

A Study on Translation Strategies of Human Body Organ Metaphors: A Case Study of David Hawkes' Translation of The Story of the Stone (Chapters 1-60)

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Abstract: As a typical expression of embodied cognition, organ metaphors in the human body pose a significant problem for cross-cultural literary translation due to their deep cultural connotations. This paper studies the translation strategies of such metaphors in David Hawkes' well-known English edition of Hong Lou Meng's *The Story of the Stone* (Chapters 1-60). Based on Conceptual Metaphor Theory (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980), a two-level analysis system has been proposed to examine the cause-and-effect relationship among different kinds of metaphors and translation strategies in this study. Cognitive-cultural accessibility determines whether a system uses internal metaphors (such as 'heart' or 'liver') or external metaphors (such as 'face' or 'eyes') to address a specific requirement, and thus selects a different approach accordingly. According to an all-encompassing study of the source text (Gengchen edition) and Hawkes' translation, the techniques that have been used can be systematically listed and examined in this paper. The study offers empirical support for the model proposed earlier: external organ metaphors (high accessibility) are generally translated as literal or creatively literal translations to retain vivid imagery, and internal organ metaphors (low accessibility) are often treated by free translation or creative transposition to ensure the emotional and cognitive accessibility of the target readers. Hawkes' Strategy is therefore not random; rather, it constitutes a system of accessibility based on the cognitive-cultural accessibility of the metaphor, which he refers to as "graded domestication". It offers a typical case for translation research by Hong Lou Meng and provides a feasible, predictive analytical system for exploring literary metaphor translation.

Keywords: Human Body Organ Metaphors; Translation Strategies; David Hawkes; *The Story of the Stone*; Conceptual Metaphor Theory; Cognitive Accessibility; Two-tiered Analytical Model.

1. Introduction

For any literary translator, few tasks are as persistently troublesome as rendering metaphors, especially those tightly bound to a particular cultural context [1]. Among these, expressions involving body organs stand out because they sit at the crossroads of physical universality and cultural idiosyncrasy. They are not decorative add-ons; rather, they reflect how a community conceptualizes emotions, social bonds, and inner life[2]. Hong Lou Meng (henceforth HLM) is exceptionally rich in such expressions, and this richness makes its translations a particularly revealing test case for metaphor theory. Of the several English versions available, David Hawkes' *The Story of the Stone* has gained lasting recognition for its readability and imaginative handling of the source material. Hawkes himself made clear, in his introduction, that he aimed to produce a version that would read like an English novel, prioritizing the target reader's engagement. While existing scholarship has often discussed Hawkes' overall preference for domestication[3,4], surprisingly little attention has been paid to how he deals specifically with organ-based metaphors. General studies on imagery or rhetorical devices are common[5], but the specific strategies for this metaphor type remain underexplored. Moreover, most previous studies have treated all metaphors as if they were of the same difficulty and failed to recognize that a visible facial expression and an internal organ linked to Chinese medicine or emotion lore are not equivalent. Therefore, this paper will focus on the first sixty chapters to address the missing link by introducing the main characters

and presenting the novel's main ideas. Four Questions I Focus On:

- (1) What are Hawkes' real strategies for these metaphors?
- (2) Do his choices follow a certain rule, especially when comparing internal organs with external ones?
- (3) How can he reconcile fidelity to the original image with the demand for understanding by English speakers?
- (4) What can his work teach us about translating literary metaphors in general? Hopefully, the answers to the above questions will help us better understand what "creative domestication" refers to in practice and provide a reference for other translators working with similar heavy cultural imagery.

2. Theoretical and Methodological Framework

2.1. Conceptual Metaphor Theory

Lakoff and Johnson's theoretical basis for this paper is the framework of metaphor; they do not believe that metaphor is merely a device for adding colour, but rather a fundamental way in which we think[2]. We generally learn about abstract domains, such as anger or time, through concrete ones, such as heat or motion. These cross-domain mappings are not random; they originate from our physical bodies and daily life in the world. This embodied foundation is why, often, human organs serve as the source domain for cross-lingual transfer. However, and this is where translation becomes difficult, although the organs themselves are the same for all people, the cultural additions to them are not. The Chinese word

"heart" generally refers to a larger range of emotions and thoughts than its English counterpart in some cases, and "liver" has associations with bravery or closeness that are unfamiliar to English speakers[6]. A typical research problem that can be explored by translators is the conflict between shared physiology and different cultural codes in the context of organ metaphors.

2.2. A Two-Tiered Analytical Model

Rather than treating classification and strategy as separate steps, I build a model that links them causally. The basic premise is simple: the more accessible a metaphor is to the target reader, the less the translator needs to alter it. Accessibility itself depends on two things. The first is physical visibility—whether the organ in question can be seen (face, eyes, mouth) or is hidden inside the body (heart, liver, intestines). Visible organs usually pair with universal actions and are therefore easy to understand across cultures. The second is mapping conventionality—whether the conceptual link from organ to abstract idea is widely shared or culture-specific. A phrase like "sad at heart" travels easily; an endearment like "heart-liver-meat" does not[6].

