

## *Original Paper*

# Translation Strategies of Chinese and English Trope Sentence

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### **Abstract**

*Metaphor is to use a familiar and concrete thing to explain another strange and abstract thing. These two things must be essentially different but have similarities. Trope is an important rhetorical device and expression means in both Chinese and English. How to translate Chinese and English trope sentences properly and accurately is a question that scholars have been discussing. Four commonly used translation strategies: literal translation, free translation, interpretative translation and supplementary translation are introduced in this paper, aiming to provide a reference and guideline to the scholars who are interested in this field.*

### **Keywords**

*trope, strategy, literal translation, free translation*

## **1. Introduction**

With the globalization being more and more comprehensive, countries are becoming more and more closely connected, trades are more and more frequent, and cooperation includes a wider range, from economy and policy to culture, education, science and health. However, communication is not only the exchange of words, but also the exchange of culture of which trope is an indispensable part. Trope can turn strange into familiar, abstract into concrete, and make the abstruse and obscure content easy to understand. Therefore, trope is regarded as an effective means of expression in all languages. In the history of rhetoric, trope is regarded as a means of arousing poetry and imaginary. It encodes not only people's feelings about the world, but also the process of people's feelings. Therefore, trope is beyond language. It exists in people's behavior and thought, and in all aspects of people's life. Thus, having a deep insight and appropriate translation of trope is extraordinarily important.

## 2. Trope

### 2.1 Definition of Trope

Trope is a figure of speech in which an abstract, abstruse, unfamiliar thing is described by a concrete, simple, and familiar thing. Chen Wangdao (1976, p. 72) defined trope as "... the object of your thought has a similarity to X, and then replaces the object by X in speaking or writing". Huang Jianlin and Tang Songbo (1989, p. 1) defined trope as "... to compare A with B through the similarity between the two essentially different things. That is to say, using B to reveal A's features". Wang Xijie (2004, p. 381) defined the trope as "Trope, in accordance with mental association, is that one thing utilizes the similarities of a different to explain it". By summarizing, we can find that trope needs to contain two things which are different in nature but have similarities and by explaining the thing we know well can help us to understand the thing we are not familiar with.

### 2.2 Elements of Trope

Tenor, vehicle, similarity and dissimilarity are the four essential elements in the construction of a trope sentence. Tenor is the object to be described or explained in a trope sentence, and vehicle is used to describe tenor. Similarity refers to the similar features between tenor and vehicle, and dissimilarity means tenor and vehicle must be different things. A trope sentence cannot be made without any of these elements.

Although the two "objects" in a trope sentence are totally unrelated, one like a bird in the sky and the other like a fish in deep sea, they must have at least one extremely similar feature. This means that the two "objects" that make up a trope should be essentially different in nature first, and then similar in one feature. In fact, the two "objects" are tenor and vehicle. Similarity is the core of trope. But comparisons between two things that belong to the same category are not trope. For example, the rhetoric in the sentence "Chinese students' learning attitude is the same as that of American students" is comparison rather than metaphor, because "Chinese students' learning attitude" and "American students' learning attitude" is the same thing. In addition, two objects with many similarities cannot build a trope relationship with each other. For instance, "Americans are like British" is not a good trope sentence, because Americans and British both speak English, many Americans are generation of British immigrants and their cultures are similar to great extent. However, if there is no similarity between two things, such as the sun and a butterfly, it cannot be the tenor and vehicle in a trope sentence. Therefore, we can draw a conclusion that tenor and vehicle are different things in essence but have extremely similar characteristics.

### 2.3 Main Types of Trope

Simile, metaphor and metonymy are the most common types of trope to be heard and used in daily communication and read in works. Simile is a comparison of two different things with common characteristics, showing the similarity between tenor and vehicle. The feature of simile is that it is possessed of indicator of resemblances, such as "seem, like, as if and as", which are used to connect the

two objects, tenor and vehicle, in a trope sentence. Metaphor is a kind of trope in which the vehicle is directly regarded as the tenor, and its feature is that there is no indicator of resemblance. The relationship between tenor and vehicle are not pointed out in metaphor, and it is up to the reader to comprehend it. Metonymy means a change of name which is derived from ancient Greek culture. There are some forms: first, replacing content with its container; second, replacing a work with the name of its author; third, replacing tools users with tools; fourth, replacing product with its brand name; but we need notice that these things are tightly related to each other.

### **3. Chinese Trope and English Trope**

#### *3.1 Similarities*

There are four similarities between English trope and Chinese trope.

