

Original Paper

A Study on Translation Strategies of Chinese Political
Metaphors from the Perspective of Cognitive Translatology: A
Case Study of Two Important Speeches Delivered in Lima

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Abstract

Cognitive Translatology is a new paradigm of translation studies grounded in cognitive science, focusing on the cognitive mechanism of translation, meaning construction, and cross-cultural communication. Rooted in embodied cognition and centered on profiling, it offers a systematic perspective for metaphor translation research. Taking President's Lima Speech as the corpus, this paper adopts the base-profile theory of Cognitive Translatology and the Metaphor Identification Procedure (MIP) proposed by the Pragglejaz Group. Through manual identification and verification, 30 metaphors in the text are selected, classified, and statistically analyzed. Furthermore, integrated with four cognitive frameworks, this paper correspondingly examines the specific applications and cognitive operational mechanisms of four translation strategies: literal translation, metonymy, free translation, and metaphonymy. Through case analysis, this study provides cognitive theoretical support and practical references for metaphor translation in political discourse, and enriches the applied research of cognitive translatology in political discourse translation.

Keywords

political metaphor translation, cognitive translatology, translation strategies

1. Research Background

President's Lima Speech focuses on important issues such as China-Latin America cooperation and global development, and contains rich metaphorical expressions. The quality of metaphor translation in this speech bears on the effectiveness of international communication and cognitive acceptance of

China's national discourse. Against this backdrop, this paper takes this speech as the research corpus, conducting a metaphor translation study based on cognitive translatology, so as to provide theoretical support and practical reference for the practice of metaphor translation in political discourse.

This study puts forward the following hypotheses: First, translators flexibly select translation strategies to achieve cognitive equivalence according to the base-profile correspondence of metaphors; second, the base-profile theory can effectively explain the cognitive mechanism of metaphor translation and provide a basis for strategy selection.

2. Literature Review

Since the philosophical turn to postmodernism in the 1960s, experiential philosophy and cognitive linguistics have emerged, giving rise to research on cognition and translation. Influenced by interdisciplinary disciplines such as cognitive science, Krings (1986), Gerloff (1986), Lörcher (1986), and Jääskeläinen (1989) proposed adopting empirical methods to investigate the translation process. Their proposals sparked an academic upsurge in exploring translators' thinking patterns and cognitive construction in translation. Chinese scholars Yang Zijian and Liu Xueyun (1994) also explicitly pointed out that the task of translation studies lies in exploring the laws governing translators' unique thinking activities. Against this backdrop, cognitive translatology has achieved rapid development. In 1997, Danks [6] formally put forward the concept of Translation and Cognition, marking the commencement of interdisciplinary research between the two fields. Since then, academic research on cognitive translatology has continued to deepen in empirical exploration and theoretical construction, yielding a series of valuable achievements. Tirkkonon-Condit [7] systematically probed into the cognitive mechanism underlying written translation and interpreting processes. Alves [8] improved the empirical methodology system for Translation Process research. Göpferich [9] introduced eye-tracking technology into cognitive translation research, diversifying research methods in this field. Shreve and Angelone (1997) further integrated theoretical findings and empirical experience of cognitive translation studies, providing significant academic references for the development of this discipline. Overall, scholars of this period have focused on issues in translation activities, including psychological operational mechanisms and information processing methods. Their efforts have promoted cognitive translatology to gradually evolve into an important branch of translation studies.

With its continuous advancement, Martin (2010) formally put forward the concept of cognitive translatology in 2010, further clarifying the disciplinary orientation and research boundary of this field. Subsequently, the proposal of the 4EA theory, namely embodied, embedded, enactive, extended, and affective cognition, has injected new vitality into the research of cognitive translatology. The theory holds that the essence of translation is embodied, and advocates contextualization and socialization, which offers a novel perspective for professional translation research. Halverson (2013) also pointed out that embodied cognition has become an integral conceptual tool in translation studies. Driven by international academic research, domestic studies on cognitive translatology have also witnessed

gradual development. As early as the 20th century, Langacker (n.d.) proposed that the base refers to the cognitive underlying matrix of the cognitive domain required or activated in comprehending a linguistic expression, while the profile is the highlighted substructure within the base. On this basis, Chinese scholar Tan Yesheng (2021) further expanded the theoretical framework and argued that the core of cognitive translology theory lies in profiling. He maintained that the base and the profile are inseparable, and semantic value is jointly determined by the two. He explicitly stated that translators' production of diverse target texts is a dynamic process rather than static equivalence. Accordingly, cognitive translology bridges micro linguistic cognition with macro social, cultural and ideological analysis, providing theoretical enlightenment for the translation practice of various types of texts.

