

Construal Recreation in Song Lyrics Translation: Cognitive Operations and Motivations — A Case Study of Liu Yong’s *Wanghaichao*

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Abstract—This study proposes a cognitive translation model integrating Langacker’s latest construal theory and category transformations. The model outlines a three-stage process from source text construal decoding, category transformations, to target text construal recreation. An analysis of Liu Yong’s *Wanghaichao* and its translations by Xu Yuanchong, and Yang Xianyi and Dai Naidie reveals that translators dynamically recreate five dimensions of construal. This process is motivated by embodied cognition, cultural cognition, and iconicity; constrained by the subjectivity and objectivity of construal; and guided by cognitive equivalence. The research offers a cognitive framework for balancing fidelity and adaptability in translation, thereby facilitating the global dissemination of Chinese traditional culture.

Index Terms—construal recreation, cognitive translation model, category transformations, motivations, Song lyrics

I. INTRODUCTION

Chinese classical poetry, a carrier of historical memory and aesthetic cognition, holds profound cross-cultural significance (Ye, 2017). As an integral literary tradition, Song lyrics, hailed as the “representative literature of an era”, are distinguished by graceful rhythm and profound artistic conception, and Liu Yong’s *Wanghaichao*, as a key cultural carrier, is renowned for its elaborate depictions of geographical features, historical narratives, and urban customs. However, English translations of classical Chinese poetry have long faced the dilemma of achieving literal equivalence but distorting artistic conception (Jia & Li, 2021). This issue is compounded by Western translators’ partial cultural understanding, which often leads to distorted or inaccurate cultural transmission (Pan, 2004). The key challenge thus lies in restoring poetic artistic conception through precise transfer of conceptual meaning.

Rooted in empiricism, cognitive linguistics emphasizes the experiential nature of human cognition, facilitating the understanding of lyrics’ artistic conception and providing a new paradigm for translation studies (Wen, 2018). Cognitive translation studies argue that translation involves transferring conceptual meaning between the source text (ST) and the target text (TT) (Wang & Chen, 2022), while highlighting the joint role of linguistic and non-linguistic knowledge in meaning construction (Si et al., 2025). A core tool for analyzing this meaning transfer is “construal”, defined as conceptualizers’ ability to conceive and portray the same situation in alternate (Langacker, 2019), with its central position in explaining translation processes having been widely acknowledged by scholars.

Construal research in translation focuses on four main aspects, affirming its explanatory value. Theoretically, Tabakowska (1993) first applied construal to literary translation, defining equivalence as image correspondence. Halverson (2003) elaborated on meaning construction through domain-construal integration. Tao (2024) equated translation’s decoding and encoding to construal manifesting at both cognitive and linguistic levels. Text-type studies cover various genres like novels (Feret, 2017), public signs (Lu, 2022), etc. Process-oriented studies view construal recreation as a constrained cognitive activity (Tan, 2016), with Tao (2024) further emphasizing translators’ subjectivity. Studies on the construction of translation models involve the cognitive equivalence model proposed by Jin and Lin (2015), which has been influential.

Despite these advances, three gaps persist. First, theoretical applications lag behind, as most rely on Langacker’s early construal theory without adequately integrating the newly added dimensions of dynamicity and imagination. Second, operational mechanisms for construal recreation remain vague, lacking clarity on specific operations. Third, research on classical Chinese poetry, particularly culturally rich genres like Song lyrics, remains scattered. Therefore, this study investigates Liu Yong’s *Wanghaichao* and its two prominent English translations, Yang Xianyi and Dai Naidie’s faithfulness-oriented version and Xu Yuanchong’s three beauties version. Drawing on Langacker’s (2019) updated construal theory, it aims to answer: (1) What are the manifestations of construal recreation in translation? (2) What cognitive operations are employed to achieve this recreation? (3) What motivations underpin translators’ choices in this process?

II. CONSTRUAL AND CATEGORY TRANSFORMATIONS

A. Dimensions and Properties of Construal

Construal theory has evolved dynamically. Langacker (2019) expanded it to include five dimensions: perspective, selection, prominence, dynamicity, and imagination. The addition of dynamicity and imagination is particularly crucial. Dynamicity introduces a temporal dimension, while imagination enables the conceptualization of abstract phenomena, like metaphor and metonymy, that go beyond direct experience (Langacker, 2017, 2019). This study therefore adopts this latest framework to ground its analysis.

Across all dimensions, construal exhibits both subjectivity and objectivity. The former stems from conceptualizers' perceptual experiences, while the latter pertains to the context being construed (Zhang, 2023). These properties are relative: cognition, shaped by the former, is grounded in real-world contexts, ensuring that construal is neither arbitrary nor purely objective. Together, they constrain translational construal recreation, striking a balance between the flexibility to adapt to TT readers and the fidelity to preserve ST's original intent.

B. Feasibility and Rationale of Category Transformations as the Cognitive Operations of Construal Recreation

(a). Feasibility

The concept of "category" was introduced to translation studies by Catford (1965), with Neubert (1985) and Snell-Hornby (1988) later applying prototype theory to classify ST and TT. Halverson (2000, 2002) empirically confirmed prototype effects in translation, revealing the absence of absolute equivalence. Subsequent research (Wen et al., 2019; Wen & Si, 2020) has solidified category transformation as a core cognitive activity in translation.

This cognitive activity is driven by construal recreation, defined as translators' reconstruction of ST construal in TT. The goal is to achieve cognitive equivalence, ensuring TT readers undergo a cognitive experience comparable to that of ST readers (Jin & Lin, 2015; Tao, 2024). This equivalence is realized through two principles of relevance: maximum relevance requires translators to maximally replicate ST author's construal operations, while optimal relevance involves constructing necessary elements using cognitive operations familiar to TT readers, thereby achieving a maximally comparable experiential effect (Jin & Lin, 2015).