First, their basic constructions are the same. It is tenor+ (indicator of resemblance) + vehicle. Moreover, it is indispensable that tenor and vehicle appear at the same time in a trope sentence, while indicator of remembrance is not necessary.

Second, their functions are basically similar. Both of them can make a sentence more vivid and turn abstract concepts into concrete and familiar things.

Third, many objects are possessed of the same characteristics in both Chinese and English trope sentences. For example, “fox” referring to “cunning man”, “the morning Sun” meaning “hope and new life”, “gardener of knowledge” symbolizing “teacher” etc.

Fourth, the common characteristics between tenor and vehicle are not always explained. The so-called common characteristics are the similarities between vehicle and tenor. The similarities may be one or more. They are the critical part of trope. Without similarity, trope cannot be formed. Although, directly explaining the relationship between tenor and vehicle can not only enhance the sense of sentence, but also make the reader easier to understand its connotation, sometimes the similarities are not written out directly, readers need to figure out them through the context and sentence patterns in the text. Whether Chinese trope or English trope, the similarities between the tenor and the vehicle do not must to appear. It mainly depends on whether the recipients can correctly understand the trope and whether it affects the performance of the work.

#### *3.2 Differences*

It is different for each nationality that the natural geographical environment, the history and culture, the way of thinking and the value orientation. These differences will inevitably cause differences in Chinese and English. Understanding these differences is essential to translate trope sentences accurately. There are five typical differences in the following.

First, China and Britain are in different geographical environment. Chinese culture originated in the Yangtze River and Yellow River regions, and thus farming culture occupies a major position. So, many trope sentences in Chinese are related to farming.

Second, China's and Britain's history and culture are completely different. China has a long history of more than 5,000 years. Confucianism, Taoism and Buddhism are the dominant cultures in China, and many of the tropes are related to them.

While the most important religion in British is Christianity which was disseminated into Britain in 4th century. Christianity affects all aspects of British life; this influence will inevitably be reflected in English, such as "Judas' kiss" which is used to describe the shameful betrayal.

Third, the ways of thinking and value orientation is different. The same image or animal has very different meanings in Chinese culture and English culture. "Dragon" is a typical representative. "Dragon" in Chinese culture is divine, inviolable, and supreme, so ancient Chinese emperors like to regard themselves as dragon. However, in the English context, dragon is evil, and is the servant of Satan. "Dog" is another typical representative. In Chinese culture, dog is a humble animal and it is an insult to describe someone as a dog. However, in British culture, dogs are the most loyal partners of human and family members. There is no pejorative meaning in relating human with dogs. For example, a lucky person is often compared to "a lucky dog".

Fourth, although the meanings and functions of the frequently used Chinese and English indicators of resemblance are basically the same, their different parts of speech lead to different trope sentence structures. Chinese indicators of resemblance, such as "若", "像", and "如", are verbs and used as predicate verbs in Chinese trope sentences.

#### **4. Translation Strategies of Trope**

##### *4.1 Literal Translation*

Literal translation means keeping the cultural and national characteristics of the source text in the target text without violating the linguistic norms of the target text and arousing false associations. When the vehicle in an English trope sentence is possessed of the same or similar meaning in its Chinese trope sentences, literal translation can retain the vehicle and its meaning, and at the same time the readers of target language can comprehend its connotation easily. In addition, literal translation can also be used for trope sentences in which the same or similar vehicle cannot be found in target language or the national characteristics of the vehicle are not obvious.

For example: He is as cunning as a fox.

In both English and Chinese contexts, "fox" is described as a very cunning animal, so to use a fox as a metaphor for a person is to say that the person is very cunning. Literal translation is the best translation method in this situation. The next two sentences follow the same pattern. Another similar example is "His death is as light as a feather".

##### *4.2 Free Translation*

Due to the great differences between English and Chinese cultures, there are many semantic voids. So if it is not necessary to use literal translation to retain the image of trope in the source language, and

there is no equivalent trope image can be found in the TL for application, it is helpful to change the image of trope in the process of translation to make the translated words conform to the form of the target language. Otherwise, the translated content will become difficult to understand. Free translation is mostly used in metaphor, sometimes in simile. For example: He is as drunk as a fiddler.

In early British life, the folk violinists accompanied the dances in the public places. People usually paid the violinists with wine, so the violinists were usually drunk. But there is no such phenomenon in Chinese culture. Chinese readers will feel puzzled if this sentence is translated into Chinese “他醉得像个小提琴手”. But if it is translated into the familiar expression like “烂醉如泥”, then the connotation of this trope can be easily comprehend by Chinese readers.

