

A Comparative Study on English Translation Versions of *Zui Weng Ting Ji* Based on Construal Theory: Illustrated by Translations of Luo Jingguo and Herbert A. Giles

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Abstract

Construal Theory, proposed by Langacker, is an essential part in Cognitive Linguistics, which can be applied widely in analyzing linguistic phenomena and data. According to construal theory, different language expressions are based on different construals toward the images. Taking two versions of translation of one of the most famous Chinese ancient prose *Zui Weng Ting Ji*, comparative studies of two versions are made from four dimension of Construal Theory, they are: Specificity, Focusing, Prominence and Perspective, to find out differences construed by two translators in their translation and explore a cognitive linguistic approach in assisting English Translation of Chinese Classics (ETCC) further.

Keywords: Construal Theory, Cognitive Approach of Translation, ETCC, *Zui Weng Ting Ji*

1. Introduction

1.1 Zui Weng Ting Ji and Its Translation

Zui Weng Ting Ji, a famous prose written by Ouyang Xiu in the Earlier Song Dynasty of China, can be regarded as a representative prose of landscape description and emotional expression among Chinese ancient classics. By describing the leisurely life of civilians and beautiful sceneries in Chuzhou, on one hand, Ouyang Xiu expresses his feelings of sharing happiness with people there, on the other hand, he expresses his mental sufferings, with the assistance of the exquisite descriptions of scenery in *Zui Weng Ting Ji*, which makes *Zui Weng Ting Ji* not only becomes magnum opus of Ouyang Xiu, but also becomes the representative prose of describing landscape and idyll in ancient China. *Zui Weng Ting Ji* is a prose with rich content, flexible structure and aesthetic significance, which is admired by readers both domestic and overseas.

In order to make it more feasibly to be appreciated by readers overseas, many translation practices have been completed by some linguists and translators both domestic and abroad, including Luo Jingguo, Yang Xianyi and Herbert A. Giles, etc..

1.2 Research Status Quo on English Translation of Chinese Classics (ETCC)

1.2.1 General Status Quo on ETCC in China

English Translation of Chinese Classics (ETCC) can be regarded as an effective approach to implement and facilitate transmission of Chinese culture, especially the excellent Chinese traditional culture, to those countries overseas, such as the English-speaking countries like the U.K, the U.S and other non-English-speaking countries on the horizon of *Belt and Road Initiative*. There are many scholars and translation theorists who have been doing interdisciplinary research on ETCC in China, in order to make some breakthroughs and evolutions. In general, the interdisciplinary research on ETCC are primarily done from the perspective of Systemic Functional Linguistics, cognitive linguistics and literary criticism, etc., such as the study on translation of *Sun Zi Bing Fa* from the perspective of deconstruction completed by Wang Xin et al. in 2016 and the study on translation of *The Classics of Tea* from the perspective of Systemic Functional Linguistics completed by Zhang Yanchun in 2018. From the instances above, the current status of ETCC, that is the interdisciplinary research of ETCC becomes more and more popular, can be reflected. In fact, the study on cognitive approach of ETCC is now converging the research focus. For instance, the research on English translation of the Classics of Chinese minorities from schema theory completed by Wang Hong et al. in 2017 and the research on translation of *Shi Jing* from the perspective of construal theory has been done by Cheng Fangxia et al. in 2018.

Above all, the interdisciplinary research of ETCC in China is becoming more and more multiple and professional.

1.2.2 Status Quo on Study of English Translation of Zui Weng Ting Ji in China

As a representative prose written by Ouyang Xiu, *Zui Weng Ting Ji* is appreciated by readers in every dynasty after the Earlier Song Dynasty up to today. Its descriptions on marvelous landscape, which inspires the later writers a lot and impresses its readers. Recently, the studies on English translation of *Zui Weng Ting Ji* have been made from the perspective of both interdisciplinary and