Category transformation, the primary cognitive operation manifesting construal recreation, is divided into linguistic and non-linguistic types (Wen et al., 2019). Linguistic category transformations involve internal adjustments within the language system, and encompass six forms. Word class category transformation alters words' grammatical class; tense-aspect-voice category transformation reconstructs temporal reference, event phase, and agent-patient relationships to replicate ST temporal and relational construal in TT; syntactic category transformation converts ST structures into functionally equivalent but formally different ones in TT to maintain propositional meaning across typological differences; semantic category transformation redistributes semantic roles like agent and patient to fit TT semantic frames while preserving core relational meaning; pragmatic category transformation adjusts ST pragmatic functions to align with TT contextual rules; stylistic category transformation matches ST stylistic features through corresponding ones in TT to ensure comparable aesthetic or interpersonal effects (Wen & Si, 2020).

In contrast, non-linguistic category transformations address relationships between non-linguistic entities or event categories, employing three operations based on categorical correspondence. When ST and TT categories fully correspond, an equivalent category transformation is achieved through direct substitution. For non-corresponding categories, a dislocated category transformation is achieved either through prototype category integration, which involves replacing ST prototypes with TT counterparts, or through hierarchical recategorization, which entails shifting between superordinate, subordinate, or basic-level categories. Finally, when ST categories lack TT equivalents, a vacant category transformation is realized through recategorization, which redefines category boundaries, or through cross-categorization, which converts to another category with reference to cultural or social categories (Wen et al., 2019; Wen & Si, 2020).

(b). Rationale

The rationale for framing category transformations as the cognitive operations of construal recreation lies in their logical congruence and theoretical validation. Translation inherently involves construal conflicts stemming from cross-linguistic and cross-cultural differences. For instance, Chinese features topic-prominent syntax while English is subject-prominent, and Chinese favors implicit logic whereas English requires explicit cohesion (Chen, 2012). Resolving these conflicts demands reconstruing ST conceptual meaning to align with TT cognitive patterns, ruling out direct replication of the ST construal. Instead, translators aim for optimal or maximum relevance to the ST construal (Jin & Lin, 2015; Tao, 2024).

Category transformations serve as the essential bridge in this process. They convert abstract construal into target-encodable language. Specifically, linguistic category transformations prioritize surface alignment, and non-linguistic category transformations resolve deep cognitive gaps, with preferences shaped by specific construal dimensions and types of category transformation. This forms a logical chain that includes construal conflicts, linguistic and non-linguistic category transformations, and construal recreation. This link is validated by cognitive linguistics, which posits that linguistic structures encode conceptualizations of experience. Categories are thus linguistic manifestations of construal; transforming them aligns TT construal with ST cognitive intent, making category transformations the operational carrier of construal recreation (Wen & Si, 2020).

Practically, the relationship is flexible, with no rigid one-to-one mapping between construal dimensions and category transformation types. For instance, emphasizing an action's agent might involve linguistic adjustments such as subject modification and passive voice or non-linguistic adjustments such as adding cultural background depending on language-system differences, text style, translators' cognition and target audience's capacity. This flexibility arises from construal's subjectivity and objectivity because translators must ground their work in ST content and intent while adapting to TT cognitive habits, manifesting their subjectivity, cognitive ability and creativity (Zhang, 2023). Ultimately, translators' choices of category transformations are guided by both objective constraints adhering to ST content and intent, and subjective factors involving their proficiency, cultural framework, translation philosophy, and evaluation of TT audience comprehension, etc. This balance ensures precise conceptual delivery with adaptive flexibility.

C. Cognitive Translation Model Based on Construal and Category Transformations in Song Lyrics

Translation is a cognitive activity involving comprehending ST and reconstructing its conceptual meaning in TT (Wang & Chen, 2022). For song lyrics translation, this cognitive process is divided into intralingual and interlingual translation, corresponding respectively to the two core sub-processes of cognitive translation. The former focuses on transferring conceptual meaning from classical to modern Chinese by resolving diachronic gaps such as archaic syntax, allusions, and diction; the latter seeks to recreate ST construal under dual constraints, including linguistic differences between Chinese and English and cultural incommensurability (Chen, 2012).

Building on this, the study integrates Langacker's (2019) construal theory with song lyric translation, operationalized through category transformations. It proposes a three-stage cognitive translation model (see Figure 1): (1) decoding ST construal, (2) maintaining or adjusting construal via category transformations, and (3) recreating construal in TT. This model follows two guiding principles: the dual properties of construal and the principle of cognitive equivalence. Its goal is to ensure TT readers attain cognitive experiences analogous to those of ST readers (Jin & Lin, 2015).