Another example: Bob is as timid as a rabbit.

Simile is used in this sentence, and Bob is described as a timid rabbit. In English culture, rabbit is a symbol of timidity and weakness, while in Chinese culture; it is a symbol of agility and speed. Therefore, the translation “鲍勃胆小如兔” is not idiomatic for Chinese readers. In China, people regard mouse as the most timid animal, so the phrase should be translated as “鲍勃胆小如鼠”. It should be noted that in western culture the mouse is a symbol of courage and intelligence because such a little animal can hardly be trapped or caught by huge human. Thus, the Chinese translator should not translate “胆小如鼠” into English “as timid as a mouse” which is hard for British readers to understand.

#### 4.3 Interpretive Translation

When the trope sentences in the source language cannot be translated as trope sentences into the target language by literal translation or free translation, we can adopt interpretive translation to explain the original meaning instead of retaining the rhetoric of trope. For example: She is a cat. The rhetoric of metaphor is used in this sentence, and the tenor and the vehicle are not connected by indicator of resemblance like “as, like, as if”, but by the copula “is”. In English, one of the meanings of cat is woman with evil intentions, while in Chinese, cat does not mean that. So, if this sentence is translated literally into Chinese “她是一只猫”, Chinese readers obviously cannot understand it. But, if we want to retain the rhetorical figure of the original sentence, we need to find the equivalent trope in Chinese. However, due to the cultural differences between Chinese and English, we cannot find its trope equivalent. In this case, interpretive translation becomes the best translation method, so this sentence should be translated into Chinese “她包藏祸心”.

Here is another instance to illustrate interpretive translation.

“...” said the waiter, with a voice like butter cakes and an eye like a cheery in a cocktail.

In this sentence, the voice of the waiter is compared to the voice of butter cakes and the eyes to the cherry in cocktail. However, because of the distinct food culture between Chinese and Americans, it is not easy for Chinese readers to understand the characteristics of the food in the sentence. In fact, the cooking sounds of butter cakes are soft, while the color of the cherry in cocktail is very red. Therefore,

it is better to translate it into Chinese “.....那侍者说道，声音绵柔，但是眼睛却通红。” instead of “.....那侍者说道，声音像黄油酥饼，眼睛像鸡尾酒里的樱桃。”

#### 4.4 Supplementary Translation

When translating trope sentences, sometimes we need to add extra words in order to make the meaning clear and complete, or make the translation conform to the idiomatic usage of the target language. Let's look at the following example:

Other jealous people are called “vinegar bottles”, but Wang Ming is not just a bottle-full of vinegar; he is a storage-jar—a whole cistern-full of it !

In the above example, the English words “jealous people” are added to its English version to make the intended meaning clear and easy for English readers to understand. In this example, Wang Ming is compared to “醋缸” (vinegar jar) and “醋瓮” (vinegar cistern). The meaning of this metaphor can be easily recognized by Chinese readers, because “醋罐子” (vinegar bottle) is often used to refer to jealous people in Chinese culture. “醋缸” and “醋瓮” are only larger in size, and can hold more vinegar than “醋罐子”. In this way, Wang Ming's jealousy becomes more obvious. However, the vehicle of “醋罐子” is not familiar to many English readers. In order to successfully and completely convey the meaning of the vehicle, the words “jealous people” are necessary to be added.

### 5. Conclusions

Trope is one of the most important and frequently used figures of speech. It can turn abstractness into simplicity and abstraction into concreteness. Thus, it is widely used in various languages. So, it is essential for the translator or foreign language learners to understand the elements and types of trope and to be able to adopt appropriate translation methods according to the specific situation to ensure that translated trope sentences are faithful to the source sentence and at the same time are able to make the readers correctly understand their meanings.

This paper introduces the aspects of the translation of trope, from its elements, types to the differences between Chinese trope and English trope. Besides, the reasons for their differences are elaborated. And, finally, the reasonable and practicable translation strategies of trope sentences are introduced.

However, any research has its advantages and disadvantages, so this paper also has some shortcomings. First of all, trope is a basic language rhetorical device, there is a vast corpus in both English and Chinese, while the materials collected in this paper are only limited to the daily expressions in both English and Chinese. Therefore, the collection of materials is not comprehensive and enough. Secondly, by comparing the trope sentences in English and Chinese, this paper studies the similarities and differences, but some of them are not fully analyzed and discussed, and some aspects are not summarized, all these need further study in the future. Finally, if this study can use corpus for analysis, this may make the study more perfect.

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