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English Translation Strategies of Cultural Metaphors in Multilateral Business Diplomatic Speeches from the Perspective of Cognitive Translation Studies

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Abstract

Metaphor serves as a key rhetorical device in multilateral business diplomatic discourse and carries rich cultural connotations. Existing research has mostly focused on CPC literature and the Report on the work of the Government, and there is still a lack of comparative studies on the dual texts of APEC business diplomacy genre. From the perspective of cognitive translation studies, this study takes the written speeches and official English translations of the APEC CEO Summits held in San Francisco, USA in 2023 and Gyeongju, South Korea in 2025 as the corpus, identifies and categorizes cultural metaphors, and focuses on analyzing three translation strategies: imagery retention, imagery transformation, and imagery deletion. The translation effects are evaluated from three dimensions: common knowledge of the vehicle, cultural adaptability, and imagery transmission. The research shows that the translation prioritizes the use of imagery retention and imagery transformation strategies. The former can fully convey the source language imagery, while the latter adapts to the target context by partially reconstructing the target language imagery. Although imagery deletion ensures the readability of the translation, it limits the retention of the source language imagery. Translators need to strike a balance between the two. This study may contribute to expanding the application of cognitive translation studies in business diplomacy discourse and provide a reference for the translation and interpretation of cultural metaphors in such discourse.

Keywords

business diplomatic discourse, cultural metaphor, translation strategy, APEC CEO Summit addresses, cognitive translation studies

1. Introduction

In recent years, with the significant enhancement of China's international status, government work reports and speeches delivered by leaders at multilateral occasions have increasingly become the focus of global attention (Yan et al., 2026). In the dissemination of diplomatic discourse, metaphor, as an important rhetorical strategy, serves as an effective tool to bridge the gap between the audience and enhance the persuasiveness of discourse by concretizing abstract ideas and popularizing complex concepts (Chilton, 2004). Metaphor possesses both cultural specificity and cognitive universality, carrying the connotations of Chinese political culture while facing the challenge of cross-contextual transformation. However, existing research has primarily focused on static translation strategies for metaphors, lacking a systematic analysis of the strategic choices and effect evaluations of cultural metaphors in multilateral business settings within the context of cross-cultural communication.

The APEC CEO Summit serves as a multilateral platform for dialogue between Asia-Pacific political leaders and the business community. Its written speeches embody both diplomatic formality and business persuasion orientation, featuring standardized vocabulary and a mature structure. The translations, reviewed by a professional team, serve as typical examples of cross-linguistic transformation of cultural metaphors. In light of this, this study utilizes the official bilingual (Chinese-English) texts of President's two written speeches delivered at the APEC CEO Summit in San Francisco, USA in 2023 and Gyeongju, South Korea in 2025 as the corpus. From the perspective of cognitive translation studies, it explores the types of cultural metaphors, translation strategies, and their effects, aiming to provide theoretical support and practical reference for the external translation and introduction of Chinese business diplomacy discourse.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Research on Business Diplomatic Discourse

Business diplomacy discourse is a type of discourse used by representatives of countries and governments to explain their positions, build consensus, and seek cooperation with the business community in multilateral economic and trade settings. It combines diplomatic normativity and business persuasion orientation. Chilton (2004) viewed it as a symbolic practice of power relations, emphasizing that discourse constructs social relationships through lexical choice and syntactic structure. Charteris-Black (2011) pointed out that metaphors in political and business discourse are important rhetorical resources for persuading audiences and shaping identity. Compared to general academic texts, business diplomacy speeches require clear positions, appropriate wording, as well as being easy to understand and persuasive, in order to win the understanding and recognition of cross-cultural audiences within a limited space.

