

Towards the Translation of Figurative Language

A PROPOS DE LA TRADUCTION DU MÉTAPHORE

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Abstract: Figurative language with its greatness of power, vividness and liveliness, as a form of language expression, is the perfect combination of informative function and aesthetic function. In conveying idea, figurative language focuses on lively figures of speech to create endless associations in readers through their senses. That is to convey meaning on the one hand and bring the aesthetic appreciation to the readers on the other. Therefore, how to deal with the figurative language in translation then to make the translation precisely and naturally reproduce the original idea from SL to TL without losing the aesthetic enjoyment as the TL readers expect from what the SL readers get, are both important in the work of translation. This thesis tries to provide several practical ways in the translation of figurative language.

Key words: Figurative language, Source language (SL), Target language (SL)

Résumé: Le métaphore est une façon d'expression de la langue. Plein de vitalité, il est la combinaison parfaite de la fonction de l'esthétique et celle de l'information. Le métaphore a pour objectif de transmettre des images vivantes et marquantes aux organes des sens pour provoquer des imaginations illimitées. Donc, la traduction, en tant que le pont des échanges des informations inter-culturelles doit traiter du métaphore de façon sérieuse, C'est à dire, il faut rendre la traduction fidèle au texte original et en même temps, chercher à donner la jouissance d'esthétique aux lecteurs. Ce texte explique la nature du métaphore en tant qu'un moyen d'expression de la langue, comment donner l'image d'esthétique aux lecteurs dans la traduction, et fait une analyse de ces cinq catégories de traductions

Mots-clés: le langage du métaphore, la langue du départ, la langue cible

1. INTRODUCTION: FIGURATIVE LANGUAGE IS COGNITION, IN WHICH THERE IS AESTHETIC APPRECIATION

Figurative language, as an essential means of semantic rhetoric, not only transcends its notional meaning in form but also goes beyond its literal meaning in semantics. Figurative language is considered as a language device to integrate language and human logic thinking. For both English and Chinese, the existence

and effect of figurative language is all-round penetrating into the fields of social life, language and culture, politics, religion, technology and economy, etc. Then what's figurative language? Edward P.J. Corbett defines it as "an implied comparison between two things of unlike nature that yet have something in common..." J.A.Cuddon defines it as "a figure of speech in which one thing is described in terms of another." So we can say figurative language is a way to seek for the similarities between 2 things, by which to describe something new by virtue of something we already knew.

Figurative language depends on the generality of

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human thinking. What's thinking? Thinking is rational cognition, which derives from the concepts, judgments and reasons that depend on the cognition in practice, then in turn helps us to know more about the new world. That is to say, human beings always depend on known experiences to know "unknown things". What are "unknown things"? Through comparison with the known things, human beings can find the similarities between them, so figurative language through comparison, as a means of thinking, sets up the relations between two things or two concepts. We almost can say that figurative language is an expression of probing into the world and knowing the world.

Essentially speaking, the key of figurative language is to know the basic relations between human beings

Tenor/Object	+Medium	+Vehicle/Image
本體	+中介詞	+喻體

"**Vehicle/Image**" comes first, and is what we already knew or experienced. "**Vehicle/Image**" is also the vivid description of "**Tenor/Object**"-----something coming second and something we want to know. "**Medium**" is a functional word to connect "**Vehicle/Image**" with "**Tenor/Object**", in which thinking could connect the two because an equivalent or similar property that we can feel combines the together. So from "B" we can know "A" so as to know the whole world as much as possible. Eg1: 明天一早方鴻漸醒來，頭裏還一條鋸齒線的痛，舌頭像進門擦鞋底的棕毯---《圍城》 Eg2: Life is a yo-yo. It's a series of ups and downs. ---Ronnie M. Rniz 《Metaphor》

In example 1 how does Mr. Fang feel? Of course there is no sawing line on his head and no brown shoe-polishing carpet, but the feeling is like sawing----- painful and the feeling is like shoe polishing carpet----dry and harsh. In example 2, what's life? Of course not yo-yo toy, but the way of playing yo-yo----full of ups and downs. So in this way cognition turns easy.

