Research Article

The Comparative Study of Metaphorical Images Translation Strategies in Tang Poetry

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Abstract

In Tang poetry, metaphorical images serve as powerful tools for poets to convey their emotions and experiences in a vivid and imaginative manner. These images, drawn from nature, mythology, history, and daily life, allow poets to create rich and layered meanings that resonate with readers across time and culture. The use of metaphorical images in Tang poetry reflects the deep poetic tradition and artistic sensibility of Chinese literature. Translating metaphorical images from Tang poetry into English poses a unique challenge for translators due to the cultural and linguistic differences between the two languages. However, this challenge also presents an opportunity for translators to exercise creativity and interpretation in conveying the essence of the original poems. By carefully selecting appropriate English equivalents for the metaphorical images, translators can capture the beauty and complexity of Tang poetry for English-speaking audiences. Through a comparative analysis of translation strategies employed in representative cases of Tang poetry, this paper combines case study and corpus analysis methods to explore the concept and function of metaphorical images in Tang poetry, analyzes the possibility and importance of its English translation, and provides a comparative analysis of translation strategies for metaphorical images using representative cases of Tang poetry translation. It reveals the rationality and fidelity of translating metaphorical images.

Keywords

Tang Poetry, Metaphorical Images, Translation Strategies, Comparative Analysis

1. Introduction

In terms of the poet's artistic thinking, "image" which refers to the objective objects including the natural world and other social objects outside the human body, serves as the material for thinking [1]. "Meaning," on the other hand, represents the subjective thoughts, concepts, and consciousness of the author, constituting the content of thinking. "Expression" refers to the recording of human language with words as the basic unit, serving as the direct result of thinking and the written manifestation [2]. The metaphorical images in poetry is expressed through the use of metaphor to convey the poet's emotions and viewpoints. Metaphorical images can serve as a creative display of the poet's own work. When translating metaphorical images, one should fully understand the creative background, artistic conception, and psychological activities of the poet in the original poem, explore the connotative meanings of metaphorical images from subtle details, and adopt different translation strategies to translate metaphorical images, thereby making the translated poem as

faithful as possible to the original and showcasing the essence of the original poem.

2. Metaphorical Images

Metaphors have appeared in ancient classics early on, and from the materials recorded in written texts, the "Book of Songs" shows a close connection between fu, bi, xing (types of poems) and images. Scholars refer to "bi" as metaphorical images and "xing" as symbolic images [3]. These two concepts can generally be used to analyze poetry. For example, in the lines "Yellow leaves in the rain, an old man under the lamp," the comparison of "yellow leaves" to "an old man" represents one object being used to figuratively refer to another object, which is known as metaphorical images [4]. Taking the metaphorical images classified by expressive function in *The Theory of Poetic Images* as an example, this book categorizes metaphorical images into five specific types: explicit metaphorical images, implicit metaphorical images, metonymical images, transformative images, and paradoxical images [2]. By combining case studies for comparison, this paper explores translators' English translation strategies and reveals the rationality of the translations.

3. Analysis of Translation Strategies for Metaphorical Images

3.1. Explicit Metaphorical Images

Based on Ludwig guru corpus, the words of explicit metaphor could be translated as "Like" "As if" "Seems" "Appears" "Resembles" "Similar to" "Seems like" "Appears to be" "Looks like" "Seems as though", these words could be a sign of explicit metaphor in Tang poetry.

For example, in He Zhizhang's poem "Ode to the Willow," there is a line that goes, "Who knows who trimmed the delicate leaves, in February the spring breeze is like scissors." The word "like" serves as an indicator of explicit metaphor. In Li He's poem "Twenty-Three Poems about Horses (V)," there is a typical example of explicit metaphorical images. The lines describe the vast wilderness of the desert, where the sand is as white as snow during the day. In the silent night, a crescent moon hangs in the sky over the desolate Yanshan Mountains, resembling a curved knife. By comparing white snow to a curved knife, the poet vividly depicts the desolation and loneliness of the border battlefield in just a few words.

Here are two translations of the lines:

On the mighty desert, and seems snow, Over Mountain Yan, a moon like a hook. (J. D. Frodsham) [5]

Desert sands white as snow, with the moon hanging like a hook over the northern mountains. (Weng Xianliang) [6].

