

A Study of the English Translation of Chinese Buzzwords from the Perspective of Functional Equivalence Theory

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Abstract—As the internet and social media develop further, there are numerous buzzwords used by the citizens, which are the fashion phenomena in China. As inter-cultural communication between China and other countries becomes deeper and frequent, an increasing number of foreigners have good command of Chinese culture. As a result, as the cultural bridge between the source and the target receptors, Chinese-English (CE) words translation become increasingly important, playing an obvious role in facilitating our communications. This study aims to apply the functional equivalence theory to the English translation in translating Chinese buzzwords so as to translate the original texts accurately. Four main methods including lexical equivalence, syntactic equivalence, discourse equivalence and stylistic equivalence are applied to have the C-E translation. The result is that lexical and syntactic equivalence are widely applied in the translation practice, which conveys the implicated cultural meanings correctly and feasibly. Furthermore, the methods of discourse equivalence and the stylistic equivalence can also be used to elaborate the implicit meaning as close as the target language. This study examines the translation practice under the guidance of Nida's theory, providing the proper strategies for interpreters.

Keywords—Chinese-English translation, Functional Equivalence theory, buzzwords translation

I. INTRODUCTION

Functional equivalence theory explores the concepts of translation work and is one of the basic theories of translation studies. Eugene A. Nida, a great American linguist and translation theorist, was called “the Father of Modern Translation”. Nida [1] first proposed “formal equivalence” and “dynamic equivalence” in translation. He put forward the structure of “functional equivalence”, emphasizing the interactive function of text translation and concentrates on the feedback of the recipient of the communication. The theory shows that the reader of the translation will have the similar appreciation effect as the reader of the original text translation [2]. In the 1990s, Nida distinguished this theory into two different categories, with cognitive and empirical factors [2]. This theory mainly help the target reader grasp and appreciate the meaning of source texts. Namely, the foreign reader can master and appreciate the text through translation as well as the original reader [3].

The development of his theory can totally be divided into three parts. In the first part, Nida summarized the former translated experiences and applied the newly linguistics points in translation concept successfully. In the second part, he states that the translation should reach the goal of cross-cultural communication based on the social context [4]. That is to say, the purpose of translation is to facilitate the foreigners' communication. In the last part, Nida post that

doing research in translation should under the guidance of social semiology, for the semiology can explain many facts deeply in our society.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

Tytler [5] first proposed three principles of translation in 1790. In the first place, the target texts should deliver the original idea of the source texts. In the second place, both the forms and tones of target texts should be correspondent to the original works. Lastly, the translation should be natural so that it can be accepted by the target readers [6]. He holds that a good translation is to translate the original articles into another language with its own shining features, which makes readers understand the meaning just as reading the source texts [7]. According to the translators, the first idea is the most significant one that the translators should conform to it when translating. Namely, if the third principle is hard to achieve it, then it can be deleted so that the main idea of the source texts should be embodied in the transcribed texts.

Then, in 1964, the notion of “dynamic equivalence” has been put forward by Eugene A. Nida, which is a guidance for translating Bible at that time. The dynamic relation is emphasized by Nida, indicating the relationship between target readers and translated information is the same as source texts readers and the original information [8]. The main purpose is that the target articles should be appreciated and read naturally and fluently. He also defined the “formal equivalence” [9]. It means the translated texts should correspondent to the source texts in a fidelity way. However, some people have a misunderstanding in this theory, insisting that only meaning ought to be totally translated, without aware of the form and style. In order to deeply explain the significance of the connection of these two elements, Nida then elaborated it in the book “From One Language to Another”, therefore, the word “functional equivalence” substitutes the former. In this part, the communicative purpose is significant in translating, so the target texts consist of both ideas and forms, which means translators spend no efforts to reduce the shock from cultural diversity [9]. This section basically supports the background section by providing evidence for the proposed hypothesis. This section should be more comprehensive and thoroughly describe all the studies that you have mentioned in the background section. It should also elaborate on all studies that form evidence for the present study and discuss the current trends.

III. ANALYTICAL FRAMEWORK

Functional equivalence theory mainly emphasizes the readers' response. That is to say, the responses between target readers who skim the target translation and those who read

the original articles should be the same. This also means that translators should use different approaches to translate texts in a fidelity way. Therefore, Nida then put forward four basic requirements: lexical equivalence, syntactic equivalence, discourse equivalence and stylistic equivalence [10]. The first factor holds that cultural connotation should be taken into account in translation practice. As a result, sometimes, domestication can be applied in C-E translation, so that the target readers can response the same as the source texts readers. It is said that semantic meaning should be remained in the syntactic equivalence, which makes the transcripts fit in with the target audiences [11]. However, though Nida reckons that both the meaning and form are crucial in translation, if these two features are different a lot, then we may ignore the form and focus more on the content, the meaning. Moreover, in the discourse section, translation should be considered based on the specific situation context or cultural context, which help readers understand the cultural differences better. Therefore the foreignization can be applied widely [12]. The last feature called stylistic equivalence, which literally consist of writing style. If the target style is similar to the source texts, then this kind of translation is appropriate to home and abroad.

