

CASE STUDIES OF AMBIGUOUS PASSAGES
IN THE CHINESE UNION VERSION BIBLE AND THE KING JAMES
VERSION BIBLE FROM THE PERSPECTIVE OF COGNITIVE LINGUISTICS

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ABSTRACT: In this paper, I examined and analyzed five ambiguous passages while providing examples from the Chinese and the English Bibles, comparing them also to the original Hebrew and Greek versions, to illustrate my points. I employed cognitive linguistic methods to delve into the informational differences between the versions. This article aims to contribute to an important research topic by highlighting specific practical principles for Bible translation.

KEYWORDS: Linguistic ambiguity; cognitive linguistics; the Chinese Union Version(CUV) and the King James Version(KJV) Bibles

An introduction to cognitive linguistics

Cognitive linguistics emerged in the late 1970s and early 1980s as a response to the formalist approach of functionalism. Unlike formalism, cognitive linguistics posits that language is not a standalone psychological system but is deeply intertwined with overall human cognition. As is known, trailblazers in this field include George Lakoff, known for his monograph *Women, Fire, and Dangerous Things* (1987), Ronald W. Langacker, who published *Foundations of Cognitive Grammar* (1987), and Mark Johnson, author of *The Body in the Mind* (1987). George Lakoff (1987) introduces a cognitive model based on semantics, emphasizing the significance of metaphor as a means of transferring cognitive structures across different domains. He examines how conceptual metaphors, also known as cognitive metaphors, influence the grammar of various languages, considering both cultural nuances and universal human experiences. In his two-volume monograph published in 1987, Ronald W. Langacker elaborated on the fundamental concepts of cognitive grammar. He extensively incorporated principles from Gestalt psychology and drew parallels between the structure

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of language and different elements of visual perception. Mark Johnson (1987) examines the crucial role of human imagination in shaping meaning, understanding, and reasoning. He discusses concepts such as metonymy, metaphor, and image schema. Johnson defines an image schema as 'a recurring, dynamic pattern of our perceptual interactions and motor programs that provides coherence and structure to our experience' (Preface, page 24). However, four decades later, cognitive linguistics research achieved new significant advancements. For instance, Geeraerts, D.&H.Cuyckens (2007) include corpus methods and multimodal discourse analysis, as well as experimental techniques in psychology and cognitive neuroscience. Time and space concepts are discussed from the perspectives of metaphorical models, cross-cultural research, evidence based on psychological experiments, and cognitive discourse analysis. Dancygier B.(2017) encompasses various areas, including phonology, word-level analysis, constructivist morphological methods, lexical semantics, cognitive grammar at the clause level, construction grammar, discourse-level pragmatics, fictional interaction, and diachronic methods, demonstrating and unifying the fundamental cognitive linguistic principle that form and meaning are interconnected. X. Wen and J. R. Taylor (2021) discuss recent advancements in cognitive linguistics, focusing on its intersections with rhetoric, finite conceptualization, translation, language education and teaching, electronic dictionary compilation, the naming of medicinal plants, and proverbs. They also cover the latest progress in cognitive neurolinguistics, diachronic construction grammar, and radical embodied ecolinguistics, among other areas. Cognitive linguistic theory not only emphasizes language knowledge, defining overarching principles that apply to all aspects of human language, but also views language as a form of knowledge that is fundamentally connected to cognition. This framework has become essential for analyzing and studying natural languages, and within this dynamic research landscape, six key theories aim to unify the diverse aspects of the field.

Cognitive linguistics posits that language originates from embodied cognition, suggesting that it reflects our perspectives, expresses our understanding of the world in tangible ways, and imposes structure, rather than merely mirroring objective reality. It contends that the meanings conveyed by linguistic symbols are not directly tied to specific references in the external world, but instead relate to concepts or mental representations that emerge from how we categorize our experiences. In this view, language comprises a collection of habitual forms and meaning pairs within a speech community, which can be identified at all levels of language, from morphemes to syntax and even discourse.

Cognitive linguistics offers six key approaches to analyzing language (William A. Ross et al., 2023, 125–151). Let me quickly review these before I come to my point, so

I can apply them more freely in my analysis. The first is image schemas. In cognitive linguistics, image schemas serve as fundamental tools for illustrating and clarifying the conceptual links between embodied experiences and linguistic meanings. It is considered that image schemas are simple cognitive structures that represent spatial configurations independently of a single sensory modality. They emerge from our repeated sensory interactions with the world, engaging the body's visual, auditory, tactile (touch), and vestibular (balance) systems. This basic aspect of human embodiment leads to the formation of various image schemas, such as front and back, left and right, as well as universally experienced concepts like up and down, and near and far. These image schemas are interconnected within human visual perception. Rather than being detailed concepts, image schemas are abstract or schematic representations that lay the groundwork for more complex conceptual and semantic structures. Dennis Tay (2021) not only reviews the evolution of image schema theory and outlines its fundamental characteristics but also highlights recent advancements in the field. It emphasizes the application of image schema theory in emerging interdisciplinary areas, such as design and psychological counseling, demonstrating the theory's remarkable flexibility and broad relevance.

