



Imagery: Translation Unit for Classical Chinese Verses

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Abstract

This article makes a detailed study on imagery. Its definition is perceived both from the cognitive viewpoint and that of culture. The essence of imagery is concluded as the freedom of imagination, association and provocation of thought by the research of relevance theory. Moreover, Harmony principle is regarded as the translation principle of classical Chinese verses.

Key words: Imagery; Translation; Harmony

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1. DEFINITION OF IMAGE

An image usually embraces two parts, the one is the “icon”, and the other is the “meaning”. “Icon” can be everything that exists or once existed in the realistic world such as scenery, people, history and place. “Meaning” will be much broader in its coverage, but it is sure to be abstract emotional activity such as ambition, nostalgia, or lovesickness and so on. With the combination of “icon” and “meaning”, images are often employed so as to express their feelings on a practical basis.

Therefore, when an image is fully actualized in a literary work, it can produce quite a few aesthetic effects such as being harmonious and affective. “It is the representation of sense experience through language especially when mentioned in poetry. Poetry is aimed at

conveying and enriching human experience. Experience is formed through sense impressions.” (Shao & Bai, 2001, p.356) Therefore, the poet’s business is to evoke such sense impressions in the reader’s mind. His method is usually to describe these things in words, or so to speak, to paint word pictures. Such a word picture is an image. The famous imagist Ezra Pound defined image as “an intellectual and emotional complex”. He once acclaimed “It is better to present one image in a lifetime than to produce voluminous works”. (as cited in Zhu, 1996, p.20) Since classical Chinese verses have been soaked in eastern culture and Chinese linguistic system for thousands of years, with both their forms and content reaching the peak of perfection, they have exerted this aesthetic function of language to the utmost extent by going to any length to touch readers by artistic conception and delicate images that can draw endless imagination, as James Y. Liu put it in his “*The Art of Chinese Poetry*”:

On the one hand, “image” is used to denote a verbal expression that evokes a mental picture or recalls a physical sensation, not necessarily visual. On the other hand, the word is also used to mean an expression, such as metaphor, simile, etc., that involves two elements (1962, p.101).

1.1 Cognitive Concept: Basis for Conceptualization

Cognitive linguists’ research finds that image is a concept of semantic description developed by *The Theory of Prototypicality and Basic-level Categories* we have introduced in the first chapter. By that theory, image refers to the abstract analogy developed from the cognition of subjects in the brain, which retains a rather long period of time in one’s memory, and change, develop constantly in human psychological activities.

According to cognitive linguistics, we actually conceptualize situation through image. A dynamic situation will form a dynamic image while a static situation a static

one. As the reflection of the material world, semantic structure in linguistic system is thus based on image, too. Moreover, the formation of image is related to people's ability to conceptualize. Different images are resulted from the different choices of individual's cognitive domain, intentional states or perspective and so forth. To sum up, image actually comes from our mental experience in the real world, and our conceptualized world is actually comprised of numerous images.

As to the relationship between language and image, it has been made in the following way: "the meaning of a certain language unit is actually an imagistic structure conventionalized by all the relevant relation with it." Therefore, according to the improved inferential model, once we come to an unfamiliar image for the first time, we always follow the path of inferential model, namely, we "start with the recovery of a linguistically-encoded sentence meaning, which has to be contextually enriched in a variety of ways to yield a full-fledged speaker's meaning" (Ran, 2001). In other words, when we first come to an image, we should take the linguistically-encoded sentence meaning, following a path of least effort, then enrich it at the explicit level and complement it at the implicit level until the resulting interpretation meets our expectation of relevance and make a sense when we fix it to all of our contextual assumptions already in our mind (though these contextual assumptions are largely based on our culture). For example, the following line is from Li Bai's "Seeing MengHaoran off to Guangling":

故人西辞黄鹤楼，烟花三月下扬州。

----李白《送孟浩然之广陵》

The smoke-flowers are blurred over the river. ----Ezra Pound

Mid April mists and blossoms go. ----John A. Turner

Among misty blossoms of the third month, goes down to Yang-chou. ----Paul Kroll

For Yangzhou in spring green with willows and red with flowers. ----XYZ (1984)

For River Town while willow-down and flowers reign. ----XYZ (1987)

In reality, "烟花" is an image refers to the spring scenery when willow seeds are flying everywhere and flowers blossoms here and there. On the whole, this word leaves an impression of sunny and prosperous view on readers who are familiar with Chinese climate and geography. It is a metaphor actually, with the connotation of "the scent of flowers and willow seeds flying to the sky just like smoke".

