

A Study of Metaphor Translation Strategies in C-E Translation of *The Seventh Day*

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Abstract: Purpose: Taking the English translation of Yu Hua's novel *The Seventh Day* as a case study, this paper analyzes the metaphorical effects in literary works and examines the metaphor translation strategies employed in the English translation of *The Seventh Day* to provide insights for the metaphor translation. **Methodology:** Elaborating on the cultural implications of metaphors in the original text and using conceptual metaphor theory as a research framework, specific metaphor translation cases in its English translation are studied. **Results:** Through the study of the original text of *The Seventh Day*, it is found that the author employs various metaphorical rhetorical devices, imbuing the work with profound philosophical meanings and cultural nuances. Analysis of its translation reveals that translators utilize various strategies to handle metaphors, balancing the literary flavor and cultural implications with the acceptance of target language readers. However, challenges arise in fully conveying the deep meanings of certain metaphors due to cultural differences and differences in language expression habits. **Conclusion:** Metaphorical language often carries cultural characteristics. To achieve effective metaphor translation, translators should prioritize serving readers, deeply understand the cultural backgrounds of both source and target languages, and employ flexible translation techniques to faithfully convey the style and emotions of the original work.

Keywords: *The Seventh Day*; Conceptual metaphor theory; Literary translation

1. Introduction

As China's influence on the international stage continues to rise, there is a growing demand in the global literary community to hear voices from various literary fields in China. This has spurred the translation of numerous Chinese literary works. Yu Hua's works, renowned for their profound and delicate portrayal of human nature and suffering, have garnered significant attention. His distinctive language and metaphorical rhetoric showcase Yu Hua's unique artistic style. Therefore, it becomes crucial to understand and translate the significance of these metaphors.

His novel *The Seventh Day*, published in 2013, portrays a frigid human society contrasted with a compassionate realm of spirits. Scholars have thoroughly analyzed this work from various angles. Hu Xuan delved into the absurd narrative strategy employed in *The Seventh Day*, discussing its impact on emotional resonance and reader comprehension.^[1] Zheng Dongling examined the spiritual core and thematic focus of *The Seventh Day*, dissecting the novel's perspectives on life, death, human nature, and loneliness.^[2] Qu Zizheng compared *The Seventh Day* with William Faulkner's *As I Lay Dying*, a Western literature on the theme of "death", exploring different cultural representations of the concept of death.^[3]

However, there are still gaps in the research on *The Seventh Day*, especially in the realm of translation. Studies on the English translations of *The Seventh Day* remain limited in both number and scope. Existing research primarily focuses on evaluating the translation quality of the text and discussing translation strategies for culturally loaded terms, lacking deeper interpretation of other aspects of this translated work. Given that literary writing encompasses multiple elements, there is a need to further expand the research scope across linguistic and cultural boundaries.

Therefore, the theme of this paper is to explore the cultural connotations embedded in the metaphorical rhetoric of *The Seventh Day* and the translation strategies for these metaphors. Guided by conceptual metaphor theory, this paper will analyze translators' strategies and approaches to cross-linguistic transformation of metaphors, examining how metaphors are transformed and presented in the translation process. The aim is to provide beneficial insights and guidance for the international dissemination of other outstanding Chinese literary works, fostering greater exchange and dialogue between Chinese and foreign literatures.

2. Introduction to *The Seventh Day*

The Seventh Day has sparked widespread discussion since its publication. Critics who dismiss the novel cite excessive subplots and un-

derdeveloped characters. Conversely, supporters view it as a more straightforward portrayal of social realities and a bold exploration of contemporary Chinese literature by Yu Hua.^[4] The English version of this work was translated by the British sinologist Allan H. Barr. American readers appreciate its lyrical language and the blend of humor with realism and surrealism which owes to the translator's deep interpretation and perfect rendering of the original text.^[5]

3. Conceptual metaphor theory

Metaphors connect two different domains by applying characteristics of one entity to another to convey new meanings. Specifically, metaphors compare the target domain with a metaphorical source, highlighting specific features and meanings of the target.^[6] As scholars delved deeper into this theory, metaphors evolved beyond simple linguistic phenomena. Advances in cognitive linguistics revealed that metaphors are pervasive cognitive activities, leading to the development of conceptual metaphor theory.

