



INTERNATIONAL  
STANDARD  
SERIAL  
NUMBER  
INDIA

2395-2636 (Print);2321-3108 (online)

## THE METAPHOR TRANSLATION IN *FOLDING BEIJING* FROM THE PERSPECTIVE OF CONCEPTUAL METAPHOR

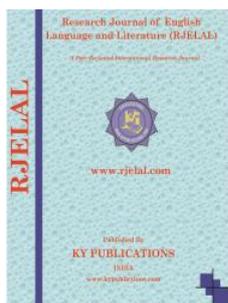
LI Li Jun<sup>1</sup>, ZHAO Qiao<sup>2\*</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Associate Professor of English, School of Foreign Languages, North China Electric Power University, Beijing, China

<sup>2</sup>Postgraduate of English, School of Foreign Languages, North China Electric Power University, Beijing, China

\*E-mail: [hdzhaoqiao@163.com](mailto:hdzhaoqiao@163.com)

<https://doi.org/10.33329/rjelal.7219.82>



### ABSTRACT

Guided by the conceptual metaphor theory, this paper takes the metaphor translation in *Folding Beijing* as an example to briefly expound the application of this theory in metaphor translation from the cognitive perspective. Metaphor not only embodies a rhetorical device, but also a cognitive style. Due to the cognition differences between China and the west, there exist the same or different metaphorical expressions. This paper analyzes and summarizes the metaphor translation methods in *Folding Beijing* from the following three aspects: structural metaphor, orientational metaphor and ontological metaphor, which is hoped to provide reference for future metaphor translation.

**Key words:** conceptual metaphor; metaphor translation; cognition

### I. Introduction

The science fiction *Folding Beijing* written by Hao Jingfang won the 74th Hugo Award for the Best Novelette in 2016, which is the second time for Chinese writers to win this award after *The Three-Body Problem* by Liu Cixin. This manifests that China's science fiction begins to go abroad and enjoys a high reputation in this field. However, the success of this novel also depends on its translator Ken Liu's smooth translation. As a Chinese American, Ken Liu successfully introduced this novel into the west with his excellent bilingual competence and writing experience of science fiction. In the last three years, Chinese scholars have studied the English version by Ken Liu from many aspects, such as functional equivalence, eco-translatology, semantic translation and communicative translation,

translators' subjectivity and so on. However, few scholars have studied it from conceptual metaphor, so this study has certain value for metaphor translation.

### II. Theoretical Basis

Aristotle regarded metaphors as "a kind of decorative linguistic form" (Zheng 52). Traditionally, metaphors have been studied as rhetoric at the word level for a long time. With the development of cognitive linguistics, more and more scholars hold that metaphors "not only belong to the category of language, but also to the category of thinking" (Ye 6).

"In the 1980s, Lakoff and Johnson proposed the Conceptual Metaphor Theory, which has brought a revolution for the cognitive science" (Huo

67). One of famous representative works in this period is *Metaphors We Live By*, written by Lakoff and Johnson. "With the publication of this book in 1980, it symbolized the beginning of the metaphor study from cognitive perspective comprehensively" (Lin 38).

In this book, Lakoff and Johnson used the "source domain" and "target domain" to represent two different categories respectively, so "the cognitive mechanism of metaphor is to reflect one category concept (target domain) by the linguistic form of another category concept (source domain)" (Xue 26). Furthermore, metaphors are divided into structural metaphors, orientational metaphors and ontological metaphors by Lakoff and Johnson. The similarity between the two things, the context of metaphors and the culture background can influence the understanding of metaphors.

As for metaphor translation, foreign scholars have explored its translation strategies from different perspectives. For example, Newmark and Toury put forward different translation strategies based on the source language and target language respectively; while Kövecses proposed a more comprehensive translation strategy and held that it should be translated according to the mapping condition (Tian 17-18).

