A Study on the English Translation of Name Metaphor in *A Dream of Red Mansions* from the Perspective of Conceptual Metaphor

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Abstract

In *A Dream of Red Mansions*, Cao Xueqin constructs a world of metaphors in which these metaphors become an integral part of the novel. The metaphors play an instrumental role in the expression of novel themes and the building of its characters. The study of metaphor is an important part in the translation of *A Dream of Red Mansions*. Metaphor is usually considered a rhetorical phenomenon, whilst most translation studies tackle it merely at the linguistic level, without addressing the fundamental contradiction between understanding and expression in metaphorical translation. As per this understanding, cognitive linguistics considers metaphor as a fundamental way of conceptualising abstract categories; meanwhile, metaphor studies have gradually transferred from a purely rhetorical view to a more systematic cognitive one. This essay adopts the conceptual metaphor theory of cognitive linguistic to explore the English translation of character’s name in Hawkes translated version of *A Dream of Red Mansions*, analyzing the English translation of character’s name metaphor through the cultural and literary contexts so as to examine its advantages and disadvantages.

Keywords

Character’s name translation, *A Dream of Red Mansions*, Conceptual Metaphor

1. Introduction

1.1 Research background of the study

*A Dream of Red Mansions* represents the paramount achievement in the art of classical Chinese fiction, to which metaphor is the key. Metaphor plays a pivotal role in *A Dream of Red Mansions*. The study of metaphorical translation is an integral part of the research on the translation of *A Dream of Red Mansions*. The comprehensive translations by Hawkes and Yang Xiangyi have furnished their studies of English translation with a rich scholarly resource, which generates large amounts of papers germane to the subject. However, these papers rarely delve into the translation of metaphors and cryptic language, discussing them generally from a rhetorical or linguistic perspective, without addressing the author’s creative thinking, the themes of the work and characters, and therefore they cannot thoroughly explain the contradiction between metaphors in translation and translation expressions. Cognitive linguistics proposes that metaphor is an essential way of human beings thinking and cognition. Lakoff’s theory has shed a new light on the study of metaphor translation. As things stand, metaphor is not only the theoretical art of *A Dream of Red Mansions*, but also the author’s unique creative thinking. However, little research has been conducted at home and abroad on character’s name transla-
tion of *A Dream of Red Mansions* from the perspective of conceptual metaphor.

1.2 Aims of the study

The essay is designed to study the translation of name metaphors portraying the images of characters, which is based on conceptual metaphor. It is generally assumed that metaphors contributing to the successful depictions of images of characters, to some degree, hinge on the proper translation of metaphors. Furthermore, by comparing the cognitive modes of name metaphor in English and Chinese, the essay reveals how name metaphor translation affects the reproduction of Characters of *A Dream of Red Mansions* in the target language.

1.3 Significance of the study

Firstly, since the cognitive function of metaphor is elaborated in conceptual metaphor, metaphor translation, as an important part of the translation study of *A Dream of Red Mansions*, will be an important factor to reevaluate the translation quality of the whole novel.

Secondly, through the discussion of Hawkes’ translation methods in the metaphor translation of characters’ names in *A Dream of Red Mansions*, this paper is of reference value for the translation of name metaphor in other literary works, insomuch as it will provide some useful name translation strategies or methods.

2. Analysis and Discussion

2.1 Introduction of Conceptual Metaphor

Conceptual metaphor theory was first put forward in Lakoff & Johnson’s *metaphor we live by*. Chen Naixin (2017) holds that “the appearance of the conceptual metaphor theory is regarded as a revolution in the history of metaphor study” (p. 10).

Conceptual metaphor comprises three categories, namely, structural metaphor, orientation metaphor, and ontological metaphor.

2.2 Structural Metaphor

Structural metaphors involve utilizing the knowledge structure of the source domain B to understand the target concept A. The source domain in structural metaphors provides a relatively comprehensive knowledge structure for comprehending the target concept (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980).

2.2.1 Metaphor translation of character’s name in *A Dream of Red Mansions* from the perspective of Structural Metaphor

The cognitive function of Structural Metaphor is to enable the speaker to understand the target A through the structure of the source domain B. For example: Dai-Yu, Bao-Chai, Bao-Yu, Feng-Yuan, Qin-Keqin, Qin-Zhong, Jia-Yucun, Zhen-Shiyin, Lady Wang and Lady Xue, all of them share the same characteristics of Structural Metaphor. In this way can social status of characters be distinguished and the local cultural and linguistic characteristics of the original version be preserved. For example, Feng Yuan’s “Feng” resonates with “be confronted with”, meaning encountering the abyss of misery. Here “Feng” is the source domain B, and “be confronted with” is the target A. Qin Keqing alludes “love can be light”, and was a sister and brother with Qin Zhong, a “spoony”, both of whom died when they were young. Here, “qing” and “Zhong” is the source domain B, and “light” as well as “spoony” is the target A.

