

Structural Metaphors of Headlines of Financial and Economic Articles and Their Translation Strategy: Based on *The Economist*

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Abstract

In the new era of information and technology, an increasing number of people can get easier access to original western magazines and news reports, thus attaining first-hand information. *The Economist*, a journal in UK that is read worldwide, includes various sections like World News, Politics, Business, and Finance and Economics. It is necessary to conduct relevant researches on headlines, which provide central ideas of full texts to readers. Structural metaphor, one of three major kinds of conceptual metaphor, is a development of traditional metaphor theories under a cognitive perspective. Due to the wide use of structural metaphors in headlines of articles about business and economics, and the importance of their translation for Chinese readers, the present author intends to discuss the types of structural metaphors and their corresponding translation strategies by taking some of the headlines from “Business” and “Finance and Economics” columns of *The Economist* as a case study.

Key words: *The Economist*; Economics and business; Structural metaphor; Translation strategies

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INTRODUCTION

In the past three decades, studies on metaphors have developed from rhetorical study to a multi-disciplinary one in which many disciplines are involved, including linguistics, literary criticism, cognitive science, psycholinguistics, philosophy, foreign language teaching, etc. It indicates that people have been aware of the significant role metaphor plays in human society. Lakoff and Johnson put forward in their co-authored book that human mind is based on metaphorical cognition, which in fact set off a “metaphor revolution” in academic circle. Since then, the study of metaphor entered into cognitive stage. Metaphor is regarded as a property of concepts and a cognitive tool. “Metaphor is pervasive in everyday life, not just in language but in thought and action. Our ordinary conceptual system, in terms of which we both think and act, is fundamentally metaphorical in nature”. (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980, p.4) The objects of this study are English news headlines in “Business” and “Finance & Economics” columns of *The Economist* journal released from September to November in the year of 2020. *The Economist*, founded in 1834, is one of British authoritative weekly journals mainly reporting political and economic news. Due to its popularity, it has massive sales volume per issue for over a million in Europe, North America and Asia. It is most famous for its brilliant insight, explicit attitude and international perspective. Most reports in this journal are written in an intelligent, powerful, precise but humorous style. As such, the journal sets itself as a high-end international journal, therefore most of its readers are well educated. With the rapid development of China’s economy and its integration with the wider world, a growing number of Chinese readers including those English learners are eager to know about the economic conditions of the rest of the world, thus the

importance of translation and corresponding translation strategies of relevant articles in journals and newspapers are highlighted accordingly, which are main channels for them to get first-hand information or learning materials. This study is also of importance to commuters, who may prefer to just have a scanning of the news headlines so as to have a basic understanding of the changes in the global economy and keep in line with the latest news but meanwhile may find some of them difficult to understand due to the metaphors utilized. As one of three major kinds of conceptual metaphor, structural metaphor is commonly used in the writing of news headlines. Thus, study on the structural metaphor and translation strategies of such headlines can help wide-ranging readers to better understand both the literal and implied meanings of the headlines and feel the humor.

A lot of researches on conceptual metaphors in news discourse have been done among Chinese and western scholars. Henderson (1994, p.358) argues the function of metaphor in economics discourse as “it is part of the generative aspect of metaphor to assist in the developing of a routine vocabulary for handling economic ideas”. He (1994, p.355) supports Lakoff and Johnson’s opinion and claims that metaphor “is a universal aspect of ordinary talk with a significant role in all aspects of language use including academic language”. Charteris-Black (2000) analyzes metaphors applied in high frequency in *The Economist*, compared with the general magazine section of the Bank of English and explained their metaphorical basis. The result shows that animate metaphors are used to describe the economy and economic organizations, while the inanimate metaphors are used to describe market movements. The reason is that “the former are represented as under the control of experts whereas the latter are represented as beyond human control.” (Charteris-Black, 2000, p.149) In China, Gan Zhimin (2007) conducts a comparative study on the conceptual metaphors in Chinese and American economic news headlines. It is found that although both Chinese and English news headlines contain five categories of metaphors, the application of different categories of them in Chinese and American economic news headlines differ in their frequencies. These differences are caused by cultural context and other factors like natural physical environment. Xuan Jing (2013) conducts a comparative study on conceptual metaphors in Chinese and American military news headlines. She puts forward that the employment of conceptual metaphors in Chinese and American news headlines differs significantly from each other. It is also found that conceptual metaphor is very important in establishing images of events or entities. Liu Qiaozhi (2014) makes a comparative study of conceptual metaphors in the headlines of Chinese and American news reports on “Sino-Japanese” conflicts. She finds that the employment of conceptual metaphors in Chinese and American news reports share similarities because human beings share similar brain structures and