In practical metaphor translation practice, many domestic scholars have carried out targeted empirical research and applied exploration supported by the theories of cognitive translology. Taking cognitive profiling as the core construct, Gong (2023) systematically expounds the base-profile cognitive mechanism, providing a faithful and operable cognitive path for the translation of Chinese political discourse. Furthermore, Zhao (2022) conducts a systematic study on the English translation of Shennong's *Classic of Materia Medica*. Centering on the two cores of lexical information and syntactic logic, she offers empirical and methodological references for the application of cognitive translology in the English translation of traditional Chinese medicine classics. In addition, Wang (2018) focuses on analyzing the translation mechanism of metaphors, systematically sorting out relevant metaphorical expressions in Chinese and Western translation studies. He reveals that translation is essentially an interactive operation at the cognitive level, rather than a simple linguistic transformation.

To sum up, as a brand-new paradigm in translation studies, cognitive translology places human cognition as well as human subjectivity and agency at the center of the causal chain. Based on the view of embodied cognition and integrating multi-branch cognitive science, Halverson (2013) constructs a translation research paradigm and forms a research framework grounded in embodied cognition, centered on profiling and translator-oriented. As an interdisciplinary discipline, it focuses on the cognitive mechanism of translation, meaning construction and cross-cultural communication. It aims to provide a unified, operable and empirically verifiable cognitive interpretation system for translation phenomena, and promote the development of translation studies (2026).

3. Metaphor Translation Strategies in President's Lima Speech

3.1 Identification and Classification of Metaphorical Expressions

Metaphor annotation is essentially a research procedure based on metaphor identification, which involves processing, recording, and interpreting metaphor-related information at different levels through specific symbolic coding. At present, no computational tool can achieve fully accurate and comprehensive intelligent identification of metaphors in corpora. In view of this, on the basis of reading through the source language text, this study conducts metaphor identification manually with reference to the Metaphor Identification Procedure (MIP) proposed by the Pragglejaz Group

(Pragglejaz Group. MIP: A method for identifying metaphorically used words in discourse.). All metaphors appearing in the text are individually identified and annotated, and the specific results are shown in the table below.

In addition, to ensure the accuracy and reliability of metaphor identification and annotation, the relevant experimental procedures of this study are double-checked by scholars with a background in English linguistics; regarding ambiguous metaphor classification issues arising during the identification process, researchers conduct full deliberation through collective discussion and ultimately reach a consensus, so as to avoid the impact of individual subjective bias on the research results.

Table 1. The Classification of Metaphors

Classification	Examples	Translations	Frequency	Percentage
Journey Metaphors	中国之船;历史倒车; 老路; 火车头; 中国之船; 十字路口; 花园之都	the China Ships; backpedaling; beaten path; locomotive; China Ships; crossroads; garden city	7	23.33%
Nature Metaphors	先河; 逆流; 逆水行舟; 逆风和回头浪; 潮流;	interactions;reverse the trend; sailing up a river; headwinds and undertows; trend	5	16.66%
Tool or Machine Metaphors	引擎作用; 引擎; 孵化器; 新动能 (4)	the biggest engine of; engine; incubator; create new momentum	7	23.33%
Human Metaphors	韧性;利益共同体、命运共同体 (2)	resilient; an interdependent community with common interests and a shared future.	3	10%
Circle Metaphors	出圈	getting very popular	1	0.33%
Building Metaphors	高墙	the walls	1	0.33%
Food Metaphors	蛋糕	pie	1	0.33%
Other Types of Metaphors	碎片化;金字招牌;新招牌;黄金三十年;网络	an increasingly fragmented;break new ground;make new brand-building efforts;30 golden	5	16.66%