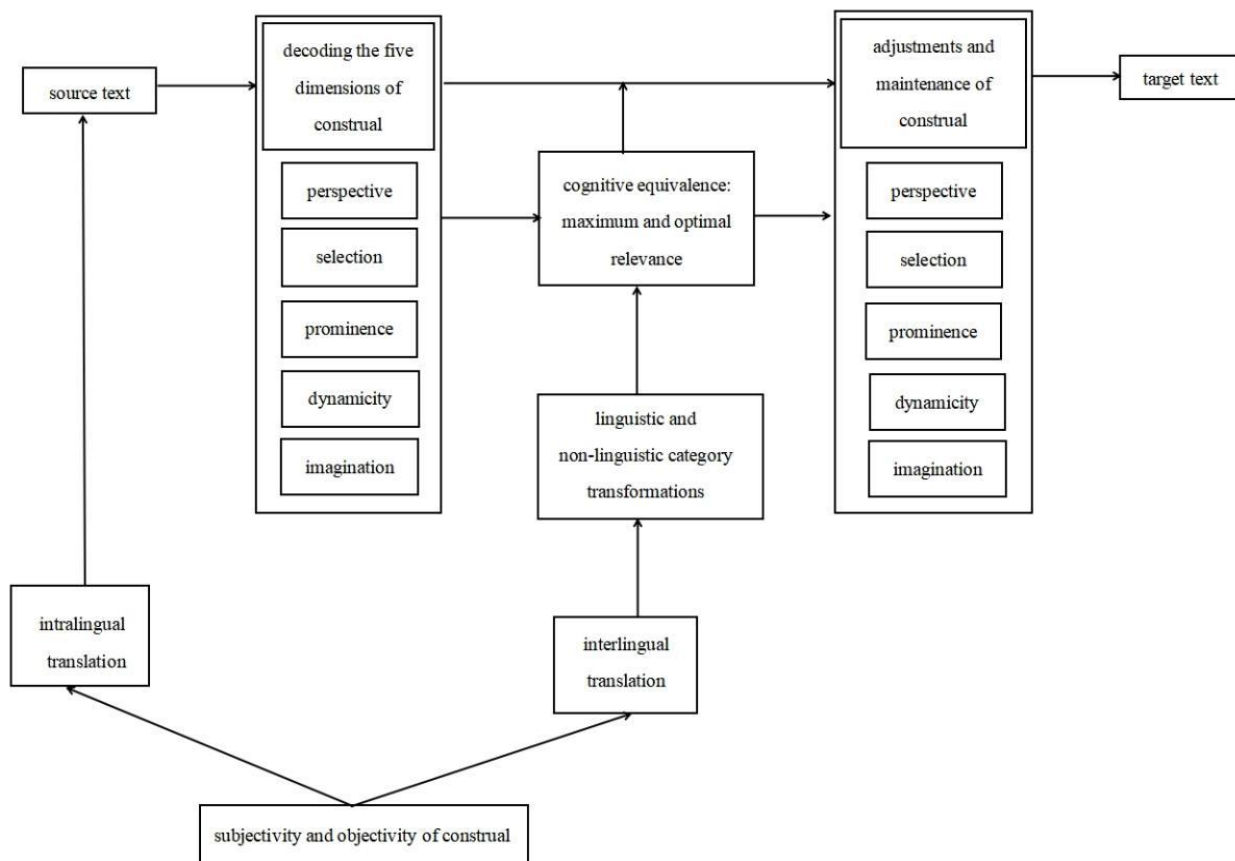


Figure 1. Cognitive Translation Model Based on Construal and Category Transformations

(a). Intralingual Translation

Intralingual translation, the premise for interlingual reconstruction (Jia & Li, 2021), focuses on decoding ST construal by resolving diachronic cognitive barriers such as classical allusions, archaic syntax, and culturally specific items. Translators must possess both encyclopedic knowledge of Song Dynasty history, traditions, and lyricists' worldviews, and a firm grasp of classical poetic conventions.

As a paradigmatic diachronic text requiring intralingual translation, Song lyrics exhibit distinct traits: obscured personhood, numerical ambiguity, imagery juxtaposition, and indistinct tense-aspect. They also include non-linguistic,

culturally loaded elements, such as symbolic images, proper names, and the rhetorical devices of *Bi* (metaphor) and *Xing* (affective evocation). *Bi* functions as similarity-based comparison, while *Xing* evokes affective association through contextual relevance (Feng, 2021), all reflecting ancient Chinese people's unique conceptualization. These elements are critical to decoding ST construal, a process constrained by construal's inherent subjectivity and objectivity.

(b). *Interlingual Translation*

Guided by intralingual decoding, interlingual translation recreates ST construal through linguistic and non-linguistic category transformations. Adhering to cognitive equivalence, translators decide whether to maintain or adjust the construal by assessing the similarity between ST and TT construal dimensions, based on linguistic typology and cultural conceptualization. When dimensions are similar, they employ category transformations to meticulously replicate the poet's construal, aiming for maximum relevance to ST; otherwise, they prioritize optimal relevance, using category transformations to recreate necessary elements and adapt the construal to TT readers' familiar dimensions (Jin & Lin, 2015). Both linguistic and non-linguistic category transformations are essential; the former adapts to TT linguistic habits, while the latter handles heavily culturally loaded items like allusions and proper names. These operations collectively guarantee effective ST construal recreation in TT.

This model operationalizes the five-dimensional construal theory through category transformations, integrating the theory's dual properties with cognitive equivalence. Its core process involves two stages: intralingual decoding of ST construal to resolve diachronic and cultural barriers, followed by interlingual recreation in TT via linguistic and non-linguistic category transformations. By balancing fidelity to ST construal with cognitive adaptability for TT readers, the model advances the "cognitive turn" in translation studies. Applied to two English translations of *Wanghaichao*, it demonstrates efficacy across all five construal dimensions.

III. CONSTRUAL RECREATION AND COGNITIVE OPERATIONS IN THE ENGLISH VERSIONS OF *WANGHAICHAO*

This section investigates how Yang and Dai and Xu achieve construal recreation through systematic category transformations.

