

Literature Review on the English Translation of Chinese Culture-Loaded Words

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Abstract:

This article reviews the translation strategies and theoretical perspectives adopted by scholars based on different types of texts in recent years, and then analyzes the shortcomings and future research directions in the field of Chinese culture-loaded words translation in China.

Keywords:

Culture-loaded words, English Translation, Review

1. Introduction

Culture-loaded words refer to words, phrases and idioms that carry the socio-cultural information of a particular ethnic group. These words can reflect the unique ways of activities of the nation that have been accumulated over a long period of time and are different from those of other nations[1]. At the same time, culturally loaded words are also called “Lexical Vacancy Words”. In the process of translation, it is often impossible to find the equivalent word of the source language in the target language culture due to the differences between cultures[2]. Such words in Chinese, which can reflect strong national characteristics and distinctive cultural features, will be beneficial to the spread of Chinese culture and the improvement of Chinese cultural soft power if they are translated properly. However, Chinese cultural load words, which are both culturally unique and complex, also face great challenges and difficulties in English translation. In recent years, Chinese scholars have focused on the culture-loaded words in different types of texts, combined with different translation research theories and proposed different translation strategies, which has become a hot issue in translation research. This article intends to review the research results of scholars on the English translation of Chinese culture-loaded words in recent years, as well as the translation strategies and theoretical perspectives adopted for different types of texts, in order to help further research on the English translation of Chinese culture-loaded words in China.

2. Translation Strategies of Culture-Loaded Words in Different English Translation Texts

Because of the unique cultural bearing of Chinese culture-loaded words, Chinese scholars' research on English translation of Chinese culture-loaded words mainly focuses on dictionaries, ancient texts, literary works and political outreach texts. For different types of texts, the translation methods or approaches of cultural load words in relevant types of texts are summarized by analyzing the translators' treatment of culture-loaded words in them.

2.1. Research on the English translation of culture-loaded words in dictionaries

Yao Ximing[3] addressed the problem of English translation of culturally loaded words in dictionaries, suggesting that in Chinese-English dictionaries, especially bilingual dictionaries, the information provided should be accurate and enlightening to readers due to the special nature of their texts and roles, so the translations should provide as much cultural information as possible to facilitate readers' understanding. He advocated the use of paraphrase and explanatory notes rather than a simple interpretive translation. This will not only help users who read for the purpose of reading, but also help translators who use dictionaries to translate other types of culturally specific words. In translation, it is also necessary to observe the principles of priority of substitution, reflecting the cultural connotation of the source language, consistency, completeness and diversity of interpretation, and to try to find the corresponding words or adopt the method of phonetic translation with expanded notes to solve the problem of translating the names of culturally distinctive words in various ways. As one of the main tools used by translators in translation, if dictionaries can truly achieve uniformity and accuracy in translating culturally loaded words, it is believed that they will be of great benefit to the translation of the same culturally loaded words appearing in other types of texts subsequently.

Li Yanxiu and Zhao Bing[4] analyzed the translation meanings of some Chinese culture-specific words in the Chinese-English dictionary of the Oxford-Foreign Research Service English-Chinese Chinese-English Dictionary through their research. They found that the translation of Chinese culture-loaded words in the Chinese-English dictionary adopts flexible and various modes of translation meanings, such as transposition, phonetic translation, direct translation, definite modifier, free translation, phonetic synthesis and omission and substitution. However, there are still problems and shortcomings, excluding the mistranslation of some words, and more of them are the lack of systematization and consistency. This problem cannot be ignored and needs to be given wide attention.

2.2. Research on the English translation of culture-loaded words in ancient classical texts

The ancient texts are an important part of Chinese traditional culture, showing the wisdom of the Chinese people for thousands of years and carrying on the profound history and culture of ancient China.

As a basic project to introduce and promote the excellent traditional Chinese culture to the world, the Greater China Library is the first systematic and comprehensive foreign translation of traditional Chinese canonical culture, covering the most representative classical ancient books in China in the fields of literature, politics, history, science and technology.

