

# Translation Strategies of Metaphors in French Translation from the Perspective of Cultural Differences

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**Abstract:** Proverbs in French are very rich, which are not only a linguistic phenomenon, but also a part of the cultural wealth of the French nation, because the rich French proverbs reflect the philosophy of life, moral concepts, code of conduct and local customs of the French nation from various aspects. In view of the strong national cultural connotation of metaphor, translation activities have encountered many obstacles. In order to break through language barriers, re-integration is often used in Chinese translation to realize the interlingual transformation of the meaning of language units. Based on some typical examples from the perspective of cultural differences, this paper discusses the differences between French proverbs and Chinese proverbs from the perspectives of living habits, ways of thinking, history and culture, so as to provide some reference and help for the correct understanding and translation of French proverbs.

## 1. Introduction

There are a large number of metaphorical sentences and phrases in French and Chinese, which are usually difficult in translation, and some metaphors with distinctive cultural characteristics may even lead to mistranslation by translators [1]. Metaphor is divided into simile and metaphor, both of which involve ontology and metaphor. When French and Chinese use metaphors for the same noun, they use the same vehicles, but the corresponding relationship between vehicles and metaphorical meanings is also different [7]. The reason is that different languages carry different cultures. Therefore, when translating, we should adopt different translation strategies according to their cultural connotations. This paper attempts to analyze the national culture of French and Chinese metaphors from the perspective of cultural differences, and to study the choice of translation strategies.

## 2. Cultural differences between French and Chinese

Culture can be divided into broad sense and narrow sense. Broadly speaking, it refers to the sum of the material wealth created in the historical practice of human society. In a narrow sense, it refers to the social ideology, and the corresponding system and organization. Culture is a historical phenomenon, and every society has its own culture. From the scope of culture, culture can be divided into [3]: Material culture, including buildings, clothing, food, tools, etc., is a variety of material products. Institutional culture, including politics, institutions, laws and regulations, and corresponding customs and habits, is embodied by social norms and codes of conduct that people abide by together. Spiritual culture is the product of people's thinking activities, including values, ways of thinking, religious beliefs and so on[5].

### 2.1. Different living habits

The food culture of France and China is famous all over the world, but each has its own characteristics. French proverb:

“Un repas sans fromage est une journée sans soleil.”

It says, “Eating without cheese is like having no sun in a day.”

Another example is:

“Pain tant qu’il dure, mais vin à mesure.”

It means “The right amount of wine, but the more bread, the better.”

In French life, cheese, bread and wine are all essential to the diet. In China, people mainly use rice, steamed bread and white wine, so there are proverbs with Chinese characteristics, such as "A clever woman can't cook without rice" and "good wine needs no bush". Therefore, different food cultures have bred proverbs with their own characteristics of food culture.

## **2.2. Different ways of thinking**

Human life can't live without animals, and the relationship between man and animals goes back to ancient times. Both Chinese and French nationalities have been inspired by animals and summed up many proverbs about animals to explain some phenomena in life. However, sometimes different animals are used in French and Chinese proverbs when describing the same phenomenon.

French proverb: “Le chat parti, les souris dansent.” (When the cat is away, the mouse is rampant.) If we express the same meaning, Chinese people often say: "There is no tiger in the mountains, and monkeys are called kings." The two languages respectively use cats and tigers, mice and monkeys to represent strong and weak forces.

Sentences with similar structures include: “Un bon renard ne mange pas les poules de son voisin.” (A fox doesn't eat the hens around him.) In Chinese, "rabbits don't eat grass beside their nests" is commonly used.

## **2.3. Different history and culture**

Both China and France have a long history, and many proverbs and idioms come from historical allusions.

“Il faut rendre à César ce qui appartient à César, et à Dieu ce qui appartient à Dieu.” (Give back to Caesar what is Caesar's and to God what is God's. )

From the New Testament of the Bible, it means to return the goods to their original owners. In Chinese, “return things to their original owners” expresses the same meaning.

But in another example, “Il vaut mieux s'adresser à Dieu qu'à ses saints.” this French proverb is tightly related to French religion and French culture. When we translate this into Chinese, we should probably say the King of Hell instead of Dieu.

## **3. Metaphor and its function**

When describing things or explaining reasons, it is called metaphor to borrow things or reasons that are similar to them [4]. Through long-term social practice and understanding of things, people use the concrete, vivid or simple prominent features of something to make analogy, arouse readers' association, and help people understand abstract, profound or unfamiliar things. Metaphor can not only make the language more lively, expressive and appealing, but also make the described image more vivid and make the article more vivid.

## **4. Translation strategies of French-Chinese metaphor**

### **4.1. Replication method**

It refers to the expression form that retains French from appearance to content. The advantage of this approach lies in retaining the image in the source language and promoting the target language to absorb new expressions [2]. The deficiency lies in its slightly stiff expression. Due to the limitation of cultural background and understanding, Chinese readers may not feel the same aesthetic effect as the original readers in the first time. Therefore, it is necessary to grasp a certain degree when using this expression, which cannot exceed the acceptance of the target readers.

### **4.2. Parallel translation**

Because the cultural traditions and environmental customs of the two nations are different, the figurative images or figurative techniques used in expressing the same figurative object are often different, and blunt word-for-word translation often fails to accurately convey the original intention,

and even causes ambiguity. Therefore, when figurative images or figurative techniques are slightly different, we should try our best to apply the description method which has the same structure and the same meaning as the source language, that is, the so-called approximate language.