The second approach is frame semantics. Frame semantics is a method within cognitive linguistics that helps us understand meaning in language. A semantic frame is a representation of experience, organized conceptually and retained in long-term memory. In essence, a frame serves as a knowledge structure comprising interconnected concepts linked to familiar, culturally rooted scenarios in human experience. These frames aid in constructing meaning due to their Gestalt properties. Hans C. Boas (2021) provides a comprehensive overview of the historical evolution of Construction Grammar and Frame Semantics, highlighting their core principles. The paper explores a variety of topics along the lexical-syntactic continuum, including argument structure constructions and other construction types, as well as construction families and networks. Corpus data, production rates, motivation, frequency, the meaning of formalization, and the challenges facing contrastive linguistics are also examined.

The third approach is domain and conceptual metaphor, which is one of the most well-known theories in cognitive linguistics. A conceptual metaphor involves two domains: a source and a target. The source is unidirectionally mapped or projected onto the target, resulting in a richer or more nuanced meaning through their correspondence. Domains are cognitive entities that vary in complexity and organization, serving as background information for understanding concepts. Often, concepts are made up of multiple domains, creating a sort of matrix. Some domains are fundamental, emerging directly from concrete experiences and thus are pre-conceptual, such

as space, temperature, time, volume, and color. These basic domains typically serve as the foundation for universal conceptual metaphors that shape the meaning of language, although more complex domains can also be present. Dirk Geeraerts (2021) explores conceptual metaphor and emphasizes its complementary relationship with several other descriptive models in cognitive linguistics. These models include the prototype model, the radial network model, the conceptual metonymy model, the frame semantics model, and the grammatical construction mechanism model. He emphasizes the common elements of these models in understanding meaning, with a particular focus on perspective, dynamism, and empiricism.

The fourth approach involves mental spaces and conceptual blending. In this case, it is thought that meaning is created by integrating knowledge structures in innovative and creative manners within larger language units (such as sentences and beyond), resulting in a process known as 'blend.' This construction of meaning through conceptual blending entails the merging of mental spaces. Fauconnier and Turner (2002) identified four types of conceptual blending: simplex, mirror, single-range, and dual-range networks. This classification facilitates the comparison of various methods for integrating input spaces during the blending process. The book specifically explores how conceptual blending enhances the compression of key 'vital relations,' such as change, identity, time, space, causality, part-whole relationships, analogy, category, and intentionality. In each case, the conceptual blending process effectively eliminates a substantial amount of less relevant semantic information from different input spaces, leading to a more streamlined representation of these 'vital relations' within the fused space.

The fifth approach involves prototypes and semantic extension. A prototype serves as a central example around which members of a related category are organized. Categories are structured radially around the prototype, encompassing other members that are progressively more peripheral yet still related. Prototype theory is relevant to lexical semantics, where a specific word represents a category stored in a 'mental lexicon.' This category features a central prototypical meaning, with additional meanings branching out from the prototype into a semantic network. This model of lexical semantics incorporates various elements of cognitive linguistic theory, particularly image schemas, semantic frames, and conceptual metaphor theory. Cognitive linguistics primarily interprets word meanings through these cognitive mechanisms, viewing them as a semantic network where less typical meanings are derived from more typical ones through motivated meaning extension. John R. Taylor's (2003) research demonstrates that categories are mainly defined by prototypes, with items being linked to a category based on their resemblance to the prototype. The author broadens the application of the prototype method beyond its clear rele-

vance to lexical semantics, paving the way for investigations into morphology, syntax, and phonology. Throughout this exploration, he delves into various subjects, such as the comprehensive nature of semantic knowledge, the redundancy of pragmatics, the occurrence of polysemy, the processes of metonymy and metaphor extension, and the dynamics of language acquisition.

The sixth approach is the cognitive approach to grammar, which encompasses two key areas: cognitive grammar and construction grammar. These two frameworks are compatible and are based on two main principles. The first principle is the semi-otic approach, which contends that the fundamental unit of grammar is the pairing of form and meaning as a linguistic entity. The second principle is the usage-based argument, which asserts that each language user constructs a mental grammar through their experiences, suggesting that there is no distinct separation between knowledge of language and its practical use. Cristiano Broccias (2021) outlines the key aspects of cognitive grammar and its evolution. It begins by discussing the grammar-lexicon continuum, then delves into essential cognitive abilities and cognitive models. The cognitive abilities examined include association, categorization, automaticity, construction, reference point ability, and fictionality. The cognitive models discussed are the stage model, the billiard model, and the control loop.