IV. CASE STUDY

This section provides a detailed analysis of the C-E translation in buzzwords. It is noted that there are four main translation categories in it, including the lexical equivalence, the syntactic equivalence, the discourse equivalence and the stylistic equivalence.

A. Lexical Equivalence

Example 1:

ST: 凡尔赛文学

TT: humblebrag.

“凡尔赛宫”, Chateau de Versailles, the sumptuous palace in France, is one of the top 5 famous palaces in the world. This word indicates the perfect life of upper-class, which is widely used in Weibo during 2020. Citizens use it to make jokes of those who often show off the dignity, luxury but keep them under wraps. However, if it is translated into “Versailles Literature”, foreign audiences may confuse but understand it as a positive word in literature. In order to avoid making cultural mistakes, “humblebrag” is better than the former, which not merely embodies the connotation of humble behaviors but also explain it in the specific context based on the lexical level.

Example 2:

ST: 裸考

TT: non-prepared exam

This word is very popular among young generation in China these years. “裸考” refers to those who don’t review or prepare long time for exams. If it translated to naked exam, then foreigners may puzzle, why should we be naked when taking an exam? Therefore, free translation should be applied, so that the transcript conveys the cultural implications and target readers response it as similar as the original readers.

Example 3:

ST: 真香

TT: break one’s promise

“真香” literally refers to describe the mouthwatering food. However, it also carries another meaning. Once an urban boy first went to a poor rural family, he thought that the food in the country was smelly and unclean, so he said to others, he would never eat meals until he died. But later, he then ate food rapidly, and said “真香”(it was really delicious.) This word soon spread out online. When someone totally changes his or her minds very quickly, then they use this word. For this reason, the translated text “break one’s promise” can equally explain the connotation, which is much easier for target readers to get the meaning.

Example 4:

ST: 秒杀

TT: instant purchasing

“秒杀”, an idiom of online games, is applied in online shopping at present. It is the word described that some products sold online in such a short time because of the discount or its lower prices. Moreover, “秒杀”often refers to a slogan used in shopping websites to attract customers attentions. Some interpreters translate it into “Seckill”, which conforms to the literal translation strategy. Yet, compare to the former, the author believes that “instant purchasing” is much more appropriate, for it is widely used in western countries, and foreigners can get it easier. It is not only obeys the readers’ response based on Nida’s theory, but also get close to the readers types, facilitating the cross cultural communication.

B. Syntactic Equivalence

Example 6:

ST: 剩女

TT: 3Sladies

“剩女” is a buzzword in China, indicating women that they are successful in work with high level of education. It is said that the 3Sladies have “three high”: high level of education, high income and high social status. However, because of their perfect performance and high expectation to the “husband”, most of them prefer to work harder and improve themselves rather than getting married on impulse. So they are still single and haven’t got married yet even at the age of 30, which doesn’t obey the traditional rules of women in Chinese culture. So this transcript used by free translation, fully elaborated the main factors of “剩女”. Moreover, the phrase “left on the shelf” is equivalent of “3Sladies” in the western countries. Therefore, in order to express the meaning of buzzwords, find out the equivalent expression or explain it in a specific way is beneficial to foreign readers.

Example 7:

ST: 官宣

TT: official announcement

This word is an abbreviation of “官方宣布”, illustrating that the news released by celebrities or institutions. For instance, the actress Zhao Liying get married with the actor Feng Shaofeng. They then post it on the social media and “官宣” to fans. Owing to its reliability and feasibility, this word

gradually applied in the popular government news. Therefore, the literal translation text “official announcement” can symbolize the form and the content, which makes the semantic meaning of source text unchanged, living up to the readers’ types.

Example 8:

ST: 双十一

TT: Double Eleven

In November 11th, many online stores are on sale, which attracts customers’ expectations, and products usually sale out. It is originally applied by Tmall and Taobao, later it became an online shopping day in China, just like “the Black Friday” in America. In each year, shopping rules are different, so citizens will share about rules or goods with friends before the Double Eleven. Collecting the shopping lists in advance and clicking the screen rapidly when the Day coming. Therefore, the translated text is literal, which obeys the syntactic equivalence both in the style and content way. Interpreters can add the phrase of “Black Friday”, so that the target readers can know the meaning and respond it as the original readers.