For a long time, the study of metaphors by Chinese scholars remained at the rhetorical level. However, "Chinese mainland started a cognitive turn to metaphor study in 1995" (Li and Qin 22). Generally speaking, the study of metaphor from cognitive perspective in China is later than that in the west. However, with the rise and prosperity of the cognitive linguistics, Chinese scholars have paid more attention to metaphor study and tried to combine it with translation study. For example, professor Liu Zhongde summarized the metaphor translation into the following four methods: literal translation, flexible translation, free translation and transliteration (Tian 17-18).

"Recent years, the study of conceptual metaphor tends to be mature in China, but it is now in a critical transition period from theory to practice" (Cheng, Xiao and Deng 69), so this paper

hopes to apply the conceptual metaphor theory into the translation practice.

### III. Case Analysis

During the translation process, metaphors in the source text may potentially cause difficulties for the translator. Focusing on this situation, this part aims to explore Ken Liu's translation methods of metaphorical expressions in *Folding Beijing* from the cognitive aspect, hoping to provide reference for the metaphor translation in science fiction in the future. It selects 12 examples of metaphorical expressions from *Folding Beijing* and divides them into three major types according to conceptual metaphor theory.

#### 3.1 Structural metaphor

This kind of metaphor means that "one concept is metaphorically structured in terms of another" (Lakoff and Johnson 16). In *Folding Beijing*, the author used a variety of structural metaphors, which can be divided into plant metaphor, animal metaphor, metal metaphor and water metaphor.

##### 3.1.1 Plant Metaphor

Example 1:

Source text: 机会的细草

Translation: The thin reed of opportunity

In this metaphor, the author compared the opportunity into the thin reed, i.e. "opportunity is the reed". On one hand, the reed is slim, which can not fight against strong power. On the other hand, the reed symbolizes hope. Therefore, the author uses the concept of "reed" to help readers construct the concept of "opportunity". For Lao Dao's father, who is a construction worker in Beijing, it is hard for him to survive in this city but he did it. Both in China and in the west, using the image of "reed" to construct "opportunity" is common, so Ken Liu chose the literal translation method. It not only retains the linguistic features of the source text, but also makes the translation more vivid, which will arouse readers' resonance.

##### 3.1.2 Animal Metaphor

While in many occasions, the animal metaphors can not be translated literally, because it

may arouse bad associative meaning (example 2) or hinder target language readers' understanding (example 3).

Example 2:

Source text	Translation
a. 饿虎扑食	Ate heartily
b. 狼吞虎咽	Devouring their food

The above two examples are the manner descriptions of customers at table. In example 2a, the source domain is "the hungry tiger" and the target domain is "the customer", i.e. "the customer is the tiger". "饿虎扑食" is a Chinese four-character word, which means that the action is very fast just like a hungry tiger pouncing on its prey. It is not difficult for Chinese readers to understand its connotative meaning. In example 2b, "狼吞虎咽" is a common metaphor in Chinese, which describes that someone eats food hungrily or quickly just like the wolf or tiger. It means that "customers are wolves and tigers".

However, when translating them to the west, the translator should consider the culture difference. If Ken Liu translated it according to its literal meaning, it may cause bad associations. The target language readers may feel confused why the Chinese people eat something like the hungry tiger or wolf. To make the meaning more clear, Ken Liu translated "饿虎扑食" into "ate heartily" and "狼吞虎咽" into "devouring their food" using the free translation method, which makes the translation more receptive.

Example 3:

Source text: 小猫腻儿

Translation: Such a basic trick

"小猫腻儿" is a colloquial expression in Beijing. It is said that cats will cover up their excrement with sand and other things, so this word refers to the secrets that do not want to be known. To put it simply, it means that "the secret is the excrement of cats". This metaphor only exists in China, so the western people can not understand it. When translating, Ken Liu omitted this metaphor

and gave its connotative meaning to the readers directly.

Example 4:

Source text: 以数量换取薄如蝉翼的奖金

Translation: To toil hour after hour for rewards as thin as the wings of cicadas.