What's more, from the two examples we can find figurative language is not only very economical and precise in word but also very vivid and expressive in semantics. In other words, figurative language can not only keep the balance between concrete image and abstract meaning, but also prevent language from remaining a set of abstract, logic but dull explanations, which can keep the fragrance of language through a set of concrete and vivid descriptions. American aesthetist Louis A. Reid says, "Beauty is perfect express-ness". As a means of cognition, figurative language integrates the content of what the author wants to express with the forms of different things through language device, in which all renders can appreciate the resonance of beauty.

and nature then to reveal the similarities and integrity between them then to set up the equivalent or similar relations between different things and among human experiences. Though English and Chinese are different both in language and personality yet they are common in thinking model, so there are a lot of similarities in terms of figurative language, as such can both be classified into Simile, Metaphor, Synecdoche and Metonymy in general. What's more, two component parts and two requirements are both necessary: the former refers to Tenor and Vehicle whereas the later refers to two different things and similarities between the two. In form, figurative language can be expressed as "**A is/like B**", which is clearly shown through the connection of Medium in the following table:

2. PRACTICAL WAYS IN THE TRANSLATION OF FIGURATIVE LANGUAGE.

Naturally, precisely and briefly, figurative language leads readers in the right way of thinking, comprehension and appreciation from being complex to being simple. So no matter in literature or science, language and culture, even in our daily conversation, figurative language may be widely used. Though the translation of figurative language is not so hard, yet translator, as the bridge between two languages/cultures, must make the TL readers receive the SL information and furthermore help the TL readers get the artistic conceptions so as to appreciate the beauty conveyed in SL. Here Literal Translation and Transference Translation are provided from the angle of generality of human thinking and culture; Meaning Translation, Literal---Meaning Translation and Ellipsis Translation are provided from the angle of individuality of human thinking and culture, which are all referential in the translation of figurative language.

2.1 Literal Translation:

Regardless of colors, countries, human beings are in common in many aspects such as emotions, life progresses etc. Though they have different languages, yet they share the same artistic conceptions in expressions, so the same thing or image may bring the same association even in different languages or cultures. Therefore, Literal Translation of figurative language between English and Chinese is acceptable for both readers to get the same feelings. In this way not only can it keep the SL flavor, convey the author's idea, but also make the TL readers appreciate the aesthetic beauty like the SL readers. For an example of comparing life to dream, in China 蘇東坡 says "事如春夢了無痕(life is

like a spring dream, vanishing without a trace). ” Likewise American poet Longfellow also says “**life is but an empty dream**(人生虛若幻夢)”. For another example, Chinese poet (Caocao) and English poet Robert Herrick both compare life to morning dew.

短歌行 曹操 To daffodils Robert Herrick
對酒當歌 we die/ As your hours do, and dry/ Away
人生幾何 **like to the summer’s rain**
譬如朝露 **or as the pearl of morning’s dew**
去日苦多 never to be found again

It is said that 伍子胥 “一夜鬚髮變白 (hair turns gray overnight) ”when passing 昭关, such grief life experience could also be seen in Byron’s The prisoner of Chillon, “**My hair is gray, but not with years./ Nor grew it white./ In a single night. /As men’s have grown from sudden fears** ”. Seen from above examples, human’s similar life experiences usually have the same artistic conceptions and effects in literature works. So they are transparent and mutual inductive no matter what language they depend on. They have the same tenor, the same vehicle and the same meaning. So in those cases it is absolutely feasible to apply to literal translation without other devices.