linguistics in China. For instance, Wu Xiaofang et al., analyzing the English version of *Zui Weng Ting Ji* translated by Herbert A. Giles, proposes the cognitive linguistic model of translation criticism operation by exploring the nature, principle and method of translation criticism under the theoretical framework of cognitive linguistics in 2014. In 2016, Yang Juan et al. make an analytical study of the English version of *Zui Weng Ting Ji* translated by Herbert A. Giles from the perspective of metaphor in order to guide the translations of Chinese Classics in a better way. Liang Wen has analyzed the English version of *Zui Weng Ting Ji* lexically, semantically, grammatically and stylistically in 2018. Meanwhile, based on spatial schema theory proposed by Talmy, Xu Dan compares two English versions of Giles and Pollard of *Zui Weng Ting Ji* to analyze how spatial schema theory can be applied on its translation in 2018.

By analyzing the status quo on study of English translation of *Zui Weng Ting Ji* domestically, its cognitive approach translation has been covered by schema theory, general cognitive linguistic theory and metaphor, etc. The analysis on translation of *Zui Weng Ting Ji* based on construal theory is seldom mentioned, let alone a comparative study of two versions from two different translators domestically and overseas. Some research could be made from the perspective of construal theory with the purpose of realistically translational significance.

1.3 Construal Theory

In cognitive linguistics, the construction and expression of certain concepts are based on the cognition to the real world, which is also an essential and exclusive ability to human beings. As one of the most important concepts and theories in cognitive linguistics, construal theory refers to the ability of every symbolic structure to construe its content in certain fashions. (Langacker: 55) According to Langacker in his book *Cognitive Grammar: A Basic Introduction*, the construal phenomena can be classified into four basic groups which can be labelled by specificity, focusing, prominence and perspective, who can apply to conceptions in any domain. (2008) The first dimension of construal in the level of detail and precision in which the situation can be characterized is specificity, which can also be alternated by the expressions like “granularity” or “resolution”. The second dimension of construal is focusing, who is the access of particular portions of conceptual universe through linguistic expressions, which can also be described as “foreground and background”. The third dimension of construal is prominence, which can be regarded as an alternative expression to salience, which means numerous kinds of asymmetries displayed by language structures. The last dimension of construal perspective, which is the viewing arrangement if conceptualization can be considered as the viewing of scene.

These four dimensions of construal will be applied into the comparative study of two versions of *Zui Weng Ting Ji* translated by a domestic translator Luo Jingguo and another international translator Herbert A. Giles to make some contributions on ETCC and cross-cultural communication from the perspective of cognitive linguistics.

2. The Comparative Analysis on Two English Translation Version of *Zui Weng Ting Ji* from the perspective of Construal Theory

2.1 On Specificity

According to Langacker, one dimension of construal is the level of precision and details at which a situation is characterized. (Langacker: 55) Specificity could also be defined as the elaboration of descriptions to the concrete entities. The more detailed the descriptions are, the more one fold the interpretations based on construal will become. On the contrary, if the descriptions are less detailed, readers or receivers will have more opportunities to construct their own construal, so the comprehension of the real entities or words based on construal will be discrepant. (Wu Xiaofang 2011:58)

From the perspective of lexicon, the elaborative relations of specificity can be expressed as the hierarchies of conventionally recognized types, which can be regarded as a relationship of hyponymy. That is to say, the words and expressions who can be listed as superordinate ones always have more opportunities to be construed by language users, whose relationships can be presented in the schematic diagram below:

thing→ object→ tool→ hammer→claw hammer

(Langacker 2008: 56)

Alternatively, there is another situation on specificity, which will influence how people construe the concepts and comprehend the utterances, that is the length of the expressions that could be made as specifically as being wanted.

Something happened.→ A person perceived a rodent.→ A girl saw a porcupine.→ An alert little girl wearing glasses caught a brief glimpse of a ferocious porcupine with sharp quills.

(Langacker 2008: 56)

From the schematic diagram above, a conclusion could be made that the longer the expressions are, the more precise and detailed descriptions toward a situation could be done, which will influence the construal of concepts of readers and receivers.

On the grounds of this conclusion, the specificity of translation, especially the translation involving many culturally disparate images, should be taken into consideration when translators accomplish their tasks, which will facilitate the improvement of translation quality and mutual understanding while decreasing translational mistakes. Here is a comparative study of two selected examples from *Zui Weng Ting Ji* translated by Luo Jingguo and Herbert. A. Giles based on specificity of Construal Theory.

