

Study on the English Translation of Metaphors in Chinese Idioms from the Perspective of Relevance Translation Theory: A Case Study of Xi Jinping: The Governance of China Vol.Ⅲ

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Abstract

Chinese idioms are one of the important components of Chinese language and culture, and they express rich cultural connotations in highly condensed language forms. The metaphors in idioms are even more diverse, and the metaphors in political texts demonstrate their unique persuasive function, which is of great research significance. This article delves into the metaphorical phenomena in idioms and, through case analysis, concludes that a series of translation strategies, such as literal translation concept method, free translation connotation method, and cultural transformation method, can better convey the deep meanings contained in idioms and effectively play their semantic functions.

Keywords

Relevance Translation Theory; Chinese Idioms Translation; Metaphor.

1. Introduction

In recent years, with China's opening-up policy and the acceleration of globalization, international exchanges have become increasingly necessary in many fields, including politics, economy, culture, and military. Therefore, in order to learn more about a country, one should be familiar with its culture, which is the most basic requirement for internationalization. As for us Chinese, we have been accepted by more and more countries, especially Western countries. Therefore, many Westerners learn Chinese culture through various means, such as setting up Confucius Institutes. We all know that Chinese idioms are one of the most important treasures of Chinese culture, so it is necessary to study the translation of Chinese idioms (X.J. Li, 2011).

2. Relevance Translation Theory

The Relevance Translation Theory is a major theory proposed by Gutt for the first time in applying Relevance Theory to the field of translation. Gutt regards translation as an ostensive-inferential cognitive process, focusing on human brain mechanisms. This translation process involves dual inference: on the one hand, the translator must understand the original author's intention from the original text's words or so-called communicative cues; On the other hand, translators must also understand the cognitive environment of the target audience. The theory of relevance translation strives to achieve optimal relevance rather than maximum relevance in language communication. This depends on two decisive factors: processing efforts and contextual effects. Processing effort refers to the effort expended for reasoning, and not all information can be obtained with the same processing effort. Context effect refers to the effort that people hope to put into understanding to improve their contextual assumptions used in communicative behavior. The improvement includes three aspects: deriving the implicit meaning of context; Strengthen or confirm existing assumptions; The Hypothesis of Eliminating Contradictions (K.N. Lin, 1994). For example, a friend saying to you, "Why are you like Lin Daiyu

all day?" allows Chinese speakers to immediately activate contextual assumptions in their brains, associating them with the sentimental image of "Lin Daiyu" in "Dream of the Red Chamber," and easily inferring the implicit meaning of this sentence. However, for foreign listeners, they lack such contextual assumptions relatively, making it difficult to produce the same contextual effect. Gert believes that under the same conditions, the smaller the processing effort, the stronger the correlation; The greater the contextual effect, the stronger the relevance. This relationship can be explained by the following formula (Y.C. Zhao, 1999):

$$\text{Relevance } (R) = \frac{\text{Contextual Effects } (C)}{\text{Process Efforts } (P)}$$

3. Metaphorical Conceptual System

The traditional theory of metaphor regards metaphor as a rhetorical device of language, belonging to the issue of language expression. However, in 1980, George Lakoff and Mark Johnson proposed different views in the book *Metaphors We Live by*. The author of this book, contrary to traditional views, proposes a new perspective on "metaphor", which not only refers to the linguistic form of metaphor, but also refers to the way people think and act - the metaphorical concept or conceptual metaphor - represented in capital letters in this article. In daily life, people often refer to familiar, tangible, and concrete concepts to understand, think, and experience, and treat intangible and difficult to define concepts, forming a cognitive way of interconnectivity between different concepts. The concept of metaphor becomes a systematic and consistent whole in a certain culture, that is, the system of metaphorical concepts, which plays a major and decisive role in people's understanding of the objective world (Y.F. Zhao, 1995).

Lakoff believes that metaphors can be divided into three types: structural metaphors, positional metaphors, and ontological metaphors. Structural metaphor refers to using the structure of one concept to construct another concept, so that two concepts are superimposed, and using words that discuss various aspects of one concept to talk about another concept, such as from "time is money" to "wasting my money"; Directional metaphor refers to a series of metaphorical concepts formed by referring to spatial orientation: up down, front back, etc., such as "I'm feeling up"; Ontological metaphor refers to people's perception of abstract and vague ideas, emotions, psychological activities, and event states as tangible objects, such as 'We are out of trouble now'.

