Stylistic Approaches to Metaphor Translation in Literary Text

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1 Introduction

This article explores the issue of poetic metaphor in translated literary texts - more specifically, what rhetorical clout the metaphor carries; how it entails perceptional effort; and what translation strategies it allows for and asks for. Built around stylistic observation that metaphor is creative risk-taking and in the same breath greatly rewarding; drawn largely from the concepts in Sperber and Wilson's Relevance Theory - which sees metaphor as an interpretative expression involving the process of sorting a set of assumptions of the tenor from those of the vehicle - and focusing on the metaphors in English translations of Lu Hsun's *The True Story of Ah Q*, this work suggests the privileged position for the creative translation, which, by replacing Source Language image with reproduced standard Target Language image, maintains the rhetorical value in literary texts, retraces the complicated uptake process of metaphor, and achieves the resembling contextual effect.

2 Theoretical considerations
2.1 Interactional risks and rewards

Metaphor, as one of the characteristics of literariness, frequently carries rhetorical clout. Its abnormal usage of language – in Toolan's words "perversity" and "outrageousness" (Toolan, 1996: 56-57) – takes the risks to (temporarily) "trick" and even "cheat" the readers. Yet it is in literary text that the readers accordantly comprehend the metaphor and at the same time enjoy the rewards: enhancing understanding or affinity.

   Metaphor can be seen as a kind of risk-taking with rewards - richer interpersonal communication. It is risk-taking because it is with the less conventional or "usage-enshrined associative possibilities" (Carter, Nair, and Toolan, 1988: 27) of its language, and the addressee may be not able to get the metaphor, in stead, merely think the addresser a liar or an idiot or needless obscure. However, metaphor has its own rewards: for instance, subtle indirect informativeness often "'gets people thinking', sorting things out for themselves without being insulted or talked down to" (ibid), being entertaining often helps the addresser to "gain friends and influence people" (ibid). Metaphor stimulates the addressee to think and sometimes increases the affinity or intimacy between the addresser and addressee. The metaphor-maker artfully designs his message, expecting the addressee to perceive the design or, at least, some aspects of it. Once the risky metaphor has been get through from the addresser to the addressee, it produces "a more-than everyday intersubjective accord and intimacy between the parties" (ibid).

   Literary texts offer for metaphorical risk-taking a safety-net, since the readers expect and appreciate *much* effort in comprehending the literary texts. Toolan explains this point as below:

> The literariness seems to carry with it a safety net for the protection of metaphoric risk taking... The safety net is the interpretative principle, of respect and deference, that people standardly bring to their reading of literature: that the unexpected and hard-to-interpret

expressions therein are not defects but fresh and difficult characterisations that it is incumbent on the reader to work at understanding. (Toolan, 1996: 67)

Toolan's illustration endorses the discussion about literariness by scholars from the Prague School, who state that *defamiliarisation* is the basic aim of art and "the set towards the message" leads to a new and fresh perception of reality:

> The purpose of art is to impart the sensation of things as they are perceived and not as they are known. The technique of art is to make objects 'unfamiliar', to make forms difficult, to increase the difficulty and length of perception because the process of perception is an aesthetic end in itself and must be prolonged… A work is created 'artistically' so that its perception is impeded and the greatest possible effect is produced through the slowness of the perception. (Shklovsky, 1917, in Pilkington, 2000: 18)

Shklovsky highlights the slowness of perception as a characteristic of literariness; in other words, works are created artistically by increasing the difficulty and length of perception. Metaphors frequently appear in literal texts, increase the difficulty and length of perception, and thus strengthen the literariness of the works.

2.2 Traditional deviation theory about metaphor

In Aristotle's *Poetics*, metaphorical use is viewed as involving a *deviation* from a literal norm. Many discussions of metaphor in semantics and in the major philosophical and literal traditions succeed Aristotle's approach.

In broad terms, *deviation* theory entails *anomaly* and *analogy*. Metaphor is a grammatical structure related to comparison, and "the comparison is always that of some likeness" (Larson, 1984: 264). Traugot and Pratt (1980: 207) claim that "anomaly provides the basis for one of the most versatile and widely used foregrounding devices, metaphor". Levinson sees metaphor as a relation of similarity, or substitution, or analogy:

> One important consideration with respect to metaphor is that it is, perhaps, too much to ask of a pragmatic theory that it should actually give us an account of what is clearly a perfectly general and crucial psychological capacity that operates in many domains of human life, namely the ability to think analogically.