Besides, the word "扬州" also carries an image of prosperity on itself through Chinese history and culture. In ancient China, Yangzhou had been one of the most flourishing and charming cities just like Shanghai nowadays. However, today's Yangzhou is far from prosperity, so when we first read this line, we may not fully appreciate the meaning of it. Therefore, we follow

the path of the inferential model so as to establish some relationship between this word and the whole text and associate it with our history and culture information. At last, we may draw the sufficient implication of this image and at the same time deposit it in our memory and make it a part of our contextual assumption that is a way in which we will conceptualize the other texts in later days.

1.2 Cultural Representation: Mirror for Internal World

Since culture is the particular system of art, thought, and customs of a society, it is doubtless that language is closely related to the culture in which it is embedded. Being an art genre on the basis of languages, literary works and images are certainly tightly related with culture, too.

One the one hand, just as has been illustrated in the cognitive linguistics, image is also the device for us to recognize the culture a literary work has depicted, as image actually comes from our mental experience in the real world and our conceptualized world is actually comprised of numerous images. We have got enough examples on how culture has influenced the images in classical Chinese verses with words like "扬州", "烟花" and so forth. Therefore, the translation of these verses will surely make more and more westerners understand China, we believe that is the real point in the great efforts that the home and abroad translators have paid.

On the other hand, the culture of a people, and to be specific, the language they speak and the image they choose to use are somewhat determined by their natural living environment, that is, their cognitive environment and cognitive model. To understand an image in a certain culture, one must understand the cultural background and the cultural model that has been developed in the historic development of a specific community. As observed by some psychologists and linguists, the characteristics of westerners' modes of thinking assumes a linear structure which may partly resulted from their writing system, whereas Chinese people are inclined to perceive things from the gestalt properties which may goes back to their ideographic writing system, therefore symbols, metaphors and the other associative semantic descriptions are more frequently used to create mental pictures or artistic conception (as cited in Chen, 1994, p.77). Moreover, because Chinese are more implicit in their expression, Chinese poets are inclined to picture their internal world in an indirect way, that is, on the basis of physical entities of the external world. We can also see this point from Lu Ji (陆机)'s comment in his "Exposition on Literature" (Yu, 1987, p.31):

遵四时以叹逝，

瞻万物而思纷。

悲落叶于劲秋，

喜柔条于芳春。

He moves with the four seasons, to sigh at transience,

And looks at the myriad objects, contemplating their complexity.

He laments the falling leaves during autumn's vigor,
And delights in the tender branches of fragrant spring.

This tradition of interweaving the human internal world with the external nature can be traced back to Taoist and Confucian disciplines. The famous line in the *Analects* says, "The wise find joy in water; the benevolent find joy in mountains." This is the so-called Harmony principle of Chinese culture and value system we will discuss in the latter part of this chapter.

2. THE ESSENCE OF IMAGE

Cognitive linguistics, especially relevance theory, has revealed the essence of image to us. We will illustrate this point with "Autumn" (《秋思》) by Ma Zhiyuan.

枯藤老树昏鸦,
小桥流水人家,
古道西风瘦马,
夕阳西下,
断肠人在天涯。----马致远《秋思》

Dry vine, old tree, crows at dusk.
Low bridge, stream running, cottages,
Ancient road, west wind, lean nag,
The sun westerning,

And one with breaking heart at the sky's edge. ---- Tr.
Cyril Birth

This is no doubt a very beautiful verse, which has been cited countless time for hundreds of years on end. It is also a typical and even extreme case for its skillful use of the linguistic structure of Chinese, parataxis, meaning-centered, loosely bound and full of images. In the first three lines, there is absolutely no connectives, no subjects, no information about time and location, no action, no storytelling, nothing but the juxtapositions of nine nominal phrases (juxtaposition of images). However, with so much absence of the so-called necessary parts in syntactic structure, Chinese readers can still conjecture a series of dynamic and vivid pictures in the way of something like screening a film and finally enjoy an artistic conception of lonely and wandering lovesickness or homesickness. Why? What lies behind this enjoyment caused merely by a few words?