Cognitive linguistics has overturned the traditional viewpoint that regards metaphor solely as a rhetorical device. Lakoff and Johnson (1980) proposed the conceptual metaphor theory, revealing that the essence of metaphor is a cognitive tool for understanding abstract conceptual domains through

concrete experiential domains. In the context of business diplomacy, metaphor effectively conveys implicit information by activating the audience's embodied experiences (Charteris-Black, 2011). Metaphors in speeches often draw from familiar experiences such as economics, journeys, war, and the body, transforming complex governance concepts and foreign policies into tangible and perceivable images. Shi (2014) criticized mainstream discourse research for exhibiting a certain Western-centric bias, leading to misinterpretation of non-Western discourses and metaphors. The root cause lies in the dislocation of conceptual domains in cross-cultural translation. Therefore, translators are required to go beyond the literal surface meaning and deeply analyze the cognitive and cultural dual implications of metaphors.

2.2 Research on Cultural Metaphor

Conceptual metaphor theory breaks away from the traditional understanding of metaphor as merely a rhetorical device, defining it as a fundamental cognitive means of understanding target domain concepts through source domain experiences. This theory lays a theoretical foundation for the study of cultural metaphors (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980). In terms of cultural dimension, cultural metaphors are regarded as metaphorical expressions that carry specific cultural connotations and can be decoded by groups within a culture (Gannon, 2001). Comparative analysis of cross-cultural linguistic data reveals that metaphors are both universally rooted in common human bodily experiences and significantly shaped by individual cultures, exhibiting notable variations (Kövecses, 2005). Their cognitive construction is the result of dynamic interaction between language, culture, and social factors, with cultural context constraining the selection and interpretation of metaphors (Wang, 2007). Different cultural groups also form unique cognitive filtering mechanisms through image schemas (Sharifian, 2011). In terms of translation, when the source or target domain of a metaphor is composed of culturally loaded words, it often leads to cross-linguistic incommensurability due to long-term cultural accumulation (Yu & Sheng, 2022).

Addressing the challenge of cross-cultural adaptation of cultural metaphors, translation studies from a cognitive perspective have gradually developed a stratified strategic approach (Liao 2015). Based on the heterogeneity of metaphors between Chinese and English, equivalent translation, functional equivalence translation, and foreignization translation constitute the basic scheme (Chang, 2008). With the help of functional perspectives such as Skopos theory, methods such as literal translation, addition, and free translation can strike a balance between political accuracy and readability (Wang, 2016). As research becomes more refined, strategies such as similarity translation, difference translation, and imagery translation are further distinguished, and the translation system of cultural metaphors is becoming increasingly complete (Wu et al., 2023). At the level of the vehicle, the consistency of mutual knowledge between the translation and the original vehicle is regarded as an important criterion for measuring the quality of metaphor translation (Liu, 2007).

In terms of the translation of Chinese discourse into foreign languages, existing research has primarily focused on central documents such as government work reports and leaders' works, examining the

identification of political metaphors, strategies, and intention transmission (Qiu, 2023; Sun & Li, 2022). In the realm of diplomatic discourse, studies have proposed a composite criterion of "political equivalence + imagery reproduction", emphasizing the balance between stance equivalence and imagery reproduction (Yang & Zhao, 2020), and further focusing on the cultural correspondence of Chinese characteristic vocabulary and the external translation model of national discourse (Wang 2020; Gao & Wu, 2023). Overall, relevant research has evolved from linguistic equivalence to cultural turn, and then to cognitive and translator paradigms, with the scope expanding from literary texts to political texts, but still concentrating on CPC literature and government work reports. There is still a scarcity of comparative studies discussing cultural metaphor strategies and effects from the perspective of cognitive translation studies, specifically targeting the APEC CEO Summit, a multilateral business diplomatic genre. This study aims to fill this research gap.

3. Research Design

3.1 Research Questions

Multilateral business diplomacy speeches often draw on allusions and imagery, and metaphorical translation requires not only accurately conveying the speaker's stance and intentions but also preserving the cultural nuances of Chinese culture. APEC speeches often use metaphors to shape public perception and partner recognition, and the cultural metaphors within them also need to be translated appropriately into English, accurately conveying the stance and intentions while preserving the cultural nuances of Chinese culture, thereby better promoting the external dissemination of Chinese culture. This study selects two speeches in Chinese and English versions from a self-built small parallel corpus, which is officially released and authoritative. This study mainly answers the following questions: First, what are the main types of cultural metaphors in the two speeches? Second, what translation strategies are employed for these cultural metaphors? Third, how effective are the strategies under the criteria of common knowledge of the vehicle, cultural adaptability, and imagery transmission?

