
Study on the Influential Analysis of Cultural Context in English-Chinese Translation

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Abstract: Language is not only part of culture but also the carrier of it, different languages are embedded in different culture, the fact requires translators to not only take culture into account but also reflect cultural context and social reality in the processing of translation. Therefore, translation is the conversion between two languages, but also the collision between two cultures. Material culture-loaded words contain national cultural elements, so it is a difficult problem in translation to accurately convey the cultural connotation of material culture-loaded words to readers. The strong or weak condition of a cross-cultural awareness and the degree of understanding culture contexts influence the quality of translation directly. In cultural translation, the translator should take language and culture into consideration. When the culture of the source language is close to the culture of the target language, the translator can adopt domestication strategy to increase the readability of the target language. When the culture of the source language is very different from the culture of the target language, the foreignization strategy can be used to increase the communication between cultures. Moreover, different cultural phenomena cause different translation strategies. Based on the analysis of differences and similarities between the Western and Chinese culture, it is mainly explored the various translation methods by focusing on culture context in English-Chinese translations.

Keywords: Cultural Context, Translation Strategies, English-Chinese Translation

1. Introduction

As is known to all, language is an indispensable carrier of culture, which culture needs to find the better representation through language use. Language is the production of cultural environment, which is moreover the developments of culture impute and improve the development of language. Each nation owns its language and culture, it has long been recognized that language is an essential and important part of a given culture and the impact of culture upon a given language is something intrinsic. The close relationship between language and culture results in the intimate relationship between translation and culture. English-Chinese translational is the transfer between English and Chinese as well as the western and Chinese culture. The difference between western and Chinese culture leads to the challenge for translators, moreover, with the background of globalization in national diversity, there would be more diversifications between modern and past in cultural environments. It is precisely because of the cultural context, strategies of translation should be chosen more seriously

during the progress of translation practices.

2. Translation and Culture

Translation is a decision-making process in a certain social culture frame. The translator's decision not merely depends on the language he/she learns, but also on the cultural environment of a specific era to a great extent. As what Bassinet and Lefevre once said, "translation reflects a certain ideology and poetics and as such manipulates literature to function in a given society in a given way" [1]. Therefore, we may say that any translation can't be carried on well without getting to know the culture. As we know translator doesn't operate under an abstract and ideal situation. He is a human being living in a certain society. It is quite natural that his idea is greatly influenced by the environment around him. We can see this from his choice of words. The choice of a translator in different period shows different characteristics, which proves that the society and political background where the translator lives affect him a

lot. Translators usually have certain anticipation or prejudice of the original text, while the anticipation or prejudices exactly reflect his political orientation. We can say the translation is jobs of recreation with the translators' own feeling. The translator's political orientation can explain why the translator will intend to explain a neutral word in the original text into vocabulary with obvious political tendency in the translation. However, sometimes there is even a totally opposite meaning in it. As we mentioned above, the translator is a person with certain culture in a real sense. As a translator, he should grasp the two languages well. However, we can't imagine someone can do a good translation without the understanding of the social culture of a language. Understanding the meaning of the original text while translating is not simply a matter of understanding, as long as we study the culture behind the language during the process of studying a language, a large amount of culture information can be transmitted equivalently. These are comparatively simpler in translation. Cultural translation is the translation in which the context of message is changed to conform to the receptor culture in some way, and/or in which information is introduced which is not linguistically implicit in the original that opposed to linguistic translation [2]. The relationship between translation and culture has been researched by many linguistics and translator. And there are many different viewpoints on cultural translation.

3. Major Factors Affecting Culture

3.1. Historical Factors

History refers to the true records of event which happened in the past time, the process of the development of man or the course of the totality of natural environment, products, traffic and citizens, also including the landscape and the weather in a place. It is inevitable that we may come across sentences in which they include the related knowledge about history. The history of culture is from the specific course of historical development and social heritage of precipitation. Due to the different process in development, it formed into different cultures. For example, in the expression of "the two of them are always at loggerheads", in which is meant "loggerhead" as the container in Middle Ages which is used for melting tar for sea war. Moreover, in the war the soldiers in one boat sprinkle tar with it towards the enemy. Now it implicates that the opposite sides cannot finally come to an agreement [3]. This proves that if we want to grasp firmly the sentence, we must understand the related war and its tactics happened in middle ages.

Moreover, the image of "apple" also can be related to big city and buzzing blokes with excitement where people can find excitant recreations. Therefore, New York is called the "Big Apple" or the "Apple". We can see that if we don't know the related history about "loggerhead and apple", we may be not easy to understand this simple sentence, and we may even convey the incorrect information to readers. Citizens in Boston used to eating baked bean. So bean eater specially

means people who live in Boston. That is the reason why Boston was called Bean Town. In addition to "garlic-burner" is a compound word which refers to the motorcycle made in Italy. Moreover, another example, as in the expression "He rides a garlic-burner" that seems to be very simple, but if we do not know what "garlic-burner" [4] refers to, we never think of it being related to the Italian motorcycle.