A. *Perspective Recreation and Category Transformations*

Perspective, defined as the angle of event description, encompasses subject-object asymmetry, vantage point, reference point, and scope, reflecting how lexical-grammatical structures shape event perception (Langacker, 2019). In Song lyrics, perspective is often obscured by implicit subjects, covert tense-aspect-voice, and culturally specific vantage and reference points, rooted in classical Chinese's topic-prominent syntax and cultural cognition (Feng, 2021). Construal recreation thus requires linguistic and non-linguistic category transformations to bridge cross-linguistic and cross-cultural gaps.

Example 1

ST: 东南形胜，三吴都会，钱塘自古繁华。

TT (Yang and Dai): A place of scenic beauty in the southeast, the metropolis in the region of the Three Wu's (Three prefectures of the ancient State of Wu.), Qiantang (Former name of Hangzhou, Zhejiang Province) has flourished since ancient times.

TT (Xu): Scenic splendor southeast of River Blue, And capital of ancient Kingdom Wu, Qiantang's as flourishing as e'er.

(a). *Intralingual Translation*

The perspective in Example 1 is decoded by resolving diachronic and cultural barriers. First, the subject-object relationship presents an implicit binary structure of a hidden poet-explicit scenery, with the observer indirectly manifested through descriptions. Second, the vantage point is a super-spatiotemporal panorama originating from "东南", embedding the cultural-geographical presupposition of "southeastern territory within Huaxia". Third, the scope hierarchy follows a logic of spatial contraction, moving from the macro "东南" to the meso "三吴" and finally to the micro "钱塘". Fourth, the reference points "三吴" and "钱塘" are culturally specific historical-geographical categories. The former refers to three Wu-related regions, while the latter refers to the sand dike of the Qiantang River in today's Hangzhou. Finally, subjectivity and objectivity are integrated through a fusion of geographical and administrative facts with implicit poetic evaluation.

(b). *Interlingual Translation*

Yang and Dai reproduce the ST's perspective through various category transformations, enabling TT readers to experience its macro panoramic view and layered focus.

To address subject-object asymmetry, they employ syntactic category transformation: paratactic noun phrases are converted into hypotactic clauses with explicit subjects, establishing an "interpreter-scenery" relationship that aligns with English's subject-prominent syntax. Regarding the vantage point, equivalent category transformation rephrases "东南" as "in the southeast", a neutral spatial term that strips its "Huaxia territory" presupposition to align with TT readers' universal geographical cognition. Scope hierarchy is recreated through syntactic and pragmatic category transformations, turning the ST's parataxis into a nested structure and contextualizing "钱塘" with "Zhejiang Province" to establish an

explicit hierarchy. This transforms the ST's implicit spatial contraction into a clear nested structure. For reference points, pragmatic category transformation clarifies “三吴” via annotation, while the combination of this transformation and transliteration anchors “钱塘” to “Hangzhou”. This coordinated strategy activates the reader's geographical cognitive schema to compensate for a lack of historical-cultural knowledge. On the subjectivity-objectivity axis, hierarchical category transformation downgrades the basic-level category “形胜” to the subordinate category “scenic beauty”, isolating the aesthetic dimension. Additionally, word class and tense category transformations shift the nominal “繁华” to the verbal phrase “has flourished”, which conveys continuity explicitly and precisely, thereby weakening poetic subjectivity and strengthening the transmission of objective fact.

By contrast, Xu prioritizes poetic cognitive logic, employing category transformations that enable TT readers to experience the ST's fusion of scene and emotion. For subject-object asymmetry, hierarchical category transformation converts “形胜” to “scenic splendor”, intensifying the poetic evaluation and shifting the subject from an implicit observer to an explicit aesthetic appreciator. Regarding vantage point, hierarchical category transformation renders “东南” as the poetic image “River Blue”, replacing geographical division with a space of poetic association. For scope hierarchy, syntactic category transformation splits “东南形胜” into a compact, parallel focus, aligning with the principle of beauty in form. For reference points, hierarchical category transformation elevates “三吴” from an administrative division to “ancient Kingdom Wu”, evoking historical-poetic cognition and matching the /u:/ rhyme in the preceding line, but lacking accuracy. “钱塘” is retained as a transliterated poetic symbol, prioritizing cultural exoticism over geographical precision. In balancing subjectivity and objectivity, hierarchical category transformation blurs temporal logic by converting “自古” to “e'er”, weakening objective historical continuity and sacrificing factual details to strengthen lyrical mood. This approach is less accurate than Yang and Dai's version.

B. Selection Recreation and Category Transformations

Selection, a cognitive process managing mental complexity, involves observing entities through activating a conceptual substrate. It encompasses attentional hierarchy, specificity, and profile choice (Langacker, 2019). Song lyrics, characterized by conciseness, image Juxtaposition, implicitness of number/tense/logic, and deep cultural embedding (Feng, 2021), require translators to properly recreate such selection strategies through various category transformations to align with TT readers' cognitive habits while preserving the poet's observational focus.

Example 2

ST: 烟柳画桥，风帘翠幕。

TT (Yang and Dai): Clouded willow trees and bright painted bridges; windbreak window drapes and kingfisher-feathered curtains.

TT (Xu): The smoke like willows form a windproof screen; adorned with painted bridges and curtains green.

(a). Intralingual Translation

Decoding the ST's selection involves resolving condensed syntax and culturally embedded imagery. Attentional hierarchy establishes a macro Jiangnan water town scope, with “烟柳” and “画桥” as primary static foci, while “风帘” and “翠幕” as secondary details, constructing an objective “foreground-background” cognitive framework. Specificity is achieved through lexical precision: “烟” specifies the willows' hazy quality, and “翠” denotes a vivid color, though their full interpretation depends on cultural associations with Jiangnan scenery. Profile choice operates via metonymy, where “烟柳” and “画桥” trigger part-for-whole associations, requiring readers' shared knowledge to construe a holistic aesthetic world.