Ambiguities in the CUV and KJV Bibles and Cognitive linguistics

In this section, I will explain why I have chosen the Chinese Union Version and the King James Version Bibles for a comparative analysis. As indicated by this subtitle, they will be referred to as CUV and KJV in the subsequent text. The CUV and KJV Bibles are the most commonly used Bible versions among Protestant Christians who speak Chinese and English, with CUV being the standard in the Chinese, and KJV in the English language. In historical terms, there have been a number of Chinese Bibles in a variety of translations, including classical Chinese Bibles, vernacular Bibles, and dialect-specific versions such as the Minnan, Hakka, Cantonese, and Wu Bibles. Unfortunately, most Chinese Bible translations prior to the 13th century have been lost to history. The first Protestant Chinese Bible was the Marshman translation, published in 1822. Following that, the Godet translation of both the New and Old Testaments was released in 1853. In the 20th century, several significant Protestant Chinese Bible translations emerged, including the Lu Zhenzhong Version (1970), the Contemporary Bible (1974), the Contemporary Chinese Version (1979), the Union Version with New Punctuation (1988), the New Translation (1993), the Revised Contemporary Chinese Version (1997), the New World Translation (Chinese version, 2001), the Revised Union Version (2006-2010), and the updated Union Version based on the Byzantine Majority Text (2013); the Contemporary Chinese Version of

the Holy Bible (revised edition, 2016); the Contemporary Chinese Version (2019); the Universal Bible (2022); among others. However, over the past century, no translation has been able to fully replace the Union Version's authoritative status within the Chinese Protestant community. While some terms and grammatical structures in the Union Version may seem somewhat unfamiliar to contemporary readers, this reality is acknowledged by the modern Chinese Protestant world.

In Protestant Christianity, the Protestant Bible serves as the cornerstone of faith and the foundation of the Christian worldview. The principle of 'One Lord, One Faith' underscores the belief in a singular truth, which means that the Bible, as the bearer of this truth from divine revelation, should maintain consistent content across different languages and publication dates. Consequently, various Bible versions can be compared. However, the materials selected for this analysis significantly influence the representativeness and value of the findings. Therefore, this article focuses on the most authoritative Chinese Union Version (CUV), widely recognized among Chinese Christians, and the King James Version (KJV), which is regarded as the most authoritative English version. The term 'most authoritative version' refers to the version that is most widely trusted and accepted for its accuracy as well as literary value, so that the comparative analysis of these versions can provide significant value and insight.

As mentioned above, the Bible has consistently been one of the most widely distributed texts in the world and serves as a significant foundation for shaping human perspectives. Hence the messages conveyed through the biblical languages, even in translation, should ideally be precise and consistent. However, discrepancies and even ambiguities often arise between various language translations – a well-known fact from the earliest times of Bible translation.

Cognitive linguistics offers a valuable approach to uncovering, and making sense of, these differences, enhancing our understanding of, and insight into, the Bible. In what follows, I present ambiguous passages from both the CUV and KJV Bibles in order to provide new case studies that demonstrate the practical application of the cognitive linguistic methods.

The lexical semantics model in cognitive linguistics incorporates multiple components of cognitive linguistics theory, particularly the six fundamental approaches outlined earlier: image schema, frame semantics, domain and conceptual metaphor, mental space integration, prototype and semantic extension, as well as cognitive grammar and construction grammar. I am convinced that these elements can help elucidate the underlying motivations behind ambiguity, as I am going to show now on concrete textual examples. In what follows, I am going to conduct a comparative

analysis of the above-chosen Chinese and English Bibles with cognitive linguistic methods.

Case Studies of Ambiguity

To begin with, I am providing a brief overview of the format used for the five groups of examples analyzed below. In each group, I will first present the Chinese verses, labeled with CUV-number (e.g., CUV-1). Next, I will include the pinyin transcription of each Chinese sentence, followed by its literal English translation. Finally, I will list the corresponding English verses, marking it with KJV-number (e.g., KJV-1, with the same number as I used to designate the same passage in Chinese, indicating their relation to the Chinese verses above). This format is consistent across all five cases analyzed below.

CUV-1: 拉班对雅各说：‘你作的是甚么事呢，你背着我偷(tōu)走了，又把我的女儿们带了去，如同用刀剑掳去的一般。’(创世纪 31:26)

lā bān duì yǎ gè shuō: ‘nǐ zuò de shì shén me shì ne, nǐ bèi zhe wǒ tōu zǒu le, yòu bǎ wǒ de nǚ er men dài le qù, rú tóng yòng dāo jiàn lú qù de yì Bān.’ (Chuàngshìjì 31:26)

Laban to Jacob said: ‘You have done is what? You unawares to me stolen away, and with my daughters carried away, as with the sword captive taken the same.’ (Genesis 31:26)

KJV-1: And Laban said to Jacob, ‘What hast thou done, that thou hast stolen away unawares to me, and carried away my daughters, as captives taken with the sword?’ (Genesis 31:26)

The Hebrew version of Genesis 31:26 is:

וַיֹּאמֶר לָבָן לְיַעֲקֹב מָה עָשִׂיתָ וּתְגַנֵּב אֶת-לִבִּי וּתְגַנֵּג אֶת-בְּנוֹתַי כְּשִׁבְיוֹת הָרֶבֶב:

Upon reading the above Chinese verse (CUV-1), one might initially be puzzled and mistakenly believe that it implies that something was literally stolen. However, a closer examination of the context reveals that the relevant text part actually refers to an act of fleeing. In the very next verse 27 of the Chinese Bible, an interpretive context is provided, which suggests to us that the term ‘tōu偷(to steal)’ here means ‘to flee:’

你为甚么暗暗地逃跑，偷着走，并不告诉我...?(创世纪31:27)

nǐ wèi shen me àn àn dì táo pǎo, tōu zhe zǒu, bìng bú gào su wǒ...? (Chuàngshìjì 31:27)

you why secretly escape steal away, and not tell me...? (Genesis 31:27)

The English verse 27 of the KJV provides the same description:

Wherefore didst thou flee away secretly, and steal away from me; and didst not tell me...?(Genesis 31:27)

In the corresponding English verse (KJV-1), we find a similar expression where the verb ‘to steal’ is used, which could also imply ‘stealing’ as well as ‘fleeing’, but the addition of ‘away’ clarifies the meaning and prevents ambiguity. The original Hebrew text employs the verb **נָסַח** *tiġ-nōḥ*, which translates to the English verb “steal away.”

How can the verb that means ‘to steal’ also convey the meaning ‘to flee’, leading to potential ambiguity? This linguistic phenomenon points to a common cognitive understanding of the same real-life phenomenon.

From the perspective of the prototype theory of cognitive linguistics, the root meaning of the Chinese verb ‘tōu偷’ is ‘to thief’, and the root meaning of the verb ‘táo逃’ is ‘to escape’. ‘To thief’ and ‘to escape’ are, of course, two distinct concepts. However, they overlap in certain attributes, such as the idea of being ‘secret and unknown to others.’ In terms of semantic extensions, both concepts utilize the same term ‘tōu偷.’ That is to say, the prototype meaning of the Chinese verb ‘tōu偷’ is ‘to steal’, and the meaning ‘to flee’ overlaps with the verb ‘tōu偷’ only in the semantic extension part where the semantic features of ‘secretly, privately, and unbeknownst to others’ figure. Consequently, when the extended meaning ‘to escape’, which is the secondary meaning of the word ‘tōu’(偷, prototype meaning ‘to steal’), is used in the text instead of ‘táo’(逃, prototype meaning ‘to escape’) in Chinese, the prominence of its prototype meaning of ‘to steal’ can create ambiguity in the sentence. However, if the context provides enough information, people can still work out the accurate semantics. As I mentioned earlier, in this English text, when the verb ‘steal’ is not followed by an object and is instead accompanied by the adverb ‘away,’ it functions as an intransitive verb. In this context, it clearly conveys the meaning of ‘to escape,’ leaving no room for ambiguity. This clarity is a characteristic of English grammar. In contrast, Chinese grammar differs significantly at this point. In Chinese, the word ‘steal’ retains its meaning of theft regardless of whether it is used transitively or intransitively, leading to potential ambiguity. To clarify the meaning, more detailed declarative sentences are necessary. For instance, in the example provided, verse 27 follows verse 26 with phrases like ‘escape secretly... and do not tell me,’ which are essential for elucidating the intended meaning.

It may be pointed out from the perspective of concept blending that as the core

concept broadens within the human psychological landscape and intertwines with associated word meanings that share familial similarities, ambiguity can easily arise. This also illustrates that the dynamic development of language requires the periodic updating of the translations of the biblical texts.

It can be seen that the most effective and precise way for presenting biblical texts in translation involves selecting language units that closely align with the original meaning. This approach, on the one hand, clarifies the ambiguity found in certain translations, while on the other, offers a pathway to achieving high-quality translations and accurate expressions.

CUV-2: 他到底怎么说呢?他说:‘这道离你不远,正在你口里,在你心里。’是我们所传信主的道。(罗马书 10:8)

tā dào dí zěn me shuō ne? tā shuō: ‘zhè dào lí nǐ bù yuǎn, zhèng zài nǐ kǒu lǐ, zài nǐ xīn lǐ.’ jiù shì wǒ men suǒ chuán xìn zhǔ de dào. (luómǎshū 10:8)

he in the end how say? he say this word from you not far even in your mouth in your heart that is we preach faith of the word (Romans 10:8)

KJV-2: But what saith it? The word is nigh thee, even in thy mouth, and in thy heart: that is, the word of faith, which we preach. (Romans 10:8)

The Greek version of Romans 10:8 is:

ἀλλὰ τί λέγει; ἐγγύς σου τὸ ῥῆμα ἐστὶν ἐν τῷ στόματί σου καὶ ἐν τῇ καρδίᾳ σου, τοῦτ' ἐστὶν τὸ ῥῆμα τῆς πίστεως ὃ κηρύσσομεν.