3.2 Corpus and Research Steps

The two texts, compiled and reviewed by a professional team, are authoritative carriers that explain China's position to the Asia-Pacific business community, featuring standardized wording and a mature system. This study excludes internationally recognized concepts such as multilateralism, the World Trade Organization, and the United Nations Charter, as well as purely policy terms, and focuses on metaphorical expressions that embody Chinese cultural connotations.

The research steps are as follows: First, metaphor identification. Referring to the conceptual metaphor theory and metaphor identification procedure, metaphorical expressions in the Chinese text are marked sentence by sentence and verified against the English translation. The criterion for determination is whether a word or phrase comprehends another experiential domain within a given context. Concepts that are understood through imagery, actions, or experiential knowledge are categorized as metaphors, while pure policy terms, proper nouns, and internationally recognized concepts are excluded. Second,

retrieval and classification. The marked entries are categorized and statistically analyzed according to cognitive domains and cultural attributes, and qualitative analysis is conducted in conjunction with the translation. Third, strategy induction. Based on the presence of imagery in the translation, three strategies are induced: imagery retention, imagery deletion, and imagery transformation. Fourth, effect evaluation. The translation is evaluated from three criteria: common knowledge of the vehicle, cultural adaptability, and imagery transmission. The main types of rhetorical loss and their causes are summarized. To ensure consistency in marking, all entries are first independently marked by the author. After a review of ambiguous boundaries, two senior translation experts are invited to verify. Due to the limited size of the corpus used in this study, classification and counting serve only for strategy description and are not used for large sample statistical inference.

4. Research Results: Type Distribution of Cultural Metaphors

After sentence-by-sentence identification and double-checking, this study extracts 53 expressions with cultural metaphorical connotations from two speeches (excluding cross-speech repetitions; the same concept appearing twice in two speeches is counted only once). Referring to the classification of source domains for conceptual metaphor (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980; Kövecses, 2010) and combining with the genre of speeches, based on the cognitive mapping relationship from source domain to target domain (Wang, 2007), they are classified into six categories: path metaphor, spatial imagery metaphor, natural imagery metaphor, character trait metaphor, co-opetition metaphor, and idiom and allusion metaphor. The number of examples and proportion for each type of metaphor are shown in Table 1.

Table 1. Distribution of Cultural Metaphors in two APEC speeches (N=53)

Types of metaphor	Total number of examples	Proportion%	Typical examples
Path metaphor (mapping development and cooperation processes with source domains such as travel, roads, and journeys)	10	18.9	kuài chē dào, zài chū fā, pá pō guò kǎn, shí zì lù kǒu, rén jiān zhèng dào, xiān jī, fěi fán lì chéng, xīn piān zhāng, rèn zhòng dào yuǎn, chéng shì ér shàng
Spatial image metaphor (mapping relationships and patterns based on spatial experiences such as locations, walls, and fields)	10	18.9	hé zuò gāo dì, xiǎo yuàn gāo qiáng, jué dòu chǎng, chāi qiáng, tuī guǎng chǎng yǔ yìng yòng chǎng, zēng zhǎng zhōng xīn, huí xuán yú dì, fā zhǎn hóng gōu, dà jiā tíng, bì lěi

