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Analyzing Rhetoric of Conversion in English Translation of Literary Works with "Mountain"

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ABSTRACT

Translating literary works into English differs from translating general documents because of the rich rhetorical techniques used in the former. To ensure that the evocative connotations of words and meanings are translated precisely, it is important to understand the techniques and rhetorical skills used in literary works. "Mountain" is a Chinese magazine about hiking, climbing and natural scenery, and its articles present the aesthetics of nature through colorful depictions of the natural world using the rhetoric of conversion and vivid descriptions. For this reason, it is worthwhile exploring the art of the text and rhetoric of conversion, to understand them in relation to the English translation. This study applied qualitative research methods to the magazine's content, and summarized four types of personification used to describe the natural world. The study should be useful to Chinese-English translators by providing information regarding the use of personification, so that they can preserve the literary art of aesthetics and liveliness expressed through the applied techniques.

1. Introduction

Precise translation of literary works is an art in its own right because literary works are not just sequences of words but rather expressions containing psychological factors related to feelings and mental perceptions. Generally, literary works can be seen as an art of language: mental productions viewed from a spiritual perspective. To communicate special feelings with readers, writers try to convey subtle and nuanced conceptions — to make their works not just sequences of words but to impart thoughts filled with rich and affective ideas.

Based on this concept, to translate literary works without losing their aesthetic quality, translators must be fluent in the idiom of the author's language and familiar with his or her frame of mind. In this way, they can translate a work without missing the overtones or mental aspects the author wishes to convey. In contrast, translating general articles focuses on practicability and 'real' meaning; for example, a notarization, science paper, or a document containing knowledge or information does not require the translator to express the author's mood or subjective thoughts because the content is objective and informative. With these types of translations, the translator needs to present only objective information. This, then, is the principal difference between translating literary and non-literary works. To translate the former accurately, producing text as vivid and descriptive as the original, calls for sophisticated writing techniques and a familiarity with the idiom of the original as well as of the translated language.

Translation is also an art of language, emphasizing truthful aesthetic intention. It is concerned with turning an expression of one language into an accurate facsimile in another with the goal of being truthful to the original

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meaning. Before beginning to translate a text, translators often have doubts about the meanings of words, how to choose among several possible connotations, and even how to interpret the art of rhetoric.

Rhetoric is concerned with the design and meaning of words, revealing the artistic conception behind the literary work. There are over 50 rhetorical techniques used in literature, each having its own features and meanings. Thus, to translate a sentence with a rhetorical structure accurately, a translator must first understand the art of expression through rhetoric. If he does not understand the rhetorical techniques, it is likely that he will translate sentences into another language with an entirely different meaning from the original. With this in mind, this study aims to explore the application of the most important rhetorical technique in literature—personification, a conversion technique, in semantic structures. Insights into the technique of personification can help the translator translate literary works without losing the original artistic conception.

Personification is a way of applying descriptions of people to objects, so that the latter can be presented in human terms. Using this technique often affects readers emotionally because it gives objects lifelike qualities, and when objects are lifelike, they can be vividly described. All objects, of course, are not living. So, when non-living objects are expressed as if they are living, translators need to beware of misrepresenting them by misinterpreting the original rhetorical expressions.

Increasingly, people want to get close to nature, whether by being actively involved in the outdoors or by reading stories and reports in the mass media about the natural world. “Mountain” is a popular outdoors magazine, with abundant photographs and skillfully written articles that use rhetorical techniques, especially personification. This study aims to explore the applications of personification in “Mountain”. Some of the magazine’s content describes natural scenery as seen during mountain climbing, and most of the content is in narrative form. The writing is quite beautiful and rhetorical techniques are frequently applied. In fact, one of these is the personification technique of the rhetoric of conversion. Thus, this study analyzes the meaning and structure of the personified syntax in the magazine’s content used in the English translation.

2. Literature Review

The purpose of personification is to make expressions vivid, interesting (Huang, 2004) and to highlight aesthetic feelings (Shen, 1995). The rhetoric of conversion includes two techniques for achieving this, objectification and personification—although the present study focuses only on the latter.