The meaning of “love and sex”, on the other hand, is hollow. For example, “Xue”, a source domain of “snow” in Chinese implies that Xue Baochai was heartless, due to abandonment by Baoyu after marriage, becoming heartbroken and widowed, all of which unveil the meaning of “snow”; “Lin” is a source domain of “spirit” in Chinese. All of these mentioned above, Structural Metaphor in *A Dream of Red Mansions* entitles readers to understand the implication of main characters’ names that provides readers with the target A as well as the source domain B. As a consequence, the metaphor translation of characters’ names can be presented vividly.

Wei Yin (2014) holds that “Because of the close interdependence between metaphor and literary context, translation of character’s name is a favorable strategy, and the success or failure of character’s name translation needs to be evaluated in relation to both its cultural and literary contexts” (p. 44).

For example, Hawkes’ translation of “hokki” into “calamity” is not objectionable from the perspective of the literary context, nor is desirable from the cultural context. Zhou Xiaoman and Yang Jingya (2013) hold that “This is because masters of feudal families in the Zhou Dynasty usually gave their slaves auspicious names such as “auspicious” and
“lucky” and would never give them unfavorable names such as “calamity” (p. 190).

Therefore, translators should be careful when these contexts conflict with each other. When the translation clearly contradicts the cultural context, it should be rendered Structural Metaphor with a note. In the example mentioned above, it is better to add a note in order to preserve the meaning of the original name that utilizes the target A through the source domain B, which is a feasible way. In conclusion, Structural Metaphor is innovative for the translation of name metaphor in *A Dream of Red Mansions*.

### 2.3 Orientational Metaphor

Orientational metaphors, in contrast to other types of metaphors, involve using a system of concepts to organize their relationships with each other, rather than constructing one concept from another. The source domain for orientation metaphors is often related to spatial orientation, including up-down, in-out, front-back, deep-shallow, and center-periphery. Spatial orientation serves as the basis for comprehending non-spatial concepts through orientation metaphors (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980).

Within physical space, the contrast between upward and downward provides a particularly effective source for metaphorical expressions.

#### 2.3.1 Metaphor translation of character’s name in *A Dream of Red Mansions* from the perspective of Orientational Metaphor

The Orientational Metaphor is within the same conceptual system. A series of metaphorical concepts are formed with reference to spatial orientations such as up and down, front and back, inside and outside, depth and shade. For example, it can express the concept of status, inferiority, importance. It’s only been a few days since the top of the hierarchy left, and you’ve become lawless; the underlings are waiting outside the door; the upper room, the lower room. These “up and down” metaphors are also very common in space.

For example, “Zhen-Yinlian” - extremely pitiful, which has the same pronunciation of “Truly deserve pity”, meaning her life is really pitiful; she is a maid, which is proportional to the noun of locality “down”, here, the noun of locality stands for the status of characters in *A Dream of Red Mansions*, moreover, “down” here symbolizes the low status of “Zhen-Yinlian”, who is a maid. Jia Yun’s uncle “Bu-Shiren” in the novel ---literally means “not a person”, and appears only once in the novel, but he is unforgettable to the reader. Jia Yun asks his uncle for help and wants to buy spices on credit, but he is taunted by his uncle and returned empty-handed. Jia Yun’s uncle “Bu-Shiren”, who is a master, which is proportional to the noun of locality “up”, here, the noun of locality stands for the status of characters in *A Dream of Red Mansions*, in other words, “up” here symbolizes the high status of “Bu Shiren”, who is a master. In conclusion, these “up and down” metaphors that stand for the high status of masters and the low status of maids, are extremely ubiquitous in the name metaphor translation in *A Dream of Red Mansions*.

In the examples mentioned above, it is better to add a note in order to preserve the meaning of the original name that utilizes the Orientation Metaphor, which is a feasible way. In conclusion, Orientation Metaphor is innovative for the translation of name metaphor in *A Dream of Red Mansions*.

### 2.4 Ontological Metaphor

Entity and substance metaphors are rooted in our experience of physical objects, particularly our bodies. These metaphors serve as the basis for a range of ontological metaphors, wherein events, emotions, thoughts, and activities are viewed as substances or entities (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980).

Lakoff and Johnson’s (1980) book also explores the container metaphor. They contend that as physical beings, we are delimited from the rest of the world by our skin’s surface, and we perceive the rest of the world as being external to us. This perspective is encapsulated in the container metaphor.