(Levinson, 1983: 159)

For most theorists, metaphor is bound up with the perception of anomaly and analogy, as the above examples showed. Black (1962) adds "interaction theory" as the one of crucial importance; he regards three rival but sometimes overlapping theories of metaphor as dominating the discussion: substitution, comparison, and interaction theories. Indeed Black has provided some of the most inciting commentaries on metaphor, claiming that metaphor is a distinctive mode of achieving insight.

Pilkington states that "metaphorical utterances are not simply alternative ways of experiencing what could equally well be expressed literally. They are not merely 'decorative' in some superficial sense. They differ in terms of *what* they communicate, as well as *how* they communicate" (Pilkington, 2000: 89).

2.3 Metaphor as a process: "how" rather than "what"
2.3.1 Relevance Theory and metaphor

Sperber and Wilson (1986) apply Relevance Theory to explain the processes of metaphor.

They start their illustration of metaphors by comparing literalness and metaphors. The relationship between the propositional form of an utterance and the thought this utterance is used to represent is one of resemblance rather than identity. This *resemblance* is identified of a very restricted type: "logical resemblance among propositional forms (where two propositional forms resemble each other if and only if they share logical properties)" (Sperber and Wilson, 1986: 222). "An utterance, in its role as an interpretive expression of a speaker's thought, is strictly *literal* if it has the same propositional form as that thought"(ibid.). Literalness is not always the optimally relevant interpretive expression of a thought, by which the context enables "the best possible balance of effect against effort to be achieved"(ibid.) In these situations, the search for optimal relevance leads the speaker to adopt a less faithful interpretation of her thoughts, for instance, metaphors.

After outputting the concept of metaphor as a less literal utterance, they take a rather more abstract example to elaborate this interpretative procedure. Metaphor, as a subset of this interpretative expression, shares the same procedure:

> Suppose I have a complex thought *P*, which makes manifest to me a set of assumptions {*I*}, and I want to communicate {*I*} to you. Now suppose that the following conditions are met: *P* is too complex to be represented literally, but the assumptions in {*I*} are all straightforwardly derivable as logical or contextual implications of an easily expressed assumption *Q*. The problem is that *Q* is not a thought of mine; it has some logical and contextual implications which I do not accept as true and which I do not want to communicate. What should I do? Given the principle of relevance, as long as you have some way of sorting the implications of Q into those I do and I do not what to endorse, the best way of communicating {I} may well be to express the single expression Q and leave the sorting to you. (ibid.: 234)

This is the mechanism of an *interpretative expression*. Having considered the process stated above as part of "encoding" process from the addresser, Sperber and Wilson then go further to the addressee's "decoding" process with the support of the principle of relevance.

> We assuming that all the hearer can take for granted is that an utterance is intended as an interpretation of one of the speaker's thoughts…all the hearer has to do is start computing, in order of accessibility, those implications which might be relevant to him, and continue to add them to the overall interpretation of the utterance until it is relevant enough to be consistent with the principle of relevance. At this point, the sorting will have been accomplished as a by-product of the search for relevance, and will require no specific effort of its own. (ibid: 234)

The highly standardised metaphors "give access to an encyclopaedic schema with one or two dominant and highly accessible assumptions". Creative metaphors involve not only "bring together the encyclopaedic entries" but also "a wide array of contextual implications". The relevance is established by "finding a range of contextual effects which can be retained as weak or strong implicatures". They place great emphasis on the weak implicatures derived from "extension of context".

> In general, the wider the range of potential implicatures and the greater the hearer's responsibility for constructing them, the more poetic the effect, the more creative the metaphor. A good creative metaphor is precisely one in which a variety of contextual effects can be retained and understood as weakly implicated by the speaker… in the richest and most successful metaphors, they even involve accessing a wide area of knowledge, adding

metaphors of his own as interpretations of possible developments he is not ready to go into, and getting more and more implicatures, with suggestions for still further processing. The surprise or beauty of a successful creative metaphor lies in this condensation, in the fact that a single expression which has itself been loosely used will determine a very wide range of acceptable weak implicatures. (ibid: 236)