2.2 Transference Translation:

Due to the distinctions of English and Chinese languages and cultures including traditions, historical backgrounds, and the same image may bring different associations, whereas the different vehicle/ images may have the same associations. So it is necessary for translators to match the images which have the same associations in translation, such as English word “**lion**” for Chinese character “**虎**”. Only in this way could the TL readers are ensured to understand the meaning but gained aesthetic appreciation. That is semantic equivalence but without misunderstanding or distortion. For and example, 你又不在家，知道你天天萍蹤浪跡，沒個一定的去處-----《紅樓夢 47 回》. English version①: You are so seldom at home, **floating about free as duckweed** everyday; one never knows where to find. -----by 楊憲益，戴乃迭. English version ②: You never seem to be at home, and you are such a **rolling stone** that no one ever knows where to look for you-----by Hawks. Version ① with 萍蹤浪跡 translated into “**floating about free as duckweed**” literally, is beyond comprehension to English or American readers if no context, for duckweed doesn’t bring them the association of “**floating about**”. Whereas version② with the replacement of English image “**rolling stone**” for Chinese 萍, enriches the English or American readers’ associations so as to understand the original meaning easily and richly. 東風 (**east wind**) in Chinese eyes may be replaced by **west**

wind in western people’s eyes for the same association. When referring to the speed of time, Chinese people may first think of “**weaver’s shuttle**” or “**arrow**” such as “日月如梭，光陰似箭” whereas English people may think of “**daffodil**” such as “**like to the summer’s rain or as the pearl of morning dew.**” There are a lot of figurative idioms between Chinese and English which require us to apply to transference translation to match the different images for better understanding and aesthetic appreciation. Such as : 愛屋及烏 (love **me** , love **my dog**) , 貓哭老鼠 (crocodile’s tears), 膽小如鼠 (as timid as **rabbit**), 醉翁之意不在酒 (many kiss the **baby** for the **nurse’s** sake), 掛羊頭賣狗肉 (cry up **wine** and sell **vinegar**) etc.

2.3. Meaning Translation:

Still owing to the total distinctions of languages, cultures, histories, traditions etc, literal translation and transference translation are not enough sometimes. In most cases, SL images/ vehicles cannot be literally translated nor replaced by another. So for natural, readable conveyance of it is original idea, Meaning Translation has to be adopted. For an example 杜甫 says in his poem, “朱門酒肉臭，路有凍死骨” and here “**朱門**” is not feasible to be literally translated into “**red doors**” or “**Vermillion portals**” . Due to the difference of Chinese and English history and culture, western people never associate “**red color**” with dignity or being noble as Chinese do, so English or American readers feel hard to understand if literally translated into “**red doors**” or “**Vermillion portals**” , but easy if translated into “**palace doors** (by Waley) ” , “**the mighty’s portals**” or simply “**the mighty**” . For another example, “太陽這麼高了，大姑奶奶怎麼還不露面？-----老舍《在紅旗下》” . Here “**太陽高了**” (the sun is high), also called “日上三竿” in Chinese idiom refers to the sun rising high, means it is quite late in the morning. So the proper meaning translation should be, “**it is so late now, why hasn’t my niece shown up?**” In fact, a lot of figurative Chinese idioms should be translated this way----Meaning Translation: 嫁雞隨雞, 嫁狗隨狗 (once the wife of a **parson**); 杯弓蛇影 (be afraid of **one’s shadow**); 怒髮衝冠 (be **hot with anger**); 山盟海誓 (pledge **mutual fidelity**); 肝膽相照 (agree in our/ their **innermost thoughts**); 飽經風霜 (have experienced **vicissitudes of life**); 破鏡重圓 (the **estranged couple** have been reconciled).

2.4 Literal---Meaning Translation:

English scholar, educator and translator as well Benjamin Jowett says, “All translation is a compromise----the effort to be literal and the effort to be idiomatic.” That is to say, only literal translation is not

enough, and extra translations or similar comparisons of the TL are needed to make up the lost aesthetic beauty in meaning translation. The only purpose is to understand easily and appreciate better. For an example “橫眉冷對千夫指，俯首甘爲孺子牛---魯迅”，“Fierce-browed, I coolly defy a thousand pointing fingers; **head-bowed, like a willing ox I serve the youngsters**.---by 黃新渠” Here in the translation, the first sentence is literally rendered, the second sentence is given a meaning version by rendering the adv. “甘” into an adj. “willing” to modify “牛 (ox)” in a figurative phrase “**like a willing ox**” and link. verb “爲” in the SL into a notional verb “serve”, whereas “孺子” is rendered into a figurative word “**youngsters**”. We can see the perfect combination of literal translation and meaning translation reveals the content and the artistic beauty from SL to TL.