Wang Yan and Li Zhengbang[5] studied the English translations of science and technology texts in the Library of Chinese Classics and concluded that science and technology texts, which record ancient Chinese scientific knowledge and technology, are both ideological and scientific, and have an important place in Chinese culture. It is important to do a good job in the foreign dissemination of science and technology texts. They analyzed two widely different translations of the Classic of Mountain and Seas and argued that translating the culture-specific words in the book into modern English or literal direct translation, although the translation has better readability, does not help readers' knowledge of Chinese culture and may even cause misunderstanding.

The translation adopted in the Library of Chinese Classics, on the other hand, is in line with Wang Hong and Zhao Zheng's[6] view that “ for technical entries, explanatory translations are used in simple and easy-to-understand language as much as possible, while direct translations are adopted for narrative entries to reproduce the original style as much as possible.” This is a good guidance for us in translating culture-loaded words in canonical texts.

English translations of medical canonical texts have also received wide attention from scholars. Wu Chunyu and Wang Yinquan[7] explored the translation of culturally loaded words in the Yellow Emperor's Canon of Medicine by comparing and analyzing two different translations of the text from ecological translation science in 2015. It is argued that translators should take into account the linguistic dimension, cultural and communicative dimensions in the actual translation process, and should make adaptive choices and transformations in the ecological environment of translation in order to achieve the best translation effect.

Wang Yan and Li Zhengbang[5] also proposed the translation method of retaining Chinese characters and pinyin in the commentary and descriptions, and adopt the phonetic translation and annotation approach in the text. Although it can provide readers with detailed materials, the overly complicated annotation is redundant and overwhelming to the text itself. In contrast, the adoption of prose dialogues, with phonetic translations as the main focus and interpretation as a supplement, allows readers to understand the true meaning of the Chinese language and promotes the development of English translations of Chinese texts and their dissemination to foreign countries.

As for the translation difficulties of culture-loaded words encountered in the English translation of Chinese cultural texts, such as texts on literature, history and philosophy, Li Wenge[8] proposed that in the English translation of Chinese cultural texts, for the culture-loaded words in them, it is necessary to take into account the types of the original text, the importance of the culture-loaded words in the original text, the purpose of translation, and the types and acceptability of the target language readers. As for “cultural equivalence”, he believed that the cultural equivalence method that could be accepted by the readers of the translated text could be found by adopting transposition, phonetic translation, substitution, explanatory translation, translating out the meaning, using both free translation, annotation and original Chinese characters, and adding notes.

2.3. Research on the English translation of culture-loaded words in literary works

A Dream of Red Mansions, the pinnacle of Chinese classical literature, contains many culturally loaded words that carry the distinctive culture of the Chinese nation,

and it is of great significance to study the English translation of culturally loaded words in Chinese.

According to Zhang Hongyan[9], the translation of culture-loaded words is both difficult and important in literary translation, and the good or bad of literary translation depends on the success or failure of culture-loaded words, which also directly affects the dissemination and promotion of Chinese classical literature to the outside world and the dissemination of the rich cultural connotation in literary works. By analyzing different versions of culturally loaded words in the translations of *A Dream of Red Mansions*, she suggested that the translators should pay attention to the different associative imagery of the same word in different cultures, fully understand and grasp the differences between the two cultures when translating, carefully figure out the ideological connotations of the two cultures, and achieve maximum fidelity and equivalence when transplanting the cultures.

Qian Yaxu and Ji Mofang[10], on the other hand, analyzed the Huo translation of *A Dream of Red Mansions* by means of quantitative analysis and concluded that Huo's translation strategies mainly focused on the substitution method and the direct translation method, arguing that for the common substances in both Chinese and English cultures, using direct translation was not a good method when translating, while due to the real heterogeneity in the two cultures, substitution had to be used to achieve basic semantic equivalence.

There are many excellent Chinese literary works, all of which show the culture of the Chinese nation and the spirit of the people from different aspects. Li Yingyu et al. [11] analyzed the translation of “ci” (瓷) in the English translation of *Turbulence* in “On the Translation of Dialectal Culture-Loaded Words”, and used the “Theory of Associative Translation” to point out that language should be understood in context, including the contextual assumptions of the author, the original text and the readers of the translated text. Taking the translation of dialectal cultural load words as an example, the translation strategy of dialectal cultural loaded words is discussed, and it is argued that the general direct translation or paraphrase will result in under-translation due to the different potential contexts of the readers of the translated text.