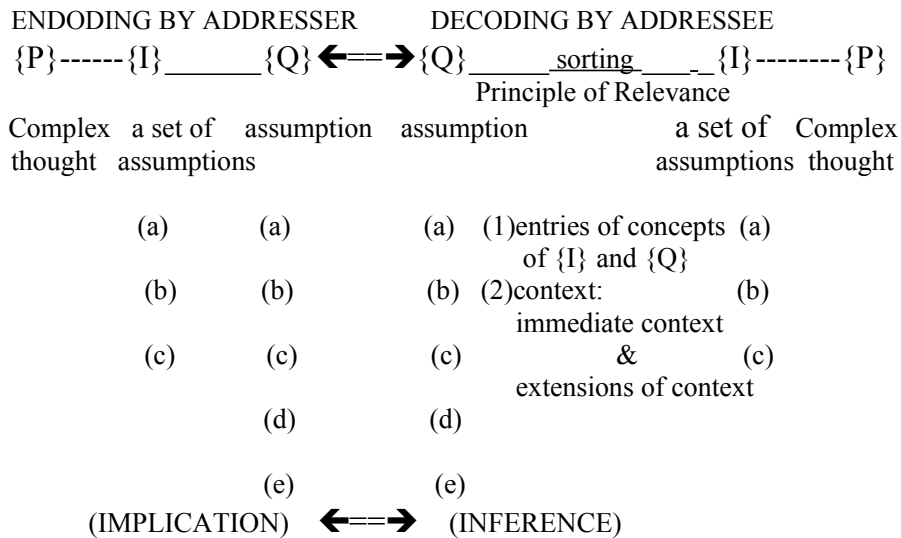The procedure of metaphor probably can be illustrated by the figure below:

ENDODING BY ADDRESSER   DECODING BY ADDRESSEE
{P}------{I}_____{Q} ⬅==➡ {Q}_____sorting____-_{I}--------{P}
                                                    Principle of Relevance
Complex a set of assumption   assumption   a set of   Complex
thought assumptions   assumptions thought

           (a)   (a)   (a)   (1)entries of concepts (a)
                                                 of {I} and {Q}
           (b)   (b)   (b)   (2)context: (b)
                                               immediate context
           (c)   (c)   (c)   &   (c)
                                              extensions of context
                        (d)   (d)

                        (e)   (e)
       (IMPLICATION)   ⬅==➡   (INFERENCE)

Figure 1 Mechanism of Interpreting Implicit Information

To recap, metaphor pithily encapsulates a set of assumptions ({I}) that might prove difficult to spell out in non-metaphorical language, "where the utterance is defective if taken literally, look for an utterance meaning that differs from sentence meaning" (Searle, 1979: 114). The addressee computes {Q}'s possible values, i.e. logical and contextual implications, and then sorts/restricts the range of {Q} by the principle of relevance. The sorting process is determined mainly by two factors: the encyclopaedic entries of {I} and {Q}, and the context.

2.3.2 The importance of context

Sperber and Wilson (1986) define context as:

> The set of promises used in interpreting an utterance (apart from the promise that the utterance in question has been produced) constitutes what is generally known as *context*. A context is psychological construct, a subset of hearer's assumptions about the world…A context in this sense is not limited to information about the immediate physical environment or the immediately preceding utterances: the expectation about the future, scientific hypotheses or religious beliefs, anecdotal memories, general cultural assumptions, beliefs about the mental state of the speaker, may all play a role in interpretation. (Sperber and Wilson, 1986: 16)

Context is a crucial determinant of the comprehension of metaphor. From Figure 1, it is obvious that the metaphor process is influenced by:

(1) the entries of concepts of {I} and {Q}.

(2) the context: immediate context, and sometimes in creative metaphors the extension of context.

Since the encyclopaedic entries of concepts {I} and {Q} is subject by context, and the contextual effect, or in other word contextual modification is highly related to context, it is valid to say that context plays an essential role in the process/practice of metaphor. Gutt notices the same issue:

> Context determines the disambiguation of linguistically ambiguous expressions: wrong contextual assumptions can lead to the choice of wrong semantic representation of such expressions. Context is usually needed to determine the propositional form of an utterance: again mismatches of context can lead to the derivation of a wrong propositional form… context is needed to derive the implicature of an utterance. (Gutt, 1991: 73)

Putting these two determinants into the process of translating, we could find that:

(1) the entries of concepts of {I} and {Q} in Source Language are probably different from those of Target Language. In details, it may happen that there is no literal translation for {I} or {Q}, or there exist literal translations {I}' and {P}', but they do not contain the same assumptions as those of {I} and {Q}.
(2) the immediate context of a metaphor is the same in both Source Text and Target Text, yet by the influence of broader contexts (socio-cultural ones), the contextual effects between {I} and {Q} in the metaphors of ST and TT are probably different. For instance, in the Target Language context, {I}' is not necessarily relevant to {Q}', or {a}' and {b}' are rejected, but {d}' is maintained.