(b). Interlingual Translation

Yang and Dai prioritize structural fidelity, reflecting an objective adherence to the ST's form and the subjective mediation of cultural gaps. Regarding attentional hierarchy, syntactic category transformation retains parallelism through “and”, preserving the primary-secondary focus. However, the macro-cultural context of “Jiangnan” is adjusted through vacant category transformation. As English lacks a direct equivalent for the cultural landscape symbol “烟柳画桥”, its implicit regional association is stripped, reducing the scene to a purely visual one. For example, “clouded willow trees” retains the hazy quality but severs its link to “Jiangnan spring mist”, shifting the focus from cultural presupposition to the physical object. For specificity, multiple category transformations are employed to clarify visual details. Word class category transformation converts the noun “烟” to the adjective “clouded”, directly describing the willows. Semantic category transformation amplifies “画桥” with “bright”, adjusting its semantic role from implicit decoration to explicit color intensity. “风帘” is rendered as “windbreak window drapes”, shifting its semantic role from dynamic imagery to a functional-locational one. This preserves visual detail while stripping away cultural connotations. Additionally, vacant category transformation recategorizes “翠”, the superordinate cultural color connoting jade and vitality, into the object-attribute “kingfisher-feathered”, concretizing the color through a specific visual referent. For profile choice, the metonymic mechanism is reconstructed from a “cultural whole” to a “visual part”. A typical example is the prototype category integration of “画桥” into “bright painted bridge”, emphasizing visual vibrancy over cultural refinement.

By contrast, Xu prioritizes aesthetic equivalence by balancing maximal relevance, preserving core ST elements, and optimal relevance, minimizing TT readers' cognitive efforts. Regarding attentional hierarchy, syntactic category transformation converts the condensed parallel four-character phrases to a main clause and participial phrase. This reduces the syntactic prominence of “风帘” and “翠幕”, but compensates with semantic prominence: “windproof” highlights the former's function and “green” preserves the latter's color, maintaining the core hierarchy to align with the ST's “human-nature harmony” construal. For specificity, coordinated category transformations preserve the lexical fine-grainedness and imagery density of ST. Word class transformation converts “烟” from a noun into the prepositional phrase “smoke like” to retain haziness via a familiar simile. Semantic and pragmatic category transformations adapt the attribute focus by shifting “风帘” from “natural vitality” imagery to “windproof screen”, aligning with English conventions. Stylistic category transformation uses the poetic syntax “curtains green” to mimic the ST's “color-entity” juxtaposition, partially retaining its conciseness. The ST's “part-to-whole” metonymy, rooted in cultural knowledge of Jiangnan scenery, is reconstructed through two types of transformation. For “烟柳”, prototype integration merges the cultural concept of “Jiangnan spring mist” with the visual prototype of “smoke” via simile, shifting the logic from cultural association to visual similarity. For “翠幕”, hierarchical recategorization simplifies the culturally rich color “翠” to the basic-level green, reducing cognitive load. The resulting phrase “curtains green” compensates for this loss of cultural granularity with stylistic specificity.

C. Prominence Recreation and Category Transformations

Prominence, arising from conceptual asymmetry in profile-base and trajector-landmark relationships (Langacker, 2019), is often conveyed indirectly in Song lyrics through image juxtaposition and ellipsis. Its expression is constrained by formal brevity, contextual dependence, and cultural symbolism, making its recreation in translation a process of balancing fidelity with cognitive accessibility. This process necessitates category transformations to bridge cross-linguistic and cultural gaps, and is shaped by the dynamic interplay between the objective prominence structure and the translators' subjective choices.

Example 3

ST: 千骑拥高牙，乘醉听萧鼓，吟赏烟霞。

TT (Yang and Dai): With a flag surrounded by a mounted retinue a thousand strong; to enjoy music while in my cups, to chant verses while admiring the mist and clouds at twilight.

TT (Xu): With flags before and guards behind you come; drunken, you may listen to flute and drum, chanting the praises loud of the land beneath the cloud.

(a). Intralingual Translation

The ST's prominence emerges from hierarchical profile-base dynamics and trajector-landmark interactions, integrating objective structure and subjective interpretation. Three progressive scenes establish the base. The first is ceremonial where “拥” foregrounds authority against the landmark “高牙”; the second is feasting where “听” is foregrounded against “箫鼓”, with “醉” subjectively elevating the experience; the third is natural where “吟赏” integrates expression and appreciation against the landmark “烟霞”. These scenes are paralleled by trajector-landmark interactions that create objective images, which are then subjectively interpreted by readers. Consequently, prominence progresses from the external action of “拥” and sensory perception of “听” to an internalized feeling-scene integration in “吟赏”. This trajectory reflects both an objective scene sequence, and its corresponding subjective emotional deepening, advancing from power to relaxation and finally to transcendence.

