

Research on metaphorical translation strategies of Network hot words from a perspective of cognitive principles

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Abstract

Based on the principles of cognitive linguistics, the difficulties and metaphorical issues in translating Network hot words is explored. The relationships between cognition, metaphor, and translation are explored. On the basis of the relationships, taking Network hot words in 2022 as the research object, this article analyzes its metaphorical meanings a perspective of cognitive principles and proposes a translation method that combines dynamic context analysis and social and cultural environment considerations. The research results manifest that the difficulties in translating Network hot words mainly come from the differences in metaphors of different cultural languages, which are reflected in the semantic generalization of languages.

Keywords

Cognitive linguistics; metaphorical translation strategies; Network hot words.

1. Introduction

Cognition is the process of understanding things, which involves discovering the basic laws of things through recognition and understanding, and directly feedback them to the human brain through information processing. Under the action of the brain, information is processed and transformed into another form of information. Cognitive process is an information processing process. It is the most basic psychological process of human beings, which includes sensation, perception, memory, thinking, imagination, and language, etc. External information is processed and transformed into human psychological activities by the human brain, and then controls human behaviors (Shen, 2023). Lakoff and Johnson (2010) point out from the perspective of cognitive linguistics that metaphor is not only a rhetorical device in language, but also a way of thinking; metaphors are ubiquitous in daily life, not only in language, but also in ideological activities. Metaphor, as a rhetorical device, is a comparison between two different things, implying their similarity. Metaphors do not use metaphorical words such as 'like', but instead use words such as 'is' and 'become', which are more flexible and vivid (Wang, 2013).

Language is the carrier of culture, and metaphors in language reflect the thinking patterns and cultural characteristics of native people. Learning and mastering various metaphorical usage, comparing metaphors in different cultures, ethnicities, and languages, distinguishing their similarities and differences, improves cognitive level and enhances the quality of text translation.

Translation is not only about translating language, but also about translating culture. When translating, it is important to consider the metaphorical connotations of the text. Literal translation may lead to the loss of connotations, and Network hot words, as an entertainment expression of contemporary culture, should also follow this principle. This article utilizes the principles of cognitive linguistics and combines social and cultural environments to conduct cognitive analysis, in order to solve the language difficulties in translating metaphors of Network hot words from Chinese to English, and improve the accuracy and expressive effect of translation. Network hot words has a wide range of dissemination and is closely related to

ideological changes. By integrating the unique concepts of Network hot words in Chinese culture and translating them to convey the correct meaning to the audience ensures that the audience can better receive the connotation.

2. The relationship between cognition, metaphor, and translation

2.1. The relationship between cognition and metaphor

Metaphor is the bridge and foundation for understanding unknown things, and cognitive activities based on metaphor better describes unknown things. Metaphor is not only a cognitive tool, but also a way of understanding the world. It exists in various aspects of people's social life, including language, culture, thinking, etc. It reflects the cognitive characteristics and commonalities of different ethnic groups. The broad metaphor belongs to the categories of linguistics and psychology. Lakoff and Johnson (2010) propose that the essence of metaphor is to understand and experience another thing or experience based on one's own existing experience. That is, in order to express and describe unknown things, people need to analyze and compare known things with unknown or unfamiliar things based on their past expressions to obtain understanding and cognition of unknown things. In terms of cognitive function, metaphor is a cognitive tool. Modern metaphorology believes that metaphor is a cognitive phenomenon that humans use as a tool to understand new, abstract, and complex concepts. Metaphors help people understand new concepts, abstract concepts, and complex concepts by comparing one concept or thing with another, revealing their similarities or correlations. After cognitive linguistics regards metaphor as a fundamental cognitive process and structure, metaphor becomes a universal principle of language and a fundamental pattern for constructing experience. From a cognitive perspective, metaphor is not only a rhetorical device, but also a way of thinking and cognitive means. In 1962, Black proposed the argument that metaphor is a cognitive tool. Later, Lakoff and Johnson referred to the metaphor they studied as "conceptual metaphor", with the central argument being that metaphor is not a feature of language expression and its meaning, but a feature of the entire conceptual cognitive domain. The purpose of conceptual metaphor is to explain the metaphorical mapping between cognitive domains and how metaphors constrain human thinking and behavior.