According to Wu (2001), personification is the conversion of nature between humans and objects. It is a concept about giving human qualities to objects based on common features to make the writing more appealing and interesting. The rhetoric of conversion can be categorized into full-article conversion and sentence conversion. In this study, we focus on sentence conversion only.

Guan (1993) maintains that there are three types of personification, namely the personification of living things, non-living things, and abstract concepts. This study considers only the first two. For example, the personification of trees, leaves, and flowers identified in this study belongs to the personification of living things, namely, plants. Similarly, the personification of birds, butterflies, and fish also belongs to the personification of living things, namely, animals. However, the personification of mountains, clouds, and the sun belongs to the personification of non-living things. We hope that an analysis of the different types of personification will help Chinese-English translators have a deeper understanding of the personification techniques used in the rhetoric of conversion.

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3. Method

The methods applied in this study include the content analysis and conceptual analysis methods (Wang, 2001), both being qualitative research tools. The basis of the study is the personification technique of the rhetoric of conversion defined in the Practical Rhetoric by Guan (1993) and the Flexible Applications of Rhetoric by Wu (2001). The literature analyzed comes from several issues of "Mountain" from 1994, when the publication began, to 2012. The research steps are as follows: (A) reading the content of each of the issues; (B) recording all sentences with the concept of the rhetoric of conversion; (C) categorizing the recorded sentences according to the subjects they describe; (D) omitting sentences with similar applications or phrases as the recorded sentences to avoid overlapping records; (E) confirming that there is indeed a personification application in the examples of each category; (F) selecting representative examples for each category; (G) for each example, analyzing the author's personification concept and listing the quantitative form and non-practical analysis as research limitations; (H) performing conceptual analyses to identify combinations of other rhetorical techniques based on personification; and (I) translating into English the artistic conception of the examples after confirming the personification application that is used.

4. Results

The analyses of the personification of the rhetoric of conversion (ROC) used in the literature from "Mountain" can be categorized into four groups: (A) analyses of ROC for natural scenery used in the descriptive examples and the personification sentences of five forms; (B) analyses of ROC for plants used in the descriptive examples and the personification sentences of five types of writing; (C) analyses of ROC of animals used in the descriptive examples and the personification sentences of three animals; and (D) analyses of the ROC for multiple scenery used in the descriptive examples and the personification sentences of four types. The reason for 'multiple scenery' is because there are two personification subjects for each type.

The writing skills with personified interactions are also analyzed. Each Chinese example was written in pinyin based on the scheme for the Chinese phonetic alphabet. Then the rhetorical technique of the example was analyzed. Finally, the example was translated into English. The results of the analysis are summarized below:

4.1. Analyses of the rhetorical technique of conversion for natural scenery

1. Personification used in the description of the mountain

Example: *"In early morning at 4 a.m., the mountain still falls asleep"* (Shia, 1994, p. 1)

Analysis: The background of this sentence is the scene before dawn with faint light shining on the mountain, which is softly outlined. Through the imagination and shift of emotion, it is better to describe the mountain as being "fast asleep" using the pronoun "she" in the translation to illustrate personification of the mountain. However, in the English translation, the mountain is not the living object to be fast asleep, so verb phrase "seems like" would be added in the translation to imply to readers the use of personification in this sentence.

Suggested translation: At 4 a.m., very early in the morning, it seems like she is still fast asleep.

2. Personification used in the description of the mist

Example: *"Putting on the thin coat as if it is made of white yarn"* (Huang, 1994, p. 61)

Analysis: This sentence describes the mist above the Seven Color Lake. The author identifies, first, the color of the mist and then finds that the mist is close to the surface of the lake. Thus, he describes the mist as "a

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coat" using the conversion technique, with further depictions. The author confirms that the color of the white mist was of low saturation, being thin rather than thick. Thus, he combines figures of speech as he describes the mist "made of white yarn." In addition, the verb *"悦"* used here means not its original meaning of happy but rather the meaning of "look enjoyable/attractive" when it is conversed in the translation. It can be seen that a total of three techniques are applied to this sentence: visualization, conversion, and figure of speech.