First, among all these absent features, what strikes us most is that the spatial interrelationship between the images are very hard to determine or, perhaps, will never be determined. We are left much room for imagination by such a loosely-bound syntactic structure. Different readers may interweave or draw different mental pictures from these images. That is what the author intends to achieve. Artistically or aesthetically, there is no need at all to determine the spatial interrelations to present a plain picture. Ezra Pound speaks metaphorically about the way words transmit electricity among themselves, generate and

intergenerate certain qualities and combinations of energy by their very position in a work. He says:

Three or four words in exact juxtaposition are capable of radiating this energy at a very high potentiality.... (The) peculiar energy which fills (words) is the power of tradition, of centuries of race consciousness, of agreement, of association.

This is especially true of the words in classical Chinese verses, for Chinese verses have a long tradition of thousand years and, furthermore, the syntactic peculiarities involved in it seem to be most suitable for "juxtaposition" of this sort, which also help to add power to the "energy".

Second, "夕阳西下" is something that happens any day. Without any reference to the date as well as coupled with the absence of verbal tense indicator, this linguistic peculiarity functions to bring the reader's imagination to the largest extent. The seeming time-unconsciousness and space-unconsciousness add to the original verse a kind of special literary sight and aesthetic value, which may help to intrigue the reader's imagination.

Last but not least, there is no personal pronoun. The employment of pronoun in a poem may have the consequence of restricting the artistic description within the narrow limits of an individual's experience and, as a result, lessening in a manner the artistic appealingness of the poem. Additionally, the original is devoid of articles, definite or indefinite and plural forms, which also gives wings to the reader's imagination.

From the absence of spatial, temporal and personal deictic, we enjoy *the freedom of imagination and association as well as the provocation of thought*, which may be the essence of imagery, to a large extent. Gutt (1991) comments on this peculiar use of language:

According to relevance theory, poetic effects arise essentially when the audience is induced and given freedom to open up and consider a wide range of implicatures, none of which are very strongly implicated, but when taken together create an 'impression' rather than communicate a "message".

In this sense, relevance theory has revealed the fact that poetic language does not need a precise syntactic structure. Still, we need a common contextual assumption between the poet and his readers to rely upon to interrelate the various images together and infer the information conveyed by the communicator.

3. HARMONY AS THE TRANSLATION PRINCIPLE FOR CLASSICAL CHINESE VERSES

"Harmony" has always been the center of Chinese people's value system. This can be shown from the sayings such as "天时地利人和", "家和万事兴" and "和气生财". There're many reasons for the formation of such

a world value and aesthetic principle.

As Chen and Xiao stated (as cited in Samover, 2001, p.117): "It is without a doubt that Harmony is one of the primordial values of Confucianism and of the Chinese culture." This principle has long been rooted in Chinese religion: "According to Confucianism, the ultimate goal of human behavior is to achieve 'Harmony' which leads Chinese people to pursue a conflict-free and group-oriented system of human relationships". Because Harmony is a guiding principle for the Chinese, they will not tolerate outward displays of anger. Such a principle can be noted by the following sayings: "The first man to raise his voice loses the argument." and "One hurtful word wounds like a sharp sword." In this way, Chinese are used to reserved orientation and cautious in linguistic activities. They are implicit and quite sensitive to the implication under the linguistic surface, thus use language in a more euphemistic and hidden way.

This psychological background has resulted in the special cognitive model and cultural model for Chinese to see and express their internal world about the reality.

3.1 Harmony as Aesthetic Principle of Classical Chinese Verses

Chinese poets, due to the central value system of Chinese, have developed a fairly harmonious tradition in their use of images to express their inner world. Roger Ames says:

The "organismic" metaphysics which explicit the relationship between part and whole and constitutes the common ground on which the Confucian and Taoist traditions have been erected, when fully appreciated, can be extended to virtually all areas of Chinese culture and used as a basis for understanding why the Chinese have traditionally chosen to construe human experience in the way that they do.

As Zhao Shikai (Dong & Wang, 2001, p.30) argues, a language has three kinds of units, namely:

- (a) Semantic units
- (b) Phonological units
- (c) Symbolic units, that is, to combine the phonological units with the semantic units by way of symbols. It is the integrated continuum comprised of lexicon, morphology and syntax.

From this argument, we can find that the so-called symbolic units have combined all the linguistic features of an utterance together to be an integrated whole. This, in some way, also illustrates the principle of "wholeness" or "Harmony" in language structure. In the following studies, we will find from the triple combination of sound, meaning and structure of Chinese characters, the melodious tonic lines in verses, to the perfect interplay between cultural images and rhetoric skills, all the characteristics about classical Chinese verses display that they themselves are vital unities of harmonious entities that deserve the careful comprehension and appreciation of both TL readers and translators.