Lakoff and Johnson believe that metaphor is a means of using cognitive principles to explain language phenomena by understanding one thing and realizing the cognition of other things. Metaphors effectively reflect the process of people's cognitive world. Cognitive theory holds that image schema and cognitive experience are the philosophical foundations of metaphor theory. Image schema is a fixed way formed in the mind by humans in the process of understanding abstract connections and concrete images, based on their cognitive foundation. It directly determines people's cognitive activities. Metaphor is one of the common ways of thinking in human beings. People from different ethnicities, eras, and regions have certain similarities, which means that people's ways of understanding things and general rules are the same. However, due to differences in geographical environment, culture, and language, they may have different understandings and expressions of the same thing.

2.2. The relationship between metaphor and translation

Metaphor and translation have close relation, that is the former is a way of thinking, while the latter is an activity of it. Metaphor can promote the effective use of language. In the translation process, the reasonable use of metaphors makes expression precise and humorous, and produce strong artistic effects. Meanwhile, the study of metaphorical mechanisms also helps translators grasp the principle of equivalence in language translation and generate creative language equivalence effects in translation. Lakoff fixes metaphors at the cognitive level of our daily lives, expanding the scope of metaphor research to the level of thinking, rather than just

limited to language. Translation is a process of language conversion through cognition and thinking, which involves communication activities across different cultures and languages. Translation inevitably involves metaphorical issues. Therefore, by studying and applying the metaphorical principle, translators will be able to translate texts with artistic characteristics that are understood and accepted by the target language audience.

2.3. The relationship between cognition and translation

Cognition is the initial stage of translation activities, and translation requires mastering the expression of the source language through cognitive activities, accurately restoring the cultural connotations contained in the source language, and translating texts with cultural connotations suitable for the target language. Therefore, translation and cognition are an interactive relationship. The process of translation is a bridge for cross-cultural communication, and accurate translation can only be achieved through interaction with cognitive activities. As human cognition of their own experiences, metaphor is a way and means of expressing emotions towards the objective world, and the translation of it requires consideration of various factors, which not only requires translators to engage in cultural and psychological communication with the author and the source language during their own cognitive processes, but also to establish communication channels between the source language author and the target language readers. The translation process includes two basic processes: understanding the original text and expressing the translated text. From the perspective of translation communication, the key to successful translation lies in correctly understanding the meaning to be expressed in the original text and appropriately using the target language to reproduce the meaning to be expressed in the original text. Therefore, the level of cognition will directly affect the translation of the text, and conversely, the quality of text translation also reflected the level of cognition.

3. Translation perspective in cognitive linguistics

3.1. Network hot words

The emergence of Network hot words is closely related to two factors. The first one is the internal factors of language. Language is dynamically changing and developing, which is fundamental to maintaining the vitality of language. The second is the external objective environment. The rapid development of technology has brought about innovation in network technology, and the construction of network platforms provides a way for the accurate and rapid dissemination of language. The increase in the number of Internet citizens has expanded the scope of online communication, and the online world has formed a unique network group. The above two factors work together on human cognitive psychology. With the turn of the times, human society, culture, economy, politics, and other environments are becoming increasingly complex. Humans are increasingly interacting and coexisting with the environment and technology. On the one hand, the internet provides people with a way to observe society and the world. On the other hand, each individual has different abilities to process complex information, and there are significant individual differences in the degree of influence of the internet environment. In addition, due to the virtual nature of the network itself, people have shown a strong desire to express themselves. With the combined effect of these factors, Network hot words have emerged.

Network hot word refers to the language that is generated and used on the internet, including various combinations of Chinese and English letters, punctuation, symbols, pinyin, images, and text. This combination often expresses special meanings in specific online media communication. Network hot word reflects the communication needs of people in the process of social and cultural development, meeting the needs of accurately expressing personal

emotions and psychological changes. In addition to being generated through communication, Network hot word may also be a concrete manifestation of social changes and public psychology in hot topics. Therefore, Network hot word is a widely used language that reflects people's psychological activities in specific situations, combined with social, political, economic, cultural, and environmental backgrounds. Modern linguistics has provided a refined interpretation of Network hot word. It is a specific language that has undergone significant differences in expression and connotation from traditional language based on human cognitive characteristics, and has a certain degree of dissemination. When spreading it among specific groups, the living conditions of social groups can be reflected. Its generation and dissemination are concrete manifestations of the current social situation in the age of Internet.