In the situation that Relevance Principle fails to work, the implication is hard to achieve, and the communication weakens or even breaks down. Without adequate contextual effects the criterion of consistency with the principle of relevance would not be satisfied; when the addressee is unable to find an interpretation consistent with the principle of relevance, he will feel dubious about what the addresser is trying to interpret. Even more seriously, without adequate contextual effects the translation text gives him an impression that it is irrelevant to him, which directly leads to − a natural response of irrelevance − the termination of communication process. Gutt claims: "there is probably no greater threat to a translation approach committed to communication than such a complete breakdown" (Gutt, 1991: 92).

2.4 Translation strategies: with Target-oriented approach

How can the translator avoid the problem caused by irrelevance (or lesser relevance) in metaphor translating when the same image does not exist in the Target culture?

The contextual difference between TL and SL allows, and even calls for Target-oriented translation, by which functional equivalence can be achieved. House's "covert translation" is considered an adequate type of translation for implicit text, including metaphor.

House defines "covert translation" as "…a translation which enjoys or enjoyed the status of an original ST [source text] in target culture" (House, 1981: 194). She calls this type of translation "covert" because "…it is not marked pragmatically as a TT [translated text]of an ST but may, conceivably, have been created in its own right" (ibid: 194, emphasis as original). Moreover, covert translations "…have direct target language addressees, for whom this TT is as immediately and 'originally' relevant

as ST is for the source language addressees" (ibid: 195). She employs a functional equivalence approach to translation, i.e., the translation should match the original text in function, which is understood as "…the application (cf. Lyons, 1968: 434) or use which the text has in the particular context of a situation (House, 1981: 37). In other words, the translator leaves the reader in peace as much as possible and moves the writer toward him.

 Newmark's approach "Replacing the image in the SL with a standard TL image which does not clash with the TL culture" (Newmark, 1981: 94), can be categorised as one of the creative approaches, and probably the most efficient and effective one, in that this approach on the one hand maintains the rhetorical clouts of metaphor – carrying the interactional risks and rewards – and on the other hand retraces the complicated process of understanding metaphor.

 Besides substitution, some translators suggest transfer implicit information to explicit information. For instance, Larson (1984: 42) suggests the explication of implicit information in the translated text: "[implicit information] will sometimes need to be made explicit because the source language writer and his audience shared information which is not shared by the receptor language audience". Communication has been achieved, yet the rhetorical values and the defamiliarization process have been pruned. Therefore it is not a recommended strategy.

 I will give some examples from two English translations of a Chinese novel *The True Story of Ah Q,* by Lu Xun who is considered "the father of Chinese modern literature", to illustrate how the Relevance Theory is employed in analysing metaphors and how the Target-oriented strategy – especially Newmark's substitution strategy – is used in translating.

3 Case studies

Example 1:

这一场 "龙虎斗" 似乎并无胜败 (*Longhu-dou*)

Back-translation: This **dragon – tiger struggle** had apparently ended in neither victory nor defeat.

Yang's translation: This **epic struggle** had apparently ended in neither victory nor defeat. (Yang, 2000: 71)

Leung's translation: It seemed that this **furious fray between dragon and tiger** had ended in neither victory nor defeat. (Leung, 1946: 99)

 Relevance Theory can explain the comprehension of this creative/poetic metaphor thoroughly. On reading this sentence, the Chinese addressee activates assumptions stored at the encyclopaedic entry for the concept "龙虎斗" (dragon-tiger struggle). The reader computes values of "龙" (dragon) as it is powerful and capable; huge; holy in Chinese legends; living in the water. The encyclopaedic entry attached to concept "虎" (tiger) is fierce, kingly, living in the forest. Then the addressee will derive the implicatures such as "the struggle is violent and vehement", "the struggle is holy", and "the struggle is between absolutely different

types of people" (water animal and forest animal). The first implicature seems quite strong like "dead" or at least "conventional" metaphorical meaning, but the second and third one seem weak. The next step is sorting, or in other words, restricting the range of assumptions above, facilitated by input of contextual information. In *The True Story of Ah Q*, both fighters Ah Q and Young D are short and skinny as a result of impoverishment, but they are so self-conceited that they delude themselves with the idea of being powerful, brave and respectable heroes. Lu Xun reveals their inner world ironically – with a metaphor "dragon-tiger struggle". By searching out and constructing contextual assumptions in this manner, the reader strengthens the first implicature "the struggle is violent and vehement" and erases the third implicature "the struggle is between absolutely different types of people", and more importantly, he converts the weak implicature "the struggle is holy" into a strong one.