#### 2.4.1 Metaphor translation of character’s name in *A Dream of Red Mansions* from the perspective of Ontological Metaphor

Lakoff and Johnson (1980) hold that entity and substance metaphors as “the way in which our experience of physical objects (especially our own bodies) provides the basis for a wide variety of ontological metaphors. In other words, it is defined as a concrete thing symbolizing abstract concept. For example, Lin Daiyu’s name and characters, namely “Dai” means “waiting for” in Chinese and “yu” refers to another main character—Jia Baoyu, have an intrinsic correspondence; here, “waiting for” is an abstract concept, however, “Dai” is a pigment used by women in ancient times to paint their eyebrows, which is a concrete thing. “Dai” is translated as “waiting for”, in other words, a concrete thing is translated as an abstract concept, which is metaphor translation of character’s name in *A Dream of Red Mansions* from the perspec-
The names of the four ladies in the Jia clan are not only translated in a phonetic way, but also convey the literary meaning contained in the original names. The names of the four ladies in the Jia clan are named after “chun”, which means spring in Chinese reflecting the “Yuan Ying and Tan Xi”: the four sisters of Yuan Chun, Ying Chun, Tan Chun and Xi Chun are homonymous with “should sigh”, ruining for their short youth in Chinese literature, and this literary and aesthetic connotation is not reproduced in the translation. “Chun” means spring in Chinese, spring is a season, which is a concrete thing. However, “chun” is an abstract concept. In the work, “chun” is translated as spring; in other words, a concrete thing is translated as an abstract concept, which is metaphor translation of character’s name in A Dream of Red Mansions from the perspective of entity and substance metaphors.

Furthermore, “Yuan Ying and Tan Xi” means “their fates should be sighed”. Here, “Yuan Ying and Tan Xi” are concrete things while “their fates should be sighed” is an abstract concept. The translator translated “Yuan Ying and Tan Xi” as “should be sighed”; in other words, a concrete thing is translated as an abstract concept, which is metaphor translation of character’s name in A Dream of Red Mansions from the perspective of Ontological Metaphor. Ontological Metaphor translation of characters’ names is a major feature of the metaphor translation of characters’ names in A Dream of Red Mansions. Feng Qinghua (2006) holds that “These names reflect the image and character traits of particular characters, conveying the author’s views on love, hatred, merits and values, and express creative ideas and thoughts” (p. 276).

Hawkes uses container metaphor translation for almost all of these names with notes, so target readers can understand the subtleties. For example, Jia-Yuncun, which has the same pronunciation of falsehood, symbolizes that Jia-Yuncun told lies invariably. Here, Jia-Yuncun itself is not a container while the falsehood is a container. In other words, Hawkes translated it as a container, which is metaphor translation of character’s name in A Dream of Red Mansions from the perspective of container metaphor. Hawkes’ use of container metaphor translation does not deprive these names of most of their metaphorical meaning and function, and at most they achieve the function of two names.

In conclusion, the successful translation of character’s name in A Dream of Red Mansions requires a counterbalance between the general cultural context and the specific literary context. Names can be translated by using abstract concepts symbolizing concrete things. When these two factors conflict, translators should choose carefully so as to avoid misleading readers and grant them a better understanding of the underlying cultural and literary themes of the original work. All in all, Ontological Metaphor is innovative for the translation of name metaphor in A Dream of Red Mansions.

3. Conclusion

3.1 Summary and conclusion

This paper examines the English translation of A Dream of Red Mansions from the perspective of the conceptual metaphor theory of cognitive linguistics, analyzing the English translation of metaphors in Hawkes’ translated version through its cultural and literary contexts, of which the strength and weakness are evaluated. A successful translation of character’s name in A Dream of Red Mansions entails a balance between the general cultural context and the specific literary context. What’s more, Structural Metaphor, Orientation Metaphor and Ontological Metaphor provide a thorough insight for name metaphor translation from the perspective of Conceptual Metaphor.

3.2 Limitations and suggestions for further studies

Although the study of metaphor translation of A Dream of Red Mansions has been well prepared and many materials has been gathered for the analysis of metaphorical translation, the limitations are mainly in the following aspects: my research generally explores the translation of characters’ names in A Dream of Red Mansions under the Conceptual Metaphor, which is a piddling point with limited reference for others. I hope more and more scholars will come up with better insights from other perspectives, or further on the basis of my research. The interpretation of metaphor and metaphorical translation is relatively subjective due to the limitations of certain English supporting materials. By further studying the metaphorical translations in A Dream of Red Mansions, a solid foundation should be laid for a comparative study of the English-Chinese concept of metaphor in order to ameliorate metaphorical translation. Cao Xueqin presents a system of motley characters, and the study of metaphorical translations in A Dream of Red Mansions should be expanded to include more characters from the original novel in order to broaden the scope of this research topic.

References