3.2. Metaphor translation from the perspective of cognitive principles

Zhou (2004) proposes that from a cognitive perspective, an assumption that metaphor is a cultural cognitive tool that uses its familiar experiences to understand and explain cognitive activities in unfamiliar fields is supposed to be made. Therefore, metaphor translation is a language activity of conveying the cognitive way represented by metaphor in one culture to another culture. However, this assumption is based on an idealized cognitive model, which means that the target readers must have the understanding and assumptions of the source language readers about the world, so that the source and target domains can map across spaces. With this cognitive structure, the various characteristics of the vehicle can be projected, and on this basis, conceptual integration can be carried out to generate meaning, and metaphorical translation can achieve equivalence and equivalence (Zhou, 2020). Studying metaphor translation from a cognitive perspective can reveal the underlying mechanisms of translatability and untranslatability of metaphors. Therefore, similar or different mapping conditions based on metaphorical concept mapping systems can not only illustrate the essence of different potential translation strategies, but also effectively define the potential space of translatability and untranslatability (Tan & Ge, 2005).

Translation is a language cognitive process in which the semantic space of users of different languages and cultures is compared and coordinated through the translator's translation activities. The logical positivists of the Vienna School hold the view of translatability, based on the homology of human cognition and the identity of logical thinking, and conclude that the thinking and language activities in translation are inseparable, and more significantly, the thinking activities are not the language activities. They point out that although various ethnic groups and languages have their own structural characteristics, it will not change people's thinking and logic. Therefore, when languages of different ethnic groups originate, although their practices and spaces are different, their thinking reach consistency, forming the objective foundation of language translatability. The Prague School points out that the reality reflected by language is not the true face of reality, but rather needs to be better integrated into the framework of simplification patterns. This also implies the untranslatability of language in the translation process, that is, language is not an isolated existence, and language must be related to reality outside of language. The differences in the realities of life among different ethnic groups will bring about untranslatability, and the translator cannot achieve complete equivalence in the reality they refer to in the process of conveying the source language.

4. Cognitive analysis of Network hot words

Network hot words can be divided into two aspects from a cognitive perspective of metaphor. The first one is textual metaphor. Like “浮云”, the source domain is a cloud floating in the sky, and the target domain is an “unreachable/meaningless thing”. The second one is phonetic metaphor, which refers to discovering similarities in pronunciation between the source domain

and the target domain, forming them through association in specific contexts, such as “夺笋” referring to “多损”, “围脖” referring to “微博”, and so on.

The mapping from the source domain to the target domain is manifested as a correspondence between two types of relationships: ontological correspondence and epistemic correspondence. In the process of metaphorical expression, we use approximate models to name new or old things with new meanings. Dick Geenaenta has conducted research on the sources of metaphors. He believes that figuration and deliteralization are two different types of metaphors, the latter having cultural and historical uniqueness, which also means that categorization in language is determined by history. When cultural factors are added to our experience, they clearly have a certain impact on language and its internal categorization. Deliteralization is a manifestation of metaphorical categorization: with the change of worldview and the development of science, a certain category may lose its literal meaning, and the literal names of vocabulary may lose their basis and become metaphorical and symbolic usage.

Taking the Network hot word “老鸽” as an example. Although it contains the word “鸽”, it has no direct connection with the basic word “pigeon”. In online communication, it refers to a joking term for “old brother” or a person who does not keep his word. The usage of “鸽” in the internet has undergone a series of evolution. Firstly, people want to express the word “放鸽子” metaphorically, so they choose to simplify the phrase to the subject “鸽子”, and then transform the noun part of speech of “鸽子” into a verb part of speech. At this point, “pigeon” has completely deviated from its literal meaning and formed a metaphorical and symbolic usage: “鸽子” is no longer an animal, but is used to describe people; The part of speech has also changed, and in addition to noun parts of speech, it has also developed verb parts of speech.

5. Cognitive analysis and translation strategies of metaphors in Network hot words

5.1. The cognitive analysis of “躺平”

In the Modern Chinese Dictionary (7th edition), the word “躺” is interpreted as “lying down on the ground or other objects”, while the word “平” is interpreted as “not tilted or undulating”. In Chinese, “躺平” is used as a verb-complement phrase, in which “平” is used to supplement the explanation of the state of “躺”. Therefore, “躺平” can be understood literally as “lying down”. Searching for corpus containing “躺平” in the CCL results in a total of 21 results. In all results, “躺平” is a phrase and used as a predicate.