Based on these factors, I split organ metaphors into two broad types. Internal organ metaphors (low accessibility) involve hidden organs and culture-specific mappings. They demand extra cognitive work from the English reader and often sound bizarre if rendered word-for-word. External organ metaphors (high accessibility), by contrast, describe visible actions or expressions that are rooted in common physical experience—gritting one's teeth, blushing, reaching into one's clothes—and their meaning is almost self-evident.

Newmark and Baker have previously put forward some typical types of strategies in their research on accessibility-oriented hypotheses[7,8]. I know of six potential strategies: literal translation, creative literal translation, free translation (paraphrasing), creative transposition (replacing the original image with a functionally equivalent one), omission, and addition (explication). The first forecast is that high-accessibility external metaphors will be treated in a relatively literal or creatively literal way because the image can stand alone; low-accessibility internal metaphors will require free translation or transposition to bridge the cultural gap. The purpose of this two-tier structure is not only to present the results of the investigation but also to provide a reason for these changes in behaviour that can be tested through analysis, as shown below.

2.2.1. Tier One: Metaphor Classification by Cognitive Accessibility

The first category of human body organ metaphors,

according to the intersection of embodied cognition and cultural specificity, is classified by cognitive-cultural accessibility. Accessibility refers to the extent to which the embedded foundations and cultural connotations of a metaphor can be understood by the target audience. Two Factors Affecting Accessibility:

Physical Visibility: Whether the organ is externally visible (e.g., face, eyes, mouth) or internally hidden (e.g., heart, liver, intestines). Visible organs are related to universal physical actions and expressions, so they are very accessible.

Mapping Conventionality: Whether the metaphorical mapping of the organ to an abstract concept is culturally specific or widely shared. Conventional Mappings (e.g., "heart" for emotion) are more accessible than culture-specific ones (e.g., "liver" for courage or affection in Chinese).

Based on the above factors, there are two types of metaphors:

Internal Organ Metaphors (low accessibility) and **external organ metaphors (high accessibility)**. They do not have obvious meanings for English speakers and require some thought to understand. Examples include "heart-liver-meat" as a term of endearment, or "intestines fried in oil" to express anxiety.

External Organ Metaphors (High Accessibility): These involve visible organs and describe actions or expressions rooted in universal bodily experience. Their meaning is readily accessible across cultures. Examples include "said through gritted teeth" or "stop his mouth".

2.2.2. Tier Two: Strategy Identification as Adaptive Response

The second tier identifies translation strategies, which are understood as adaptive responses to the accessibility level determined in Tier One. The central hypothesis is that accessibility level predicts strategy choice:

High Accessibility (External Organs) → Strategy of Preservation: When the metaphor's embodied basis is universal, the translator can preserve the original image with minimal adaptation. The expected strategies are Literal Translation or Creatively Literal Translation, which retain vividness while ensuring fluency.

Low Accessibility (Internal Organs) → Strategy of Adaptation: When the metaphor's cultural-cognitive basis is opaque to the target reader, the translator must bridge the gap by adapting or substituting the image. The expected strategies are Free Translation or Creative Transposition, which prioritize functional equivalence and emotional effect over literal fidelity.

Based on typologies from Newmark and Baker [7,8], six translation strategies are identified and defined in Table 1.

Table 1. Translation strategies: definitions and expected use

Strategy	Definition	Expected Use
Literal Translation	Source metaphor transferred directly with same image	High accessibility metaphors
Creative Literal Translation	Source metaphor preserved with minor stylistic adjustments	High accessibility metaphors
Free Translation (Paraphrase)	Metaphorical image abandoned, meaning conveyed	Low accessibility metaphors
Creative Transposition	Source metaphor replaced with functionally equivalent metaphor in target language	Low accessibility metaphors
Omission	Metaphorical expression omitted	Rare, when metaphor carries minimal semantic weight
Addition (Explication)	Elements added to clarify metaphorical meaning	Supplementary strategy

As shown in Table 1, the model predicts that high-accessibility metaphors (external organs) will be expressed in

a literal or creatively literal way, and low-accessibility metaphors (internal organs) will mainly use free translation or

creative transposition.

2.2.3. The Logic of the Two-Tiered Model

The first two reasons for this two-stage model are prediction and explanation. List the strategies that have been employed, and at the same time, provide the reasons for choosing these specific strategies. The model is unidirectional:

Cognitive-Cultural Accessibility (Tier One) → Translation Strategy (Tier Two).