(b). Interlingual Translation

Yang and Dai prioritize structural fidelity, retaining the ST's prominence structure through subjective category transformations to achieve cognitive equivalence. For profile-base dynamics, they preserve the progressive base across the three scenes. For the ceremonial base, they use syntactic category transformation to convert the S-V-O structure of “千骑拥高牙” into a prepositional phrase, preserving the background-foreground relationship and retaining the power imagery. For the feasting base, pragmatic category transformation explicates the implicit trajector as the first-person “my”, aligning with English conventions, and keeping the protagonist's emotional perspective as the focal point, thus preserving the base's function of shifting from physical to spiritual experience. For the natural base, pragmatic category transformation adds “at twilight” to anchor “烟霞” to a concrete spatiotemporal frame, resolving cultural presupposition gaps while retaining the landmark for natural harmony. Parallel to preserving profile-base dynamics, Yang and Dai sustain trajector-landmark relationships across scenes. For the ceremonial scene, the interaction between the trajector “千骑” and landmark “高牙” is retained via word class transformation, reclassifying the noun “骑” as an adjectival participle “mounted retinue” to explicate the riding state and reinforce the imperial grandeur imagery. In the feasting scene, hierarchical category transformation elevates the basic-level instruments “箫鼓” to the superordinate term “music”, enhancing sensory immersion and mirroring the shift from physical intoxication to spiritual relaxation. In the natural scene, part-to-whole metonymy is retained, with the trajector interacting with “烟霞” through “吟赏”, preserving the evocation of human-nature harmony.

Xu, conversely, focuses on cognitive accessibility, using category transformations to bridge cultural gaps and enhance reader comprehension, while maintaining the ST's essential prominence. For profile-base dynamics, he adjusts the cognitive schemas to ensure accessibility for TT readers. In the ceremonial scene, hierarchical category transformation converts “高牙” into “flags”, reducing the cultural specificity of the base to activate a more familiar and generalized schema. In the leisure scene, word class transformation elevates the verbal phrase “乘醉” to the adjectival “Drunken”, emphasizing the trajector's agency. In the aesthetic scene, hierarchical category transformation shifts the base from the abstract symbol “烟霞” to the concrete visual landscape “land beneath the cloud”. This subjective schema expansion makes the base more accessible by providing a tangible backdrop for the foregrounded action. Corresponding adjustments to trajector-landmark interactions include preserving objective interaction in the ceremonial scene through syntactic restructuring while introducing a second-person perspective to enhance engagement; retaining “flute and drum” in the leisure scene to foreground sensory input and listener agency; and facilitating direct interaction in the aesthetic scene through the trajector's “chanting the praises loud of the land”, explicitizing the human-nature connection while retaining the landmark's symbolic role as a site of transcendence.

D. Dynamicity Recreation and Category Transformations

Dynamicity, a newly added construal dimension, stems from the temporal unfolding of conceptualization, distinct from the described situation's time (Langacker, 2019). It involves two mental scanning processes: sequential scanning processes events step-by-step and is crucial for verbs profiling evolving relationships, while summary scanning captures a holistic gestalt by activating all temporal phases simultaneously (Zhang, 2023). In Song lyrics, dynamicity is often implied by verbless clauses and vague or implicit tenses, requiring category transformations to bridge linguistic and cultural gaps.

Example 4

ST: 羌管弄晴，菱歌泛夜，嬉嬉钓叟莲娃。

TT (Yang and Dai): The sound of flutes soars up to the sunny skies, the singing of folk songs breaks the silence of night, happy are the old anglers and girls collecting water chestnuts.

TT (Xu): Northwestern pipes play with sunlight; water chestnut songs are sung by starlight; old fishermen and maidens young all beam with smiles.

(a). Intralingual Translation

The ST's dynamicity is constructed across four dimensions. In processing time, three sequential clauses create a linear cognitive flow: from the auditory perception of “羌管” to “菱歌”, ending in the audio-visual perception of “钓叟” and “莲娃”. In conceived time, “晴” and “夜” establish a day-night sequence, with the first two clauses creating a temporal leap while the final one extends continuity via summary scanning. For mental scanning, sequential scanning operates in “弄” and “泛”, characterized by incremental sound propagation, while summary scanning in “嬉嬉” activates the temporal phases of collective joy to perceive the figures “钓叟莲娃” as a static and holistic group. In dynamic-static construal, “弄” and “泛” merge the static “晴” and “夜” into dynamic components, framing sound as an active entity to integrate isolated temporal elements into a cohesive landscape.

(b). Interlingual Translation

Yang and Dai prioritize preserving the objective dynamic structure of ST while employing subjective category transformations to align with TT readers' habits. For processing time, they use syntactic category transformation to convert parallel subjectless clauses into subject-predicate structures by adding explicit subjects while retaining the ST's clause order. This preserves the cognitive flow from the sound of “羌管” to the main figures “钓叟莲娃”. Equivalent category transformation renders “钓叟” as “old anglers”, and hierarchical category transformation elevates “晴” to “sunny skies”, anchoring cognitive extension from sound dynamics to characters' state and environment. In terms of conceived time, tense-aspect category transformation converts implicit tenses to English simple present, enhancing immediacy and scene dynamism. For mental scanning, sequential scanning is preserved through verb expansion: “弄” expands to “soars up” for vertical sound diffusion, and “泛” expands to “breaks the silence” for horizontal song spread. Summary scanning is reinforced through syntactic category transformation: the inverted structure fronts “Happy” to emphasize collective joy, while adding “collecting water chestnuts” embeds action details, balancing static imagery with a sense of process. Prototypical category transformation adjusts the scanning objects by rendering “羌管”, a Qiang instrument without an English equivalent, to the superordinate term “flutes”, retaining the wind instrument's sound properties familiar to TT readers. In dynamic-static construal, syntactic category transformation preserves the dynamic essence through verb phrase expansion. Prepositional phrases like “to the sunny skies” and “of night” transform static backgrounds into dynamic propagation carriers, continuing the ST's static-to-dynamic activation. Additionally, prototypical category transformation adjusts interaction modes: “菱歌” is rendered as “folk songs”, shifting focus to the general sound-environment relation and aligning with English cognitive schemas for folk music. “莲娃” is converted to “water chestnut-picking girls” through cross-scenario integration, unifying the imagery and retaining the dynamic role of female pickers to ensure consistency in the reader's cognition of character actions.

