On Iconicity in English Translation of "Song of Mulan"

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Abstract

The book, "The Collection of Poems of Yuefu", is the essence of the folk songs of the Han Dynasty, Wei and Jin Dynasties, and North and South Dynasties, which plays an important part in the Chinese poetry world, and shines between the pre-Qin and Tang poems and Song poems, and its creative methods have far-reaching influences on the genre structure and language art of the poems of the later generations. As one of the two peaks of China's Yuefu poetry, the "Song of Mulan" has been translated by many Chinese and foreign translators due to its profound social and ideological significance and high artistic achievement. Taking "Song of Mulan" as an example, this article aims to deeply understand the characteristics of resemblance embedded in the poem from the lexical, syntactic, and discourse levels, analyze how faithfully the translation reproduces the principle of resemblance in the original poem, and explore the linguistic choices made by the translators in order to present the forms and meanings of the original poem as well as their expressive effects, with a view to providing a different perspective for the translation of classical Chinese poems.

Keywords

Iconicity, "Song of Mulan", English Translation, Poetry

1. Introduction

1.1. Research Background

There is a prevalence of pictorial linguistic expression in poetic discourse, which manifests not only at the lexical and sentence levels but also at the level of discourse. As (Hiraga, 1994) points out, iconicity is not confined to any one level of language. Rather, it is ubiquitous, present in everyday language as well as in the specialized domain of poetry, where it plays a pivotal role in shaping the structure and meaning of poetic texts. In the context of poetic discourse, iconicity can be understood as a

principle that governs the relationship between linguistic elements and their corresponding mental images, facilitating the evocation of vivid imagery and sensory experiences. This principle of iconicity, or resemblance, permeates all levels of poetic expression, from the choice of individual words to the overarching structure of the poem, and serves to heighten the aesthetic impact of the work.

In the study of "Song of Mulan", a quintessential piece of Chinese classical poetry, the application of iconicity theory allows for a deeper understanding of the poem's figurative and linguistic features. "Song of Mulan" is one of the two celebrated peaks of the "Yuefu twin gems" in Chinese literary history, alongside the "Gong Yu" poem. This work, through its vivid portrayal of Mulan's bravery and determination, evokes a profound resonance not only in its narrative but also in its form. Its lexical and syntactic choices serve to depict Mulan's journey, both physically and emotionally, creating an iconic representation of her experiences. Scholars have long recognized the powerful social commentary embedded within "Song of Mulan", especially in its exploration of gender roles and filial piety in ancient Chinese society. Yet, what elevates this work further is its unique artistic quality, which can be attributed to its use of iconicity at multiple levels of discourse.

Translation of this poem into other languages, particularly English, has attracted considerable scholarly attention, with numerous translators attempting to preserve both the form and content of the original text. However, as translation inevitably involves a degree of transformation, it raises important questions about how closely a translated text can adhere to the original's iconic features. The analysis of translation from the perspective of iconicity offers valuable insights into the ways in which translators make linguistic choices to capture not only the meaning but also the expressive power of the original work. By focusing on the iconic relationship between the linguistic elements of the original text and the images they evoke, we can examine the extent to which translators succeed in recreating the iconicity of the source poem.

The application of resemblance theory in translation studies, particularly in the context of Chinese poetry, highlights the interplay between form and meaning. Chinese characters themselves possess inherent pictorial qualities, where their visual structure can convey meaning beyond the linguistic level. This is particularly significant in the translation of Chinese poetry, where the aesthetic value of the written form is often inseparable from its semantic content. In analyzing "Song of Mulan" through the lens of iconicity, we aim to illuminate how translation choices can either preserve or distort the iconic features of the original text.

The specific translation of "Song of Mulan" analyzed in this study is Wang Rongpei's version, which was chosen for its clarity in conveying the poem's emotional depth while maintaining the original structure. By focusing on the principles of sequential iconicity, this study also examines how differences in cognitive frameworks between the Chinese and English-speaking worlds impact the translation process. Cultural differences and varying cognitive styles influence how poetic meaning is processed and conveyed, which in turn shapes the translation

choices made. Through this analysis, we aim to contribute to the discourse on the translation of Chinese poetry, offering a fresh perspective on the application of iconicity and highlighting the challenges and potential for cross-cultural dialogue facilitated by translation.