Suggested translation: The light cloth put on looks attractive as if it is just like white yarns.

3. Personification used in the description of the sun

Example: *"The sun appeared to see us and it warmed up"* (Shao, 1996, p. 53)

Suggested Translation: The sun showed *his* face to *check* us *out* and all of a sudden it got warmer.

Analysis: The sentence "the sun showed his face" with conversion is based on the sense of sight. A human face is used to describe the sun. This technique uses personification, which is often used in children's literature. The phrase "all of a sudden it got warmer" is based on the sense of touch. There is also the concept of antithesis. "The sun showed his face" means that the sun appeared, but the scene before "the sun showed his face" is different from the scene after it appeared. Before, there was no light and it was cold; after, the sky lights up, and the shape of the sun can be seen clearly, which accounts for the description "showed his face". In the translation, we should be aware of the effect of the sun showing up is for the temperature to rise. This is an antithesis structure with "coldness" and "warmness" contrasted "before the sun showed up" and after.

4. Personification used in the description of the park

Example: "*Yangmingshan National Park has a unique style of green outerwear, which has already become extraordinarily beautiful. If you add some decorations, his bright face and beauty would have made people moved. One of its accessories is a marsh."* (Wang, 1996, p. 38)

Suggested translation: Yangmingshan National Park looked exceptionally beautiful and attractive with *this green coat* of a unique style. Everybody would have been tempted by *his* charm if *he wore* some more ornaments. And the most beautiful *one* was the marsh.

Analysis: The conversion used in this description is for a large area. The idea is, first, to scale down the image so that it can be seen from different angles. For example, the scene of the mountain filled the view — the image of the scene is scaled down — and then the outlines of the shapes, different colors of the sky and the mountains, and the associations with the surroundings can be seen. It is easier to find the features of this scene for the purpose of conversion used in the translation. The "green coat" is a conversion description of the color of the grassland. Visually, this color is different from other colors, and the description of the "marsh" as an ornament (*one*) used in the translation is based on comparisons of size, color, terrain, and landform between the green grassland and the marsh.

5. Personification used in the description of the waterfall

Example: "*The Golden Waterfall did not have such grandiose feeling that the horse is galloping with great momentum, but it made people feel it was gentle and graceful like a girl, charming and moving."* (Chou, 1998, p. 115)

Suggested translation: The golden waterfall did not look majestic with great momentum and power of ten thousand horses galloping ahead. Instead, it was as gentle, graceful, and dainty as *a little young girl.*

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Analysis: Various rhetorical techniques are applied in translation here. The comparison between "great momentum and power of ten thousand horses galloping ahead" and "gentle, graceful, and dainty" forms an antithetical structure. The description of the former is based on imagination, to set off the "small and beautiful" waterfall. The technique of hyperbole is applied as "ten thousand horses", and "with great momentum and power of ten thousand horses galloping ahead" used to describe the powerful flow of water, as a contrast to "gentle, graceful, and dainty", which is used to describe a girl's bashfulness; however, it also indicates the flow of the waterfall is reduced, which is the true meaning and should be referred in the deep side of translation. The two descriptions are about momentum. In addition, the flow's two momentums lead to a vivid contrast, inviting readers to see the waterfall's properties and features more easily. Credit for this effect is due to the rhetorical technique of antithesis.