years;network

Total

30

100%

Adopting the MIP to screen metaphors in the discourse, this study identifies a total of 30 metaphorical expressions, including recurrent metaphorical formulations such as new driving force and a community with a shared future for mankind. As can be seen from the statistical table, journey metaphors and tool-machinery metaphors rank the highest in frequency, jointly accounting for nearly 50% of all identified metaphors. In metaphor translation practice, translators predominantly adopt the strategy of literal translation to preserve the metaphorical intention of the original text, or employ free translation to fully convey the value orientation and stance implied behind metaphors to target language readers. When dealing with special metaphors, translators also apply the translation strategies of metonymy and metaphonymy. Given the limited sample size of the research corpus in this study, the overall application frequency of the metonymy strategy is relatively low. The specific cognitive mechanism and selection rationale of each metaphor translation strategy will be analyzed one by one in the subsequent sections.

3.2 Case Study of Metaphor Translation Strategies

3.2.1 Same / Similar Profile + Same / Similar Base

Based on the base-profile theory of cognitive translology, an ideal equivalence in metaphor translation can be achieved when metaphors in the source language and target language share a consistent base and exhibit same or similar features in the profiled profile (Tan, 2023). At this point, universal human cognitive experience, aesthetic consensus and cultural commonality enable corresponding expressions of source-language metaphors to exist in the target language (Yang, & Liu, 2023; Zeng, 2021). Therefore, when identifying such metaphors, translators should fully consider the universality of human ideology and spiritual dimension, and take into account the common ground between different cultures in morality, ethics, traditional culture and aesthetic values. In terms of translation strategy, literal translation is generally adopted to completely retain the cognitive connotation and imagery features of original metaphors.

(1)...满载着丝绸和瓷器的“中国之船”就远航拉美...。

...the China Ships, laden with silk and porcelain, reached the far coast of Latin America...(Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the People's Republic of China, 2026)

In this case, the base of China Ships is “a ship as a means of transport and a medium of communication”, and the profile is “material transportation and friendly ties between China and Latin America”. Literally, China Ships refers to the Chinese vessels that sailed to Latin America carrying porcelain and silk in the second half of the 16th century. Metaphorically, it symbolizes friendly exchanges between China and Latin America and serves as a vehicle for cultural interaction and economic cooperation between the two sides. President Xi has repeatedly used the “ship” metaphor on various international occasions to convey the vision that all countries should help each other in the

same boat and strive for a shared bright future. The cognitive connotation of this metaphor is common to both Chinese and Western cultures. From the perspective of cognitive translology, the base of “ship” is consistent in both the source language and target language, where it is regarded as a vehicle for cross-regional and cross-cultural communication. Furthermore, the profiled profile of “friendly ties” is shared. Therefore, the translator adopts the strategy of literal translation and renders it as China Ships, which not only preserves the imagery of the original text but also achieves an ideal equivalence in the cognitive connotation of the metaphor.

(2)...亚太发展的下一个“黄金三十年”。

...and usher in another 30 golden years of development for our region..(Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the People's Republic of China, 2026)

The base of this metaphor lies in the cognitive domain that regards gold as a precious substance and a symbol of prosperity, while its profiled profile highlights the preciousness, superiority and promising prospects of Asia-Pacific development. In this case, the expression “30 golden years” refers to the sustained, rapid, stable and prosperous development momentum of the Asia-Pacific region in economic, social and other fields. This period boasts remarkable economic achievements and favorable development conditions, and is regarded as a golden stage of development. Chinese leaders also frequently employ “gold” as a metaphor to refer to valuable undertakings and sound development momentum. In both Chinese and Western cultures, people share a consistent base of gold as a precious substance, and both metaphorically associate gold with valuable things and favorable development situations. The profiled profile is therefore similar, constituting an ideal equivalent scenario of “same/similar profile plus same/similar base”. Based on it, the translator adopts the strategy of literal translation and retains the metaphorical vehicle “golden years”. On the one hand, this approach facilitates international audiences’ understanding of Chinese culture and culture-loaded expressions; on the other hand, it strengthens the power of national discourse and enables the international community to better hear China’s voice.