1.2. Research Significance

Firstly, it is of theoretical significance. From the perspective of Cognitive Linguistics, metonymy existing in the "Song of Mulan", the translation of iconicity, as well as the cognitive processes of translation will be discussed. This study could not only enrich the perspective of iconicity translation research but also combine Cognitive Linguistics and translation studies together. The focus of iconicity research is not limited to the same language form and the cognitive thinking of language users, but involves the comparison of cross-language expressions. The translators' cognitive mechanism in the process of expression switching will also be explored. Hence, it is conducive to expanding the research scope of iconicity theory and broadening the research field and vision of Cognitive Linguistics.

Secondly, it is of practical significance. This study is conducive to improving translators' understanding of the translation process and translation strategies of iconicity, which could provide translators with some reference for the principles and standards when dealing with various expressions. At the same time, this study can enlighten that translators should not only pay attention to specific expressions in the source text or related translation skills, but also pay attention to the cognitive mechanism of iconicity. When dealing with translation texts, translators should attach importance to the different cognitive experiences objectively existing between the source language readers and the target language readers. At the same time, translators should give full play to their subjective creativity, so as to better contribute to the translation of excellent works with Chinese characteristics.

Thirdly, in this day and age, translation is not only the conversion of two languages but also an important means of introducing China to the outside world, expanding the influence of Chinese discourse, and allowing China to go to the world and participate in global governance. The social significance of the story in the poem "Song of Mulan" lies in the fact that Mulan's enlistment in the army breaks through the femininity prescribed by society and breaks the stereotypes of women, which is a kind of remodeling of the female gender image. This paper presents and conforms to the aim of telling China stories and spreading the charm of culture. Translation, especially foreign propaganda translation, plays an indispensable role as a bridge to enhance the international community's understanding of and cooperation with China, to build up China's good international image, and to create a favorable external environment for national development.

2. Literature Review

2.1. Previous Studies of Poetry Translation

Poetry, as a form of literary expression, presents significant challenges in terms of

creation, comprehension, and translation. The process of translating poetry is particularly complex, as it goes beyond the mere conversion of words and involves cognitive, discursive, and performative dimensions between both the human actors and the text in a specific social and physical context (Jones, 2011). Wang (2022), in his book "On Poetry Translation", highlights that what distinguishes poetry from other literary genres is its unique core element: poetic meaning. In essence, poetic meaning emerges from the interaction of a specific message within a particular poetic form, and it is this very interaction that gives poetry its distinctive effect. Despite these inherent challenges, many translators are compelled to undertake the arduous task of rendering poetry into other languages. One such example is Lawrence Venuti, who has sparked extensive discussions on the concepts of foreignization and domestication, drawing from his own approach to translating poems. Similarly, the renowned Chinese translator and professor Xu Yuanchong, in his translations of hundreds of ancient Chinese poems, emphasizes the "Three Beauties" (beauty in sound, sense, and style) that define his approach to poetic translation. Furthermore, in 2001, Professor Hu Gengshen of Tsinghua University introduced the concept of Eco-translatology, which was later developed into a formal theory in 2008.

The study of poetry translation itself can be categorized into two primary approaches: process-oriented and product-oriented. This division highlights the diversity of methods available for translating poetry, reflecting the intricate nature of the task.

In conclusion, poetry translation is a complex and multifaceted endeavor. It requires not only linguistic skills but also an understanding of cultural nuances, cognitive processes, and the inherent iconicity that shapes poetic meaning. As such, poetry translation studies can take on various forms, with iconicity emerging as a key area of focus that continues to unfold in scholarly research.

2.2. Previous Studies of Poetry Translation from the Iconic Perspective of Cognitive Linguistics

The theory of iconicity, which embodies the natural relationship between the signifier and the signified was first put forward by Peirce, the founder of American semiotics. Iconicity, as an important component of cognitive linguistics, is a complement to the theory of arbitrariness of linguistic signs proposed by Saussure, which reveals the relationship between language and cognition. The theory of iconicity maintains that linguistic forms are in many ways iconicity related to the objective world, experiential structure, cognitive modes, conceptual systems and what is expressed. Based on human bodily experience and cognitive process, language is formed. Namely, there exists an inherent connection between linguistic form and content. Iconicity, therefore, is an objective attribute of language just like arbitrariness.