In this metaphor, the source domain is "the wings of cicadas" and the target domain is "the thin rewards". "薄如蝉翼" is a Chinese four-character word to describe something thin. Here, the translator translated it literally. Although this kind of metaphorical expression does not exist in western culture, the target language reader can get its meaning based on their existed knowledge about cicadas. Ken Liu's translation retains the original meaning, which is conducive to spread Chinese culture.

### 3.1.3 Metal Metaphor

Example 5:

Source text	Translation
斩钉截铁	Made the decision right away
秘书的脸铁青着。	The secretary's face was now severe and dark.

In example 5a, "斩钉截铁" is a Chinese four-character word. Its literal meaning is to cut off the nail and iron. Its connotative meaning is that someone speaks or acts decisively without hesitation, so "making decision is to cut off the nail and iron". When translating, the translator omitted this metal metaphor and translated it by free translation method. For Chinese, this metaphor is easily mapped from the source domain to the target domain. However, this metaphor does not exist in the west, so it can not be mapped to the target domain of the western people successfully if translated literally. Considering that, Ken Liu translated it into "made the decision right away", which is more conducive to target language readers' understanding.

In example 5b, "脸铁青" means that the face of people is as dark as the iron, i.e. "face is the iron". On one hand, the color of iron powder is dark.

On the other hand, iron makes people associate with something cold. Based on these features, its connotative meaning is that someone's face becomes dark because of anger or nervousness. The source domain is easily mapped into the target domain in Chinese. However, this metaphor does not exist in the western culture. When translating, Ken Liu omitted this metal metaphor and presented its connotative meaning to the target language readers directly.

### 3.1.4 Water Metaphor

Example 6:

Source text: 人声鼎沸

Translation: Everyone was hungry and loud.

In Chinese, this four-character word means that the noise of the crowd is just like boiling water in the pot, i.e. "noise is boiling water". For Chinese, it is easy to understand that it means the crowd is noisy. While considering this metaphor is not familiar to western people, Ken Liu did not translate it into "the voice is just like the boiling water in the pot" according to its literal meaning. If he translated it by this way, the source domain can not be mapped to the target domain in English. He omitted this metaphor and translated it into "loud" according to its connotative meaning. Besides, the translator added the word "hungry" into his translation, which gives a supplementary explanation of the state of people just after work. His translation is more concise and creative, which vividly conveys the meaning of the source text.

### 3.1.1 Orientational metaphor

"Orientational metaphor, i.e. spatial metaphor, refers to a series of complete

metaphorical concepts formed by referring to spatial orientation. It applies specific concepts such as up-down, high-low and in-out that people experience to abstract concepts, such as emotion, time, state, quantity and social status" (Wen and Zhang 77). In *Folding Beijing*, the author endows some concepts with orientation and direction, which makes the expression more vivid. The following are some examples extracted from the novel.

Example 7:

Source text: 往上爬

Translation: Climb up the ladder of government administration

Whether in the cognition of Chinese or the western people, it is recognized that the high status means up and the low status means down. In Chinese, "往上爬" here means that the person in Second Space wants to pursue a higher status. This metaphor means that "the higher status is up", so in Ken Liu's translation, he remained the "up" concept, because it does not affect readers' understanding. What makes his translation wonderful is that he compared the social classes into a ladder. Ken Liu chose the additional translation method and compensated the meaning of the source text. In Ken Liu's translation, there exists a structural metaphor. The source domain is "ladder" and the target domain is "social classes". The "ladder" is mapped to "social classes". Then it can be constructed in people's mind that people chase the higher status just like climbing up the ladder. Ken Liu's translation gives a detailed description about the "up" concept and vividly conveys the meaning of the source text.