4.2. Analyses of the rhetorical technique of conversion for plants

1. Personification used in the description of flowers

Example 1: *"A sea of azaleas strewed the mountains. It looked like a girl dressed up with the mountains and the land, spraying tenderness and garish all over the ground."* (Wu, 1994, p. 18)

Analysis: The words "a sea of azaleas" and "strewed the mountains" in Example 1 describe the broad distribution of the flowers. It is a full-view visual description. The rhetorical technique of figure of speech is applied to the following: a girl's nature of wishing to appear beautiful by dressing up is used to describe the colorful and beautiful azaleas. The word "tenderness" in relation to the grace and the word "garish" in relation to the bright colors are combined. The technique used here is vivid personification. The wonderful fall scene is presented forcefully and vividly. How do we know it is fall? The words "over the ground" reveal that leaves are falling; this happens only in the fall. Where the word "spraying" is used, the conversion technique is applied. "Spraying" is an activity of humans, and it is used here with falling leaves, based on personification. As for imagery, the antithesis implication should be evident in the translation. That is, on the one hand, the beautiful flowers are in the mountains; on the other hand, they begin to fall because it is autumn. While the beauty of the flowers can be appreciated, it is disappointing that the flowers are falling. From above, the rhetorical techniques and translation applied in this example include visualization, simile, metaphor, conversion, and antithesis.

Suggested translation: A flower sea of azaleas strewed the mountains. The scene looked like *a girl dressed up* with colors of mountains and the land, and the leaves seemed to *spray* their *tenderness and garish* all over the ground.

Example 2: "The tender and garish flower find a bright and splendid stage." (The editorial office, 1997, p. 30)

Analysis: This is a close-up shot of the flower and the artistic conception of this example is somewhat deep. First, from the perspective of a professional, a talented person would lament his under-achievement if he could not find a stage to show his talents. Similarly, without a stage to exhibit itself, a beautiful flower can love its own fragrance but desolately. Thus, the word "found" is based on rationality. "Found a bright and splendid stage" is a description of the flower's desire, successfully presents the psychological state and reflects on the author's frame of mind in translation for talented people. The writing concept and its translation of feeling and setting, happily blended, can be found in this example.

Suggested translation: The tender and garish flower *found* a bright and splendid stage, (so do a talented man to find his pathway).

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Example 3: "T*he only lilies in early fall smile at people along the road."* (Lo, 2010, pp. 50)

Analysis: Example 3 is a dynamic description of people seeing lilies everywhere they walk. Besides appreciating the lilies, the author projects his emotions. Thus, it looks like the lilies are smiling charmingly. Based on this, it can be inferred in the translation that the author is in a light, happy and contented mood.

Suggested translation: I saw the only lilies in early fall smiling at people along the road.

Example 4: Cosmos bipinnatus flowers are just like flower fairies. (Su, 2002, p. 25)

Suggested translation: Cosmos bipinnatus flowers are just like gregarious flower fairies in the world of mortals.

Analysis: "gregarious" is used to describe the cosmos bipinnatus flowers in terms of their interpersonal relationships, suggesting that they cluster together in a large area. This description is from the perspective of quantity. The word "fairies" is used to imply that the flower's exceptional temperament and disposition are like those of fairies. This description is from the perspective of quality. They are presented in the translation about the cosmos bipinnatus flowers from two perspectives, quality and quantity, with the application of personification, making the description exceptionally vivid.

2. Personification used in the description of leaves

Example: "*Some branches and leaves contain finely sand, and they will come out from the snow to say hello to you."* (Lin, 1994, p. 1)

Suggested translation: Some branches and leaves of plants would *come out* of the snow ground to *say hi* while holding bits of sand.

Analysis: This description is based on the author's detailed observation. The scene occurs somewhere high in the Taiwan mountains; it is snowing. Although it is not common to see snow in Taiwan, people tend to play with boundless joy in an environment with snow. In the eyes of literati, the artistic conception of snow is exceptionally beautiful. When the land is covered by snow, in the aspect of imagery, the atmosphere is desolate and silent. In the moment when there is no life in sight, a small twig is found. Even though it is small, it can incite pleasant amazement as if finding an oasis in a desert. The cheer caused by just a little water can be considerable.

It is easier to see the author's idea in the description and translate it based on this understanding. Moreover, in the aspect of implication, "holding bits of sand" shows that the branches and leaves have been under the sand and snow, eventually breaking through and straightening up. The implied message is the force of life.