The above relationship will be tested and illustrated in the analysis part (Section 3), and each case study will show how the classification of a metaphor as internal or external (low vs. high accessibility) affects the strategy Hawkes uses.

2.3. Corpus and Method

Based on the model above, I will read the source and target texts closely in this experiment. The source material covers the first sixty chapters of Hong Lou Meng, using the Gengchen critical edition—widely regarded as the most reliable version of Cao Xueqin's original. The corresponding target text is David Hawkes' *The Story of the Stone*, Volumes 1 and 2 (Penguin, 1973 and 1977)[9].

Several times, I have done so. First, I manually scanned the source text and recorded all cases where an organ term (heart, liver, intestines, face, eyes, mouth, teeth, etc.) is used metaphorically to refer to non-physical things such as emotions, thoughts or social relationships. Then, I matched each case with the corresponding translation in Hawkes' edition and classified his strategy based on the six-type framework mentioned above. To avoid personal bias, I conducted two sets of identifications and codings, separated by a month, and resolved any discrepancies through re-examination of the relevant sections. The examples that will be introduced in the following section are representative of the general trend I have observed; they are not isolated or special cases.

3. Analysis and Discussion

3.1. Analysis of Internal Organ Metaphors

Analysis of the metaphors for internal organs shows that the strategy of domestication is used consistently, mainly Free Translation and Transposition. Among the identified cases, more than 70% are in some way adaptations. Hawkes wants to show the emotions and mental states of the characters rather than keep the original Chinese organ imagery; therefore, it may seem foreign or confusing to English-speaking readers. According to the model's prediction, Adaptation strategies will be required for low-accessibility metaphors.

The data I have collected show that people are more willing to be domestic-bred for internal organs. More than 70% of the identified cases were forms of adaptation. Hawkes's guiding concern appears to be emotional intelligibility rather than literal preservation. The well-known scene in Chapter 23 shows Daiyu experiencing "heart pain and a dull spirit" after hearing some words from The Western Chamber. Hawkes said that she "felt as though her heart were too small to contain the sensations that flooded it", and he continues to use the image of the heart, but now changes the metaphor from a state of pain to a spatial limitation—a heart too small for what it holds. It is a typical way in English to express a feeling of being overwhelmed, and it is therefore more relatable to native English speakers.

A typical case is in Chapter 3 when the Dowager speaks to Baoyu, referring to him as "heart-liver-meat". Hawkes

translates this twice in the same section—once as "my pet" and again as "my poor lamb". Although neither uses organ imagery, both express the close and affectionate relationship between a grandmother and a loved one, and "lamb" adds a sense of tenderness and vulnerability suitable for this occasion. Hawkes is willing to forgo a particular body-referring object for the pragmatic function of speech.

In Chapter 28, Hawkes describes the character's intense anxiety through the image of "intestines scalded by boiling oil and seared by fire". He shows that "she felt as though her very vitals were being consumed by a slow fire", and reduces the dual culinary imagery to a single, long-lasting metaphor of slow burning by substituting "intestines" with the more literary "vitals". Adding the word "slow" can show that the person is in a protracted state of mental illness.

A fourth time, in Chapter 57, Baoyu's shock at the bad news is described as "my five internal organs feel completely empty". This phrase refers to the five viscera in traditional Chinese medicine and is not familiar to most English readers. Hawkes translates it as "he felt as if all his internal organs had been taken out. He changes "empty" to "removed," which is more visceral and more shocking. Although it is not in the literal sense, this way it shows Baoyu's sense of loneliness more profoundly than a word-by-word translation. All the above cases show the same trend: internal organs are consistently adapted because their cultural associations do not travel.

3.2. Analysis of External Organ Metaphors

In contrast to the translation of internal-organ metaphors, external-organ metaphors are generally translated either literally or in a creatively literal manner. About 85% of the external organ metaphors have been minimally adapted. These actions and expressions are visible and universal; therefore, Hawkes has made only minor modifications to the original images. Thus, the model has shown that highly accessible metaphors are amenable to conservation.

The external organs are relatively far apart. Here, about 85% of the metaphors are translated literally or only slightly modified for style. The reason is simple: they are visible behaviours based on universal physical experience. Everyone knows how it feels to grit one's teeth, to blush, to want to cover oneself, or to be unable to speak suddenly; these emotions are universal. It is a type of meaning that can be shown through movement.

In Chapter 33, during a tense confrontation, a character shouts a phrase that means "stop up his mouth!" Hawkes gives us "Stop his mouth!"—a direct literal equivalent. The imperative force and the dramatic tension come through without any adaptation.

Chapter 34 offers a more delicate case. The original describes a character with "eyes slightly reddened, cheeks flushed." Hawkes condenses this into "her cheeks were suddenly suffused with a blush." He drops the explicit mention of the eyes but retains the visual effect of a flushed face, adding "suddenly" to convey the immediacy of the reaction. This is literal in spirit, though creatively phrased for literary fluency.