For professional terms or keywords with strong regional characteristics like Lingnan cultural load words, Wang Hai and Wang Haichao[12] argued that both the etymological origin and translation principles should be respected and the reading convenience of the target readers should be taken into consideration, and on the basis of fully understanding the meaning and cultural connotation of the relevant cultural load words by fully tracing and verifying the etymological origin of the word, we can adopt “Cantonese pinyin + English translation + subtext” or “Mandarin + English translation + subtext”, in order to minimize the cultural loss.

2.4. Research on the English translation of culture-loaded words in political foreign propaganda texts

With the deepening of China's Opening-up and the increasing frequency of foreign economic activities, foreign propaganda work is particularly important, among which the translation of political foreign propaganda texts, especially the translation of culturally loaded words. If properly done, it can reflect Chinese cultural characteristics to the greatest extent, and help Chinese culture go out and improve Chinese cultural soft power. On the contrary, if the translation is inappropriate, it will cause difficulties in understanding and misunderstanding to the readers of the

translated text, which will not achieve the effect of foreign propaganda and may even cause serious negative impact.

According to the classification theory of Newmark and Neubert for different texts, Yuan Xiaoning[13] believed that foreign propaganda texts belonged to informative and inducing texts that should be attributed to the culture of the target language, and should be translated by using the method of communicative translation, and the formatting and expressions should conform to the expression habits of the genre in the translated language as far as possible[14]. The translation of foreign propaganda texts should also focus mainly or completely on the translated text[15]. He argued that if allusions related to Chinese history, culture and society appear in the process of English translation, alternative expressions can be made through stories or names of people and places that exist in foreign countries themselves when translating, so as to first make foreign readers perceptualize and resonate with them, and then gradually reduce or even omit such interpretive and translation methods with the help of metaphors as the West's cultural understanding of China gradually deepens.

Wang Yinquan[16], based on the English translation of the Olympic mascot "Fuwa", argued that for words with strong national characteristics, when there was a meaning gap in the target language culture, the strategy of adopting Chinese Pinyin with explanatory translation was feasible and appropriate. In order to have confidence in one's own culture, if one is subservient to the strong culture, one's own culture will always be in a weak position in the process of cultural exchange, and the cultural differences in the original language can be appropriately preserved according to objective needs and realistic purposes to promote one's own language and culture.

In Wu Wenyan's[17] article, she argued that the purpose of foreign propaganda translations containing culturally loaded words is foreign propaganda, so that foreign readers can accurately obtain information from the original language. Therefore, under the principle of retaining the cultural information of the original language as much as possible, the translated language should be used as the home, and the logical thinking habits and language expression habits of foreign readers should be considered, so as to minimize the obstacles encountered by foreign readers in obtaining information. She proposes to follow three major principles when dealing with the translation of Chinese culturally loaded words: the principle of retaining the cultural information of the original language, the principle of conforming to the expression habits of the translated language, and the principle of being close to the thinking habits of foreign audiences. The translation methods advocate the adoption of phonetic translation with notes, direct translation with notes, and free translation.

3. Theoretical Perspectives on the Study of English Translation of Culture-Loaded Words

Western translators take linguistics as the theoretical basis of translation practice, and through the study of language, they then study translation. Chinese Domestic researchers have also explored and discussed the English translation of Chinese culture-loaded words from different theoretical perspectives under the guidance of linguistic and translation theories, making the research more scientific. These theories include: association theory perspective, acceptance theory perspective, functional reciprocity theory perspective, purpose theory perspective, ecological translation theory perspective, optimal association perspective, interpretation theory perspective, acceptance aesthetics perspective, semantic translation perspective, communicative

translation theory perspective, cultural schema theory perspective, cultural translation theory perspective, multiple system theory perspective, resistance translation theory perspective, functional grammar context theory perspective, Conformity theory perspective, and so on. Due to the limitation of space in this article, only the research of individual scholars in this area is cited in this article. Wu Chunyu and Wang Yinquan (2015) analyzed the translation of culturally loaded words in medical texts from the perspective of ecological translation theory; Li Yingyu et al. (2008) explored the translation strategies of culturally loaded words in dialects using the theory of associative translation.