This set of comparable sentences from CUV and KJV highlights the ambiguity arising from the differences in expression between the respectively Chinese and English texts. In the Chinese text, the subject is the third-person pronoun ‘he,’ which clearly refers to Moses based on the context. In contrast, the English text employs the inanimate neuter pronoun ‘it,’ which, in context, refers to the passage quoted from the Old Testament. The original Greek text uses a similar usage to English: τί λέγει (ti legei, what says it?) In theory, Bibles in various languages should convey the same information. However, it is clear that the interpretations of Chinese and English readers will differ in this case. Chinese readers will perceive the teachings in this passage as rooted in the words of Moses, while English readers will view them as based on the teachings of the Old Testament. These distinct perspectives lead to different conceptual structures and frameworks. Frame semantics can effectively analyze this ambiguity.

As previously mentioned, frame semantics examines the categories represented by words within a language community and describes word meanings through these

categories (Fillmore 1982). It is a comprehensive, encyclopedic approach that relates to human experience. Frame semantics posits that understanding a word's meaning involves activating the semantic knowledge associated with the concept the word represents. In CUV-2 and KJV-2, the subjects 'he' and 'it,' referred to as images in frame semantics, evoke distinct frame domains and rely on different systems of background knowledge. In the Chinese version, readers are introduced to the teachings of the great prophet Moses. This invokes a conceptual domain rich in background knowledge about Moses, including his role as a prophet chosen by God, his leadership of the Israelites in Egypt, his direct reception of God's teachings, his efforts to guide the Israelites away from wrongdoing, his constant communication with God through prayer, and his enduring patience with the Israelites' transgressions. However, the readers of the English version will interpret the text through a framework of background knowledge related to the Old Testament in general, viewing it as the word of the one true God and as absolute truth inspired by the Holy Spirit. Consequently, the differing subjects in the Chinese and English versions of this verse activate different kinds of background knowledge for readers, leading to variations in how they understand and accept the teachings of the Bible. This results in the construction of different belief details.

CUV-3: 约沙法大有尊容资财,就与亚哈结亲。(历代志下18:1)

Yuē shā fǎ dà yǒu zūn róng zī cái, jiù yǔ yà hā jiē qīn. (lìdàizhìxià 18:1)

Jehoshaphat in abundance had honour riches thus with Ahab marriage
(II Chronicles 18:1)

KJV-3: Now Jehoshaphat had riches and honour in abundance, and joined affinity with Ahab. (II Chronicles 18:1)

The Hebrew version of II Chronicles 18:1 is:

וַיְהִי לַיהוֹשָׁפָט עֲשָׂר וּכְבוֹד לְרַב וַיִּתְחַתֵּן לְאַחָאב:

In the Chinese example CUV-3, the word 'jiù 就 (thus)' is used between the two clauses, while in the English example KJV-3, the word 'and' is used instead. The grammatical function of 'jiù 就 (thus)' here is to follow the order of events or actions, and to connect the two clauses, expressing a relationship of premiss – consequence between them. That is, after the event expressed in the first clause occurs, the result expressed in the second clause will occur.

In contrast, it is well-known that the grammatical role of 'and' is to indicate a parallel relationship between the two clauses, as in the English and Hebrew passages above, both use the conjunction 'and (ו)'. However, it has to be mentioned here that

in Hebrew, ‘and (1)’ may have a consequential meaning ‘and so, as a consequence etc.’ This discrepancy leads to variations in the meanings of the corresponding Scriptures in the Chinese and English versions. The statement in CUV-3 indicates that the in-law relationship between Jehoshaphat and Ahab – stemming from Jehoshaphat’s son marrying Ahab’s daughter (as noted in II Chronicles 21:1, 6 ‘Now Jehoshaphat slept with his fathers... And Jehoram his son reigned in his stead. He walked in the way of the kings of Israel, just as the house of Ahab did, for he had Ahab’s daughter as his wife, and he committed evil in the sight of the Lord’) – is rooted in Jehoshaphat’s significant honor and wealth. This suggests that these attributes are prerequisites for their familial connection. In contrast, KJV-3 simultaneously highlights Jehoshaphat’s honor and wealth while also depicting his in-law relationship with Ahab in a parallel manner. The two complex clause relationships presented convey distinct meanings, leading readers of the Chinese and English versions to interpret the passage differently. According to cognitive grammar, these variations in syntactic and semantic relationships reflect different psychological processes and cognitive structures. These processes and structures can be identified through image schemas. In cognitive linguistics, image schemas serve not only to depict the spatial organization of specific sensory experiences but also to represent more intricate concepts and semantic frameworks through abstract or schematic forms. CUV-3 and KJV-3 exemplify two different image schemas: CUV-3 represents an inferential image schema that illustrates the relationship between conditions and outcomes ($A \rightarrow B$), while KJV-3 highlights a parallel relationship between two conditions ($A+B$).