embodied experience. The differences also exist due to the different ideologies, political positions and culture. From the studies above, it can be concluded that domestic studies of conceptual metaphor in news headlines stay in an initial stage. The studies on conceptual metaphors basically have three features. Firstly, studies related to the subject of this thesis are not abundant. Secondly, most of the researches emphasize on the perspective of discourses. Thirdly, though there are many researches on conceptual metaphors in news headlines, few of them combine analysis of conceptual metaphors in news headlines with the explanation of their translation strategies.

OVERVIEW OF CONCEPTUAL METAPHOR

Different from traditional metaphor theories, the conceptual metaphor theory is a development of metaphor theory under a perspective of cognitive linguistics, which views human language itself as fundamentally rhetoric; complex, abstract concepts were built from those simple, concrete concepts in a metaphorical way; human language, thinking pattern and acts are fundamentally metaphorical in nature. According to Andre (2010, pp.5-7), a growing recognition of the innovative potential of metaphors outside the areas of rhetoric and literary studies appeared in the late 1970s and 1980s. Scholars in this period began to reflect on the limitation of traditional metaphor study perspective and look forward to a new one.

Conceptual metaphor was further divided by Lakoff and Johnson (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980, pp.10-33) into three types according to the different source domains: structural metaphors, orientational metaphors and ontological metaphors. Structural metaphor is defined as “cases where one concept is metaphorically structured in terms of another”, or to build abstract concepts by concrete concepts. The example “the meeting room was full of journalists, all firing questions at them” belongs to war metaphor, a sub-type under structural metaphor. Besides, there are many other sub-types under structural metaphor, such as journey metaphor, engineering metaphor, plant metaphor, tie metaphor, conduit metaphor, voice metaphor and so on. Orientational metaphor is another type of conceptual metaphor. It uses a series of spatial orientation to describe concepts, such as up--down, in--out, on--off, central--peripheral, deep--shallow, front--back and so on. They come from the fact that we have bodies and that they function as they do in our physical environment. For example, orientational metaphors “happy is up; sad is down” can be found in common expressions like “I’m feeling up today.” The third type of conceptual metaphor is ontological metaphor. Lakoff and Johnson defined the ontological metaphor as “the way of viewing events, activities, emotions, ideas, etc., as entities and substances”. Ontological metaphor can be further classified into three subcategories: entity and substance metaphor, container metaphor, and personification.

Among these three kinds of conceptual metaphors, the very focus of this thesis is the structural metaphor and the strategies for interpreting it which is used in the news headlines of economics and business related articles of *The Economist* Journal.

ANALYSIS OF STRUCTURAL METAPHORS OF HEADLINES AND THEIR TRANSLATION STRATEGY

In this part, we will show examples of four major kinds of structural metaphors appearing in Columns “Finance and economics” and “Business” of *The Economist* Journal from September to November in the year of 2020 and some other kinds used in low frequency, and then analyze the official English-Chinese translation versions and corresponding strategies used towards them.

The basic means adopted to recognize all the structural metaphors is called Metaphor Identification Procedure (MIP) put forward by a group named “Pragglejaz” consisting of ten linguistic researchers, which is comprised of 3 steps: first, divide the lexical units in the discourse. Second, respectively establish each lexical unit’s basic meaning and contextual meaning. Third, determine whether the basic meaning and contextual meaning of a lexical unit are distinct enough; if it is, then the lexical unit can be seen as a metaphorical one. Here the author takes the sentence “此次疫情中，中华儿女筑起了抗击疫情的巍峨长城” (Li Keqiang, *Report on the Work of the Government 2020*) as an example:

First, we can divide it into the lexical units:

此次/疫情/中，中华/儿女/筑/起/了/抗击/疫情/的/巍峨/长城/。

Second, we respectively establish each lexical unit’s basic meaning and contextual meaning (here take the lexical units “筑” and “长城” as an example.)