3.2.2 Same / Similar Base + Different Profile

Based on the base-profile theory of cognitive translology, it represents a normal scenario in metaphor translation when the metaphors in the source language and target language share an same or similar base, yet differ in their profiled profile (Gong, 2026). Metaphors are inherently culturally embedded. Cultural discrepancies in human cognitive experience lead to substantial differences in the connotations conveyed by the same metaphorical vehicle across contexts, and audiences from diverse cultural backgrounds may form distinct cognitive imagery toward the same metaphorical source (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the People's Republic of China, 2026). Under such circumstances, translators generally rely on the shared base and adopt the strategy of metonymy to adjust the profile activated by metaphorical profiling, so as to achieve smooth semantic transmission and equivalent cognitive adaptation.

(3)...共同做大并分好经济发展“蛋糕”...

...and work together to grow the pie...(Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the People's Republic of China, 2026)

In this case, the base of the source language metaphor “蛋糕” and the target language metaphor “pie” is similar. Both fall into the cognitive domain of divisible and shareable food, and their core cognitive connotations both refer to distributable interests and achievements, which constitutes their shared base. Nevertheless, there exists a divergence in their profiled profile: the profile activated by the source metaphor “蛋糕” lies in its identity as a common shared food in Chinese culture, symbolizing the distribution of collective interests. By contrast, the profile highlighted by the target metaphor “pie” is that of a typical shared food in Western culture, which better conforms to the conventional metaphorical expression of “interest distribution” in the English context. This situation exemplifies the normal translation scenario of “same/similar base + different profile”. The translator adopts the strategy of metonymy, substituting the conventional Chinese metaphor “cake” with the culturally and linguistically appropriate metaphor “pie” in the target language. Relying on the shared base of “interest distribution”, the translator adjusts the profile realized by metaphorical profiling. This practice ensures that the translation conforms to English linguistic norms and cultural context, enabling English readers to readily grasp the core implication of jointly expanding and rationally distributing the fruits of economic development.

3.2.3 Different Profile + Different Base

When there are marked discrepancies in the base of metaphors between the source language and the target language, and their profiled profile are completely divergent, translators are required to reconstruct the cognitive framework of metaphors. Such situations mostly stem from profound differences between Chinese and Western cultures, resulting in the absence of corresponding cognitive frameworks for source-language metaphors in the target-language context. If literal translation is adopted, it will easily trigger misunderstanding and fail to convey the core semantic meaning and emotional tendency of the original text. Accordingly, translators usually employ the strategy of free translation, abandoning the superficial form of original metaphors and focusing on their core cognitive connotations. This approach ensures that target language readers can achieve equivalent cognition and accurately comprehend the in-depth implications of the source text.

(4)...不能走少数国家独占霸权的老路。

We must reject the beaten path that a few countries have taken to pursue dominance and hegemony. (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the People's Republic of China, 2026)

In the source language, the base of the metaphor “老路” refers to “the past and irrational development trajectory in Chinese culture”, and its profiled profile highlights “the unreasonable development model and practice of hegemonism pursued by a small number of countries by virtue of their economic and political advantages”. By contrast, the base of the expression “old path” in the target language denotes “a physically worn and time-honored road”, with its profiled profile emphasizing merely the obsolescence of the road itself. Evident disparities exist in both the base and the profile between the

two. If “老路” was rendered literally as “old path”, readers might misinterpret it as merely an aging physical road, thereby losing the profound metaphorical implication and failing to convey China’s political stance of opposing hegemonism. For this reason, the translator abandons the superficial form of the original metaphor and reconstructs the cognitive framework of “an irrational and repeatedly followed wrong path”. The word “beaten” carries a derogatory connotation of “being frequently trodden, outdated and unreasonable”, implicitly alluding to the unjust hegemonic acts of certain countries. This rendering accurately conveys China’s position against hegemonism and power politics, embodies China’s advocacy of win-win cooperation and the building of a community with a shared future for mankind, and projects the peaceful image of a major country (Wang, 2018). It conforms to the translation framework for such metaphors and the requirements of the free translation strategy.