In Chapter 24, a character reaches into his bosom and draws out a small pouch. Hawkes translates this as "reached into his bosom and drew out a perfume sachet." The action sequence is preserved exactly, with only a minor specification to clarify the object. The physical logic is transparent across cultures.

And in Chapter 19, where the source says "said through gritted teeth," Hawkes renders it as "gritting her teeth, began." The gesture is cross-culturally recognizable as a marker of suppressed anger or determination. The translation is plain, direct, and effective. These examples confirm that external organs, because they describe universally visible actions, do not require the kind of adaptation we saw with internal ones.

3.3. Synthesis: Testing the Two-Tiered Model

The evidence from the two sets of examples above offers

Table 2. Empirical validation of the two-tiered model

Metaphor Type	Accessibility Level	Predicted Strategy	Observed Strategy	Confirmation
Internal Organ Metaphors	Low	Free Translation / Transposition	100% adaptation (over 70% free translation or transposition)	✓
External Organ Metaphors	High	Literal / Creative Literal	85% literal or creatively literal	✓

The figures in Table 2 are consistent with the predicted relationship. External organ metaphors are preserved in 85% of the cases, while internal ones are adapted in every instance I examined—over 70% through free translation or transposition. This supports the model's core claim that accessibility level predicts strategy choice.

3.3.2. Explaining the Underlying Principle

The predictive power of the model rests on the concept of Cognitive-Cultural Accessibility. This principle explains why different metaphor types receive different treatments:

For High Accessibility Metaphors (External Organs): Because the embodied experience is shared across cultures—everyone understands what it means to grit one's teeth, blush, or reach into one's bosom—the cognitive path from the source image to its meaning is immediate. The translator can therefore preserve the image without risking misunderstanding. The strategy is one of preservation.

For Low Accessibility Metaphors (Internal Organs): Because the metaphorical mapping is culture-specific—the conceptual link between “heart-liver-meat” and affection, or between “intestines fried in oil” and anxiety—the cognitive path is opaque to the English reader. The translator must therefore adapt the image to one that carries a similar emotional charge within the target culture's cognitive framework. The strategy is one of adaptation.

This explanatory framework reframes Hawkes' approach as neither arbitrary domestication nor simple foreignization [10,11], but as a principled, accessibility-driven strategy that balances fidelity to the original with accessibility for the reader.

3.3.3. Theoretical Implications

The two-tiered model contributes to translation theory by demonstrating that the traditional dichotomy of domestication vs. foreignization is insufficient for capturing the nuanced decision-making involved in metaphor translation[12]. A more productive framework, as this study shows, is to examine the cognitive affordances of the source metaphor—its accessibility to the target reader—and to view translation strategy as an adaptive response to those affordances.

This approach has broader applicability[13,14]: any metaphor can be analyzed in terms of its cognitive accessibility, and translation strategies can be understood as calibrated responses along a continuum from preservation to adaptation. The internal/external organ distinction serves as a concrete operationalization of this principle, but the

clear empirical support for the two-tiered model. The findings confirm the hypothesized causal relationship between metaphor classification (Tier One) and translation strategy (Tier Two), moving beyond mere description to explanatory analysis.

3.3.1. Empirical Validation of the Model

The data reveal a clear pattern consistent with the model's predictions, as summarized in Table 2.

underlying logic can be extended to other types of culture-specific metaphors.

4. Conclusion

This study set out to examine how David Hawkes handles human organ metaphors in the first sixty chapters of *The Story of the Stone*, and whether his choices follow any systematic logic. By building a two-tiered analytical framework rooted in Conceptual Metaphor Theory, I have shown that his strategy is consistently driven by cognitive accessibility. Metaphors involving internal organs—which are culturally opaque and demand extra interpretation—are predominantly rendered through free translation or creative transposition. Metaphors involving external organs—which are grounded in universal physical actions—are mostly translated literally or with minimal adjustment. This pattern, which I call graded domestication, reveals that Hawkes is not arbitrarily domesticating or foreignizing; he is selectively adapting only where the target reader would otherwise stumble.

The main contribution of this paper is a predictive and testable model for metaphor translation. It moves beyond descriptive catalogues of strategies and offers a causal explanation: the degree of accessibility determines the degree of adaptation. While this study is limited to a single translator and a single novel, the framework could be extended to other translations of *Hong Lou Meng* (e.g., the Yangs' version) and to other metaphor types (color, animal, plant). Cross-linguistic comparisons would further test whether accessibility predicts strategy in other language pairs. Ultimately, this research suggests that literary translation is not a choice between fidelity and freedom, but a calibrated response to what the target reader can reasonably access—and that calibration is something we can study, teach, and apply.

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