Lakoff, G. and Johnson, M. introduced conceptual metaphor theory in their book *Metaphors We Live By*, "Metaphor is pervasive in everyday life, not just in language but in thought and action. Our conceptual system, in terms of which we both think and act, is fundamentally metaphorical."^[7]

Human cognitive patterns are closely intertwined with their environments, and their understanding of metaphors is profoundly influenced by individual cultural backgrounds, making metaphoric translation exceedingly complex. Guided by conceptual integration theory, English-Chinese metaphors exhibit both cultural overlap and cultural differences.^[8]

Metaphors are typically based on concepts and comparisons within a specific cultural context. Therefore, translators must carefully consider how to transform metaphors from the source culture into forms understandable in the target culture, ensuring the preservation of the metaphor's meaning and effect. Moreover, cognitive differences are also a consideration in metaphor translation: variations in cognitive structures across languages and cultures lead to differences in metaphorical understanding. To effectively convey the meaning of metaphors, translators need a deep understanding of the cognitive patterns of the target culture to ensure accurate translation that elicits similar understanding and emotional resonance in the target audience.

4. Metaphor translation strategies in *The Seventh Day*

Metaphor establishes a relationship between two entities by describing one through the characteristics of another.^[9] In the process of metaphor translation, translators need to sensitively capture the implicit imagery and emotions in the original text, and employ the target language to convey these features. This involves two key aspects: a deep understanding of the characteristics of the vehicles present in the source text, and the skillful reconstruction of those vehicles in the target language. Therefore, metaphor translation is both an application of language skills and an insightful exploration into the psychological processes of the author. This paper analyzes the English translation of *The Seventh Day* using four metaphor translation strategies: preserving the imagery of the source language, transplanting the imagery of the source language, transforming the vehicle, and abandoning the form while retaining the meaning.

4.1 Preserving the image of the source language

The strategy of preserving the image of the source language is commonly known as literal translation. Because different cultures are not completely isolated but continuously evolve through communication, cognitive behaviors and cultural concepts may differ in various living environments, yet they also share commonalities. These commonalities serve as the link between two cultures and the prerequisite for mutual understanding among readers of different languages. In conceptual metaphors between Chinese and English, some vehicles share similar associative meanings, allowing translators to preserve the vehicles of the original text and directly translate its metaphors based on this foundation.

ST: 他仍然身轻如燕, 陡峭的地方还需要他拉我一把。^[10]

TT: ...he moved as nimbly as a swallow and was able to give me a helping hand on the steepest stretches.^[11]

Whether in Chinese culture or Western culture, swallows are renowned for their agility, and readers from both sides generally share a similar understanding of this tenor. In Chinese culture, the metaphor "身轻如燕" (as nimbly as a swallow) connects swallows with humans to depict agility and nimbleness in movement. The original metaphor "身轻如燕" is preserved directly by the translator. In the conceptual framework of the target language readers, swallows also symbolize agility and flexibility. Therefore, preserving the image of the source language is an appropriate translation strategy.

ST: 我的突然离婚对我父亲是一个晴天霹雳。^[10]

TT: For my father, my sudden divorce was a bolt out of the blue.^[11]

The original text uses "晴天霹雳" (a bolt out of the blue) to describe the shocking impact the protagonist's divorce has on his father. Readers easily grasp the father's astonishment and surprise through this metaphor. Additionally, "晴天霹雳" typically refers to bad news with strong emotional connotations in Chinese culture, which enhances readers' understanding and sympathy for the character. The translation pre-

serves the imagery, as English also has a similar expression: “a bolt out of the blue”. English readers’ cognitive habits align closely with the Chinese metaphor, where both convey the literal and associative meanings effectively. Preserving the image of the source language is the most suitable translation strategy, successfully conveying the essence of the original text.

The commonality between these two examples lies in the same vehicle having similar or identical symbolic meanings in both cultures and this symbolism is widely accepted by readers. When faced with similar situations, translators need to keenly identify cultural commonalities between the source and target languages and employ literal translation strategies to preserve the metaphors of the original text.