Since the emergence of a post titled “‘躺平’ is justice”, the form and meaning of “躺平” have gradually changed. “躺平”, as a deconstruction of the “involution culture”, has led many Internet citizens to strongly agree with the attitude of “no longer striving, no desire, and no pursuit” represented by “躺平”. As a result, the term has rapidly spread on the internet. With the increasingly frequent use of the phrase in specific contexts, people have gradually shortened the grammatical distance between the morphemes “躺” and “平”, causing the traditional meaning of “躺平” to solidify from a phrase to a word, transforming from the previous state of “lying down” to a lifestyle attitude of “having no desires, and being content with the situation”. This transformation expands the meaning of “躺平”, weakens the semantic features of actions, and enhances the meaning of behavioral attitudes.

Metaphor includes both the source domain and the target domain. The source domain is equivalent to the ontology of metaphor, often representing familiar and concrete experiential feelings or things, while the target domain is to the metaphorical vehicle, which people are often relatively unfamiliar with. The essence of metaphor is to understand the target domain through

the source domain. In most cases, people's perception of “躺平” is a state of lying down. In the process of metaphorical mapping of it, this state of lying flat becomes the source domain, and the target domain is a mental representation state of inaction when people face difficulties.

Yan (2008) points out that the metaphor of compound words can be divided into two situations. One is word formation metaphor, which means that the meaning of the metaphor is related to the structure and morphemes of the compound word itself; The second is semantic metaphor, which is independent of the structure and morphemes of the compound word itself, but related to the overall meaning of the word. The first belongs to the category of word formation, while the second belongs to the evolution of word meanings. Zhang (2000) notes that generalization refers to the abstraction, generalization, and expansion of the meaning of content words, which is based on the premise of the detachment of some specific morphemes of content words and the expansion of the scope of application of word meanings. When “躺平” continuously generalizes its meaning through metaphor, the metaphorical meaning gradually becomes its commonly used meaning, that is, the basic meaning. Then, by combining with various noun elements, new meanings are generated, forming a range of compound words. This is the result of the combined action of semantic metaphor and word formation metaphor.

When the word “躺” is combined with the word “平”, which means “without any bumps or tilts”, and then metaphorically generates a new meaning, a new morpheme is formed, and its word formation function becomes stronger. After the generalization of the metaphor of “躺平”, the various forms of word formation formed by its metaphorical meaning can only be understood from the perspective of metaphor in order to establish its meaning combination. For example, “躺平学” is used to refer to a philosophy of life that seeks nothing. It aims to let go of posture, calmly think, and rationally pursue new things, which can effectively relieve stress and reflect on oneself. With the emergence of a series of words such as “躺平主义”, “躺平运动” and “躺平族”, the basic meaning of “躺平” is further dissolved in the new form of word formation. As mentioned earlier, when it enters the third stage characterized by semantic mixing, the increase in frequency of use will unconsciously lead people to overlook the essence of its metaphorical generalization of semantics.

5.2. The translation strategies of “躺平”

When studying metaphor translation strategies, context is an important factor as it has a specific impact on a particular word. The term “躺平” not only achieves its communicative function, but also has neutral or derogatory emotional connotations. Due to its appearance in different contexts, it also has pragmatic functions such as description and evaluation, self-deprecation.

Language is closely related to social reality, and with the development of social life, people need more words to refer to and express certain things or phenomena. The new meaning of “躺平” derived from metaphor based on the original meaning is like this. Whether it is used to express the mentality of being content with the situation or the attitude of opposing involution in life, it is describing a certain objective phenomenon, and the description of the phenomenon and behavior of it is fulfilling its own function in specific contexts.

The meaning of a word is composed of conceptual and affective meanings. When using words, their affective meanings are expressed accordingly. Behind “躺平” lies a negative emotional color of powerlessness. Although this kind of meaning is often used, young people often use “躺平” in daily communication to express self-deprecation that cannot change reality. The usage of the term is a verbal protest against the limited space for social progress.

Overall, after metaphorical generalization, the meaning of “躺平” transforms from a concrete and perceptible behavioral state to a representation of a psychological one. At the same time,

under the influence of multiple cognitive subjects, the word formation function of it is becoming increasingly powerful, and its pragmatic function of expressing description, self-mockery makes the word frequently used in social life.

From the above cognitive analysis of “躺平”, it can be seen that literal translations such as “lying flat” or “lying down” cannot fully express the cultural connotation of “躺平” as a Network hot word. The linguistic basis for the popularity of it lies in the concretization of abstract psychological states, and it also carrying rich social connotations and historical backgrounds. When considering its appropriate translation method, dynamic contextual analysis and social environment considerations are supposed to combined.