筑长城：

Basic meaning: to build a Great Wall;

Contextual meaning: to enhance solidarity against the epidemic;

Third, determine whether the basic meaning and contextual meaning of a lexical unit are distinct enough: Yes, they are.

Conclusion: “筑长城” is recognized as metaphorical lexical unit.

We will recognize and identify all the structural metaphors in the following analysis with the method of MIP and the details will be omitted here. In addition, the subtitles provided in each of the examples are supposed to help readers to understand the background and topic of the whole text.

Animal Metaphors and Their Translation Strategy

Animal metaphor is the most frequently used structural metaphors in the source text. In an animal metaphor,

the target domain is seen as an animal. The conceptual basis for animal metaphors is a semantic shift from the attributes related with animals to that of events or humans’ behaviors.

The following are typical examples of animal metaphors.

Example (1) Eggheads

Chinese version: 蛋中有机 (Buttonwood, Column “Finance and economics”, September, 2020)

Subtitle: What the world can learn from Chinese futures trading (世界能从中国的期货交易中学到什么)(All the examples and translations in this thesis are selected from 商论-- an officially certified application introduced by *The Economist*.)

The source language can be seen as an animal metaphor. Here, we need to first figure out the background information, that is, China’s unusual asset -- egg futures, the only ones of their kind in the world market, which can promote the development of China’s real economy. The official translation version retains the metaphor but used a homophone in the translation by substituting “鸡” with “机”, explaining the deep meaning of the headline and offering the indication that other countries could learn from China and attempt to explore more opportunities from the agricultural products. In fact, heads can also mean “chances” since they can further give birth to more chicken. The translation gives an explicit explanation so that the readers can understand quickly.

Example (2) Big fish

Chinese version: 大鱼 (Column “Finance and economics”, September, 2020)

Subtitle: Twenty years ago the world’s elite exchanges were clubby and obscure. Now their tentacles spread far and wide (二十年前世界顶尖交易所排外而低调。如今它们的触角四处蔓延)

In this example, literal translation strategy is used by literally translating “big fish” as “大鱼”。Here, the “fish” means the stock exchange, which explores and collects valuable capital flows from around the world. Different from the past, elite stock exchanges are now seeking differences in the mix and structure of their assets and capital flows traded.

Example (3) Queen of the colony

Chinese version: 蚁后 (Column “Business”, October, 2020)

Subtitle: Does the giant Chinese fintech upstart represent the future of finance? (中国的金融科技巨头新贵是否代表了金融的未来?)

In this example, the official translation version adopts the strategy of literal translation plus explanation making the “queen” more detailed. “The giant Chinese fintech upstart” represents the Ant Group, in which “Ant” means “蚁” in Chinese. The queen of ants usually own the largest bodies among the ant group and is in charge of the whole group, which is line with the status of Ant Group in the fintech field. The headline intends to indicate that Ant

Group is rising rapidly and may become the leader in the fintech sector.

Journey Metaphors and Their Translation Strategy

Journey metaphors have a long history in cognitive linguistic research. Initially, Lakoff and Johnson (1980, p44) put forward the conceptual metaphor “love is a journey”, drawn from expressions like “we’re at the crossroads”, “go our separate ways”, etc.. A journey in these expressions is regarded as a purposeful activity involving movement in physical space from a starting point to an end point or destination. Lakoff (1993) redefined the journey metaphor as “purposeful activity is travelling along a path towards a destination.” This explanation highlights movement and goal-orientation. Apart from goal-orientation, our knowledge of journeys also include the effort one has to make to reach the destination.