4.2 Transplanting the image of the source language

Transplanting the image of the source language is also a form of literal translation. The distinction from preserving the image of the source language lies in this aspect: preserving the image of the source language assumes that the metaphor of source language and target language share the same cultural phenomenon, where both vehicles are identical and equally familiar to readers. In contrast, transplanting the image of the source language typically occurs when the metaphor of target language culture lacks a cognitive concept as the source language. In such cases, literal translation can introduce imagery with cultural characteristics from the source language into the target language culture.

ST: 郝强生吓了一跳,像是接过一个烫手的山芋一样接过了我。^[10]

TT: Hao gave a start, accepting me as gingerly as he might a piping-hot roast sweet potato.^[11]

“烫手的山芋” is a commonly used metaphor in Chinese culture, often employed to describe sensitive and delicate matters. In the novel, the main character accidentally picked up a baby, which would cause problems to the unmarried man. The author vividly portrays this situation by describing it as a “烫手山芋” (hot potato), which effectively communicates the character’s bewilderment to readers. In the translation, the phrase “烫手的山芋” is rendered as “a piping-hot roast sweet potato”, directly transplanting the imagery from the source language. This decision is primarily based on two reasons: firstly, the image “sweet potato” in the source language is common in the target language environment; secondly, the extended metaphorical meaning of “烫手山芋” is straightforward and easily understandable — a hot sweet potato is scalding and difficult to handle, allowing readers in the target language to grasp the original expression clearly.

ST: 干柴遇上了烈火,他们急不可耐地商定,明天就去办理登记结婚的手续。^[10]

TT: Dry kindling met hot fire, and they agreed to marry the very next day.^[11]

“干柴烈火”(dry kindling fierce fire) describes a situation where something is on the verge of erupting, while its extended meaning in Chinese culture often describes intense emotions between men and women. Although this metaphor originates from Chinese culture, “dry kindling” and “hot fire” are vivid and direct vehicles that English-speaking readers can easily understand in their literal sense. This allows them to grasp the characters’ urgent emotions in the original text and expands their understanding of this metaphor in the target language.

In these examples, although the vehicles appearing in the original text do not have similar usage in the target language expression, the imagery is commonplace in the target language environment. The extended meanings from the source language are also easily understood in the target culture. Therefore, translators can similarly adopt a literal translation strategy, identifying the vehicles suitable for transplantation from the original text, ensuring their adaptability and clear underlying meanings in the target language culture, while preserving the original imagery.

4.3 Transforming the vehicle

The translation strategy of transforming the vehicle can be understood as a form of free translation. Readers in different languages may have significant differences in their living environments and historical traditions. The vehicle from the original text may evoke different associative meanings when placed in the translation, which means translators cannot directly present the equivalent vehicle in the translation. Instead, they must find alternative metaphors in the target language culture that evoke similar associative meanings as those in the source language culture.

To preserve the narrative style of the original text, translators are supposed to seek metaphorical expressions that are familiar to the target language readers that can replace the original imagery.

ST: 我们恋爱的消息在公司里沸沸扬扬。^[10]

TT: News of our romance spread like wildfire.^[11]

In the original text, the state of message dissemination was described using the phrase “沸沸扬扬”, which is a metaphor comparing the spread of the message to the state of boiling and bubbling water. The English expression “spread like wildfire” is a similar metaphor to “沸沸扬扬” or a message spreads rapidly in a short period of time. The vehicle of “boiling water” may not have as strong of an associative connection to message dissemination in the minds of English readers, and they may not immediately grasp the true meaning. However, the metaphor of “wildfire” can resonate more within the target language culture. Therefore, the translator’s approach in this case is to adopt a strategy of transforming the vehicle.

ST: 李月珍现在认定她是一个势利眼……^[10]

TT: But now Yuezhen was convinced Li Qing was a gold digger…^[11]

The metaphorical image in the original text is “势利眼”, which in Chinese is a pejorative term typically used to describe individuals who are inclined towards money, power, and influence. In the translation, “gold digger” literally refers to someone who seeks gold, but in modern usage, it often describes someone who is motivated by money, a materialistic person. While there is some scope difference between the two terms, considering the context of the original text, the strategy of transforming the tenor is appropriate. Furthermore, both “势利眼” in the original text and “gold digger” in the translation are relatively colloquial expressions that enhance the connection and familiarity between the characters and the readers in the work.