The words "like" and "seems" in the original poem are clear indicators of explicit metaphorical images. In this line,

there are two explicit metaphors: "sands like snow" and "moon like a hook." The poet uses the familiar image of "white snow" to metaphorically describe the boundless desert, and the image of a "curved knife" to metaphorically describe the crescent moon in the night sky. This effectively brings to life the desolate landscape of the borderlands that has remained unchanged over the years. J. D. Frodsham, a British sinologist, translates "Sha ru xue" as "the mighty desert, and seems snow," while Weng Xianliang translates it as "desert sands white as snow." Both translations render "Yue ru gou" as "a moon like a hook." Frodsham ignores the first explicit metaphorical images in the original text and translates it differently, interpreting the metaphor of the white "snow" as a description of the environment resembling falling snow. On the other hand, Weng's translation clearly recognizes the presence of two explicit metaphorical imageries in the poem and adopts a more literal translation, faithfully capturing the explicit metaphor indicators "like" and "as" in the original text. In this case, Weng's translation better preserves the implicit metaphorical images of the original poem.

3.2. Implicit Metaphorical Images

Implicit metaphorical images, refers to where the tenor and vehicle appear, but the metaphorical word does not appear, the metaphor becomes connected by words like "is," "becomes," or "turns into." Du Fu's "Spring View" is a representative example of metaphorical images in Tang poetry, expressing the poet's concerns about national affairs and personal matters. Starting with describing the scenery, the poet then uses it to express the poet's sincere emotions.

Seeing flowers come, a flood of sadness overwhelms me; Cut off as I am, songs of birds stir my heart. - (Rewi Alley) [7]

Grieved over the years, flowers are moved to tears; Seeing us apart, birds cry with a broken heart.- (Xu Yuanchong) [8]

In the text, both "flowers are moved to tears" and "songs of birds stir my heart" use the personification technique of metaphor, implying the object of "tears" and "heartache," which is the poet himself. In the poet's eyes, "flowers" and "birds" also have grievances. People and animals and plants are emotionally connected, showing his love and respect for all life [9]. In Alley's translation, the translator accurately understood the implicit metaphorical images of the original poem and used a free translation strategy to restore the metaphorical images, highlighting the true emotional subject "I" in the English translation. Although this free translation is more beneficial for reader's understanding, it also diminishes the beauty of the original metaphor. In comparison, Xu's translation directly preserves the two implicit metaphorical images in the original text using a literal translation strategy, leaving readers to ponder the true objects of the metaphor with suspense and significance.

3.3. Metonymical Images

Metonymical images typically refers to another form of comparison, where the vehicle is used to replace the tenor without explicitly mentioning the metaphorical elements. This seemingly concise language expression can generate a distinctive rhetorical effect. For instance, in Li Shangyin's poem "Untitled": "Spring silkworms die, silk exhausted; Wax candles burn out, tears dry." Another example is found in the Tang dynasty poet Cen Shen's poem, the two translations are:

Like a spring gale overnight, blowing open the petals of ten thousand pear trees.- (Witter Bynner) [10]

As if the vernal breeze had returned overnight, adorning thousands of pear trees with white blossoms.- (Xu Yuanchong) [8]

The poem was composed by Cen Shen on his second departure from the frontier. The first half of the poem portrays the romantic scenery of snowfall in the Western Regions in August. From there, it delves into bidding farewell to friends amidst the snow, the melancholy of leaving one's homeland, and the nostalgia for home, all encapsulated in a short seven-character poem. In the original text, the phrase "blowing open the petals of ten thousand pear trees" employs metonymical images to describe the beautiful sight of snow falling on trees through the blooming and pure pear blossoms. In Bynner's translation, a literal approach is taken, rendering it as "petals of pear trees," providing a seemingly complete translation but missing the metaphorical meaning of "snow as pure as pear blossoms," thereby disconnecting the direct association between the metaphorical subject of "snow" and the vehicle of "pear blossoms." Conversely, Xu's translation expands the verse to "pear trees blossom white," emphasizing the purity of pear blossoms and preserving the metaphorical implication of the poet using the pure white of pear blossoms to depict the snowy scene, thus more accurately hinting at the subject of the metonymical images.

3.4. Transformative Images

In Liu Yuxi's poem, the lines "Boats lined by the side, thousands of sails passing by; Sickly trees ahead, a forest in spring" use the sails of ships as a metonymy for the ships themselves. This is a type of metonymy where a part represents the whole. Transformative metaphor is a way of substituting the tenor with the vehicle, which are two different entities in essence but are associated in social life. Tang dynasty poet Wang Wei's poem "Yearning" features the lines using the description of objects to express longing. The poem has a graceful and elegant sentiment, full of passionate longing, with simple and plain language and harmonious rhythm [11].

