Yang chooses to translate “黄花” into “yellow flower”, it will cause reading difficulties for the target language readers. Therefore, the free translation is a better choice here, which makes the target language readers understand the real meaning of the original text, although it changes the form of the original text. Cultural differences are more difficult to make up than language differences and may result in the loss of part of the meaning in the translation. The translator needs to consider how to make up for this part so as not to affect the exchange of meaning.

4.2.2 Cognitive Competence

When translating metaphors, translators must first deeply understand the meaning of the “flower” metaphors in the original text, process it in their own cognition, and then produce a corresponding translation. Therefore, the translator’s cognitive competence significantly affects the accuracy of the translation. Yang Xianyi, who was born in China and went abroad to study, knew both Chinese and English cultures, and both languages had a great influence on his cognition. Yang Xianyi’s wife, Gladys Yang, was born in China but was British. English was her mother tongue, so she was familiar with the norms of English language usage. Their experience had a significant impact on their successful translation of the “flower” metaphor. For example, Yang Xianyi and Gladys Yang translated “也特别称赞那花儿刻的好” into “they all admired the carvings I made on those partitions”. “花儿” refers to a nice carving in the original text, and also implies the exquisiteness of the graphics and Old Li’s superb skills. Yang Xianyi is familiar with this meaning of “花儿” expressed in Chinese culture, but he also knows the differences between English and Chinese expressions. Therefore, to avoid unnecessary misunderstandings here, free translation is still a better choice.

4.2.3 Context

Metaphorical meaning cannot exist apart from the text, and the same is true of metaphor translation. The metaphorical meaning of “flower” needs to be understood in the original text, and only after accurately understanding the meaning of the metaphor in the whole context can translators choose the most appropriate way to translate the metaphor. Translators consider factors such as the author’s creative purpose, the theme of the work and the characteristics of the characters in the novel when choosing a translation method. For example, “这一次带着桂花的人进去”, Yang Xianyi and Gladys Yang translated the original text into “he was taking in a casualty”. Sun Li describes a girl who was accidentally injured while crossing a river by boat in the original text. Yang judges what kind of metaphorical meaning “flower” here is based on the meaning of the context, and then chooses to use free translation. Without context, not only translators will misinterpret the original text, but the source language readers will be confused about the meaning of “花” here.

5 Conclusion

This study explores Yang Xianyi and Gladys Yang’s translation methods of three types of “flower” metaphorical phrases based on CMT in *Selected Stories by Sun Li*. It is founded that literal translation and free translation are the main translation methods adopted by Yang Xianyi and Gladys Yang in “HUMAN IS FLOWER” “ABSTRACT CONCEPT IS FLOWER” “SHAPE IS FLOWER”. When encountering difficulties in translation, the translator’s first consideration is to clearly convey the meaning of the original text to the target language readers. Besides, the choice of translation methods of “flower” metaphors will be affected by cultural differences, translator’s cognitive competence and certain context. These are factors that are inevitable and cannot be specifically measured in “flower” metaphor translation. Translators need to convey the accurate meaning of the original text to the fullest extent possible without changing the meaning and form of the original “flower” metaphor. If there is a conflict between two languages or cultures, translators try to make a choice guided by their own cognitive competence.

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