Example (4) Dangerous curves ahead

Chinese version: 前方弯道，危险 (Schumpeter, Column “Business”, September, 2020)

Subtitle: The trucking industry is in the midst of upheaval -- and hype (卡车运输业正在经历剧变，以及炒作)

In this example, the headline provides readers with a vivid picture of a truck driver driving on the road and encountering some danger. Through the subtitle, however, we can quickly get the deep meaning that the topic of this article is the trucking industry, which is threatened by other factors including maybe the tech world and retailers like Amazon and Walmart. Translated literally, the headline implies the dangers the trucking industry may meet by describing the dangers a truck driver may encounter in his/her journey.

Example (5) Turning inward

Chinese version: 向内转 (Column “Business”, November, 2020)

Subtitle: Why the old development strategy of import substitution has gained a new lease of life (进口替代这一老发展战略为何获得了新生)

In this example, we can see that “turn inward” literally means the change of the direction. Here, the literal translation is also adopted, implying the shift of the policy concerning imports and exports. Here, “turning inward” means that China will readopt the development strategy of import substitution, which has been preferred by developing countries to impose strict import restrictions on tariff, quota and foreign exchange control, so as to support and protect the relevant domestic sectors.

Example (6) The home straight

Chinese version: 最后冲刺 (Column “Business”, November, 2020)

Subtitle: What the race to lead the WTO says about some thorny trade issues (世贸组织掌门人的角逐反映出一些棘手的问题)

In the above example, the word “straight” also literally means a direction of a journey and “home straight” means “the last part of a race”. Here, the translation strategy is also the literal translation. “最后冲刺” delivers the contextual meaning that the selection of the WTO leader is nearly completed and WTO will welcome a new leader in the immediate future. In the process, there are a lot of challenges since it is the last part.

Human Activity Metaphors and Their Translation Strategy

Human activity metaphor refers to a metaphor that conceptualizes particular human activity as other kind of human activity, based on similarities shared by them. Some examples of human activity metaphors are listed as follows:

Example (7) Down but not out

Chinese version: 击倒，未出局 (Column “Finance and economics”, October, 2020)

Subtitle: Commerce has shown a strange resilience to covid-19 (面对新冠肺炎的冲击，贸易活动表现出不可思议的复原力)

In this example, the literal translation is adopted. Here, conducting commercial activities are regarded as playing a bowling game, in which the bowling balls are knocked down but the beaten side can still continue the game since the ball is not decisive. Likewise, the pandemic has not totally beaten the commerce and there is still possibility for it to return back to the original.

Example (8) Fixing the plumbing

Chinese version: 修管道 (Column “Finance and economics”, November, 2020)

Subtitle: A well-functioning Treasury market is crucial -- whoever is in the White House. Time to fix how it works (无论谁入主白宫，运转良好的国债市场都至关重要。是时候修整一番了)

In the above example, the plumbing literally means the system of pipes, tanks, fittings and other apparatus required for the water supply, heating, and sanitation in a building. Here, the plumbing means the financial system required repairing so as to be on the right track again which is the inevitable task of the President according to the subtitle. There exist similarities shared by the two activities.

Example (9) The games are only just beginning

Chinese version: 游戏才刚刚开始 (Column “Finance and economics”, November, 2020)

Subtitle: A battle royale between the new PlayStation and Xbox consoles is kicking off. But gaming’s prospects -- and millions of new users -- depend on streaming (新款PlayStation和Xbox之间的“大逃杀”已经开局。但游戏产业的前景以及能否吸引数百万新用户取决于流媒体)

In the above sentence, one human activity is “playing games” and the other is “battling”. The biggest similarity shared by them is the inevitable end -- there must be a loser and a winner in the end. The headline implies that

the competition between the two types of game is just coming just as the beginning of a game. People expect to see the final result.

War Metaphors and Their Translation Strategy

War metaphor is the fourth most frequently used structural metaphors of the selected texts. In a war metaphor, “war” is the source domain, and the target domain is a more abstract concept built form “war”. The most famous example of war metaphor can be found in the following example: “argument is war”. War metaphor is even more common in modern Chinese political discourse, such as “打赢脱贫攻坚战”, “决胜全面建成小康社会”.

Example (10) On the march

Chinese version: 在行进中 (Column “Business”, October, 2020)

Subtitle: The blockbuster listing of Ant Group shows how fintech is revolutionizing finance (蚂蚁集团上市大片将展示金融科技正如何重塑金融业)

In the source text, the “march” literally means the act of marching of the army or the enemy. However, here, translated by the literal translation strategy, “on the march” indicates that Ant Group is making huge progress and may become a fierce competitor to other companies in the fintech sector, and a tense phenomenon is revealed.