And from the perspective of functional grammar context, Chen Xirong[18] argued that culture-loaded words have their basic meaning but no absolute meaning. When the situational context changes, the meaning of words will change accordingly. Therefore, it is important to deal with the cultural contexts of the original text and the translated text. He suggested that when translating culturally loaded words, the cultural color of the original text should be preserved as much as possible, and the cultural context of the original text should be transplanted to the translated text, so that readers can gain new cultural experiences in the "different" reading.

Cultural translation theory emphasizes that translation is a process that helps to disseminate the unique culture of each nationality and thus promotes cross-cultural communication. From the perspective of cultural translation theory, Zhang Kunpeng and Wei Tianchan[19] analyzed that the English translation of culturally loaded words should take culture as the core of information, follow the general principle of "self-centered", and use the way of alienation with naturalization to promote the spread of source language culture in the target language culture and further enrich the language and culture of other nationalities, so as to achieve the purpose of cultural exchange. The purpose of cultural exchange is to promote the transmission of the source language culture in the target language culture and further enrich the language and culture of other ethnic groups.

From the perspective of cultural iconography theory, Wang[20] proposed that translation is a communicative process with two stages of activity, which is closely related to the activation of cultural iconography process. As a translator, he or she should not only activate the cultural iconography of the original language when reading the original text, so as to correctly recognize and understand the original text, but also adopt appropriate ways to help the readers of the translated text activate the cultural iconography as much as possible when outputting the translated text, so as to understand the profound connotation of the culturally-based words. And when the cultural iconography of words in two cultures fit, parallel, different or vacant, different translation methods should be adopted to fill, correct and reconstruct the cultural iconography.

Sun Lin and Han Rainbow[21] discussed the dominant role of translators in the translation ecology from the perspective of ecological translation science, which has a major mission in maintaining its balance. As the master of the environment, he or she can actively "adapt" and "select" the translation of culturally loaded words in order to present a translation with Chinese characteristics to the readers of the translation and present a masterpiece with authentic expressions.

4. Conclusions

The strength of a country's soft power depends on the proliferation of its culture, and only when culture can spread and spread can the country's soft power be continuously enhanced[22]. It is also only when Chinese culture goes out of the country and into the international arena that the country's soft power can have the opportunity to keep rising and China's international discourse can be improved[23]. As translators, our translation work is actually the process of building a bridge between two languages. How well this "bridge" is built will have a direct impact on the effect of cultural communication. The importance of culture-loaded words, like an indispensable brick and stone in this bridge, is self-evident.

Throughout the research results, the English translation of culturally loaded words has gradually become a hot topic in the field of translation in China and abroad. Regarding the translation research of cultural load words, the research results of foreign scholars are relatively few, and most of the researches are mainly concentrated in China. This article composes the research results of scholars in recent years. In the domestic research on the English translation of Chinese culture-loaded words, scholars have put forward their views and English translation strategies based on different text types.

First, for the cultural load words in dictionaries, scholars have realized that dictionaries are different from other types of bilingual texts in that they have certain authority and have a great reference role in subsequent studies. Therefore, the problem of systematization and unity of English translations of cultural load words in them needs to be solved. However, looking at the studies of English translations of culturally loaded words, the dictionary-based studies are far less abundant than those of other types. It is hoped that the relevant studies can be promoted gradually, so as to put an end to the misunderstandings caused to novice translators or non-professionals due to the complicated and amorphous transliteration names as soon as possible, and to curb the occurrence of source errors in a timely manner.

Secondly, for culturally loaded words in canonical texts and literary works, scholars use the methods of comparative analysis of translations and quantitative analysis to make the corpus of Chinese culturally loaded words truly rich in sources.

Third, for culturally loaded words in political outreach texts, most scholars prefer the translation method of naturalization, but for different promotional occasions and purposes, they can also change their strategies appropriately to achieve the best cultural promotion effect.

Fourthly, domestic researchers have switched their research perspectives through different translation theoretical perspectives to make research on English translation of Chinese cultural load words, and the theory supports the practice, making the research more scientific.

Conflicts of Interest

The author declares that there is no conflict of interest regarding the publication of this article.

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