As an important rhetorical device in poetry, iconicity is pervasive in poetry as poetic language is often motivated at any level from phoneme to text. There are a large number of iconic studies of literature, especially of poetry, carried by schol-

ars at home and abroad. Such as (Zhou & Yang, 2022) views that due to the requirements of the genre, news language needs to attract readers' attention quickly and convey the news intention and attitude quickly. Phonological iconicity in English news discourse can stimulate readers' associations and help to emphasize the meaning of the news and convey it completely. Li Yan carried out that pragmatic functions of English euphemisms from the perspective of linguistic iconicity, and classical English works and euphemisms in daily communication are used as materials for example analysis (Li, 2023).

Since the mid-to-late 20th century, with the shift in Western translation from author to translator and from product to process, the translation community has begun to introduce the concepts and methods of cognitive science to study the psychological process of translators. Cognitive science has provided valuable methods and inspirations for studying the functioning of the translator's brain and establishing an empirical model of translation process, and brought a brand-new disciplinary vision to translation research; and the study of the cognitive process of translation has gradually become an important topic in some subdisciplines of cognitive science. Since the beginning of the new century, the integration between translation and cognitive science has become more and more obvious, and has achieved remarkable results (Deng, 2011). In conclusion, the scholars in cognitive area have made an attempt to apply iconicity to the practice of poetry translation and achieve certain success, but there exists large room for their successors to develop this study towards the transference of more specific iconic features in the process of poetry translation.

Throughout the past research, we can find that from the perspective of iconicity, language studies are mainly focused on the levels of vocabulary, clause and discourse, and from the perspective of linguistics, poetry discourses are analyzed from the aspects of multimodality, critical discourse analysis and metaphor and so on, among them there is little research of advertisements based on iconicity. In addition, the relevant research on the "Song of Mulan" as the research object has not yet appeared. Therefore, this paper attempts to make a study on poetry translation from the perspective of iconicity and hopes that the results can provide some reference for relevant research.

3. Principles of Iconicity in Poetry of the "Song of Mulan"

3.1. Translation of Diagrammatic Iconicity in Poetry

In accordance with Hiraga (2004), diagrammatic iconicity refers to the phenomenon where "the structure of linguistic representation sometimes resembles the structure of the content it conveys." This concept, deeply embedded in the nature of language, is particularly relevant in the context of poetry, where form and content often intertwine to create a distinctive aesthetic experience. Diagrammatic iconicity in poetry is not only an intrinsic aspect of poetic structure but also a key factor influencing translation, as it allows the form of the poem to mirror the essence of its content, thereby enhancing its emotional and sensory impact.

While research on diagrammatic iconicity is often explored within the syntactic realm, especially in the work of linguists abroad, it is essential to recognize that iconicity operates at multiple levels within poetry. Iconicity at the text level plays a particularly prominent role in poetry translation, where the structure, rhythm, and overall presentation of the text may align with its thematic or emotional content. This higher-order iconicity, particularly at the textual level, can evoke images, emotions, or actions in a way that transcends the mere linguistic elements of the poem. As pointed out by Fauconnier & Turner (2008), text-level iconicity encompasses more than just syntactic structures—it also includes how the arrangement of words, their placement on the page, and the rhythm of the language contribute to the meaning and emotional resonance of the poem.

In the translation of poetry, maintaining the integrity of diagrammatic iconicity is essential to preserving both the aesthetic and cognitive effects intended by the original poet. When translating poetry, translators must consider how the formal elements of the poem—its line structure, rhythm, and visual arrangement—interact with its content. This becomes particularly important when dealing with languages that have differing syntactic structures, word order, and graphic conventions. Therefore, the translation of diagrammatic iconicity at the text level requires not only a deep understanding of the original poem's meaning but also a sensitivity to the visual and rhythmic patterns that convey that meaning.

The following part of this paper will center on three primary principles of diagrammatic iconicity in the context of poetry translation: sequential iconicity, quantity iconicity, and distance iconicity. These principles provide useful frameworks for understanding how the form and structure of a poem can mirror its content, and how these relationships can be preserved or transformed during the translation process.

3.2. Translation of Sequential Iconicity in "Song of Mulan"

"Song of Mulan", together with Southeast the Peacock Flies is the most outstanding work. "Song of Mulan" sings of a girl named Mulan who disguised herself as a man, joined the army in place of her father, and won glory on the battlefield. The success of describing Mulan's heroic image is related to the iconic approach.