Yet the Target Language reader cannot infer the above implicatures as the Source Language readers do. The socio-cultural context of English determines the assumptions stored at the encyclopaedic entry of the concept "dragon" as not only violent but also extremely evil, which is impacted by Western legends and Bible; "tiger" as only fierce. Therefore, the English reader can only derive that the struggle is fierce rather than that it is a significant, holy, and proud event.

Leung translates this metaphor as "furious fray between dragon and tiger", he ignores the implication "the struggle is significant", which precisely "gives the metaphor its poetic force" (Pilkington, 2000: 102).

Yang gives a creative translation by substituting "dragon-tiger" with "epic". The word 'epic' would elevate the battle between the two characters to a status which is historically significant and therefore rooted in living memory, yet the two characters are not built up in Lu Xun's story as very positive and strongly recommendable. On reading "epic struggle", English reader is able to suddenly infer that the "heroic personage" is to satirize Ah Q and Young D. Moreover, the "epic struggle" *per se* implies the battle is violent. Having achieved functional equivalence, the creative translation "epic struggle" is highly recommended.

Example 2:

赵白眼(*Zhao-baiyan*), 赵司晨(*Zhao-sichen*)

Yang's translation: Zhao Baiyan, Zhao Sichen (Yang, 2000: 57)

Leung's translation: Chao paiyen, Chao szu-chen (Leung, 1946: 79)

The assumptions of the encyclopaedic entries of the concepts of "白眼" and "司晨" are generated from Chinese legends, in which "白眼" represents the "wolf" or "dog" (犬, *quan*), taken from its literal meaning "white-eye", and "司晨" (鸡, *ji*), with literal meaning "crowing in the morning", is the nick name of "rooster". In this immediate context, "赵白眼" and "赵司晨" appear together as the names of brothers. These paralleling names immediately trigger another assumption derived from the collocation of "鸡犬之辈" (the peers of roosters and dogs). Lu Xun satirizes Mr Zhao's relatives with these ridiculous names.

Both translators do not penetrate the implicatures of these names. By maintaining the similar pronunciations, "Baiyan"/ "Paiyan" and "sichen"/ "szu-chen" are

meaningless for Target readers, to say nothing of the weak implicatures and rich intertextual relevant effects. Yang's and Leung's translation terminates communication from Lu Xun and the reader about the luminosity of this masterful addressing.

Relevance Theory should underpin our translation of these names. I suggest creative translation: replacing *Baiyan* with Riff and *Sichen* with Raff. The English reader has the same assumptions of the encyclopaedic entry of "riff and raff" as that of the Chinese reader. Semantically, Riff-raff shares the similar meaning of "*Jiquan-zhibei*". Riff-ruff means persons of a disreputable character or belonging to the lowest class of a community, or a collection of worthless persons. Activating the same assumptions, the English reader connects Zhao Riff and Zhao Raff together, just as the same contextual procedure of the Chinese reader to the Chinese novel. The satire of Lu Xun therefore is maintained properly.

4 Conclusion

In Literary texts, metaphor carries rhetorical clout and entails *much* perceptional effort, which is pertinent to literariness. Metaphor is creative risk-taking with less conventional use of language; yet there are some rewards that make the risks worth taking: enhancing understanding or affinity. It is because metaphor is abundantly used in *literary* texts that the readers are incumbent and inclined to work at understanding. What understanding process is, or in other words, *how* the addresser and the addressee (writer and reader) communicate, arises as a considerably crucial question. Sperber and Wilson's Relevance Theory adequately illustrates and counters the comprehension process of metaphor. The context determines this process: mismatches of context can lead to the derivation of a wrong propositional form.

In translation, the contexts of the source text and the target texts are different. With different context, the Relevance Principle becomes weaker, the implication is hard to achieve, and the communication weakens or even breaks down. The type of covert translation is suitable for translating metaphor. Substitution - replacing the image in the SL with a standard TL image which does not clash with the TL culture - is recommended. Case studies from *The True Story of Ah Q* test this approach in practice. From stylistics and pragmatics aspects, the research offers some validity of the creative translation for metaphors.

To sum up, in this article, I have outlined some of the characteristics and values of metaphor. My focus has been on the mechanism by which we perceive metaphor and I have stressed the importance of being aware of this mechanism when translating literary works. I have identified some examples of unsatisfactory translation and have argued that the problems inherent in these arise from a failure to ensure that an understanding of metaphor underpins the translator's art. What I propose is that a more creative process is required when translating literary texts, and I have suggested that relevance theory can provide the theoretical perspective that will underpin such a process and help the translator to come out more creative translations.

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