The red bean grows in southern lands, With spring its slender tendrils twine. - (W. J. B. Fletcher) [12].

The red beans grow in southern land, How many load in spring the trees? - (Xu Yuanchong) [8].

In this five-character quatrain, the red beans are used as a metaphor for the sentiment of yearning, expressing it in an indirect and restrained manner. Red beans are grown in the southern regions, they are bright red and round, resembling coral, and are often used by people in the southern regions for decorative purposes. During the Tang dynasty, poets often used red beans to express feelings of longing. The term "yearning" is not limited to romantic love, but can also express the longing between friends. The first line "The red bean grows in southern lands" describes the origin of the red beans, creating a sense of imagination. The phrase "How many branches sprout in spring?" uses a rhetorical question to convey the poet's wishes, vividly and deeply expressing emotions [13]. Both translations render "southern lands" for "Nan guo" in a literal manner, which blurs the true metaphorical meaning represented by "southern lands." Fletcher's translation even alters the original meaning of the poem for the sake of rhyme. Xu's translation retains the rhetorical question structure in the second half of the poem, leading readers to contemplate and explore the sentiment of longing conveyed in the lines.

3.5. Paradoxical Images

While general metaphorical images focuses on a certain similarity in external features between the tenor and the vehicle, the paradoxical images further attributes to the tenor unrelated characteristics of the vehicle. For example, in Wang Zhen's poem "Five Poems of Parting (IV)" written to commemorate his deceased wife, the lines employ the technique of paradoxical image to vividly express the protagonist's infinite affection for his departed lover.

It is difficult to be water for one who has seen the great seas, and difficult to be clouds for one who has seen the Yangtze Gorges.— (Lin Yutang) [14]

No water's enough when you have crossed the sea；No cloud is beautiful but that which crowns the peak. — (Xu Yuanchong) [8]

"It is difficult to be water for one who has seen the great seas." This originates from Mencius' "Mencius • Jinxin" where it states "Those who gaze at the sea cannot be satisfied with water," indicating that after witnessing the vast ocean, one would not yearn for a small stream. On the surface, this is a comparison between the ocean and rivers. The ocean is vast, boundless, grand, and magnificent; while a small stream can be viewed in its entirety. The latter part of the line "clouds of Mount Wu" uses an allusion from Song Yu's "Ode to Gao Tang" where "the clouds of Mount Wu" mentioned by Song Yu refers to the "lady of Mount Wu" dreamt by King Chu, who was an incarnation of a goddess [15]. When Wang Zhen says "difficult to be clouds for one who has seen the Yangtze Gorges", he cleverly uses the metaphor of "morning clouds" to symbolize the woman he loves, fully showcasing his genuine feelings for her. The paradoxical images in the poem suggests the importance of the wife in Wang Zhen's heart is as significant as the "vast seas" and the "lady of

Mount Wu" surpassing everyone else in the world. Lin's and Xu's translation both adopt a literal translation strategy in preserving the paradoxical image of "great seas." However, in the translation of the latter part "Mount Wu," Lin translates it as "the Yangtze Gorges," making it clear to readers the approximate geographical location of Mount Wu; while Xu chooses to translate "Mount Wu" as "the peak," downplaying the geographical images of Mount Wu and enhancing the paradoxical image, allowing readers to focus on the intrinsic meaning of it, that is, the "beloved person."

4. Conclusion

From the analysis and interpretation of the translation of typical metaphorical images in Tang poetry above, it can be concluded that in the English translation of poetry, the restoration and deviation of images are caused by the differences in the translators' understanding of the tenor in metaphorical images. These differences mainly stem from the varying social, cultural, and historical backgrounds in which the translators are situated. Whether translators choose to transcribe, amplify, paraphrase, or translate literally when dealing with metaphorical images, their goal is to accurately and completely restore the original poetic images. Therefore, in the process of translating metaphorical images, translators should fully consider the creative background of the original poem and the reception of the target language readers. They should strive to find a balance between the tenor and the vehicle, the source language, and the target language, focusing on restoring the metaphorical images in the poetry effectively.

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Conflicts of Interest

The authors declare no conflicts of interest.

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