C. Discourse Equivalence

Example 9:

ST: 内卷

TT: involution

It originally refers to the fact that our society will be stagnating or cannot reach the higher level when the human society develops such a long time with less opportunities for younger generation. However, this word has another implication for China, which indicates that the irrational or even vicious competition but without substantial progress among all walks of life. Translators should pay more attention to the differences between the source text and the target text, even the “same” word just like “involution”. What interpreters need to do is to add the annotation in translated text in the first time. In the following section, this word can be used without connotation. Based on the guidance of discourse equivalence, both target readers and original audience should know the new words with the specific cultural and social context. Therefore, the annotation is crucial for C-E translation, which helps target readers understand the Chinese social contexts much easier.

Example 10:

ST: 996

TT: working from 9:00 am to 9:00 pm, 6 days per week

As the Chinese society develops, many employers need to work overtime without extra income. Numerous working-class should go to work at 9:00 in the morning and finish the work at 9:00 at night, and they have only one day to relax at weekend [13]. As a result, number 996 is a kind of abbreviation for this fascinating phenomenon. As we know, this type of buzzword can be easily memorized by the source readers but hard to know for foreigners. And there are no equivalent words in western countries, so literal translation and free translation cannot be fully express the content. Therefore, annotation or explanation is feasible and readable. Translators need to elaborate the meaning with sentences based on Chinese social contexts, so that the readers response

it just as the original readers do, which conforms to the Nida’s theory.

D. Stylistic Equivalence

Example 11:

ST: 后浪

TT: Generation Z

There is an old saying called “长江后浪推前浪” (the new things overthrew the old. The young always surpass their elders, and the senior should help the juniors catch up with them.) Therefore, “后浪” states the strengths of younger generations with positive ambitions. Yet the “rear waves” cannot illustrate the core vale of the word. Fortunately, “Generation Z” (people who are born in 1995 to 2005) is widely used in western culture, which is similar to the “后浪” with both the same form and content style. Therefore, selecting the appropriate word in C-E translation is crucial for translating. This means that the equivalent text is natural, coherent and close to the foreigners under the guidance of Nida’s theory.

Example 12:

ST: 长臂管辖

TT: Long Arm Jurisdiction

It is a legalism used by the America, which states the power of a court in one state to assert personal jurisdiction over a person in another state. This means that every state has a law called a long-arm statute which details under what circumstances a court in that state may assert jurisdiction over an out-of-state defendant. In 2017, Foreign Ministry spokesperson Gengshuang used this phrase, saying “China opposes ‘long-arm jurisdiction’ on foreign enterprises,” adding that China has made this stance very clear to the United States. Therefore, to express the improper control of the fields, the literal translation “long arm jurisdiction” is perfect, for it consists of the original meaning and have the same form and style of the source text in accordance with the Nida’s rules. Define abbreviations and acronyms the first time they are used in the text, even after they have been defined in the abstract. Do not use abbreviations in the title unless they are unavoidable.

V. CONCLUSION

The functional equivalence theory has been developed for decades. It first called “dynamic equivalence” and “formal equivalence”, which means the content first, later the form. Moreover, in order to help interpreters fully understand it, he came up with the notion “functional equivalence”, which holds that the target texts should be faithful for its meaning and the texts style should also be similar [14]. As the cream of the language, Chinese buzzwords possess their own features. They have complex structures and meanings. Numerous words are heavily loaded phrases with implicated cultural meanings, which are mainly from history, social contexts, religions and so on. Therefore, how to translate them correctly into English is a must for practice. Based on the related researches of translation, the literature review of functional equivalence theory, the author puts forward main four methods, including lexical equivalence, syntactic equivalence, discourse equivalence and stylistic equivalence.

Among them the translation of lexical equivalence and

syntactic equivalence are used widely for translation practice, which can reach the closest goal of functional equivalence, emphasizing not only context equivalence but also form equivalence. For instance, the phrase “裸考” is equivalent to the phrase of “non-prepared exam”, which refers to those candidates who take an exam without any preparation. The other two methods including discourse equivalence and stylistic equivalence are also accessible to achieve the functional equivalence in certain aspects. Take the word “剩女” for example, it indicates that those talented ladies who have a high degree of education and high salary haven’t decided to have a marriage. So they cannot be mentally recognized by the society.

The application of Nida’s functional equivalence theory to the methods on Chinese buzzwords translation is mentioned to have some implications from distinct aspects. Theoretically, it provides a theoretical guidance for this paper. When translating buzzwords, three main methods can be taken into consideration. Practically, necessary translated solutions with unique examples are listed. Furthermore, the strategies mentioned here are not always perfect and there might be much better strategies to be found. What interpreters seek is to translate original texts with the maximum equivalence for the target readers.

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