3.2 Harmony as the Translation Principle for Classical Chinese Verses' Imagery

During both the comprehension and reproduction processes of a classical Chinese verse, it is through the agency of Harmony that the translator is able to grasp the full meaning of the whole imagery and the attributes images. A verse may be abridged or simplified when translation processes in a translator's mind, but the elements of it and its fundamental coherence have to remain intact all the time; otherwise the verse would lose its aesthetic wholeness and artistic effect. Language messages in verses are composed of elements, that is, of single items and composite group of items. In the translation of a verse, both the linguistic meaning and the aesthetic quality, both the analytic parts and the integrated whole, are to be taken into account. Every element seems to stem from the context that is indispensable to its existence. The logical structure of the whole imagery in a verse determines the distribution of the elements that will be projected into the TL text. Thus the translator acts as an artist should skillfully embody it in sensuous form as well as content. In this way the organic unity is transferred to another language in a fairly vivid style so as to be further experienced by the TL readers though the linguistic form to represent the image is somewhat different from the original. As Mitias stated:

In this process every element is internally related to the element which is next to it; in a way the presence of the latter is necessary, for its nature and role, and consequently its value, have a bearing upon the elements which come before, after, or next to it.

4. IMAGERY AS TRANSLATION UNIT IN THE TRANSLATION OF CLASSICAL CHINESE VERSES

4.1 Distinction between Image and Imagery

Being a concept from cognitive linguistic and aesthetic systems, image is also referred to as imagery in many textbooks or theoretical monographs. However, in this thesis, we mean to define image as the attribute for the whole mental conception of a literary work, and imagery is considered as the gestalt aesthetic property of the work. In some sense, "image" here is countable as visible linguistic point, and all the images in a work form into a meaningful whole, which is often called its imagery. So "imagery" is uncountable as an inseparable entity that can only be perceived from the entire work. It is coherent in structure and exquisitely integrated to present a unified idea. By their relationship, the imagery of a literary work can be comprised of many images which may appear as words (characters), some patterns of sound, some special syntactic structures or some certain scenery and so on. All these images will be also emphasized by the whole

imagery of the literary work in return. For example, in verse “Autumn” (《秋思》), the whole imagery of loneliness and homesickness or lovesickness actually comes from the integrated operation of the nine images, that is, “枯藤”, “老树”, “昏鸦”, “小桥”, “流水”, “人家”, “古道”, “西风”, “瘦马”. These nine images appear as nine sceneries that accumulated into one theme---nest for crow, home for farmer and endless journey for the poet. It is the interaction of these images that makes this verse something other than a mere description of the reality as perceived by the senses and therefore enables language users to go beyond their logical structure, and meanwhile aesthetic significance is also conveyed.

In Li Bai's line “烟花三月下扬州”, the integrated effect of the two images “烟花” and “扬州” renders us a feeling of prosperity and fairly bright color, and Chinese readers may even possibly smell the blossom of the flowers. This whole feeling of radiance and enchantment is the imagery that the poet was trying to leave on us.

Thus we come to the conclusion that verses usually contain a sequence of aspects (images) which imply a totality (imagery). In return, this totality conditions the structure of these aspects. The totality has to be assembled, and only in this way do the aspects take on their full significance, because only then can all the references carry their full weight.

4.2 Imagery as the Aesthetic Essence of Classical Chinese Verses

Obviously, image is the soul of poetry as language is the body of thought. Chinese poets always try to express their ambitions and emotions by the way of evoking readers' mental conception. Thus there comes the explanation for the tradition of classical Chinese verses: “诗言志”, “诗缘情”, while here we will argue the aesthetic essence of classical Chinese verses is imagery rather than specific images.

On the one hand, verses usually form a unified sequence whose full meaning and power become apparent only when all the elements are read together. In this way, a verse is a complex wholeness of details, parts, components, and they are realized in certain scenery, a certain character or a certain event. Meanwhile, this wholeness is built on parts but is more than what the individual parts all signify. What matters most in a verse is not quite the linguistic meaning but the aesthetic significance, which is characterized by the expressive mood, feeling or the atmosphere involved in the imagery.

On the other hand, the fundamental theory of cognitive linguistics has also proved this argument. According to the theory, human being's thought has gestalt properties, namely, when we recognize something, we first take the “gestalt perception or holistic perception”, and then we come to the “attributes”. In other words, after we have fully appreciated the whole verse, we can turn back to look at the attributes images that have comprised the completely mental conception.