EXAMPLE 1: Source Language: 作亭者谁? 山之僧曰智仙也。

Luo's Version: Who built this pavilion? Monk Zhixian, who lived in the mountain.

Giles's Version: It was built by a Buddhist priest, called Deathless Wisdom, who lived among these hills.

With the comparison of two translated English version of the source language above, it is clear that two translators have different translations towards the expression “僧曰智仙”, which means they have different construals about this concept in their minds, and also, the different translations will influence the readers to construe this concept directly.

Firstly, about the name, Luo translates this concept with the assistance of Chinese Pinyin, which is a phonetic notation system exclusive to Chinese language, especially the mandarin Chinese, while Giles translates this concept by illustrating the intended meaning of the name belonging to a Buddhist priest, which is more detailed than illustrating directly with the assistance of Pinyin system from the dimension of specificity. Secondly, about the identity, Luo translates this concept as “monk” while Giles’ translation as “Buddhist priest”. In English, monk always means a member of male-religious group living in a monastery apart from mundane life. Actually, this image in English does not exclusively belong to the references of Buddhism, other religious groups also can employ this image as reference to their male members. While in Giles’ version, the construal is more specific as a member of priest of Buddhism, which is more corresponding to the writer’s original meaning in Chinese, even though it is more complicated in the expression.

By making the comparison towards the translation of image “僧曰智仙”, what is held that Giles’ translation is more precise and detailed contrasting to Luo’s from the perspective of specificity in Construal Theory, which is more helpful to those readers, especially the international readers who do not know much about Chinese culture and the cultural background of this prose to have a better comprehension, which is also favorable for the dissemination of ETCC.

2.2 On Focusing

Focusing is another dimension of construal proposed by Langacker. In the book *Cognitive Grammar: A Basic Introduction*, Langacker believes that focusing is the selection of conceptual presentation, whose arrangement could be described as two key concepts, they are: Foreground and Background. (Langacker 2008: 57) According to the Construal Theory proposed by Langacker, when one conception precedes and, in some ways, facilitates the arising of another, the binary relation of foreground and background should be mentioned. Background knowledge always can be helpful as a basis in accessing more knowledge superficially and deeply, which is the basic knowledge in the real world experienced by human-beings all day long. As for foreground, it is more about the facilitation evoked by background. With the assistance of the information which can be regarded as foreground, the information of background could be accessed easily. The manifestation of perception of foreground and background can be presented as a binary opposite relation, that is figure and ground, which can be regarded as an essential part of cognitive grammar. (Chen Mingjuan: 2012) Here are two examples illustrating how “figure-ground” relation manifested in language comprehension.

Sentence: Two apples are in the box. (1) He came here in the night. (2)

In sentence (1), there are two images, one is “two apples” and another is “box”. By comprehending and analyzing this sentence, it is apparent that the first image “two apples” is in a comparatively dynamic and attention-getting position with a smaller volume, while the second image “box” is in a correspondingly static and inconspicuous position with a larger volume. So in this case, the first

image “two apples” could be served as the figure, and the second image “box” could be served as the ground.

In sentence (2), there are three essential parts: he, the action of coming and the temporal setting. In this case, the images of action and temporal setting are needed to be analyzed in the view of the relation between figure and ground. So this sentence could be divided into two elements: “he came here” and “in the night”. Apparently, the first element is a dynamic one while the second is a static one. So according to the analysis above, a conclusion could be made that the first element here is a figure, while the second element here is the ground.

In consideration of the analysis on the relation between figure and ground in the utilization of language, the importance of choosing the appropriate images as figure and ground should be attached greatly in translation, especially in ETCC, for its linguistic particularity and cultural imparity. In order to show readers overseas the essence of Chinese ancient classics, the translator should choose the identical figure and ground to present one image as the original writer does. Here is a comparative study of two selected examples from *Zui Weng Ting Ji* translated by Luo Jingguo and Herbert. A. Giles based on figure and ground in the dimension of focusing in Construal Theory.