Metaphor is an important cognitive way for humans, playing an important role in describing scenes, depicting characters, describing characters' psychology, highlighting semantics, and deepening themes. However, metaphorical translation often leads to cultural losses and communication setbacks, which has become a major challenge in the translation industry (Lei Xiaofeng and Tian Jianguo, 2014). In addition, idioms are the essence of national language and the concentrated reflection of national culture. They have distinctive cultural characteristics and strong national flavor. They are widely used in daily life and have strong cultural attributes. Due to the significant social, political, economic, and cultural differences between China and the West, Chinese idioms are not only difficult to find corresponding expressions in Western culture, but also difficult to understand by readers from different cultural backgrounds, thus exacerbating the difficulty of translating metaphors into English in Chinese idioms. However, the principle of optimal relevance in relevance translation theory can effectively guide the translation of metaphors in Chinese idioms. By analyzing the information and communication intentions of the original author, as well as the cognitive environment and reception ability of the target readers, the optimal relevance of Chinese idiom expression can be achieved.

4. Translation Strategies of Metaphors in Chinese Idioms

4.1. Literal Translation Method.

ST1 应该风雨同舟，荣辱与共。

TT1 We are in the same boat, and we should stick together, share well and woe.

In this sentence, the core image lies in the concept of "舟", meaning boat. In the cognitive domain of the source language, this concept can immediately remind the source language readers of a commonly known proverb "grasshoppers on the same boat", thus understanding the connotation and meaning of the idiom. In the cognitive domain of the target language, there is also a similar cognition. The most typical example of the concept of "boat" in Western culture is the "Noah's Ark" in the Bible, symbolizing a refuge for common resistance against difficulties. Therefore, the translator did not use a large amount of text here to explain the origin of the idiom, as this not only makes the translation lengthy and cumbersome, but also makes the translation reader put in a lot of unnecessary processing effort to understand the idiom. On the contrary, the translator adopts a literal translation method to translate "风雨同舟" into "in the same boat", which not only preserves the information and style of the original language to the maximum extent, realizes the principle that the target language is the best reproduction of the original text, but also enables the target language reader to easily infer the meaning of the original idiom based on the context of the translation, so as to accurately obtain the intention of the original author without much processing effort.

4.2. Free Translation method.

ST2 更加自觉地投身改革创新时代潮流，坚决破除一切顽瘴痼疾。

TT2 We must do more to channel our energies towards the contemporary current of reform and innovation and resolve to address deep rooted problems.

In this example, the idiom "顽瘴痼疾" relates to traditional Chinese medicine culture in China and has distinct cultural characteristics, making it difficult for target language readers to understand. At this point, due to significant cultural differences, it is difficult for the translator and the original text to find similar expressions to interpret this idiom. The translator translates "顽瘴痼疾" into "deep rooted problems", using a free translation method and following the principle of relevance, flexibly adapting the language, discarding the literal meaning of the original Chinese idiom, and translating its metaphorical or implicit meaning, thus reproducing the original author's communicative intention in a specific context.

4.3. Borrowing Translation Method.

ST3 政法机关要敢于刀刃向内、刮骨疗毒，坚决清除害群之马。

TT3 Judicial, prosecuting and public security departments should be strict with themselves, remove all irregularities despite pains, and ferret out any rotten apples with the strongest will and the most resolute actions. (355).

ST4 清除了党内存在的严重隐患，成效是显著的，但这并不意味着我们就可以高枕无忧了。

TT4 However, this does not mean we can rest on our laurels.

In English, some idioms have meanings that are very similar to those of certain Chinese idioms. In this case, the translator can use the nested translation method to translate the corresponding Chinese idioms using target language idioms with similar meanings, so that the translation can not only convey the intention of the original author, but also enable the readers of the translation to accurately understand the meaning of the idiom without unnecessary processing efforts. In the above two examples, the translator applies the phrases "Rotten apples" and "rest on our laurels" to explain the idioms "害群之马" and "高枕无忧" respectively, so that the translated readers do not have to put in too much processing effort to infer the original author's

intention from the translated text, achieving consistency between the original author's intention and the translated readers' expectations.

5. Conclusion

In summary, under the guidance of relevance translation theory, translators should consider factors such as the intention of the original author and the cognitive environment of the target readers in accordance with the principle of optimal relevance, flexibly adopt different translation strategies, and strive to ensure that the translation can accurately convey the original author's intention to the target readers, while also enabling the target readers to obtain sufficient contextual effects without unnecessary processing efforts. In order to achieve more effective dissemination of the meaning of Chinese idioms while conveying the Chinese cultural characteristics contained therein as much as possible.

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