

A Study on C-E Translation Methods of Culture-Loaded Words: A Case Study of *Selected Modern Chinese Essays*

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Abstract—As a country competes for its overall national strength all over the world, culture has grown to be an increasingly significant aspect. Considering the differences in the development paths and cultural traditions of different countries, more sophisticated translation strategies and skills are needed in the process of cultural going out. From the cultural perspective, this paper takes Zhang Peiji's English Translation of *Selected Modern Chinese Essays* as an example, selects and summarizes culture-loaded words full of Chinese characteristics, and analyzes their translation strategies and skills, including place names, salutations and four-character idioms, which are representative of culture-loaded words. This paper aims to provide referential strategies for the translation of similar culture-loaded words in other texts, and to solve the difficulties in the translation of culture-loaded words. After the case analysis, this paper found that the most commonly used translation methods of culture-loaded words should be literal and free translation, and that it is necessary to preserve the original meaning and reveal the accurate connotation of culture-loaded words in order to convey the uniqueness and characteristics of Chinese culture.

Keywords—culture-loaded words, *Selected Modern Chinese Essays*, translation methods

I. INTRODUCTION

With the connections between countries around the world becoming increasingly close, culture is also becoming an increasingly important means for countries to enhance competitiveness and promote exchanges and interactions. China is also working hard to enhance cultural exchanges with other countries. In the process of expressing Chinese stories and propagating Chinese voices, translation plays a crucial role, like the bridge between countries.

In the vast and profound culture of China, distinctive literary works serve as an important pathway for foreigners to understand Chinese culture, as literary works reflect the social realities and cultural phenomena of China. However, the literary works contain a lot of culture-loaded words with Chinese characteristics which are difficult to understand. Therefore, translation as well as specific translation methods are needed here to help foreigners better grasp the cultural connotation. So this paper is devoted to the study of English translation skills of culture-loaded words, analyzing their translation methods one by one after classifying these cultural words, and selecting representative culture-loaded words that reflect social features with Chinese characteristics for research, such as place names, salutations and four-character idioms.

In this paper, the cases analysis are all based on Zhang Peiji's *Selected Modern Chinese Essays*, which is a translation work of high study value especially in literary translation. This work gathers masterpieces of prose from a

specific period in China, containing abundant Chinese specific words and unique cultural phenomena. Mr. Zhang Peiji employs his exceptional translation skills to convey the unique cultural connotations of China, leaving a profound impression on readers. So the culture-loaded words in this work are appropriate and enough to be analyzed here. The purpose of this paper is to better guide translation practice and provide some guidelines for the translation skills of cultural words and to better encourage the transmission and spread of Chinese culture. After the analysis, the paper found that each types of culture-loaded words should be translated by specific methods, especially literal and free translation methods. What's more, studying the English translation skills of culture-loaded words can help Chinese culture go out, better adapt to the requirements of the target language, adapt to the aesthetic needs of readers, and provide value for translators to follow.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

As cultural phenomena are more and more mixed in the communication and mutual learning between countries, scholars from different countries have attached importance to the study of cultural words and their translation strategies, and have also done a lot of research on such phenomena.

A. Foreign Literature Review

Eugene Nida, a famous American translation theorist, believes that cultural words are words with corresponding concepts and great differences in cultural connotations. The five categories into which linguistic cultural aspects are divided are ecology, material culture, social culture, religious culture, and language culture [1]. Li [2] believes that culture-loaded words represent the cultural characteristics of a nation, which is the deepest cultural connotation and precipitation. Cui [3] proposed that language is the bridge between people, but also the most can reflect the cultural habits of different countries, so the culture-loaded words can reflect the connotation of Chinese culture.

B. Domestic Literature Review

Xu [4] said that although culture-loaded words have certain particularity, they still belong to the category of language. Therefore, we cannot treat it as a separate type. It should be differentiated according to different circumstances. As for the definition of cultural words in China, Huang [5] was the first to accurately explain this type of words. He pointed out in *Differentiation of Lexical Categories of Ancient Culture* that cultural words are words with cultural colors and sound easy to understand. Later, Su [6] proposed that "cultural words" refer to "words produced under a specific cultural background with only cultural significance

but no general linguistic significance”. Zheng [7] believes that culture-loaded words refer to “words, phrases and idioms that mark specific things in a certain culture”. Idioms, proverbs, colloquial sayings, greetings, polite terms, address predicates, allegorical sayings, political words, and other words with cultural meanings can be found practically anywhere, whether in English or Chinese. Jia [8] mentioned in her book that cultural words are words with cultural markers. They represent the characteristics of meaning, reflect national characteristics and customs, and are closely related to the changes of social institutions.