For another example, “一個籬笆三個樁，一個好漢三個幫---毛澤東選集”，“A fence needs the **support** of 3 stakes, an able man needs the **help** of 3 other people”. In this translation, the meaning translation “**support**” is what obviously no in the SL sentence but there is figurative meaning. So the translation would be perfect with both Literal and Meaning Translation.

Another important field is Chinese Rest-ending sayings, which is the characteristic of Chinese language and includes figurative type and pun type. The figurative type of Rest-ending sayings should be perfectly translated by Literal—Meaning Translation. For an example, “咱們這些兵是什麼兵呀，都是拿鋤把子的手，猛不咋的拿起槍就會打仗呀？這是‘腐子擔水---得一步一步來麼！’-----《新英雄兒女傳》”。“Until a few days ago, the only thing these fellows ever held in their hands was a hoe, you can not suddenly switch to a gun and expect them to know how to fight. **They are like cripples carrying water---you have got to lead them step by step**.----by Sidney Shapiro.” Here the first half of the Rest-ending saying is virtually literally translated, the second half is rendered into an integration of literal version---“**step by step**” and meaning version for extra explanation---“**you have got to lead them slowly**”. For another example, “我說二三百兩銀子，你就說二三十兩！‘戴著斗笠親嘴---差一著帽子’”。 “When I say 200 or 300 teals, you say 20 or 30! **It’s like kissing in straw-helmets---the lips are far apart**.” Here we can see in the translation of Rest-ending sayings, Literal Translation to render the first half, then Meaning Translation to render the second half may be the ideal way.

2.5 Ellipsis Translation:

Another characteristic of Chinese language is figurative antithesis, which appeals to either 2 different images to

convey the same figurative meaning or 2 similar images repeatedly for the same idea. Such as “舞文弄墨”，“七上八下”。 In the translation of this structure, Ellipsis is suggested. That is to eliminate the repetitive parts and only keep its basic meaning. Antithesis in English is not as widely used as it is in Chinese, usually is a phrase of 2 words which have similar meaning, the same alliteration or rhyme and are linked by “and”. Though English antithesis usually does not have figurative idea, Ellipsis Translation is yet a good method in practice. For an example, “那張三和這婆娘，如膠似漆，夜去明來。---《水滸》20回”；“The lovers **stuck together like glue**, Zhang came every night and left with the dawn.---Sidney Shapiro”. For another example, “這才忙著穿衣抬床，老儒夫婦哭得死去活來。---《紅樓夢》12回”；“At once they laid him out and ready the tier, while his grand parents **gave way to uncontrollable grief**.---by 楊憲益，戴乃迭”。 In fact there are too many such figurative antitheses in Chinese that in translation we’d better apply to Ellipsis to avoid being wordy or being repetitious. More phrases are supplemented for better reference: 傾國傾城 (**overwhelming beauty**); 一官半職 (an official post); 甜言蜜語 (**honey sweet words**); 朝三暮四 (**chop and change**). In addition, Ellipsis Translation is only a way of translation but in expressing idea Ellipsis should be connected with any one of the methods mentioned above. Such as 傾國傾城 may be “**overwhelming beauty**” ---a meaning translation whereas “**beauty which can cause cities and kingdoms fall**” ---a literal translation.

3. CONCLUSION

Whatever communication, no matter it is on the level of form or the level of meaning, will surely lose information, so does translation. Translator, as the bridge between 2 cultures or 2 languages, would surely do well in the translation of his native language no matter how well he knows the alien language and culture. So in order to accomplish a perfect translation, the translation of figurative language might be a very helpful practice, for the purposes of the translation language are not only to convey the idea, but also to obtain an aesthetic appreciation embodied in the SL, so figurative language itself as a means of thinking can help perceive the world, esp. know the unknown from the known. What’s more, the translation of figurative language as a cross-cultural communication can in some ways help make up what could be lost in ordinary translation, esp. the aesthetic appreciation that the SL readers can enjoy.

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