For example:

“peureux comme un lièvre”

Literally translated into Chinese is “timid as a rabbit”, which has the same metaphorical meaning as the common Chinese idiom “timid as a mouse”, but the figurative image is quite different. Therefore, parallel translation as “timid as a mouse” is more easily accepted by the target readers.

Another example is:

“poser un lapin” literally translated as “putting a rabbit”, it means breaking an appointment with others, which has the same metaphorical meaning as the idiom “putting pigeons” in Chinese; “C'est battre le chien devant le lion” is translated as “kill a chicken before a monkey” and so on.

### 4.3. Foreignizing translation and domesticating translation

Metaphor is a rhetorical device commonly used in proverbs. Through metaphor, abstract things can be expressed concretely and vividly, and profound truths can be expounded in a popular and simple way. Chinese proverbs are so, so are French proverbs. However, France and China have different cultural traditions and environmental customs, so they often have to express the same meaning by choosing different figurative images or techniques. For example:

“Mieux vaut être tête de chat que queue de lion”(Better be a cat's head than a lion's tail)

And the Chinese proverb “better be a chicken's mouth than a cow's back” both mean “better be small and independent than big and be dominated by others”. However, the metaphors used in the two countries are quite different. There are many such cases. How can we deal with the relationship between subject and object in translation? It's hard to generalize about this.

Taking “Qui trop embrasse mal étreint” as an example, if we adopt foreignizing translation method, it should be literally translated as “holding many bundles is not tight”, which keeps the metaphorical image of the original language, but it is difficult for Chinese readers to understand the meaning of this sentence without annotation; On the contrary, if we use domesticating translation method, we can choose the synonymous Chinese proverb “You can chew more than you can chew” as the translation. The meaning is self-evident, and the sentences are simple and fluent, which only changes the metaphorical image of the source language and loses the “French flavor”. It can be seen that whether it is foreignizing translation or domesticating translation, it contains both advantages and disadvantages. To study which one has advantages and disadvantages, we should choose it according to the specific conditions and requirements of translation, and we should not be biased.

The examples listed above are all metaphorical French proverbs, that is, these proverbs often use their metaphorical meanings instead of their original meanings. They are only used as metaphors, and their metaphorical objects (i.e., the metaphorical subjects) do not appear in proverbs themselves, which can only be made clear in specific application occasions.

This kind of proverbs is a kind of vivid language material, which can be used to form a multilateral metaphor, saying many things and objects in the meantime, and it is often intended to be beyond words. Therefore, it is sometimes impossible to point out the meaning according to the literal translation of the original language, so it is better to borrow synonymous Chinese proverbs for translation, which leads to the special method of domesticating translation.

As for another kind of French proverb which uses metaphor, its metaphorical subject and object have been determined in the proverb itself, and the metaphorical meaning has been clarified, such as: “La parole est d'argent, mais le silence est d'or.” (The word is silver, silence is gold.)

Therefore, even if there are synonymous Chinese proverbs or idioms to borrow, it is not necessary to be “guest-oriented”, but to translate literally according to the source language in order to maintain the metaphorical image and charm of the source language.

### 4.4. Literal translation

The language content and cultural connotation of some French proverbs can't be properly expressed in Chinese from content to image. At this time, we can use literal translation method to

translate French proverbs in Chinese which conforms to the form of proverbs as much as possible, and try to correctly express the basic meaning and cultural connotation of the original text.

“Paris ne s’est pas fait en un jour.”(Paris was not built in a day.)

“Tous les chemins mènent à Rome.” (All roads lead to Rome.)

When the cultural connotation of French proverbs is not well known to Chinese people, it is sometimes necessary to annotate the moral of the whole sentence, and sometimes it is necessary to indicate the source of proverbs.

“Le vin est tiré, il faut le boire” (You should drink the wine when it has been poured out. )

Metaphor now that things have started, you have to do it.

#### 4.5. Reshaping method

There is no metaphor in the source language, but in order to enhance the expressive power of the target language, similes can be reconstructed. Such as:

“Lui même ne regardait personne. Et l’image était si «posée», le vide autour de lui si étrangement théâtral que je me souviens avoir pensé:c’est comme une mise en scène,le meilleur photographe du monde ne l’aurait pas imaginée plus réussie.” (*Les Derniers Jours de Charles Baudelaire*) (His eyes were blank, his appearance was “solemn”, and his empty surroundings were as strange as acting. I couldn't help thinking that it was like a scene directed by a director, and even the best photographers in the world wouldn't design such a successful scene.)

The reason why this translated sentence doesn't translate “he is looking at nobody” or “supercilious” is that there is no one around the hero, but he sits there blankly, as if he has lost himself. The original language “théâtral” doesn't use metaphor, but it translates simile: “It's like acting”. The function of metaphor here is to emphasize this vivid scene, a wonderful and solemn scene.

The above examples show that if used properly, the creative use of similes in translation can produce the vividness and appeal of the original text. Of course, similar techniques are not only applicable to similes.

### 5. Conclusions

Translation is cross-cultural communication through language conversion. Metaphor, as a visual expression of language, is not only a linguistic phenomenon, but also a concentrated reflection of a national culture. Proverbs have a strong national color, so the process of translating French proverbs into Chinese cannot be simply transplanted. Since the social and cultural backgrounds are different and the expression methods are different, we should fully understand the cultural differences reflected by proverbs in the cultural communication between China and France and deepen our understanding of cultural background knowledge. Only by combining the characteristics of culture, sentence meaning and word meaning in the translation process, can the source language and the target language have the same meanings in their respective cultures and shorten the distance between the two languages and cultures, can we overcome the barriers between the two cultures.

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