The context of this verse reveals that Jehoshaphat experienced significant blessings from God, yet also faced considerable losses due to his alliance with Ahab. In I Kings 18:29-31, the text states: ‘The king of Israel said to Jehoshaphat, “I will disguise myself and go into battle, but you wear your royal robes.” So the king of Israel disguised himself, and they went into battle. When the captains of the chariots saw Jehoshaphat, they exclaimed, “It is the king of Israel!” They surrounded him to attack, but Jehoshaphat cried out, and the Lord helped him; God caused them to turn away from him.’ Furthermore, in II Chronicles 19:2, we read: ‘Jehu, the son of Hanani the seer, went out to meet him and said to King Jehoshaphat, “Should you help the wicked and love those who hate the Lord? Because of this, the Lord’s wrath is upon you.”’ Additionally, in II Chronicles 20:35-37, we find: ‘After this, King Jehoshaphat of Judah allied himself with Ahaziah, king of Israel, who acted very wickedly. He allied himself with him to build ships to go to Tarshish, and they constructed the ships in Eziongeber. Then Eliezer, the son of Dodavah from Mareshah, prophesied against Jehoshaphat, saying, “Because you have allied yourself with Ahaziah, the LORD has

destroyed your plans.” Consequently, the ships were wrecked and could not set sail for Tarshish.’

This illustrates that Jehoshaphat nearly lost his life due to his association with the wicked Ahab, and he received a warning and condemnation from God through the prophet, along with other losses. This indicates that the corresponding verses from CUV-3 and KJV-3 highlight two aspects of Jehoshaphat’s situation. The parallel complex sentence in KJV-3 is more fitting here than the conditional compound sentence in CUV-3, as Jehoshaphat’s significant status and wealth were not prerequisites for his familial ties with Ahab. This is supported by the conjunction ‘ו’ in the original Hebrew text, which indicates a parallel relationship.

CUV-4: 他们唱新歌说: ‘你配拿书卷, 配揭开七印, 因为你曾被杀, 用自己的血从各族、各方、各民、各国中买了人来, 叫他们归于上帝……’ (启示录5:9)

tā men chàng xīn gē shuō; ‘nǐ pèi ná shū juàn, pèi jiē kāi qī yìn, yīn wèi nǐ céng bèi shā, yòng zì jǐ de xiè cóng gè zú gè fāng gè mín gè guó zhōng mǎi le rén lái, jiào tā men guī yú shàng dì……’ (qǐshìlù 5:9)
they sung new song say you worthy take the book worthy open the seven
Seals for you ever was slain by own blood from every kindred every
direction, every nation, every country among bought people make them
belong to God (Revelation 5:9)

KJV-4: And they sung a new song, saying, Thou art worthy to take the book, and to open the seals thereof: for thou wast slain, and hast redeemed us to God by thy blood out of every kindred, and tongue, and people, and nation. (Revelation 5:9)

The Greek version of Revelation 5:9 is:

καὶ ᾄδουσιν ᾠδὴν καινὴν λέγοντες, Ἄξιός ἐστι λαβεῖν τὸ βιβλίον καὶ ἀνοῖξαι τὰς σφραγίδας αὐτοῦ, ὅτι ἐσφάγης καὶ ἡγόρασας τῷ θεῷ ἐν τῷ αἵματι σου ἐκ πάσης φυλῆς καὶ γλώσσης καὶ λαοῦ καὶ ἔθνους

In CUV-4, the term ‘gèfāng(各方)’ is employed, which can denote either a geographical area, meaning various locations (directions), or all parties involved, referring to everyone engaged. However, ‘gèfāng (各方)’ can not correspond to ‘language.’ In contrast, the KJV-4 uses the word ‘tongue,’ which refers to language in this context. As a result, the Chinese and English Bibles offer distinct semantic frameworks in this case. Frame semantics, a method from cognitive linguistics, helps us understand the meanings here. This method is a semantic frame that serves as a conceptual representation of experiences, organized and stored in long-term memory. In essence, a

frame is a knowledge structure made up of interconnected concepts linked to well-known, culturally embedded scenarios in human experience.

Focusing on CUV-4 and KJV-4, the semantic framework presented in CUV-4 by ‘gèfāng (各方)’ typically emphasises the various individuals, groups, organizations, countries, or entities involved in a situation, event, or transaction. It encompasses two or more entities that share a common interest or responsibility regarding a specific issue, or those that are impacted by the same event, which are the objects redeemed by the Lord Jesus with His precious blood in the text. In contrast, the KJV-4 presents a semantic framework focused on the various languages of the world. The word ‘tongues’ in this English verse is shaped by the linguistic elements of pronunciation, grammar, and vocabulary, highlighting that those redeemed by God encompass individuals who speak many different languages. This interpretation aligns with the Greek term γλῶσσης (glōssēs), which translates to ‘tongue.’ In this case, consequently, readers who rely solely on the Chinese text may overlook the idea of people from various languages being redeemed by God’s precious blood, instead interpreting it as referring to individual entities. As a result, readers who access information through Chinese scriptures encounter a conceptual framework that differs from both the original Greek version and its English translation. This discrepancy can lead to cognitive errors and a loss of information for Chinese readers, which needs to be addressed.