3. Personification used in the description of maples

Example: *"Every time in the fall, it made the maple leaves to apply blush, becoming splendid and glorious."* (The editorial office, 1996, p. 14)

Analysis: The maple leaves turned from green to red in the fall, becoming more beautiful. The conversion technique used in this example can be discussed from two aspects. The first is the active aspect. The season 'fall' is converted into a person who gives the maple leaves advice and it is better to use anticipatory subject "it" as a beginning in the translation. And the maple leaves are converted into people who receive the advice of applying blush to their faces. This is the second aspect, the passive aspect. Thus, associations are generated through the interactions of these subjects through conversion, advancing the artistic conception.

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Suggested translation: When it comes to the fall, it *advised* maple leaves to apply blush, *becoming* splendid and glorious.

4. Personification used in the description of trees

Example: "*The closer you get to the various trees, the more you would feel the fascinating and lovely trees. They are sometimes humorous and interesting, sometimes romantic, sometimes strong and sometimes soft, sometimes lonely and quiet."* (The editorial office, 2004, p. 22)

Suggested translation: The closer I got to the trees, the more I could feel the charm and sweetness of them. Some of them were humorous and funny, some were romantic and mysterious, some were strong and gentle, and some were lonely and quiet.

Analysis: The author applies the conversion technique, describing the appearance and his feelings for the trees based on various personality traits. And, readers can easily associate with the variety of trees in the translation.

5. Personification used in the description of tea leaves

Example: *"The characters of the tea leaves were determined by the mountains and waters."* (4A, 2009, p. 33)

Analysis: The conversion technique is applied to both subjects of description in this example. "Characteristic," "quality," "determined," and "moisturized" are all related to people. The relationship between "tea" and "mountains and waters" is based on the conversion, and this relationship should be revealed in the translation to help readers to understand that great mountains and waters lead to good tea.

Suggested translation: The characteristics and quality of the tea leaves were determined and moisturized by the mountains and waters.

4.3. Analyses of the rhetorical technique of conversion for animals

1. Personification used in the description of fish

Example: *"The male and female salmons completed their wedding ceremony."* (Hsu, 1994, p. 25)

Analysis: This example applies the conversion technique with the personification of salmon, which are breeding, and is expressed vividly based on a human marriage. This suggests the importance of the role salmon breeding plays in the author's mind, and their incredible upstream journey to lay eggs in the same place where they were original hatched in their lifespan.

Suggested translation: The male and female salmons have *completed their* life cycles.

2. Personification used in the description of butterflies

Example 1: *"The butterfly was beautiful*" (Lee, 1996, p.91)

Example 2: "*It flies slowly and leisurely*" (Lee, 1996, p.91)

Suggested translation: The butterfly was beautiful, frail, and delicate. . .It *danced* in the wind slowly and freely.

Analysis: The words "beautiful" and "frail" are adjectives for human expressions and the word "freely" is, in this instance, an adjective for human sight. Here, they are used to describe the butterfly. The personification is obvious. Even more compelling is that the butterfly is represented by a dancer in the article's title, showing,

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significantly, the wonderful charm and grace of dancing dynamically in the wind.

3. Personification used in the description of birds

Example: *"The heroes were guarding the mountain and forest."* (Hsiao, 1994, p. 64)

Analysis: This example is about birds lingering in the high mountain forest, like human "heroes" guarding it. In addition, "the flying heroes" in the translation can render the sentence more vivid and allowing readers to appreciate the dignity of the birds. The description is impressive, which is one of the effects of the conversion technique.

Suggested translation: "The flying heroes were guarding the mountain forest."

4.4. Analyses of the rhetorical technique of conversion for multiple scenery

1. Personification used in the description of wind and snow

Example: *"The strong wind and snow were the sculptors of the white cedars on Yushan mountain. What task did they want to assign?"* (The editorial office, 1997, p. 16)

Analysis: The subjects for conversion in this example include the wind, snow, and trees. The definite images of sculptors are given to the "wind" and "snow" and presented in the translation through the rhetorical technique. The appearances of the white cedars within the coverage of the wind and snow are shaped due to erosion. This brilliant association is exciting and gripping to be found in both writing and translation.