Natural imagery metaphor (mapping economic and environmental concepts to natural experiences such as animals and plants, water and soil, heaven and earth)	12	22.6	shí dài cháo liú, zēng zhǎng yǐn qíng, wěn dìng zhī máo, biàn gé làng cháo, shēn gēng zhōng guó, quán qiú huà làng cháo, cóng lín fā zé, hé zuò dàn gāo, wò tǔ, dǔ diǎn, zhǔ xuán lǜ,,zēng zhǎng dòng néng
Character trait metaphor (mapping subject status through character image, appellation, and trait)	3	5.7	nòng cháo ér, gǎn wéi tiān xià xiān, xiān xíng zhě/ kāi tuò zhě/ yǐn lǐng zhě
Co-opetition metaphor (mapping international economic and trade relations through complex interactions such as game theory and cooperation)	8	15.1	líng hé bó yì, zhèn yíng duì kàng, tuō gōu duàn liàn, yíng zhě tōng chī, wén míng chōng tū, wén míng hù jiàn, bà líng, jí tuán duì kàng
Idioms and allusions metaphor (carrying traditional concepts through established idioms and ancient proverbs)	10	18.9	hé ér bù tóng, hé zhōng gòng jì, yǐ lín wéi hè, qiú tóng cún yì, xiū qī yǔ gòng, liǎng lì gǔ yǐn yǔ, qǔ cháng bǔ duǎn, xié shǒu gòng jìn, yōu shì hù bǔ
Total	53	100.0	—

From the perspective of the functions undertaken by metaphors, the six types of imagery each have their respective orientations: the metaphor of path focuses on outlining the development stages and forward direction, endowing the cooperation process with a sense of history and action. The metaphor of spatial imagery focuses on defining the cooperation pattern and relationship boundaries, contrasting openness and closure, connectivity and separation. The metaphor of natural imagery focuses on visualizing economic vitality, growth momentum, and development environment, facilitating understanding by business audiences. The metaphor of character trait focuses on portraying the spiritual temperament of innovation and responsibility. The metaphor of co-opetition focuses on presenting the complex economic and trade dynamics where game, competition, and cooperation coexist, indicating positions and attitudes. The metaphor of idioms and allusions supports value propositions with concise traditional concepts, enhancing the cultural depth of discourse. Various metaphors complement each other and jointly serve the business diplomacy discourse logic of

initiation-persuasion-consensus.

From the perspective of metaphor type distribution, metaphors of natural imagery account for a relatively high proportion. This is related to the fact that the speeches are targeted at the business community and require the use of intuitive economic imagery to convey the concept of cooperation. The number of metaphors involving idioms and allusions ranks second to natural imagery, but they carry the strongest cultural load, making them the most challenging to translate. A cross-comparison reveals that core concepts and high-frequency imagery remain stable across the two speeches, while some metaphorical resources are adjusted according to the change in the topic field. The metaphorical resources in the two speeches are focused on different aspects according to the topic field: the 2023 San Francisco speech focuses on reviewing the history of Asia-Pacific cooperation, with a concentration of path imagery and natural imagery metaphors such as “kuài chē dào /快车道” and “wěn dìng zhī máo / 稳定之锚” . The 2025 Gyeongju speech directly faces the century-old changes, with an increase in co-opetition metaphors such as “cóng lín fǎ zé/丛林法则 ”, “chāi qiáng/拆墙” and “rén jiān zhèng dào / 人 间 正 道 ”. This shift in metaphorical resources corresponds to the different topic fields and persuasion goals of the two speeches: the former focuses on summarizing experience and boosting confidence, while the latter focuses on clarifying positions and building consensus.

It should be noted that the aforementioned six categories are based on the cognitive types of the source domains of metaphors, addressing the question of what experiential domains constitute metaphors; whereas translation processing depends on the mapping relationships of metaphors in the target culture, addressing the question of how should imagery be conveyed across languages. These two aspects belong to different analytical dimensions. For metaphors of the same cognitive type, due to differences in the common knowledge and cultural attributes of the vehicles, retention, deletion, or transformation may be adopted in the translation. The next section will shift to a cross-cultural mapping perspective to discuss the English translation strategies for the same set of metaphors.