3.2.1. The Definition of Sequential Iconicity

The principle of sequential iconicity reflects a deep connection between linguistic structure and human cognition. It embodies the parallelism between the order in which linguistic elements are presented and the sequence in which events unfold in the world, guided by our cognitive understanding of time and causality (Denning & Kemmer, 1990). Aissen (2002) defines sequential iconicity as the alignment between the temporal or categorical order in a narrative and the sequence of events as they occur in reality, assuming other factors remain constant. In other words, the way events are ordered linguistically mirrors the natural or logical progression of those events in the real world. This principle operates not only within the linear, temporal flow of storytelling but also within the broader cognitive structures that

guide human understanding of how actions, thoughts, and events unfold.

3.2.2. The Analysis of Sequential Iconicity in "Song of Mulan" and Its Translation

The Analysis of Sequential Iconicity in the "Song of Mulan" and Its Translation.

As discussed earlier, sequential iconicity is a principle that governs the relationship between the order of linguistic elements and the cognitive or physical sequence of events. Within this framework, "Song of Mulan" demonstrates a strong reliance on temporal order, which is one of the key categories of sequential iconicity. Temporal order is commonly used in poetry to organize a narrative into a coherent and logical sequence, allowing events to unfold in a way that reflects the natural progression of time. This structuring not only aids in narrative clarity but also enhances the emotional impact of the poem by guiding the reader through the unfolding of key moments in the story.

One of the most striking examples of sequential iconicity in "Song of Mulan" is the scene where Mulan prepares herself for war after receiving the conscription notice. In this section, the series of actions she takes—opening the doors, sitting on the bed, removing her warrior's coat, and dressing in her female attire—are presented in a clearly ordered sequence. The following lines illustrate this progression:

Original:

开我东阁门，坐我西阁床。脱我战时袍，著我旧时裳。当窗理云鬓，对镜贴花黄。

Translation by Wang Rongpei:

She opens the doors of chambers east and west and sits on her own bed to take a rest. She first takes off her warrior's coat of mail and then puts on her female dress and veil. She stands by windows doing her long hair and faces mirrors painting her brows fair.

These six sentences reflect the natural sequence of actions, presented in an order that mimics how they would occur in reality. Mulan's actions follow a linear, step-by-step process: she opens the door, sits down, removes her warrior's attire, changes into her traditional clothing, and finally adjusts her appearance in front of the mirror. The temporal order of these actions corresponds directly to the narrative development of Mulan's transformation—from warrior back to daughter, and from military leader back to the domestic sphere. Each step of the sequence builds upon the previous one, reinforcing the psychological and emotional journey Mulan undergoes in this moment of transition.

In terms of translation, this form of sequential iconicity is relatively straightforward to preserve. As Wang Rongpei's translation demonstrates, the natural order of the events in the original text is mirrored in the target language. The translator follows the same temporal progression without significant rearrangement, ensuring that the iconicity of the sequence is retained. This linear translation approach reflects the natural flow of time and action, which is fundamental to preserving the narrative's coherence and emotional resonance. By maintaining the order of events as they appear in the original, the translator ensures that the reader in the

target language experiences the same cognitive and emotional process as the original audience.

Moreover, the temporal order in the original poem not only reflects the sequence of physical actions but also enhances the thematic depth of the narrative. The act of changing clothes and preparing for battle symbolizes Mulan's internal transformation from daughter to soldier, highlighting the personal sacrifice she makes for her family and country. The iconicity of this sequence, through both its temporal and symbolic dimensions, is crucial to understanding Mulan's heroism. By adhering to this order in translation, the translator preserves the symbolic weight of the transformation, allowing the audience to fully appreciate the gravity of Mulan's decision.

The analysis of sequential iconicity in "Song of Mulan" demonstrates how the poem's temporal progression functions as a structural tool that deepens its emotional resonance. The original poem organizes Mulan's journey through a logical, step-by-step sequence of events that not only guides the reader through the narrative but also emphasizes the significance of each action in her transformation. From her decision to take her father's place in battle to her victorious return, every moment is tied to the one that precedes it, building tension and excitement while highlighting her courage and sacrifice.