Example 8:

Source text	Translation
a. 奔逃之后，镇静下来，又意识到未来生存在这样的城市会是怎样的一种殊荣，便继续辛苦摩擦手脚， <u>低眉顺眼</u> 勤恳辛劳，寻找各种存留下来的机会。	But after they calmed down, they realized what an honor it would be to live in such a city in the future, and so they had continued to toil diligently and <u>docilely</u> , to <u>meekly</u> seek out any opportunity to remain in the city.
b. 低声下气	Submissively

In example 8a, “低眉顺眼” is a Chinese four-character word, which means that someone’s brows are dropping and the eyes show the obedience. It describes the facial expression of someone, while its profound meaning is the obedient attitude shown in someone. In example 8b, “低声下气” means that someone speaks in a humble and submissive attitude. It shows that someone is in a low status in society. To sum up, these two metaphors means that “the lower status is down”.

In the western culture, these two metaphorical expressions do not exist. If they are translated by their literal meaning, it will confuse the target language readers. When translating “低眉顺眼”, Ken Liu omitted the images of “brow” and “eye”, and chose the free translation method. He translated it into “docilely” and “meekly” according to its connotation. When translating “低声下气”, the translator took the same translation method and translated it into “submissively”. The free translation method taken by Ken Liu will make the target language readers have a fluent reading experience and understand the source text easily.

### 3.2 Ontological Metaphor

“Human’s experience of objects provides a material basis for us to interpret abstract conceptual expressions as entities” (Zhao 68). Lakoff and Johnson pointed out that entity and substance metaphor, container metaphor and personification all belong to ontological metaphor (23-29). The following are some examples of ontological metaphors in *Folding Beijing*.

#### 3.2.1 Entity and substance metaphor

Entity and substance metaphor means that people can regard something abstract as entity and substance, such as events, activities, emotions, ideas and so on based on their experience (Lakoff and Johnson 23). Therefore, these metaphorical expressions can be referred, quantified and identified.

Example 9:

Source text: 它们认死理儿。

Translation: Sometimes they don’t know how to be flexible.

In this sentence, “认死理儿” is a Chinese colloquial expression, which means that someone insists on some reasons. Its connotative meaning is that someone is stubborn and does not know how to be flexible. In fact, the reason is abstract, but it is regarded as an entity and can be identified. Therefore, it is an entity and substance metaphor. When translated, this metaphor is omitted. The translator just translated its connotative meaning, which will make the target language readers have a better understanding.

Example 10:

Source text: 一点心意，你收下。

Translation: Please accept this token of my appreciation.

“一点心意” is a kind of abstract emotion in Chinese and its connotative meaning is to send something to somebody, so it is considered as an entity in this context, which can be referred and quantified. When translating, Ken Liu chose the free translation method. Although this ontological metaphor is familiar to Chinese people, it does not exist in the western culture. If the translator translated it into “mind” or “intention” according to its literal meaning, it is difficult for the target language readers to map the source domain to the target domain. Here, the translator translated it into “this token of my appreciation”, then the target language readers can easily understand its original meaning.

#### 3.2.2 Container metaphor

Container metaphor is another kind of ontological metaphor. “The target domain of metaphor is regarded as a container with the boundaries and it can be accessed in and out” (Qin 196).

Example 11:

Source text: 他的日子总是从胶囊起，至胶囊终。

Translation: His days had always started with the cocoon and ended with the cocoon.

“胶囊” means capsule, which is a kind of medicine. Here, it refers to the small public housing unit that Lao Dao lived. The writer regarded this capsule as a container that can store the time, so it is a container metaphor in Chinese. Therefore, the “days” are the substance in the “capsule”. When translating, the translator eliminated the image of “capsule” and translated it into “cocoon” creatively. In *folding Beijing*, “胶囊” has appeared as much as six times, while the translator treated them as “cocoon” every time. If it is translated as “capsule”, the readers can not associate it with the living place for people. While “cocoon” refers to safe and isolated living environment for someone in the west, so it is easy for target language readers to understand. By comparing the capsule to the cocoon, the target language readers can clearly understand the humble abode that Lao Dao lived.

### 3.2.3 Personification

The personification is also a typical ontological metaphor, which “uses some characteristics of human beings to map some characteristics of abstract things” (Sun 87). In *Folding Beijing*, it is not difficult to find that the author has used a lot of personifications.