CUV-5: 你们眼中不要爱惜你们的家具,因为埃及全地的美物,都是你们的。
(创世记45:20)

nǐ men yǎn zhōng bú yào ài xī nǐ men de jiā jù, yīn wéi āi jí dì de měi wù, dōu shì nǐ men de. (Chuàngshìjì 45:20)

your eyes in do not cherish your furniture because Egypt whole land the beautiful things all are yours. (Genesis 45:20)

KJV-5: Also regard not your stuff; for the good of all the land of Egypt is yours.
(Genesis 45:20)

The Hebrew version of Genesis 45:20 is:

וַעֲיִנְיָם אֶל־תַּחֲסֵם עַל־כִּלְיָם כִּי־טוֹב כָּל־אֶרֶץ מִצְרָיִם לָהֶם הוּא:

In CUV-5, the first clause mentions ‘jiājù 家具 (furniture),’ and the second clause introduces ‘měiwù 埃及全地的美物 (the beautiful things (in all of Egypt)).’ The second clause is the cause of the first clause, and this relationship is connected by the conjunction ‘yīnwéi 因为 (because).’ From a semantic point of view, the ‘jiājù 家具 (furniture)’ mentioned in the first clause should be able to be replaced or included in the ‘měiwù 美物 (the beautiful things)’ mentioned in the second clause.

To illustrate this point, consider following two sentence patterns, A and B:

A: 'Do not love the X in your eyes, because all the X in Egypt are yours.'

B: 'Do not love the X in your eyes, because all the Y in Egypt are yours.'

I call sentence A Pattern XX, which is a both valid and logical argument. In sentence pattern B, which I call Pattern XY, if the semantics of Y includes X, the sentence logic is valid, while at the same time, the sentence emphasizes the conceptual prototype of X. On the contrary, if Y refers to something that does not include X, then sentence pattern B does not hold, is not a convincing argument. In the Hebrew Bible, the first clause of the sentence uses כְּלִיָּהֶם (k'lēchem, your things) and the second clause uses טוֹב (tūb, the best). Its structure follows Pattern XX, with clear semantics and strong logic.

In contrast, the CUV-5 sentence uses 'jiājù 家具, furniture' as X in the first clause and 'měiwù 美物, beautiful things' as Y in the second clause. In modern Chinese, 'jiājù 家具, furniture' refers to items that facilitate daily life or work activities. Although by virtue of natural semantic change over time, the specific items it covers have evolved over time – modern furniture includes items such as TV-sets, which evidently did not fall under the concept of furniture in ancient times –, the basic definition of furniture as a set of convenient tools for daily life and social activities has remained consistent.

Now the CUV translation of the Chinese Bible, the most widely used translation in Chinese churches, was produced in 1890 and officially published in 1919. It has undergone many revisions since its initial publication, and the examples discussed in this article are taken from the 2012 revision. In this context, the word 'jiājù 家具 (furniture)' is consistent with the definition mentioned above. The signified of Chinese term 'jiājù 家具 (furniture)', under the same signifier, has undergone semantic changes in different historical periods. Initially, the term referred to the reed mats that ancient people used to sit on the ground. It then progressed to designate the intricate furniture of the Ming and Qing Dynasties, and has now been extended to mean the modern designs that blend Eastern and Western influences. The evolution of furniture mirrors the advancement of human society and the exchange of cultures. Furniture serves not only as a daily necessity but also embodies rich cultural significance and artistic value. I do believe that during the translation of the CUV, the esteemed translators likely chose the Chinese term 'jiājù 家具 (furniture)' in order to give a close literary equivalent of the Hebrew expression כְּלִיָּהֶם (k'lēchem, all the things that are yours); however, this aspect is beyond the scope of this article. Here, I will focus on the contemporary meaning of 'jiājù 家具 (furniture)', which refers specifically to items that facilitate daily life or work activities. While this definition may be narrower than in previous historical contexts, it is important to note that for

modern Chinese readers, the meaning of the term has indeed become more limited. The CUV Bible, still widely read by many contemporary Chinese users, no longer accurately reflects the meaning of the original text. I will explore this issue further below, highlighting the urgent need for updates and improvements to the CUV Bible. The Chinese term ‘měiwù 美物’ refers to beautiful things and can broadly cover furniture. Therefore, the sentence CUV-5 is valid in a broad sense. However, it emphasizes the specific concept of ‘jiājù 家具 (furniture)’ as it refers to living or working supplies. In contrast, the original Hebrew word כְּלִיָּהֶם (k^llēchem) refers to any kind of property so it covers much more than furniture. The Hebrew word כְּלִיָּהֶם (k^llēchem) carries a possessive suffix of the second person plural masculine, referring to ‘all the things that are yours’. The Vulgate has supellectile (‘household utensils, goods, furniture, stuff’), while the Septuagint reads τῶν σκευῶν (from ta skeua, ‘the instruments, tools’). All of these translations encompass a much broader meaning than the Chinese word ‘jiājù 家具 (furniture)’.