In contrast, Xu prioritizes cross-cultural cognitive accessibility, enhancing readability while retaining the ST's dynamic essence through various category transformations. For processing time, Xu uses syntactic category transformation to add subjects as shown in the translation, maintaining the cognitive hierarchy of "from object to sound to person". Basic-level category correspondence renders "钓叟" as "old fishermen", and hierarchical category transformation recategorizes "莲娃" to "maidens young", omitting the culture-specific lotus-picking scene to adapt to English readers' unfamiliarity. This ensures semantic and syntactic equivalence between TT and ST, while anchoring cognitive extension from sound dynamics to human states. In conceived time, hierarchical category transformation converts abstract "晴" and "夜" to concrete "sunlight" and "starlight" to keep the day to night timeline, fusing temporal sequence with vivid imagery. For mental scanning, syntactic category transformation converts "弄" and "泛" to "play with sunlight" and "are sung by starlight", shifting from active propagation to environmental interaction. This dynamism is compensated by semantic concretization of "晴" and "夜" to form interactive scenes. In dynamic-static construal, prototypical category integration renders "羌管" as "Northwestern pipes" to address cultural conflicts. Voice category transformation adjusts the interaction mode by changing "弄晴" to "play with sunlight" and "泛夜" to "are sung by starlight", shifting from dynamic dominance to dynamic-static accompaniment, with the passive voice "are sung" weakening action.

E. Imagination Recreation and Category Transformations

Imagination, a newly added dimension of construal, encompasses four interrelated mental abilities: extensionality, referring to unifying multiple entities in a single representational space; integration, involving connecting entities through mental operations; disengagement, entailing projecting cognition beyond the immediate context via mental simulation; and abstraction referring to the reduction of specific information in the process of forming mental representations, that is, distilling specific experiences into information-poor symbolic structures (Langacker, 2019; Zhang, 2023). In Song lyrics translation, the cognitive contrast between intuitive, image-based thinking in ancient Chinese thought and rational, logic-driven Western thinking (Lian, 2010; Feng, 2021) necessitates strategic deployment of linguistic and non-linguistic category transformations to recreate ST's imagination.

Example 5

ST: 异日图将好景，归去凤池夸。

TT (Yang and Dai): When one day you win promotion with glory, you will praise this place at Phoenix Pool (the imperial cabinet or court in general) profusely.

TT (Xu): You may picture the scene another day, and boast to the Court where you'll go in full array.

(a). Intralingual Translation

The imagination in this line is decoded as follows: Extensionality unites the entities "异日", "好景", "图", "归去", "凤池", and "夸" in a single representational space. Integration forges them into a causal chain: "异日" prompts "图将好景", which enables returning to "凤池" to "夸", linking static scenery to dynamic action. Disengagement projects the poet's perspective into a simulated, non-actual scenario, creating the line's imaginative power. Abstraction distills concrete experience into symbols: "好景" is stripped of specific sensory details and elevated to represent the poet's successful tenure, while "凤池" evolves from the Central Secretariat, ancient Chinese bureaucratic institution, to a symbol of power and success.

(b). Interlingual Translation

Yang and Dai prioritize preserving the ST's objective imaginative framework while adapting to English cognitive patterns through coordinated category transformations. For extensionality, they unify the six ST entities through coordinated category transformations. The core "time-means-process-place-action" framework is retained through semantic role explicitation. "异日" is rendered as "when one day" via tense-aspect category transformation to explicitize the implicit futurity, complemented by hierarchical category transformation that generalizes a specific future point to a universal temporal domain, aligning with English demand for overt temporality. The abstract "好景" symbolizing fine prospect and success is semantically downgraded to the concrete "this place" through hierarchical category transformation, anchoring TT readers in a tangible location. The action "图" and the process "归去" are merged into the single outcome "winning promotion", streamlining the causal logic through syntactic category transformation. The culture-specific term "凤池" is translated directly to preserve its symbolic label through equivalent category transformation, supplemented by pragmatic category transformation that adds "the imperial cabinet" as an annotation to bridge cultural gaps.

For integration, these transformations are synthesized: "归去凤池夸" is restructured syntactically into "praise this place at Phoenix Pool", demoting the process to a locative adverbial to align with English focus-fronting. This is paired with semantic role redistribution, which compresses the entire means-to-an-end sequence into the single, goal-oriented concept of "winning promotion". For disengagement, temporal projection is made explicit through markers like "will praise" and "when one day", collectively signaling a simulated future scenario. For abstraction, symbolic meaning is balanced with accessibility; "凤池" retains its symbolic label, while "好景" is concretized to "this place", offset by the context of "winning promotion", implicitly restoring its abstract connotation of success.

In contrast, Xu prioritizes cognitive accessibility, using category transformations to lower the reader's cognitive load

while preserving the ST's imaginative core. For extensionality, the representational space is unified through syntactic restructuring, where hypotactic coordination replaces the ST's paratactic clauses. This frames the entities under the superordinate concept of "future planning", aligning with the English preference for explicit logical connectors. For integration, the causal chain is simplified. Specifically, semantic category transformation clarifies the implicit agent, the poet, as the generalized "you", providing a shared reference point for linking entities. The chain is condensed to the sequence of "depicting a scene" and then "boasting at court", thereby retaining the "means-to-goal" logic while omitting procedural details for conciseness. For disengagement, the simulation of a non-actual scenario is strengthened through tense-aspect and semantic category transformations. The modal verb "may" converts the ST's assertive future into an open, hypothetical scenario. The agent "you" elevates personal imagination to a shared cognitive experience, weakening the scene's tie to a concrete reality. For abstraction, Xu focuses on cross-cultural symbolic transmission. "好景" undergoes semantic generalization to "the scene", shifting its meaning from a specific "beautiful scenery" to the more abstract "scene worth depicting", which is then linked to "图" to imply a "depictable achievement". For "凤池", pragmatic category transformation is employed by translating it as "the Court", activating a corresponding concept of a "center of power" for TT readers. This is complemented by hierarchical recategorization, elevating the specific bureaucratic term to the superordinate, cross-cultural symbol of "the ultimate stage of success".