EXAMPLE 2: Source Language: 醉翁之意不在酒，在乎山水之间也。

Luo’s Version: The drinker’s heart is not in the cup, but in the mountains and waters.

Giles’s Version: But it was not wine that attracted him to this spot; it was the charming scenery which wine enabled him to enjoy.

With the comparison of Luo’s version and Giles’ version, the point of view of two versions are discrepant from each other. In Luo’s version, the key concepts can be divided into two parts, the first part is the figure, that is drinker’s heart, which is in a comparatively dynamic concept for its alternative positions between cup and landscapes with mountains and waters, therefore, these two specific alternative positions can be regarded as the ground. While in Giles’ version, two emphatic sentences are employed here to highlight the figures of the sentence, they are wine and charming scenery. Comparing to Luo’s version, the figure and ground in Giles’ version are inverted, with this spot, a comparatively vague concept as an asserted complement, as the ground. By comparing two versions, Luo’s translation is more close to Ouyang Xiu’s original intention, the setting of figure and ground is more consistent with the original article, while Giles’ translation more accords with the language convention of native speakers of English. With the assistance of the transference of figure and ground from a cognitive perspective, the linguistic expressions become different. In the view of target readers from the perspective of the relation between figure and ground in the view of Construal Theory, Giles’ version meets more the reading demands of international readers, especially the readers from English-speaking countries.

2.3 On Prominence

According to Langacker in his book: *Cognitive Grammar: An Introduction*, language structures can show many kinds of asymmetric relations, which can be regarded as the matter of prominence, alternatively expressed by salience, in its applications. (2008: 66) The matter of prominence or salience should be considered after figure and ground. By focusing on salience, the starting point for analysis in settings should be attached great importance to. The analysis on salience can be done

from two dimensions: profiling and trajector/ landmark alignment, whose constructs are highly examined on semantic ground.

2.3.1 Profiling

Every word and expression has its own conceptual meaning, which can be called as its conceptual base, who could be retrieved in all domains of on a given occasion, which can be regarded as the maximal scope. Langacker holds that the conceptual base can be identified as the immediate scope in active domains when it is construed in a narrow way, while the portion onstage is foregrounded as basic locus of attention point as well as the attention falls on a particular substructure called profile in the onstage domains, which is in a salient position in language process of cognitive approach. (2008: 66)

Taking the word “tire” as an example, a construal process could be analyzed as below, as shown in figure 1:

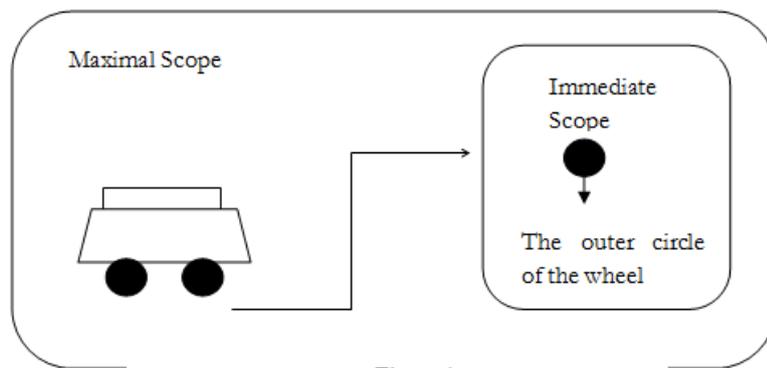


Figure 1

In the example above, the word “tire” is mentioned here, from a general perspective, the maximal scope construed in the mind should be the entity of a vehicle, including any parts of it. In the entity of a vehicle, the image of whole wheel can be put into onstage as the immediate scope. And then, within the immediate scope, there are many substructures which can be served as referent or profile, which has been mentioned above. And the profile is the most attention-catching part comparing to the whole part, in this case, that is the rubber rings fitted around the wheel of a vehicle. So the concept and image of tire is salient in this circumstance.