In translation, preserving this temporal order is crucial for maintaining both the clarity and emotional weight of the narrative. For instance, in Wang Rongpei's translation, the sequential structure is carefully adhered to, with each event unfolding in the same chronological order as in the original poem. This adherence ensures that the audience of the translated version experiences the same emotional journey as the original readers, with Mulan's gradual transformation from daughter to warrior to hero becoming a coherent, immersive experience.

By carefully maintaining this sequential iconicity, translators ensure that the narrative's flow remains intact and that the emotional impact of Mulan's journey is not lost. For example, when a translator alters the sequence of events or condenses moments that are key to her transformation, they risk diminishing the emotional buildup that the original poem carefully constructs. A translator who respects the sequential iconicity of the poem ensures that Mulan's heroism unfolds gradually, allowing the reader to experience the journey in a similar way to the original audience.

In this way, the principle of sequential iconicity is not merely a structural choice but a means of preserving the emotional core of the poem. This principle bridges cultural and linguistic divides, ensuring that the story of Mulan remains as compelling in translation as it is in its original form.

3.3. Translation of Quantity Iconicity in "Song of Mulan"

3.3.1. The Definition of Quantity Iconicity

Quantity iconicity, as a principle of diagrammatic iconicity, refers to the relationship between the number or amount of linguistic elements and the magnitude of the content they convey (Haiman, 1985). This principle suggests that the quantity

of linguistic elements—whether words, phrases, lines, or stanzas—can mirror the significance or intensity of the concept being expressed. In other words, the larger or more important an event or concept is within the context of a narrative, the more linguistic space it occupies in the text. This direct alignment between quantity and content magnitude is a fundamental way that language organizes meaning, especially in poetry, where the structure of the poem contributes to its overall impact (Haiman, 1985).

For instance, a particularly dramatic or pivotal moment in a poem might be depicted with more words, greater elaboration, or more lines than a less significant event. This alignment between linguistic quantity and thematic magnitude can heighten the emotional or intellectual effect on the reader. Quantity iconicity thus operates not only at the level of individual linguistic elements but also at the level of structural design, influencing how content is distributed across the form of the poem.

In the context of "Song of Mulan", quantity iconicity can be seen in how the poem allocates linguistic space to various events and actions, reflecting their thematic and emotional significance. The balance between brevity and elaboration in the poem's depiction of Mulan's journey allows readers to engage with the events in proportion to their importance to the overarching narrative. As Haiman (1985) explains, the "correspondence between form and content" is particularly crucial in poetry, where the physical structure of the poem can mirror its thematic elements, enhancing both the aesthetic and cognitive experience of the reader.

Quantity iconicity plays a central role in the structure of "Song of Mulan", where the linguistic elaboration of key moments reflects their thematic importance. The direct alignment between the amount of language used and the significance of events enhances both the emotional resonance and narrative clarity of the poem. When translating "Song of Mulan", translators must be attentive to this balance, ensuring that the quantity of linguistic elements in the translation accurately reflects the magnitude of the events being described. Through this careful management of quantity iconicity, translators can preserve the iconic relationship between form and content, allowing the translated poem to resonate in a manner similar to the original.

3.3.2. The Analysis of Quantity Iconicity in "Song of Mulan" and Its Translation

When crafting the image of Mulan preparing to set off for battle, the poet intentionally employs a series of four parallel sentences: "东市买骏马，西市买鞍鞯，南市买辔头，北市买长鞭" (She buys a strong horse in the eastern market; She buys a saddle in the western market; She buys a bridle in the southern market; She buys a long whip in the northern market). This choice might appear stylistically simple on the surface, but it serves a profound function in the poetic structure, one that enriches the reader's engagement with the narrative.

On a basic level, the information conveyed by these four sentences could indeed be expressed in a single line: "Mulan buys a strong horse, a saddle, a bridle, and a

long whip in the market." However, the poet deliberately complicates this otherwise straightforward statement by dividing it into four separate actions. The repetition of structure across the sentences draws attention to the urgency and intensity of Mulan's preparations. This is not merely a list of items; it is a portrayal of a pivotal moment in Mulan's journey, a moment fraught with emotional and symbolic weight. Each market—east, west, south, and north—symbolizes the totality of Mulan's readiness, reflecting the expansive, multifaceted nature of her decision to embark on the battlefield.