5. Research Discussion: Translation Strategies for Cultural Metaphors

The previous section summarized six types of metaphors based on the cognitive types of the source domain. This section examines the handling of the same set of metaphors in translations from the perspective of cross-cultural mapping relationships. When the source and target cultures form an equivalent mapping, there is a tendency to retain the imagery. When the mapping is absent in the target culture, there is a tendency to delete the imagery. When the mapping requires adaptation and alignment, the imagery is transformed. Based on this, the English translation of cultural metaphors in two speeches can be classified into three strategies: imagery retention, imagery deletion, and imagery transformation. The following sections will discuss these strategies with examples, and the translation effects will be evaluated comprehensively in the final section.

Based on the 53 examples annotated in this study, there are differences in the frequency of use among the three strategies, with the specific distribution shown in Table 2. Imagery retention accounts for the

highest proportion, often used in cross-cultural common experience domains such as journeys, natural imagery, and spatial imagery. Imagery transformation follows, often used for the docking between Chinese idioms, traditional concepts, and existing conceptual frameworks of the target language. Imagery deletion accounts for the lowest proportion, mainly used for unique local imagery and classical Chinese allusions. This distribution corroborates the aforementioned type distribution: metaphors in common experience domains are most likely to be retained, and the stronger the cultural specificity, the more inclined it is to be transformed or deleted. It should be noted that some translation examples simultaneously incorporate both image retention and paraphrasing, constituting a compound strategy. In this study, the dominant approach is used as the basis for classification. In addition, an example sentence often contains multiple metaphorical units. Each example in this paper only discusses the translation strategy for the target metaphor marked within quotation marks; other metaphors in the same sentence are classified according to their dominant approach and are not counted repeatedly in this example.

Table 2. Distribution of English Translation Strategies for Cultural Metaphors in two APEC speeches (N=53)

Translation strategy	Frequency	Proportion%
Imagery retention	21	39.6
Imagery transformation	17	32.1
Imagery deletion	15	28.3
Total	53	100.0

5.1 Cultural Mapping Equivalence: Cultural Adaptation with Imagery Retention

Imagery is the primary carrier of culture, and retaining imagery can convey the values and historical background of the source language culture. When the source language and the target culture share similar imagery and a high degree of mutual intelligibility in terms of metaphorical objects (Kövecses, 2005), the translation tends to retain the original imagery, allowing readers to encounter different cultural expressions and enhancing understanding and respect (Liu, 2007). This strategy is more common in metaphors related to natural and spatial imagery, which are shared across cultures.

Example 1 “xiǎo yuàn gāo qiáng/小院高墙” (San Francisco, USA in 2023)

Translation: high fences around a small yard

“xiǎo yuàn gāo qiáng /小院高墙” metaphorically refers to the closed and divisive practice of exclusion through the spatial imagery of a walled courtyard. The translation retains the two spatial images of “xiǎo yuàn/小院”and “gāo qiáng/高墙”, and translates them directly as “high fences around a small yard”, recreating the image of closure and division. From the perspective of the common knowledge of the metaphor vehicle, “fence” and “yard” are concepts from everyday English experience, allowing

readers to directly establish the cognition of spatial isolation. In terms of cultural adaptability, the exclusionary practice described by this image is universally comprehensible. The translation does not undergo abstraction, and its emotional critical tone is close to the original text, achieving functional equivalence.

Example 2 “wěn dìng zhī máo/稳定之锚” (San Francisco, USA in 2023)

Translation: an anchor of stability for global development

“máo/锚” symbolizes stability and support, mirroring the role of a fixed object. The translation retains the image of an anchor. Anchors are well-known metaphors in English economic discourse, with high commonality and good cultural adaptability. The translation maintains emotional resonance through images that are comprehensible to the audience, simultaneously reproducing rational and empathetic functions.

Example 3 “cóng lín fǎ zé/丛林法则” (Gyeongju, South Korea in 2025)

Translation：the law of the jungle

“cóng lín fǎ zé/丛林法则” reflects the international logic of the law of the strongest through the metaphor of survival competition in the natural jungle. The translation “law of the jungle” is an existing English expression with a complete image retention, allowing readers to immediately grasp the connotation. This example falls under the category where the source, metaphor, and target are highly recognizable in the target culture. Retaining the imagery not only conveys the judgment of the original text but also does not add cognitive load.