In consideration of utilizing the concept of profile, it is vital important to choose correct and appropriate maximal scope and immediate scope in construal of images during the process of translation. For the otherness and discrepancy existed between Chinese, especially the ancient Chinese and English, the importance of construing the appropriate scope should be attached to in ETCC. Here are two instances chosen from the translated English versions of *Zui Weng Ting Ji* by Luo Jingguo and Herbert. A. Giles to analyze how salience is manifested in the view of profile.

EXAMPLE 3: Source Language: 朝而往，暮而归，四时之景不同，而乐亦无穷也。

Luo's Version: Going to the mountain in the morning and returning home in the evening
and enjoying the beauties of the mountain in different seasons is
a delight beyond description!

Giles's Version: Morning is the time to go thither, returning with the shades off night; and although the place presents a different aspect with the changes of the season, its charms are subject to no interruption, but continue always.

In this case, by analyzing the text of source language, the theme of this sentence should be the action of "going to the mountain, paying a visit and enjoying the different landscapes in mountains". So here, this series of actions should be put into a salient position, in other words, should serve the profile, which is the most attention-catching part in this sentence. In Luo's version, the series of actions, such as: go, return and enjoy, are all transformed as gerund phrases to serve as the subject of whole sentence, that is the subject the adjective manifesting the mental status presents. So here, this series of action implemented by potential person should be served as profile in a salient position comparing to the description of the mountain, which could be served as the maximal scope when construing the whole image. While in Giles' version, the translation, especially the second half of the translated sentence has different salience. In his version, the salience of who image is the "place", which serves as the profile. Actually, according to the description of source language, the salience should always be put into the action, instead of the "place", whose responsibility is to serve as the maximal scope to help construe the whole image. Based on this comprehension and interpretation, Luo's translation here is better than Giles' from the perspective of profile in salience. And also, in other ETCC cases, the correct choose of profile is always essential.

2.3.2 Trajector/ Landmark Alignment

In book *Cognitive Grammar: An Introduction*, Langacker proposes another pair of concepts about prominence after the introduction to profile, they are: trajector and landmark. In a profiled relationship, the most prominent participant can be called as a trajector, and also within which, it can be called as primary focus, for this is an entity which is construed as being located, evaluated and described. While with this profiled relationship, some of other prominent participants can be called as secondary focus, who are named as landmarks. (2008: 70) Actually, the relationship between trajector and landmark can be reversible mutually, that is to say, according to the practical application of language in certain situations, the comprehension of the same content will be different with reversible relationship of trajector and landmark.

Taking the prepositional phrases of locality "behind" and "in front of" in sentences as example, the analysis on trajector and landmark in a profiled relationship could be made.

Sentence: Behind the tree, there is a mansion. (1) In front of the mansion, there is a tree. (2)

In the sentences above, the relative position of tree and mansion is profiled, which is an attention-catching part. And in this part, there is a relationship between trajector and landmark can be manifested. In sentence (1), mansion can be regarded as a salient object or primary focus comparing to tree, because the position of the mansion is described by treating the position of the tree as a opposite one. In this case, the position of the mansion is trajector while the position of the tree is landmark. Actually, sentence (2) can be used to describe the exactly same picture as sentence (1) does, but the trajector and the landmark are reversed for the position of tree is the primary focus and the position of the mansion is a secondary one.

From the analysis above, a conclusion could be made that even though two sentences predict the same relationship, they are semantically different because of their trajector and landmark alignments. In the view of employing the relationship of trajector and landmark, the images especially those involving the description of positional and temporal displacement in Chinese ancient classics can be translated in a better way with the assistance of construal theory. Here is an example selected from two English versions of *Zui Weng Ting Ji* to analyze how construal theory could be applied into ETCC from the perspective of the relationship of trajector and landmark and a comparative study could be made to analyze which version is better in the view of trajector and landmark alignments.

EXAMPLE 4: Source Language: 树林阴翳，鸣声上下，游人去而禽鸟乐也。

Luo's Version: The shadows of the trees are deepening, and birds are chirping high and low. The people are going home, leaving the birds free to enjoy themselves.