3.2. Political Factors

In western, politic is related to everybody. The concepts and knowledge from politics have integrated to western culture. "Lobby" is not only a word means a room for rest, it also means going about drumming up support for an idea. "Maverick" is not only the name of a farmer but also refers of those who persist their old ways. Moreover, "gate" even becomes a language phenomenon used to describe the scandal events in use of "Watergate". Political events can be reflected by the language and influent culture in translation. Due to difference between western and Chinese political system, there are cultural empty. In western capital country, they claim the freedom of speech all the time. Newspaper, broadcast and television, these three medium is the represent word of freedom. Tomas Jefferson once said, "Were it left to me to decide whether we should have a government without newspapers or newspapers without a government, I should not hesitate a moment to prefer the later" [5], which we may see the political factor here.

3.3. Geographical Factors

Geographical culture means the cultural formation of natural conditions and geographical environment, and they change with their geography. There are many different views by different ethnic. Because of different geographic different place had formed different weather, wear style, even eating habit in translation. It may never snow in a tropical country, so it is natural that there is no such a concept of "snow" in the local people's language as well as in their experiences. In contrast, the Eskimo, who live in the polar region may have numerous words to describe snow. Because of the geographic of the British, the most amiable and warmest weather there is summer instead of spring. In Shakespeare's Sonnet X, VIII, he compares his friends with summer and vivid description of the good-temper in summer. The warm braw in the Britain is west wind instead of east wind, which is totally contrasted to China. So the British endowed west wind warmth, the original of life and other beautiful meaning and image, like Shelly's *Ode to the West Wind*. All of above, we can see the effect of geographic on language, literature, culture and so forth.

3.4. Social Customs and Habits

Each nation has its own social customs and habits which are created by people of its own nation living together for a very long time. The formation of those customs and habits is closely linked with the natural condition, social environment, life style, tradition, etiquette and belief or even superstition. In

Britain, where people like to wear hats, when they greet somebody or extend their respects to others, they will take off their hats. Therefore, they employ "take off one's hat to somebody" [6] to express the meaning that a person pays one's respects to somebody.

3.5. Literature and Religious Belief Factors

Western culture, or rather European and American culture, originates from different two ancient cultures, Hellenistic culture and the Hebraic culture. The Greeks also had known as Hellen whom is a very imaginative ethnic group. During their civilization, they developed a complex system of mythology. Greek mythology nurtures people's spiritual world and is an inexhaustible fountain for western painting, sculpture, music and literature. Zeus, Prometheus, Hera, Hephaestus, Achilles, all these names become a part of western culture. The Trojan War, the legend of Odysseus, the journey of Oedipus, the most important events in Greek mythology are known by almost everyone in western countries. In addition to the Greek mythology (which was inherited and integrated by the Roman Empire and therefore influenced the later Western world), Western culture originates from the Hebraic-Christian culture that is undoubtedly embodied in and founded upon the *Holy Bible*. Jehovah, Abraham, Jacob, Moses, these famous people in the Bible are frequently referred to in later works of ethics, theology, philosophy, literature and art. The fall of man, the construction of tower of Babel, the fall of Jerusalem, the stories, or incidents, are either legendary or historical, but they always conjure up our imaginations and deepen up our understanding.

As for the influence of literature on culture and language, Shakespeare's influence nobody can deny, "I am no hamlet." The sentence should be translated as "我决不犹豫" rather than "我不是哈姆雷特" [7] in Chinese. If we ever read Shakespeare's work Hamlet, we may know that the hero hamlet in the work hesitates to avenge for his father. Therefore, "hamlet" here means "undeterminable". There are still dozens of examples which can show the influence of traditional culture on translating. The first one is "He is changing to *Rip Van Winkle*." In the sentence "Rip Van Winkler" refers to a hero. After sleeping for 20 years, he is far behind his time. For example in the sentence, "This is the opinion of some *Rip Van Winkle*" here means "这是一些不识时务的意见". It is the same with the next example "He is a kindly Fagin who shelters a nest of adolescent thieves." Fagin refers to an old man in Oliver twist. So here we should not directly translate as "费金" in Chinese. While in English traditional culture, this kind of examples is uncountable, such as "Don Juan" of "花花公子" in Chinese and "Cinderella" of "灰姑娘" in Chinese. Although the difference exists among nations, due to some similar of geographical environment and physical of human, more or less, there is culture overlap [8]. And through communication, culture diffusion appears, especially after the invention of computer and internet, and loan words are the best example.