5.2 Cultural Mapping Absence: Cultural Default with Imagery Deletion

Chinese and English are significantly different languages. When the unique symbolic imagery of the source culture lacks cognitive correspondence in the target culture, or direct transplantation may trigger negative associations (Yu & Sheng, 2022), the translation usually removes the imagery and directly expresses the core meaning to enhance readability (Chang, 2008). Such processing ensures information transmission, but specific and vivid metaphors are replaced by abstract concepts, weakening the visual image and cultural connotation.

Example 4 “pá pō guò kǎn/爬坡过坎” (San Francisco, USA in 2023)

Translation：surmounted numerous difficulties and obstacles

“pá pō guò kǎn/爬坡过坎” metaphorically refers to overcoming difficulties, using the imagery of climbing mountains and surmounting ridges. In English, there is no fixed metaphorical expression for climbing mountains that corresponds to this concept. If translated literally as “climb mountains and cross ridges”, readers may find it difficult to directly associate it with the meaning of overcoming difficulties. The translation removes the imagery of mountains and ridges and translates it as “surmounted numerous difficulties and obstacles.” From the perspective of common knowledge of the vehicle in the metaphor, “difficulties and obstacles” is readily intelligible and shares a high degree of common ground with target readers. In terms of cultural adaptability, the abstract expression conforms to the concise and direct habit of English political discourse. However, compared to the original text,

the physical experience of climbing mountains and the trait of perseverance are obscured, and the emotional tension decreases, representing a weakening of function. This treatment prioritizes the immediate understanding of the target audience.

Example 5 “hé zhōng gòng jì/和衷共济” (San Francisco, USA in 2023)

Translation：solidarity and mutual assistance

“hé zhōng gòng jì/和衷共济” uses the imagery of crossing water to symbolize concerted efforts and solidarity. In English culture, there is no corresponding metaphor for cooperation across water. The translation extracts the connotation of unity and mutual aid for interpretation and domestication, removing the imagery of crossing water. The core meaning of the translation is clear, and the common understanding of the metaphor is good, but the rhythmic quality of the four-character phrase and the implicit water imagery are lost, weakening the vividness of the spirit of partnership. This choice prioritizes instant understanding by cross-cultural audiences.

Example 6 “wàn wù dé qí běn zhě shēng，bǎi shì dé qí dào zhě chéng/万物得其本者生，百事得其道者成。” (San Francisco, USA in 2023)

Translation：As an ancient Chinese scholar observed, “plants with strong roots grow well, and efforts with the right focus ensure success.”

This sentence expresses the concept of adhering to the fundamental principles through antithetical structures, citing classics as cultural resources. The translation fails to retain the antithetical structure and does not indicate the source, instead generalizing the source as “an ancient Chinese scholar observed” and interpreting it as two straightforward propositions. From the perspective of the common knowledge of the vehicle, words such as “plants,” “roots,” “efforts,” and “focus” have straightforward meanings, making them easy for readers to understand. In terms of cultural adaptability, after stripping away the classical Chinese form, the translation conforms to the habits of English argumentative discourse. However, the cultural depth and authoritative source of intertextuality from classical texts are weakened, representing a functional weakening and reconstruction. This approach aligns with the communicative properties of diplomatic speeches, prioritizing discourse fluency and immediate acceptability, thus sacrificing the heavy intertextual effect of tracing back to classical texts.