Example (11) One-armed fighter

Chinese version: 独臂战士 (Column “Finance and economics”, September, 2020)

Subtitle: China is almost back to its pre-pandemic growth trajectory (中国差不多已回到疫情前的增长轨道)

In the war metaphor, people usually think that war represents violence and conflicts, indicating pains of certain event. In the above example, the translation strategy adopted is also literal translation, translating “one-armed fighter” as “独臂战士”. Here, the indication is that China is still fighting against the pandemic though it has suffered a lot of losses due to the outbreak.

Example (12) Fighting spirit

Chinese version: 战斗精神 (Bartleby, Column “Business”, November, 2020)

Subtitle: What the armed forces can teach business (军队能交给企业什么)

The above example may belong to the kind of war metaphor most commonly seen in the daily news so that the strategy used here is still literal translation. The subtitle actually offers some a clue that the fighting spirit is not used on the battlefield but in the companies. The executives need to learn how to instil their employees with such fearless and innovative spirits in their work and the workers need to, in turn, consciously equip themselves with such spirits.

Other Conceptual Metaphors and Their Translation Strategy

Apart from metaphors analyzed above, other categories of metaphors including climate metaphors, body part metaphors, disease metaphors, religion metaphors, color

metaphors, machine metaphors, and various types of people metaphors are also applied for many times in news headlines. Here, two examples of disease metaphors and body part metaphors are given.

Example (13) Still ailing

Chinese version: 依然病弱 (Column “Business”, November, 2020)

Subtitle: Look beyond the frothy stockmarket and booming tech giants and you will find thta much of American business is still in a sorry state (放眼红火的股市和繁荣的科技巨头以外, 会发现大部分美国企业都还在挣扎)

This is an example of disease metaphors, which refer to metaphors that conceptualize particular phenomena as certain kind of disease. Most of these phenomena are negative. The basis is that diseases always make people suffer from pains or other bad feelings, so do some phenomena. In this example, the literal translation is adopted. We can infer from the subtitle that America’s economy is still in its pandemic-induced funk and corporate America requires a turnaround, which has suffered a savage downturn. Here, the word “ailing” means that American business is still suffering just as someone is suffering from certain disease.

Example (14) A closer look at greasy palms

Chinese version: 细看脏手 (Column “Business”, October, 2020)

Subtitle: Bribery pays -- if you don’t get caught (贿赂生财—只要不被抓到)

As one of the examples of body part metaphors, it also adopts literal translation, delivering clearly both the lexical and conceptual meanings to the target readers. Body part metaphors are considered as blends of metaphor and metonymy based on some familiar relations of correspondence of particular parts of the body with particular actions. For example, the hand is metaphorically related with various types of physical action. The heart is always associated with feeling and emotion, the head with thinking and eyes with seeing. Here, “greasy palms” means “unjustified approaches”. Through the subtitle we can know that the topic is bribery, in which someone obtains something through illegal means.

CONCLUSION

Metaphor is a significant component of language. It is not only a figure of speech, but also an important way for building language and concept. Having adopted the perspective of conceptual metaphor, this thesis clarified the difference between traditional rhetorical metaphor theory and conceptual metaphor theory, introduced the three kinds of conceptual metaphor and choose structural metaphor as its research object. Four kinds of structural metaphors are most frequently used, that is, animal metaphors, journey metaphors, human activity metaphors, and war metaphors.

It can be concluded that structural metaphors are frequently used in the finance and business related articles in terms of the examples selected from *The Economist* journal. The common translation strategies are literal translation, that is, finding the same metaphor in the TT to substitute the metaphor of the ST, and free translation, that is, finding the metaphor in the TT with the same contextual meaning with the ST. There are also other strategies not mentioned above, such as literal translation plus explanation. It is necessary to choose appropriate strategies in terms of the types of the text. Through the analysis, the thesis could provide guidance to the news headlines writers and editors as well as the readers.

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