Due to the above two reasons, we conclude the aesthetic essence of classical Chinese verses should be imagery rather than a mere word, a character or a clause.

4.3 Imagery as Translation Unit in the Translation of Classical Chinese Verses

Since we have evidenced that the aesthetic essence of classical Chinese verses is imagery amid the verses, we here further conclude that the translation unit in classical Chinese verses translation should also be imagery. Lefevere (1992) has also claimed that when translators as readers “say that they have ‘read’ a book, what they mean is that they have a certain image, a certain construct of that book in their heads.” Translation, as Lefevere put it, “is to project the image of an author and a work in another culture”. For example:

千山鸟飞绝，万径人踪灭。

孤舟蓑笠翁，独钓寒江雪。----柳宗元《江雪》

A hundred mountains and no birds,

A thousand paths without a footprint;

A little boat, a bamboo cloak,

An old man fishing in the cold river-snow. ----Tr.

Witter Bynner

From hill to hill no bird in flight,

From path to path no man in sight.

A straw-cloak'd man in a boat, lo!

Fishing on river clad in snow. ----Tr. XYZ

No sign of birds in the mountains;

Nor of men along the trails; nor any craft on the river

but a little boat,

with an old man in rustic hat and cap dangling a line

in the frigid waters---a solitary figure veiled in silent snow.

----Tr. Weng Xianliang

This verse was in reality written as the poet was demoted when he was quite lonely and in a rather low spirit. Under such circumstances, the poet had painted a picture of hollow, cold and deserted scenery. With this dominant impression, the poet's aloof and proud spirit has thus been displayed by such images of “千山鸟飞绝”, “万径人踪灭”, “孤舟”, “独钓”. While all these images have contributed to the whole imagery of “isolation” in return. When we look at the three translations by different translators, we may find all of them are trying to avoid the use of verbs which may smash the whole imagery.

Through this example we conclude that the translation of classical Chinese verses should be undertaken from the perspective of the imagery as a whole. Only after the essence of the verse is digested can the translation begin, and every word, syntactic structure or view we choose must be in well accordance with the original imagery. Imagery should be the translation unit in classical Chinese verses' translation. We may take another example:

There are still too many examples to list all of them here, but through the above two examples, we have already found that, images and imagery are closely related

to each other. When we are trying to translate a classical Chinese verse, we must apply the whole imagery to every element in the verse; otherwise, it is inevitable to make such mistake as Ezra Pound's "smoke-flower".

However, with such a claim of imagery as the aesthetic essence and translation unit of classical Chinese verses, in translation practice, both the comprehension and reproduction of the imagery should start from specific images after we have the whole imagery in our mind. Therefore, in the following two chapters, the comprehension and reproduction of images are studied in details under the framework of imagery.

CONCLUSION

In this article, some concepts of cognitive linguistic and relevance theory are applied to the analysis of the translation of imagery in classical Chinese verses. The study has been carried out mainly in three parts. In the first part, images have been studied in detail from the perspective of cognitive linguistics and culture. On this basis, the principle of Harmony is introduced both as the aesthetic principle of classical Chinese verses and as the translation principle of them. Second, the study is from the perspective of the comprehension process in translation and images occur at sound, meaning, syntactic, writing and value systems of the verses have been explained, and then in the third part, the dual roles of translator and the requirements for a successful translator are discussed. At last, different translation tactics are introduced according to the amount of information an image carries.

Several conclusions can be drawn from the analysis:

(a) As translation studies have been stuck to some extent, with many principles impractical, one of the effective ways to break through lies in its combination with the other research fields, among which cognitive science is one of the most promising.

(b) Literary texts go far beyond mere semantic meanings and literary translation is involved in a process much more than mere linguistic transference.

(c) The aesthetic essence of classical Chinese verses should be imagery rather than a mere word, character or a clause. On this basis, translation unit in classical Chinese verses translation should also be imagery.

(d) During both the comprehension and reproduction processes of a classical Chinese verse, it is through the agency of Harmony that the translator is able to grasp the full meaning of the whole imagery and the attribute images. So Harmony should also be the translation principle for classical Chinese verses.

Cognitive linguistics is a rather complicated system, while this research has only resorted to several basic concepts of this system, so it is certain that the research is limited in its profundity and width. Future study may be broadened or deepened in the same direction.

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