Giles' Version: Then in the growing darkness are heard sounds above and below: the beasts of the field and the birds of the air are rejoicing at the departure of man.

In the example above, the translators Luo Jingguo and Herbert A. Giles have different construals on trajector and landmark about this image. In Luo's version, the spatial relationship is blur, which means there is not too much information about trajector and landmark in his translation about this sentence. Instead, Luo describes the background environment and the action people do during that time but does not make any connections to them. While in Giles' version, he construes an image in which there is a spatial relationship, that is people, beasts and birds are all in the woods, below the shades of the trees, pursuing for pleasures. In Giles' version, a comparatively spatial relationship can be manifested, where the trajector is focused on the actions and behaviors of the man, beasts and birds and the landmark definitely should be the tree above, for they are doing all these below the tree in the shades. By making a salient spatial relationship, the whole spatial sense of tableau is prominent with the assistance of trajector and landmark, who can make the whole image more visualized. Based on this understanding, Giles' version is better in employing trajector and landmark in spatial relationships to make the salience.

2.4 Perspective

After discussion how specificity, focus and prominence are applied in the translation of *Zui Weng Ting Ji*, the last dimension is required to be discussed according to the Construal Theory of Langacker, that is perspective. Perspective refers to viewing arrangement, which is different from the viewing of a scene. In the book *Cognitive Grammar: An Introduction*, Langacker holds that viewing arrangement is the overall relationship between viewers and the situation being viewed. (2008: 73) Different perspectives will bring about different cognitive reference point, which means the difference in conceptualization, who will also cause some discrepancies in expressions of language. (JinShengxi 2015) Talmy also holds that the perspective system has several semantic categories, such as the spatial or temporal positioning within a larger frame of a perspective points, the distance from the referent entities and also the viewing direction from the perspective point to the regarded entities, etc. (2000: 68) For example:

The girl opened the door and got off the car. (1)

The car's door opened and the girl got off the car. (2)

In the examples above, two sentences express the same meaning but are depicted from different spatial perspectives. Sentence (1), to some degrees, the perspective of description is possibly exterior, for the sentence is organized from the external observation perspective, while in Sentence (2), the viewer may locate inside of the car, instead of being external, which altogether cause the different language expressions toward the identical situation.

In the issue of translation, perspective can always be manifested by such points like the using of personal pronouns like "I" as a first-person pronoun and "he" as a third-person pronoun. Here is a comparative analysis about *Zui Weng Ting Ji* translated by Luo Jingguo and Hebert A. Giles to discover how perspective could be manifested in ETCC of *Zui Weng Ting Ji*.

EXAMPLE 5: Source Language: 太守谓谁? 庐陵欧阳修也。

Luo's Version: And who is the prefect? He is Ouyang Xiu of Luling.

Giles' Version: And should you ask who is the Governor, I reply, "Ou-yang Hsiu of Lu-ling."

In the example above, two translators illustrate this rhetorical-question sentence diversely. In Luo's version, the third-person perspective is used in the answering of the question, taking the view as a spectator, Luo gets the basic ideas of the original texts, while in Giles' version, the first-person perspective is used in answering the question. With the assertion of a first-person pronoun "I" here, the description perspective is turning into a more subjective one. By comparing these two version, the meaning they express is no difference, so both of them are appropriate and effective translation. Nonetheless, in other ETCC situations, whether the application of first-person perspective is appropriate or not, is still in the demand of verification, on account of some subjective emotions and judgments will be involved into translation in some first-person perspective situation by translators, which will influence the effectiveness of translated texts and also will cause the confusion of the readers.

3. Conclusion

From the analysis above, the differences of translated versions of *Zui Weng Ting Ji* by Luo Jingguo and Herbert A. Giles can be manifested based on different construals toward one Chinese ancient prose. By comparing two English versions of *Zui Weng Ting Ji* and integrating the four dimensions, like specificity, focusing, prominence and perspective of Construal Theory, a new cognitive approach of English Translation of Chinese Classics can be expanded, meanwhile, with the assistance of theories and knowledge in Cognitive Linguistics, the potential errors will be made less in translating Chinese ancient prose ahead.

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