Example 12:

Source text: 时间不等人。

Translation: Time was of the essence.

“时间不等人” means that time waits for no one and its connotative meaning is that time is very urgent. In this short sentence, time is regarded as a person, i.e. “time is a person”. When translating, Ken Liu did not translate the personification directly. He translated it into “time was of the essence” according to its deep meaning to emphasize that time is so urgent. Through this translation method, the target language readers can understand the context of the source text clearly.

This part classifies metaphors in *Folding Beijing* into three categories and discusses their translation methods from cognitive perspective based on conceptual metaphor theory. Through the above case analysis, it can be found that when translating metaphors, whether the metaphor

existing in Chinese and western cognition should be considered, so as to select appropriate and effective translation methods.

### IV. Conclusion

After probing into the specific translation methods of metaphorical expressions adopted by Ken Liu in *Folding Beijing*, it can be concluded that how to translate metaphors is based on the cognition of the target language readers. If the metaphor also exists in the west, it is mainly translated literally by keeping the images. If not, the translator may choose the free translation method to convey its deep meaning by omitting the images. However, sometimes, to spread culture, the translator also chooses the literal translation method by keeping the images even though the metaphor does not exist in the west. To sum up, when exploring metaphor translation methods from the perspective of conceptual metaphor theory, translators should consider the cognitive differences between China and the west and the concrete context, so as to achieve effective communication.

**The funding project:** 2017.9-2019.9 研究生优质课建设 “应用翻译” Construction of High-quality Lesson “Pragmatic Translation”. Project No. XM1703201

### Reference

- [1] Cheng, Kaiwen, Yadan Xiao and Yanhui Deng. “Bibliometrical Analysis of Conceptual Metaphor Research in China.” *Journal of Southwest Jiaotong University (Social Sciences)* 20(01) (2019):62-70.
- [2] Huo, Mingjie. “Conceptual Metaphor in Translation.” *Journal of Huanghe University of Science and Technology* v.20; No.104.04 (2018):66-72.
- [3] Lakoff, George and Mark Johnson. *Metaphors We live By*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1980.
- [4] Li, Fuyin and Jinping Qin. “25 Years of Metaphor and Cognition Studies (1980 - 2004): Achievements, Problems and Current Trends.” *Foreign Languages of China* 4.4(2007):17-22.

- [5] Lin, Shuwu. "Studies on Metaphor: State of Arts, Focuses, and Trend." *Journal of Foreign Languages* 1(2002):38-45.
- [6] Qin, Naichuan. "Metaphor Translation in Chinese-English Version of Stray Birds from the Perspective of Conceptual Metaphor Theory." *Overseas English* 8(2016):195-196.
- [7] Sun, Fenglan. "English Translation of Yellow Emperor's Canon of Medicine from the Perspective of Conceptual Metaphor." *Shanghai Journal of Translators* 2(2016):84-88.
- [8] Tian, Dan. "A Review of Metaphor and Metaphor Translation Strategies." *Journal of Yanbian Institute of Education* 32(06) (2018):16-18.
- [9] Wen, Xiuying and Yan Zhang. "A Comparative Study of Two English Versions of The Plum in the Golden Vase under the Framework of Conceptual Metaphor." *Journal of Hebei tourism vocational college* 17.1(2012):76-79.
- [10] Xue, Mei. "A Study of Chinese-English Translation of Novelty Metaphors." *Shanghai Journal of Translators* (01)(2019):25-30.
- [11] Ye, Zinan. *A Course in Cognitive Metaphor and Translation*. Beijing: Beijing University Press, 2013.
- [12] Zhao, Yanfang. "Metaphorical Cognitive Structure of Language: A Review of Metaphors We Live By." *Foreign Language Teaching and Research* 3(1995):67-72.
- [13] Zheng, Yafeng. "A Review of Metaphor Theory." *Masterpiece Review* 3(2017):52-54.