5.3 Cultural Mapping Shift: Cultural Adjustment with Imagery Transformation

Cultural mapping shift refers to converting imagery from one culture into imagery with similar meaning or function in another culture, in order to eliminate misunderstandings and promote acceptance (Liu, 2007). When the source and target metaphors lack common knowledge in the target culture and direct translation is prone to semantic vacancy, translators utilize familiar functional imagery in the target language to achieve cultural adaptation, enhancing readability and recognition while retaining core meaning (Chang, 2008), and achieving equivalent transmission at the political stance level (Yang & Zhao, 2020). This strategy is often used for connecting idioms, allusions, and traditional ideological metaphors with the existing conceptual framework of the target language.

Example 7 “rén jiān zhèng dào/人间正道” (Gyeongju, South Korea in 2025)

Translation: the right way forward

“rén jiān zhèng dào/正道” metaphorically represents the correct direction of development with the metaphor of a path. The translation is converted to “the right way forward”, retaining the domain of the path while reconstructing the image with the commonly used English expression “way forward”. “Way forward” is commonplace in English political discourse and enjoys high vehicle common ground with target readers. The translation shifts the focus from the philosophical connotation of the traditional “dao” to the path that can be taken forward, aligning the cognitive framework with the political expectations of English readers, and achieving significant cultural adaptation.

Example 8 “chāi qiáng/拆墙” (Gyeongju, South Korea in 2025)

Transaltion：remove barriers

“chāi qiáng/拆墙” metaphorically represents the removal of barriers through the spatial action of demolishing walls. The translation omits the word “wall” and replaces it with “barriers,” a commonly used term in English trade discourse, fitting the economic and trade context. “Barriers” is widely recognized in the international economic and trade context and has good cultural adaptability.The specific action image of walls is weakened, shifting to an abstract concept of obstacles.

Example 9 “wén míng hù jiàn/文明互鉴” (Gyeongju, South Korea in 2025)

Translation：mutual learning among civilizations

“hù jiàn/互鉴” metaphorically refers to the equal learning and complementing of strengths among different civilizations, using the image of a bronze mirror reflecting and referencing each other. In English culture, there is a lack of corresponding expressions that use “jiàn/鉴” (mirror) to metaphorically refer to civilized exchanges. The translation does not retain the imagery of the mirror, but instead converts it into the commonly used phrase “mutual learning among civilizations” in English, completing the reconstruction with the functional imagery of learning and exchange. From the perspective of the common knowledge of the metaphor, “mutual learning” is common in international discourse and is easily understood by readers. In terms of cultural adaptability, the translation shifts the focus from the reflective connotation of the traditional “jiàn/鉴” to equal exchanges among civilizations, aligning the cognitive framework with the political expectations of English readers, and achieving significant cultural adaptation. The imagery of the mirror as an object is weakened and transformed into an abstract concept of exchange behavior.

5.4 Evaluation of the Effects of Translation Strategies

This study evaluates translation quality based on three interrelated criteria: the common knowledge of the vehicle, cultural adaptability, and imagery transmission (Liu, 2007). The common knowledge of the vehicle is the foundation of metaphor translation, ensuring that the vehicle in the translation can be understood and accepted by the target cultural group. Imagery transformation is a means to achieve cultural adaptability, adjusting or replacing the vehicle to make the metaphor more expressive in the target culture. Cultural adaptability is the ultimate goal of metaphor translation, ensuring that the translation can grow naturally in the target culture and avoid cultural conflicts (Gao & Wu, 2023). The

three complement each other, jointly constituting an evaluation framework for cultural metaphor translation.

Based on the analysis of the two corpora, it is evident that the imagery retention strategy performs best in terms of the commonality and cultural adaptability of the vehicle: the retained images are mostly common human experiences or well-known English vehicles, allowing readers to directly establish connections with the target. This strategy achieves optimal intentional transfer and is the preferred approach for handling cultural metaphors, provided that the vehicle possesses sufficient commonality in the target culture. The imagery transformation strategy comes next. When the source vehicle lacks commonality, transforming it into a functional image familiar to the target language can enhance acceptance while retaining the core meaning. However, its success depends on the degree of fit between the new vehicle and the target. While the imagery deletion strategy can remove comprehension barriers and avert cultural conflicts to achieve superficial adaptive effects, it tends to make it difficult to preserve the cultural imagery embedded in the source text, thereby diminishing the rhetorical appeal and cultural connotations of the metaphor. For this reason, translators are advised to weigh this strategy carefully. A comparison of the performance of the three strategies across the three evaluation dimensions is presented in Table 3.