(5)...开创了中拉友好交往的先河。

...starting friendly interactions between China and the region. (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the People's Republic of China, 2026)

In this example, the base of the source-language expression “先河” resides in the cognitive domain of ancient Chinese ritual culture. Originally, it referred to the ancient emperors’ ritual practice of offering sacrifices first to the Yellow River and then to the sea, regarding the Yellow River as the source of the sea. It was later extended to mean pioneering and precedent-setting conduct, with its profile highlighting the pioneering significance of China–Latin America friendly exchanges. Nevertheless, there is no equivalent cognitive framework for the metaphor in the target language. Its base and profile differ markedly from those in the source language, leaving target readers devoid of relevant cultural background knowledge concerning this expression. A literal translation of “先河” as “preceding river” would confuse English readers and render them unable to grasp its implied meaning in the context of China–Latin America friendly exchanges. Such a rendering not only violates English idiomatic conventions but also fails to convey the core connotation of the original text. Accordingly, the translator reconstructs the cognitive framework of “the initiation of friendly exchanges” and adopts free translation to interpret the phrase as “starting friendly interactions”. The term “interaction” accurately captures the core implication of communication and exchange, conveying the essential message of the official establishment of China–Latin America friendly relations and emphasizing their two-way interaction. This rendering conforms to English linguistic norms and enables English readers to comprehend the sentence meaning clearly.

3.2.4 Same / Similar Profile + Different Base

When metaphors in the source language and target language share same or similar profile through profiling, while exhibiting significant differences in base, it constitutes a special phenomenon in cross-cultural metaphor translation. Due to their limited understanding of Chinese culture, target language audiences have low perceptual resonance with the metaphorical vehicle of the source language, making it difficult to achieve ideal imagery mapping (Yang, & Zhao, 2020). In such cases, translators need to adopt the translation strategy of metaphonymy. They should balance the

prominence of the metaphorical profile with cross-cultural cognitive adaptation. On the premise of retaining the core profile of the metaphor, translators conceal the culturally specific base of the source language and convert it into cognitive expressions accessible to target language readers, so as to realize functional equivalence.

(6)...是开历史倒车。

... is nothing but backpedaling. (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the People's Republic of China, 2026)

In this example, the source language takes vehicle travel as its cognitive base, mapping the embodied experience of “reversing” onto the historical and political cognitive domain. Through profiling, it highlights the core semantic profile of historical retrogression, going against the trend of the times and deviating from the general development tide. Although the English context can comprehend the abstract implication of “backward movement”, it is not accustomed to adopting the cognitive base of vehicle reversal as a metaphor for historical and political regression. A literal translation would sound stiff and obscure, giving rise to cognitive estrangement. Accordingly, the English version adopts the term backpedaling. It retains the core prominence profile of retrogression, regression and backtracking embedded in the original metaphor, while abandoning the vehicle-travel cognitive base peculiar to Chinese. Instead, it completes cross-domain mapping by switching to the action-retreat cognitive domain conventionally used in English, realizing the replacement of cognitive frameworks by means of metaphonymy. While preserving the core profiling meaning of the metaphor, the translator adapts to the target language cultural cognitive paradigm and the expressive conventions of political discourse. This avoids semantic misalignment and comprehension barriers caused by literal rendering, enables target readers to construct image schemas equivalent to those of the original text, and accurately conveys the original stance of opposing historical retrogression and upholding progressive development of the times.

4. Conclusion

This paper takes President’s speech in Lima as the research corpus. With reference to the Metaphor Identification Procedure (MIP), it identifies 30 metaphorical expressions, nearly half of which are journey-related and tool/machinery-related metaphors. Grounded in the base-profile theory of Cognitive Translatology, this study classifies four cognitive scenarios based on the similarities and differences between source language and target language metaphors in terms of base and profile. Translators accordingly adopt differentiated translation methods: literal translation is used when both base and profile are consistent; metonymy when bases are similar but profiles differ; free translation when both exhibit obvious discrepancies; and metaphonymy when profiles are consistent but bases differ. All strategies aim to achieve cognitive equivalence between the source language and the target language. Among them, metaphonymy effectively addresses the cognitive adaptation of cross-cultural metaphors, while the application of metonymy is relatively infrequent due to the limited corpus size.

Theoretically, this study verifies the applicability of the base-profile theory in cognitive translatology to

metaphor translation in political discourse, enriching the application of this theory in specific texts. Practically, it provides a cognitive pathway for metaphor translation in political discourse, facilitating the international communication of national discourse. Compared with existing studies, this paper also has limitations such as a limited corpus sample and the absence of a comparison of multiple translated versions. Future research can expand the corpus scope, deepen the cognitive analysis of metaphor translation by incorporating multiple translated versions, and further improve the cognitive research framework for metaphor translation in Chinese political discourse.

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