In this case, the principle of quantity iconicity is at work. "Quantity iconicity" refers to the direct correlation between the amount of linguistic material used and the magnitude or intensity of the content being conveyed (Haiman, 1985). By spreading the narrative over four parallel sentences, the poet elevates the emotional gravity of the scene, signaling the significance of each action as Mulan prepares for battle. The parallelism not only highlights the systematic nature of her preparations but also mimics the rushed, almost frantic atmosphere of someone who is about to make a momentous decision. The structure of the poem itself becomes an extension of the thematic elements, amplifying the emotional intensity of Mulan's readiness.

The use of parallelism also enhances the reader's sensory engagement with the poem. Each market is associated with a distinct item: a horse, a saddle, a bridle, and a whip—each item contributing symbolically to Mulan's transition from a daughter at home to a warrior heading into battle. This partitioning of the action, along with the repeated sentence structure, underscores the magnitude of each choice she makes in preparing for war, emphasizing her autonomy, strength, and determination.

When translating this scene, it is crucial to preserve both the structure and the meaning inherent in these parallel sentences. Wang Rongpei's translation successfully maintains the integrity of this iconic structure, demonstrating how the quantity of language can reflect the magnitude of the event:

Translation by Wang Rongpei:

She buys a strong horse in the eastern market;

She buys a saddle in the western market;

She buys a bridle in the southern market;

She buys a long whip in the northern market.

Wang's translation preserves not only the meaning but also the rhythm and form of the original. The repetition of "She buys" at the beginning of each line mirrors the parallel structure in the Chinese text, while maintaining the intensity and urgency of Mulan's preparations. This approach ensures that the reader in the target language experiences the same rhythmic, iconic effect as the original audience, where each sentence feels like a deliberate, weighty step toward the battlefield.

The principle of quantity iconicity is thus intricately tied to the thematic development of the poem. By expanding a simple idea into a series of parallel actions,

the poet reflects the symbolic significance of Mulan's preparations. Each action in the sequence represents a distinct, but equally important, part of her transformation from a daughter into a warrior. In translation, this structure must be respected and carefully maintained to preserve the emotional and thematic power of the original poem.

This use of quantity iconicity not only exemplifies the relationship between form and meaning in "Song of Mulan" but also illustrates how the poem's structure contributes to the overall impact on the reader. The poet's decision to employ a greater quantity of linguistic material mirrors the emotional and symbolic intensity of the moment, and this principle is faithfully upheld in Wang Rongpei's translation, ensuring that the iconicity of the original is carried over into the target language.

In "Song of Mulan", the use of quantity iconicity serves as a potent poetic device that amplifies the emotional resonance of the narrative and underscores the thematic weight of Mulan's preparation for battle. Through the repetition of specific actions and the use of parallel structures, the poet intensifies the urgency and gravity of each decision Mulan makes, reinforcing the significance of her choices. The poet's strategic use of this technique mirrors the escalating emotional stakes of the story, drawing the reader's attention to the cumulative nature of Mulan's resolve.

Translators, such as Wang Rongpei, face the challenge of preserving this quantity iconicity in their translations, as it is not merely a stylistic element but a key component of the poem's symbolic and emotional impact. To maintain the integrity of the original text's quantity iconicity, translators can employ several strategies. For instance, they may retain parallel structures or use repetition in the target language to reflect the rhythm and intensity of the original. In cases where exact repetition may be difficult due to linguistic constraints, translators might opt for variations that maintain the sense of accumulation or progression, ensuring that the emotional weight of each action is preserved.

By carefully preserving these elements, the translator ensures that the thematic core and emotional power of the original poem are conveyed effectively to the target audience. Through such strategies, the translator can faithfully render the symbolic power of quantity iconicity, ensuring that the translation not only communicates the narrative's content but also its deeper emotional significance.

3.4. Translation of Distance Iconicity in "Song of Mulan"

3.4.1. The Definition of Distance Iconicity

Distance iconicity in language means that the more similar the concepts in an utterance are, the closer their linguistic forms are in space and time. Analyzed in terms of linguistic cognition, this distance feature is related to the mode of processing information by language users. Related concepts in close proximity often need to be co-processed, and concepts that are closer in time and space are more likely to be co-stimulated when processed by the human brain, thus reducing the time and effort required to process the message (Tao & Huang, 2021).