Suggested translation: The strong wind and snow resemble the *sculptors* and examiners to the white cedars on Yushan mountain. What missions are they on?

2. Personification used in the description of sunlight and clouds

Example: *"When the sunlight met the clouds… The sunlight began to play with the clouds."* (Cheng, 2008, p. 32)

Analysis: This example is a description of the changes in natural scenery in relation to sunlight and clouds. The word "met," is a colloquial and human-based word, to illustrate the short distance between sunlight and clouds. Hence, we realize the author find the sunlight were spreading on the clouds. Besides, the word "play" forms an image of playful frolic, implying the dynamic movements and dark colors of the clouds because only dark clouds would set off the faintly discernible sunlight which appears indistinctly. Because of this visual effect, it is appropriate to describe the relationship in the translation between the clouds and sunlight using the conversion technique with the word "play".

Suggested translation: When the sunlight was *spread on* the clouds… The sunlight began to *play with* the clouds.

3. Personification used in the description of trees and white clouds

Example: *"The white cedars have nothing to do, so they imitated the white clouds twisting and bending their bodies."* (The editorial office, 2004, p. 23)

Analysis: The two subjects described here are unconnected. However, we can find a similarity through imagination and observation: bending. Both subjects are dynamic and changing because of the wind, which is present but not described. Because of the wind, the shapes of the clouds change and the white cedars swing. Only because of this dynamic view can the trees be described as imitating the clouds "twisting" and "bending".

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The shape of the clouds changes as well. The clouds are above and the trees below. Their relationship is thus formed and reveled in the translation. The white cedars and the white clouds are both moving around. This is why the word "imitated" is used based on imagination.

Suggested translation: The white cedars were occupied with nothing, so they imitated the white clouds twisting and bending their figures.

4. Personification used in the description of a mountain spring and chirps of insects

Example: *"The springs and insects form a symphony orchestra, playing a touched and natural movement."* (The editorial office, 1997, p. 30)

Suggested translation: *The sound* of mountain spring and *the chirps* of insects formed a symphony orchestra, *playing* a beautiful and touching movement of nature.

Analysis: The technique applied here is the description of hearing. The word "formed" is used for conversion. It can be understood that the sounds from the mountain spring are continuous, though of different musical scales. And the chirps of insects are intermittent. Though dissimilar, the sounds respond to each other, which is why the movements in nature are associated with them.

5. Conclusion

This study explores the effects of the rhetorical technique of conversion in describing natural scenery before it is translated. It was found that this technique can supply vivid imagery, and, as a result, readers may find the articles warm and the wall separating them from the natural world fading temporarily. After all, the rhetorical technique of conversion is simply a literary technique for creating lifelike images, and the enjoyment of literature lies in ever-changing feelings. Because the words in "Mountain" are beautiful and the content colorful, the key to this achievement is the application of the rhetorical technique of conversion, which helps to make descriptions of natural scenery vivid and inspiring.

Literary works are subjective expressions of the authors' feelings. To allow readers to share their subjectivity, translators also apply rhetorical techniques to the sentences to make writers' descriptions vivid and to deepen the reader's pleasure through word choices and addition to extra words. The most important rhetorical technique applied is personification of the conversion technique. This study shows that personification is a way of projecting human behavior, posture, preferences, looks, personalities, and languages onto objects. It is based on imagination and on association, giving human attributes and feelings to observed objects. What is described using this technique does not exist in the real world; it exists only within the art of rhetoric. But if translators fail to understand this, they are likely to make logical errors when translating literary works into English. For example, why is the pronoun for a flower so often "she" rather than "it"? Similarly, why is a tree "he" instead of "it"? This study clarifies the artistic and literary technique used to determine such choices of word, so that translators will avoid the linguistic pitfalls common to every translation. It is hoped that it will help translators of literary works understand this technique, so that they can present the authors' sentiments and observations accurately, and use it to preserve the life and beauty of the written word in every language.

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