Similarly, the word ‘stuff’ used in the English example sentence KJV-5 refers to a specific or general type of substance, material, object, or activity, which is mentioned, implied, or suggested. In a broad sense, it covers a wide range of items far more than furniture. Therefore, the Chinese verse is not completely consistent with the Hebrew and English verses, resulting in differences in the information it conveys and the concepts presented to the Chinese readers. The prototype theory of cognitive linguistics can analyze this issue more clearly.

Prototype theory is related to lexical semantics, in which specific words symbolize categories stored in our mental vocabulary. Categories are composed of progressively marginal but still interrelated members, forming a radial structure around a central prototype concept. The prototype is the main example within the category, and related members are centered around it. This central prototype conveys a core meaning, from which other meanings branch out to form a semantic network. This lexical semantic model draws on various aspects of cognitive linguistic theory, especially image schema, semantic frame, and conceptual metaphor theory. Cognitive linguistics explains word meaning primarily through these cognitive mechanisms, conceptualizing it as a semantic network in which atypical meanings are derived from more typical meanings through motivated meaning extension. Therefore, members of cognitive categories show family resemblance and hierarchical structure. In this example, the Chinese sentence CUV-5 exhibits a conceptual category whose image schema consists of multiple levels, with ‘jiājù 家具 (furniture)’ as the prototype. Here, ‘jiājù 家具 (furniture)’ is a secondary level concept, while ‘měiwù 美物 (the beautiful things)’ is a superordinate category concept. The front and back clauses of CUV-5 use concepts of different levels, and ‘měiwù 美物 (the beautiful things)’ is a category with

‘jiājù 家具 (furniture)’ as the prototype. In contrast, the same level of concepts is used in the Hebrew and English sentences, as mentioned above, כְּלִיָּהֶם (your things) and הַטֹּב (the best thing), ‘stuff’ and ‘the good (thing)’, so the whole sentence is harmonious and nothing stands out. הַטֹּב (the best thing) is a singular noun of masculine gender in Hebrew. However, this is rendered as a plural in the Chinese text. This means that the latter part of this verse highlights inconsistencies between different versions as well. Due to space limitations, I will not delve into this in detail. This example is enough to demonstrate the issue by focusing solely on the analysis of the first part. In this respect, the Chinese version stands apart from both the Hebrew original and the English translations. Hence, it can be seen that in Bible translation, the use of cognitive linguistics theories and methods, such as the method discussed here – by selecting words of the same level in the same category – can help reduce the semantic gap in the translation.

Conclusion

In the preceding discussion, I examined and analyzed five ambiguous passages while providing examples from the Chinese and the English Bibles, comparing them also to the original Hebrew and Greek versions, to illustrate my points. I employed cognitive linguistic methods to delve into the informational differences between the versions. However, the differences highlighted here, along with their analyses, represent only a small portion of a much larger picture. As of 2020, there are already 700 complete translations of the New and Old Testaments globally. The Bible has its roots in Hebrew, Aramaic, and Hellenistic Greek (koinē). Throughout the ages, countless individuals have dedicated their efforts to translating it into numerous languages, recognizing its significance as a foundational text. It serves as a guide for our life’s journey, illuminating the complexities of human existence; it embodies truth, helping individuals cultivate a victorious perspective; and it represents the essence of a doctrine necessary for life, as it conveys the Creator’s words. Consequently, various translations of the Bible should ideally provide the same guidance to speakers of different languages.

However, the potential for ambiguity in language can lead to serious misunderstandings, making the pursuit of clarity in translation a critical priority. Cognitive linguistics serves as a valuable tool and approach in the academic research of Biblical translation techniques. It posits that human language ability is not an isolated skill but is intricately linked to overall cognitive capabilities. As a result, it seeks parallels between linguistic phenomena and general cognitive processes. Cognitive linguists have drawn extensively from psychological research concerning human categorization, attention, memory, and Gestalt principles, enriching and invigorating their

theories. Rather than being a singular theory of language, cognitive linguistics represents a comprehensive research paradigm that intersects with various fields, including artificial intelligence, linguistics, psychology, and systems theory. This interdisciplinary approach highlights the deep connections between language and other cognitive mechanisms. Consequently, employing cognitive linguistics to explore and clarify ambiguities across different versions of the Bible, as well as inconsistencies within the same version, is a promising method.

This article aims to contribute to an important research topic by highlighting specific practical principles for Bible translation. These include selecting words that align closely with prototype semantics (illustrated in Case 1), opting for clearer sentence structures based on cognitive grammar (demonstrated in Case 2), accurately conveying the relationships between clauses through construction grammar (as shown in Case 3), using expressions that are more aligned with the semantic framework (depicted in Case 4), and choosing words that correspond to the appropriate semantic categories (as seen in Case 5). I believe that these efforts will enhance understanding among people of diverse races and languages, allowing them to dig into the true meaning of the Bible more accurately, thereby leading them closer to the truth and granting them freedom within that truth.

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