3.4.2. The Analysis of Distance Iconicity in "Song of Mulan" and Its Translation

In "Song of Mulan", distance iconicity plays a crucial role in structuring the relationships between characters, particularly within the family. The poem reflects the cognitive and emotional proximity between Mulan and her family members through the spatial arrangement of the stanzas. This alignment not only reinforces the familial hierarchy but also enhances the emotional depth of Mulan's return home.

The scene depicting the reactions of Mulan's parents and siblings upon hearing her approach is a clear example of how distance iconicity manifests in the poem:

Original (Chinese):

爷娘闻女来，出郭相扶将。

阿姊闻妹来，当户理红妆。

小弟闻姊来，磨刀霍霍向猪羊。

Translation by Wang Rongpei:

On hearing that Mulan will soon be home,

Her parents leave the courtyard arm in arm.

On hearing that Mulan will soon be home,

Her younger sister makes up to add charm.

On hearing that Mulan will soon be home,

Her younger brother butches pigs on the farm.

In the original text, the family members are placed in a clear hierarchical order that mirrors their conceptual proximity to Mulan. The parents, being the closest and most significant in Mulan's life, are depicted first. They are followed by the younger sister, who, despite being from the same generation, is slightly more distant in terms of the familial role. Lastly, the younger brother, representing the most distant in terms of both emotional connection and generational difference, is placed in the final stanza.

This careful arrangement aligns the spatial distribution of the characters with their relative emotional and conceptual distances, further emphasizing the significance of Mulan's return. The parents' immediate response, symbolized by their action of leaving the courtyard arm in arm, represents their strong emotional bond with Mulan. The sister, preparing herself with makeup, signals a more personal, but less urgent, reaction. The brother, busy with farm work, symbolizes a more distant and less involved response, in line with his position in the family hierarchy.

Wang Rongpei's translation successfully preserves the distance iconicity of the original by maintaining the same spatial structure in the English version. The parallel sentence structure is mirrored in the translation, ensuring that the cognitive and emotional proximity of the family members to Mulan is conveyed effectively. Each family member is still presented in a separate line, preserving the hierarchical and conceptual relationships in the translated text.

Translation by Wang Rongpei:

On hearing that Mulan will soon be home,

Her parents leave the courtyard arm in arm.

On hearing that Mulan will soon be home,
Her younger sister makes up to add charm.
On hearing that Mulan will soon be home,
Her younger brother butches pigs on the farm.

By replicating the spatial distance between the family members, Wang's translation preserves the emotional depth of the original poem. The structure not only ensures that the familial relationships remain intact but also mirrors the shifting emotional distances between Mulan and her family. This faithful adherence to the original spatial order allows the translation to maintain the same cognitive and emotional impact as the original work.

The use of distance iconicity in "Song of Mulan" illustrates the powerful connection between linguistic structure and conceptual relationships. By organizing the characters according to their cognitive proximity to Mulan, the poem highlights the emotional significance of her return home. Wang Rongpei's translation successfully maintains this spatial arrangement, ensuring that the emotional and conceptual distances between the family members are preserved. This demonstrates the importance of preserving "distance iconicity" in poetry translation, allowing the translated text to retain the same emotional depth and thematic resonance as the original.

4. Conclusion

Lu & Wang (2013: p. 609) believe that the acquisition of translation competence depends on the development of various sub-competencies and their integration with each other; and the development and integration of various sub-competencies not only require the accumulation of declarative knowledge but also depend on the reconstruction of existing knowledge by translators. In the process of translation, the translator's cognitive background is one of the factors that determine the choice of translation strategies, and the cognitive differences of translators make differences in their translations. However, adhering to principles of iconicity in poetry translation is helpful for the transference of formal meaning, formal beauty, and realization of the communicative intention and rhetorical effect of the original poem.

Iconicity reveals the connection between linguistic form and content and presents people's conceptual and experiential structures. This paper reveals the relationship between poetic form and structure and cognitive thinking through a comparative analysis of the bilingual text of the "Song of Mulan". To sum up, the explanation and research of some terms related to iconicity needs further study. By promoting the dissemination of Chinese literature to the outside world, the international community will gain a better understanding of China and demonstrate the Chinese people's cultural values of pursuing peaceful development and advocating a harmonious world (Huang, 2008).

Conflicts of Interest

The author declares no conflicts of interest regarding the publication of this paper.

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