4. Influence of Culture Context in English-Chinese Translation Strategies

As we all know that language is intimately connected with culture, and they cannot be separated in any times. Chinese is a language with a long history and excellent tradition based on Chinese culture. We could draw the conclusion that English and Chinese cultures differ from each other obviously in the origin and development. However, after studying and analyzing Chinese and English languages and cultures, we may discover that both of them have such great similarities, which lay a solid foundation for the further study of Chinese and English cultures. We must learn how to use literal translation and liberal translation. Besides similarities, there are also many differences between two cultures, which form the most difficult part in translation. As translation is a cross-cultural activity, while, no matter the differences or similarities influence the strategies of English-Chinese translation.

In the process of cultural convergence, there are many differences in culture. The cultural differences have brought about many difficulties in our translation. Zero of equivalent word means in the target language, there is no direct equivalent of an expression existing in the source language because of different life experiences, customs and traditions, religions and philosophies [9]. Millions of examples of lack of vocabulary equivalence can be found in the translation between two languages. Some of the problems caused by the lack of vocabulary equivalence were much more serious than the frequently quoted examples of the Japanese "mokusatsu" (to ignore or to withhold comment) in the World War II. Those who live in the same community may encounter the problem that one's idea means nothing to another, let alone the people who belongs to two vastly different cultures. The problem has a great difficulty to inter-language translating. Similarly, we cannot translate all these words into Chinese or English directly. Analogous problems are also caused by different custom and tradition.

4.1. Literal and Liberal Translation

Literal translation also called word-for-word translation is ideally the segmentation of the source language text into individual words and target language rendering of those word-segments one at a time [10]. Because of some similarities between the two cultures, we may find their equivalents in the target language, and we can employ the technique of literal translation so as to completely retain their meanings forms in both cultures, that is retain the original images. In most of Chinese idioms, for example, "hang by a hair" "burn the boat" and "walls has ears", we can find the vivid descriptions between Chinese and English culture. This method can be firstly employed in translating proverbs which appear vivid and figurative. We should manage to clearly show the qualities of original. The following are just a few of them, such as "A lazy youth, a lousy age" can be translated into "少壮不努力, 老大徒伤悲", "Grasp all, lose all" can be

translated as “贪多必失” and “Looker-on sees more than players” into “当局者迷，旁观者清” in Chinese. Literal translation is used to retain the image of original. This method can be beneficial to the communication and mixture between English and Chinese culture. We can always use it in the common sense and allusions. We may see the examples for translation, such as “the tower of ivory” in “象牙塔” and “Eden” in “伊甸园” for the processing translation between different cultures.

Liberal translation, free translation, also known as sense-for-sense translation, emphasizes transfer of the meaning or “spirit” of a source text over accurate reproduction of the original wording. The purpose of sense-for-sense translation is to accommodate the needs of the target language reader by producing a text which conforms to the linguistic and textual norms of the target language and culture and which does not therefore sound “foreign” [11]. As we all know, there is cultural gap, therefore it shouldn't be equal English with Chinese language. In this case, literal translation cannot apply because the translation version will be sorry-reading, and its meaning is to be farfetched and hard to understand. Therefore, liberal translation may be used. Besides, the proverbs with national color are not rendered generally by the method of substitution. In other words, the names of people and places in English proverbs can never be directly copied in Chinese version; similarly the Chinese names and places not be used in the English versions. For example, in the idiom of “When Greek meets Greek, then comes the tug of war”. It is used to describe the fierce scene when two brave warriors fight against each other. Therefore, someone has translated it into “张飞遇张飞，杀得满天飞”，while there is no such a person called “Zhang Fei” in British history, which it is not proper to only mention someone's name in this expression. The translation of “两雄相遇，其斗必烈” in Chinese would be much better, which keeps the original flavor.

4.2. Foreignizing and Domesticating

While literal translation and liberal translation mainly deal with linguistic production, foreignizing translation and domesticating translation are concerned more with cultural, linguistic and aesthetic considerations [12]. Besides cultural, economic, political, the translator's attitude towards the source language text is very important factor. The two terms had been approached from different perspectives, linguistic, cultural, ideological, etc. Some scholars associated the two terms with literal translation and free translation, and historical reviews were made on them. Now the majority commonly held that while domesticating translation was the main trend in the 20th century, therefore in the new century will mostly embrace the translation of foreignizing. It has been surely played an important role in translation studies in China and the West, for it had been largely ignored in the past, and what is more, the age of globalization calls for the kind of translation. In fact, two pairs of terms, foreignizing/localizing and alienation/adaptation (or assimilation), the former lays its emphasis on ideological and cultural values, while the latter on aesthetic and linguistic values. Whether a

translation should be approached in a foreignizing or localizing way, there are many factors to affect one's choice. This is especially true in different cultural contexts. This is a strategy in which target text is produced which deliberately breaks target conventions by retaining something of foreignness of original. This method is “an ethno deviant pressure on target-language cultural values to register the linguistic and cultural difference of foreign text, sending the reader abroad” [13] to have alien reading experience.