Due to cultural differences, it is inevitable that some metaphors cannot directly convey their associative meanings in translation. This requires translators to first understand and analyze the deep connotations and emotions of the original metaphor, and then find an expression in the target language that carries similar nuances to enhance resonance with the target audience.

4.4 Abandoning the form while retaining the meaning

The translation strategy of abandoning the form while retaining the meaning is also a form of free translation. The premise of this strategy is that the associative meanings of the metaphor in source language are significantly different from those in the target language, and there is a lack of similar expressions in the target language culture. The primary goal of translation is to convey information effectively. The forced retention of vehicles may make the translation difficult to understand or even lead to mistranslation.

When cultural imagery is absent, translators are compelled to abandon the metaphorical expression from the original text and simply convey its essence. However, employing the strategy of abandoning the form while retaining the meaning may result in the loss of the original text’s implications, thereby preventing the target language readers from experiencing the cultural atmosphere of the original text and losing the linguistic beauty of the original work.

ST: 你是闷声不响发大财。^[10]

TT: “You’re a sly one,” he said.^[11]

“闷声不响发大财” is an idiom in Chinese culture carrying a negative connotation, implying that someone achieves their goals through secretive means. The tone in the original text is somewhat playful. Directly translating it as “Silent operations lead to great wealth” would appear overly serious and may not convey the intended meaning to English-speaking readers, who might not understand the connection between “闷声不响” (silent operations) and “发财” (great wealth). The translator renders the phrase as “sly one”. This adaptation discards the literal form of the original metaphor but retains its essence in a manner that aligns with the style of the original text.

ST: 然后看见了美丽聪明的李青, 看见了我们昙花一现的爱情和昙花一现的婚姻。^[10]

TT: That’s when I saw the lovely, brilliant Li Qing and our brief love and fleeting marriage.^[11]

“昙花一现” is often used in Chinese to refer to something brief yet beautiful. In the original text, using “昙花一现” twice to describe the fleeting nature of love and marriage between the protagonist and his wife portrays his reluctance and nostalgia towards this relationship to the original readers. This is a metaphor rich in Chinese cultural characteristics, seldom used in Western contexts. English readers are unfamiliar with the associative meanings of that vehicle and both preserving or transplanting the image of the source language could result in a translation that is obscure. The translator adopts the strategy of abandoning the form while retaining the meaning to preserve pragmatic meaning.

In these examples, the similarity lies in both metaphors lacking equivalent expressions in the target language culture, with significant differences in associative meanings. After assessing the cultural differences and clearing that the metaphorical rhetoric cannot be retained in the translation, the translator discards the original form and directly conveys its essence in the target language, prioritizing effective information passing while striving to preserve linguistic aesthetics as much as possible.

5. Conclusion

Metaphor is a complex cognitive activity, and the introduction of conceptual metaphor theory has provided new insights into metaphor translation. This paper primarily explores the metaphor translation strategies in Chinese writer Yu Hua’s novel *The Seventh Day* and its English translation, employing in-depth analysis based on conceptual metaphor theory.

Based on the characteristics of the selected materials, this paper proposes four main metaphor translation strategies: preserving the original imagery, transplanting the original imagery, transforming the vehicles and abandoning the form while retaining the meaning. Through specific case analyses, each strategy’s application and effectiveness in translation are illustrated: preserving the original imagery strategy maximizes the retention of metaphorical meaning and effect; transplanting the original imagery emphasizes the necessity of introducing cultural characteristics from the source language into the target language culture; transforming the vehicle is an strategy that adjusts vehicles to suit the target language cultural concepts when appropriate; abandoning the form while retaining the meaning is a method of free translation, ensuring

the transmission of the basic information by abandoning the original form while preserving its narrative essence.

Through the analysis of metaphor strategies in the English translation of *The Seventh Day*, this paper finds that translators must consider cultural conceptual differences and the importance of cognitive modes in cross-cultural translation. The application of conceptual metaphor theory provides valuable references and insights for resolving related issues, facilitating the international dissemination of other outstanding literary works domestically, and promoting dialogue and exchange between Chinese and foreign literature.

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