F. Summary

Cognitive incommensurability between ST and TT necessitates construal recreation through category transformations. These transformations serve as a technical bridge, operationalizing the balance between fidelity and accessibility. Specifically, linguistic category transformations address surface-level typological gaps, while non-linguistic category transformations resolve deeper cultural-cognitive incommensurability.

Across the five construal dimensions, Yang and Dai prioritize structural fidelity through hybrid category transformations, thereby preserving the ST's cognitive architecture for readers seeking historical-cultural accuracy. In contrast, Xu emphasizes cognitive accessibility through adaptive transformations, recreating construal to resonate with TT readers' aesthetic schemas. Together, these approaches enable cognitive equivalence by aligning the objectivity of construal with the subjective cognitive experience of readers.

IV. MOTIVATIONS BEHIND CONSTRUAL RECREATION

Cognitive translation studies emphasize both description and explanation (Wen et al., 2019), thus requiring an exploration of the underlying motivations behind construal recreation. In Song lyrics translation, this process is driven by the dynamic interplay of embodied cognition, cultural cognition, and iconicity. These three factors collectively guide translators to balance fidelity to ST with TT readers' acceptability, aiming for cross-cultural cognitive equivalence.

A. Embodied Cognition

Embodied cognition, arising from body-environment interaction, provides the fundamental perceptual material for construal. Its universality offers a shared platform for cross-linguistic transfer (Lakoff, 1987; Halverson, 2003).

For instance, the brightness of "晴" and darkness of "夜" are universally perceived, allowing direct translation. However, cultural specificity challenges this transfer when perceptual paths are embedded, as with the Chinese "烟柳", which evokes the culturally specific image of "Jiangnan spring mist". To bridge this gap, translators employ category transformations. Yang and Dai use a semantic category transformation to render it as "clouded willow trees", preserving the hazy visual while stripping the geographical presupposition. Xu opts for prototype category integration, translating it as "The smoke like willows" to map the unfamiliar "misty" prototype onto the English readers' familiar "smoke" imagery, and to pursue the aesthetic meaning of ST. This strategy of preserving common experiences while adapting culturally specific ones defines the feasible boundaries for subsequent cultural and formal choices.

B. Cultural Cognition

Building on this perceptual foundation, cultural cognition shapes raw experience into sociocultural conceptual frameworks. As translation is inherently intertwined with culture (Bernárdez, 2013), language, cognition, and culture intersect profoundly, with culture shaping language structure and realizing experiential conceptualization through cognitive structures like imagery and categories (Palmer & Sharifian, 2007). Construal recreation thus must retain the ST's cultural core, such as untranslatable cultural imagery or historical allusion connotations, while aligning with the TT's cultural cognitive framework to avoid "cultural mismatch" (Wen, 2024).

Specifically, for universal cultural experiences, meanings are conveyed via equivalent category transformations. For culturally specific expressions like "三吴" or "凤池", rooted in historical geography or bureaucratic culture, translators reconstruct cognitive frameworks through dislocated or vacant category transformations, retaining the cognitive framework for TT readers. This process endows embodied perception with sociocultural significance, setting aesthetic boundaries for formal expression.

C. Iconicity

Iconicity, as the formal carrier of construal, reinforces the link between form and meaning through intrinsic similarity

between linguistic symbols and cognitive experiences (Calfoglou, 2014), guiding translators to preserve “form-meaning isomorphism” via category transformations. Main types of iconicity include order, quantity, distance, and symmetry (Tabakowska, 2013; Wen, 2018). It reflects the cognitive principle of recognizing the world through similarities, and allows for an analysis of the underlying cognitive models that govern how meaning is expressed in TT (Chen, 2023).

Objectively, iconicity is anchored to the ST’s inherent features: linguistic order must align with event sequences, as in “羌管弄晴，菱歌泛夜”，where both Xu, and Yang and Dai retain the “day-night” timeline to preserve temporal cognition. Subjectively, translators adapt to TT cultural norms: the Chinese “four-character structure” parallelism of “烟柳画桥，风帘翠幕” is rendered by Yang and Dai with “and” to maintain structural symmetry, while Xu uses a semicolon and rhyming “green” to compensate with rhythmic harmony. This formal adjustment, guided by cultural cognition’s demand for readability within cultural norms, ensures iconicity reinforces rather than conflicts with cultural meaning transmission.

V. CONCLUSION

This study develops a cognitive translation model, analyzing two English translations of Liu Yong’s *Wanghaichao*. It finds that translators recreate the ST’s construal through linguistic and non-linguistic category transformations, which is constrained by the dual properties of construal, guided by cognitive equivalence, and motivated by embodied cognition, cultural cognition, and iconicity. Theoretically, it integrates Langacker’s updated five-dimensional construal theory with category transformations, offering insights into translation cognitive operations. However, focusing on a single text limits its generalizability to other classical Chinese poetry, and lacking empirical data weakens model validation. Future research should expand the scope of poetic texts, and adopt empirical methods.

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