According to Wikipedia, the term “couch potato” refers to a lazy person whose recreation consists chiefly of watching television and videos, or a person who does no work. It is more relevant to the cultural connotation of “躺平”. Couch potato originates from a popular usage in the English language environment, which means that no matter how hard you work, you cannot achieve lifelong goals. It concretizes abstract psychological states, makes them perceived, and is widely used as a word. Therefore, it can be said that “couch potato” is an appropriate translation of the Network hot words “躺平”.

5.3. The cognitive analysis of “XX刺客”

“刺客” first appears in the Biographies about the assassins in *Historical Records*, and are used to refer to people who participate in assassination activities. The formation of it has gone through a long historical process, and its activity level is closely related to the political situation, social environment, and so on. In ancient times, “刺客” mainly appeared in historical books, novels, notes and other literary genres. In modern times, people hired to kill others are generally referred to as “杀手” instead of “刺客”. “刺客” are only seen in literary and film works, and are almost no longer used in spoken language. But whether it is ancient Chinese or modern Chinese, the syntactic function of the word is roughly the same, and it often appears alone as a syntactic component, with other modifiers before it.

Wang (2019) points out that language is formed by people’s interactive experience and cognitive processing with the real world, and only through human cognition can language have a relationship with reality. Metaphor is a cognitive mechanism of imagination and association. The explanation of “刺” and “客” in *Shuo Wen Jie Zi* highlights the characteristics of the assassin’s direct behavior and being instructed by others, but does not show the secrecy and surprise of the assassin’s assassination, during which the identity and whereabouts of the assassin cannot be exposed. It has a hidden nature; In addition, when assassinating, it is important to take advantage of people’s unpreparedness and have a sudden attack. “XX刺客”, whether referring to people, objects, or prices, have a hidden nature before people come into contact with something or some events. However, when some things appear or events occur, they contradict subjective expectations and have a sudden nature. People use “刺客” to refer to these unexpected people and objects through association, that is, taking assassination as the origin domain, projecting its secretive and sudden characteristics onto other target domains, giving “刺客” semantic features of [+secrecy] [+unexpected], thus giving rise to a series of “XX刺客”.

5.4. The translation strategies of “XX刺客”

Take “雪糕刺客” as an example. It became a Network hot word in the summer of 2022. “雪糕” is a common commodity in daily life, and “刺客” is a part of Chinese martial arts culture. The unexpected attack of “刺客” is used to describe the psychological impact of the prices of “雪糕” which exceed expectations. “雪糕刺客” refers to ice cream with ordinary packaging but relatively high prices. Consumers only realize when they check out that the price of it they hold

far exceeded their expectations. The “雪糕刺客” harms ordinary consumers and endangers normal business order. It reflects the public’s metaphorical perception of high prices of the ice cream. Meanwhile, the metaphorical expression of language can reflect people’s deep-seated emotional experiences. “雪糕刺客” reflects a two-way dimension of price and psychology, with one being that the price is higher than expected. The second is that the shadow of “刺客” is projected, reflecting the psychological state and the unpleasant emotional experience caused by ice cream with high prices.

In summary, the mapping of the original meaning of “刺客” to the target domain reflects its metaphorical meaning. When it is paired with an item, it can reflect the price of the item and people’s psychological expectations of the price. According to Wikipedia, assassin means one who murders by surprise attack, especially one who carries out a plot to kill a prominent person. The original and metaphorical meaning of assassin are both similar to “刺客”. Therefore, “XX刺客” can be literally translated as “XX assassin”.

6. Conclusion

This article aims to explore the metaphorical translation of 2022 Network hot words from the perspective of cognitive linguistics. By exploring the relationship between cognition, metaphor, and translation, the cultural background and living environment differences in metaphor cognition between Chinese and English are revealed, providing a certain theoretical basis for metaphor translation between Chinese and English. This study finds significant cultural differences in metaphorical expressions between Chinese and English, which are reflected in the semantic generalization of language. Therefore, it is necessary to translate them reasonably in cross-cultural contexts. When translating, it is necessary to consider the cultural background and context of the target language, and adopt appropriate translation strategies and techniques. In addition, through the study of metaphorical translation of Network hot words, we can better understand the important role of metaphors in language, thereby improving our language cognitive abilities. However, there are still some shortcomings in this study. For example, the samples of the study is relatively limited and fails to fully reflect the full picture of metaphorical expressions in both Chinese and English. Future research can consider increasing the sample size and expanding research on other languages to further investigate the cognition and translation of language metaphors.

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