The comparatively famous example should be Coca-Cola. When it is translated into “可口可乐” in Chinese, it keeps the syllable and sound of the original word. It is easy to associate it with a type of beverage, which tastes delicious. The translated word makes the product more vivid and tempting to the customers. We can say that the effect of the translated name has exceeded the original name; and “coca” has already become the symbol of the beverage in modern society. We can see the powerful strength of the translated name in the culture. Moreover, the outstanding enterprise in China is “Procter&Gamble”, for the translation of “宝洁” seems really popular acceptance in Chinese Marketing. Many of its products are very popular in China. Besides the elements of marketing, the translated brand name of the products also plays a very important role in promoting these products. For example, “舒肤佳” is “Safeguard” in Chinese. When we hear the brand of “舒肤佳” in Chinese, we may easily associate it with a type of soap which can protect our skin. Moreover, the Chinese translation of “佳洁士” is the brand of “Crest”, and the “Rejoice” gets the translation of “飘柔” in Chinese, which shows the characteristic of the shampoo. Besides, there are also many other successful examples. “乐凯” was translated into “lucky” and so on. Therefore, it is pointed that the domestication is strategy in which a transparent, fluent style is adopted in order to minimize the strangeness of the foreign text for target language readers. This method is “an ethnocentric reduction of foreign text to target-language cultural values, bring the author back home” [14].

4.3. Substitution Translation

When the equivalents of some set phrases can't be located in the target language, a substitute may be applied in the translation. This translation should be understood by readers and retain the image anyway. In other words, the form between the two cultures is different though, the meaning between them is the same. It is used to shift the references to the reader gets acquainted with so that the source language is easily expressed and understood. Here are some typical examples in translations of idioms translation, such as, “Neither fish nor fowl” in “不伦不类”, “A fly in the ointment” of the expression in “美中不足” and “Diamond cut diamond, crook cut crook” of “棋逢对手，将遇良才” in Chinese translation.

4.4. Multiple Translation

Translation is a continual tug-of-war between faithfulness and smoothness, literal translation and liberal translation,

foreignization and translationese [15], loyalty to the author and appeal for reader. Only use one method in the process of translate is impossible. Sometimes two methods can be used together in English proverbs translation. In practical translation, we may come across such a phenomenon that one set phrase in English has multiple translation in Chinese and vice versa. We can choose the one we prefer, or pick up the one appropriately fitting in the context. There are several typical examples in translations of idioms translation, such as, "Fish in the air" in "水中捞月", "Beat the air" of expression in "隔靴搔痒" and "Cry for the moon" of "挑雪填井" in Chinese translation. From these cases studied above, we may find the principles of solving the cultural gaps when the differences appeared in the cultural diversities.

5. Conclusion

Due to the action of translating involving many aspects of cultural background fields, we should not be merely concerned about the ability of applying language and the theory of translation. We also must be familiar with cultural background knowledge such as the cultural tradition, cultural mentality and customs, together with professional knowledge. Therefore, in view of the close relation between cultural background and translation, we must learn more about the culture of English-speaking countries. And to completely understand the source book and gain a satisfying target work, we translators firstly must have good command of cultural background knowledge. According to examples has referred above, it is obviously known that the cultural background knowledge performs the dominant role in translation activities [16]. So widely reading is necessary. In the course of reading we open our vision, and accumulate much knowledge and even understand other nationalities' cultural background. Undoubtedly, this also can help us improve the ability to read and the quality of translating. From the nowadays situation, the influence of Chinese culture is weaker than western culture, it reflect the advance of western technology and economical statue. But with the rapid soar of Chinese economic, our culture will affect the world. Cultural context is very widely touch, the translation is complex and changeable, it is not steady but development all the time, translator can't avoid the difficult of translation due to culture difference, further research on the difference and similarity, the characters and law of two language, analysis and compare the structure and expression, understand and control the culture, all those can contribute to the capability of translation.

Last but not least, either in the history or present, the principle lay on the culture of target language is always gaining the upper hand. This is because of publishers and critics put more attention on the readable of translation, what's more, target readers also prefer to the smooth and easily comprehended translation. No matter how rapid the

globalization has developed, only use the proper translation strategy in proper context seems necessarily in various cultural context of the communication among different nations.

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