Table 3. A Three-dimensional Evaluation and Comparison of Three Translation Strategies

Translation strategies	Vehicle common ground	Cultural adaptability	Imagery transmission	Overall judgement
Imagery retention	High	Strong	Fully convey the original imagery	Balanced across dimensions; the preferred choice when common ground is available
Imagery transformation	Relatively high	Relatively strong	Conveys the original imagery through partial reconstruction	Fairly effective, suitable for cases requiring cultural adaptation
Imagery deletion	Gains relatively high common ground through abstract interpretation	Achieves only surface-level cultural adaptation	The original imagery is largely lost	Ensures readability, yet limited retention of imagery

Upon further analysis, it becomes evident that translation examples with insufficient imagery

transmission often adopt the method of omission after removing images. Although this type of processing ensures the readability of information, it weakens the cultural rhetorical color of the discourse, reflecting the tension between “accuracy” and “vividness” in cross-cultural political communication. Such trade-offs mainly stem from the absence of corresponding cognitive frameworks in the target culture, as literal translation would easily create semantic gaps. Translators have to prioritize readability over cultural fidelity.

Based on the above translation examples, the choice of translation strategies for cultural metaphors is mainly constrained by three factors. The first is textual function. Speeches at the APEC CEO Summit mainly focus on position declaration and business persuasion, requiring the translation to be politically accurate and easily understandable to readers. When cultural imagery conflicts with information conveyance, the former often gives way to the latter. The second is cultural cognition. The level of mutual knowledge between the source and target cultures directly determines whether to retain, convert, or delete. The higher the mutual knowledge, the more room there is for retaining imagery. The third is discourse system. Concepts with Chinese characteristics need to establish stable terminology in the target language. For example, “harmony in diversity” and “a community with a shared future for mankind” have formed fixed translations. Translators should give priority to following the established terminology system rather than retranslating them sentence by sentence. (Yang & Zhao, 2020; Sun &Li, 2022). The metaphor translation in official translations is not determined on a case-by-case basis, but is constrained by a relatively stable set of terminology norms and translation principles. The core concepts remain consistent across different texts, ensuring the coherence of Chinese discourse in external communication (Wang 2020). Under the combined influence of these three factors, translators seek a balance between political equivalence, cultural transmission, and reader acceptance (Liu, 2007).

6. Conclusion

This study uses the Chinese and English versions of two speeches delivered at the APEC CEO Summit as the corpus to conduct a comparative statistical analysis of the types of cultural metaphors, and analyzes their translation strategies one by one. The study finds that cultural metaphors adopt different translation strategies under different cultural mappings. Translators need to compare the differences between Chinese and Western cultures, and choose to retain, delete, or transform images based on cultural adaptation, cultural default, and cultural adjustment. The effectiveness of the translations is evaluated from three aspects: common knowledge of the vehicle, cultural adaptability and imagery transmission. The research results show that the imagery retention strategy is conducive to balancing the common knowledge of the vehicles and cultural adaptability, but the cultural connotations of some common images are difficult to fully convey in diplomatic translations without annotations. The imagery transformation strategy helps to enhance cultural adaptability and complete imagery reconstruction, but the transformed vehicles must be carefully selected to avoid semantic deviations. The imagery deletion strategy can ensure cultural adaptability of the translation, but it may discard the

visual imagery, emotional tension, and cultural implications inherent in the original metaphors, resulting in a loss of cultural connotation. Limited by the size of the corpus, this study focuses on the textual comparison of the two speeches, and the strategy induction and classification counting are manually annotated results. Future research could incorporate more sessions and other multilateral occasions, and further investigate the cross-linguistic transmission effect of metaphor translation in combination with audience feedback.

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