Domestic scholars have differing perspectives on the categories of cultural terms. Chang [9] also divides cultural words into 15 categories: Words that express dialectical ideas, words that express ethical ideas, words that reflect the sense of moderation and euphemism, words that reflect the characteristics of the mentality of the Han nation, words of classical culture, words of religious culture, words of folk culture, words of ritual culture, words of image, words of symbol, words of food culture, numerals, words of color, personal names and place names. To be more concise, Li [10] divides cultural words into four categories, namely, material cultural words, institutional cultural words, behavioral cultural words and mentality cultural words, which are mainly classified according to cultural structure, and this classification method is also a kind of classification method recognized by the academic circle.

III. CULTURE-LOADED WORDS

A. Definition of Culture-loaded Words

Culture-loaded words are words or phrases that carry cultural connotations or meanings that may not be immediately apparent to individuals from a different culture or background. These words often have a strong emotional or social significance within a specific cultural context and can be used to convey specific attitudes, values, or beliefs associated with that culture. For example, the word “freedom” may have a different connotation in the United States compared to other countries or cultures. Similarly, the word “family” may have different meanings and implications in different cultures depending on the roles and expectations associated with family members.

Culture-loaded terms are also referred to be “vocabulary vacancies” in the strict sense, which indicates that the cultural information sent by the words of the source language does not have an equal meaning in the target language. It is different social and religious norms, values, and so on that make each country form its own unique culture, and it is because of cultural differences that culture-loaded words come into being. The special words, idioms, and common phrases that are specific to a particular culture are known as “culture-loaded words”.

B. Characteristics of Culture-loaded Words

Here are some characteristics of culture-loaded words:

Cultural-specific meaning: Words that are specific to a certain culture are known as “culturally loaded words”, and they are frequently used to describe thoughts, attitudes, or beliefs that are particular to that society.

Emotional and social significance: culture-loaded words often carry an emotional or social significance within their

cultural context. They may be associated with values, beliefs, or attitudes that are highly regarded or respected within that culture.

Context-dependent: The meaning of culture-loaded words is often dependent on the context in which they are used. The symbolic significance or implications of a term might vary depending on the cultural setting.

Prone to misunderstanding: culture-loaded words can be easily misunderstood by individuals from different cultures who may not be familiar with the cultural context in which the words are used.

Reflect cultural norms and values: culture-loaded words often reflect the norms and values of the culture in which they are used. They may be used to reinforce or challenge cultural expectations and beliefs.

Evolve over time: culture-loaded words can evolve over time and may take on different meanings or connotations as the culture itself changes and adapts to new circumstances.

C. Classification of Culture-loaded Words in Selected Modern Chinese Essays

A large number of the words in Selected Modern Chinese Essays have strong cultural meanings. Zhang Peiji has used a variety of translation methods to deal with the translation of culture-loaded words. His translation works to help the readers transcend the gap between Chinese literature and Chinese culture and conforms to the reader’s feelings and expectations. As a result, his translation methods value for later reference and research. Most of the Selected Modern Chinese Essays describe the social landscape of the May Fourth Period and the thoughts and feelings of the writers at that time, which is close to the reality at that time, so the culture-loaded words in the essays are difficult to understand, especially for foreigners.

Selected Modern Chinese Essays contains many famous modern essays and prose. The translation text will inevitably involve the translation of many culture-loaded words, including personal names, place names, idioms, proverbs, four-character idioms, salutations and so on.

IV. TRANSLATION METHODS OF CULTURE-LOADED WORDS INVOLVED IN *SELECTED MODERN CHINESE ESSAYS*

A. Translation Methods of Places

Place names are not only the title or code name of the region, but also the important carrier of the regional culture of the region and the condensation of local historical and cultural characteristics. The ability to understand Chinese culture can be considered to be reflected in place names. In Zhang’s Selected Modern Chinese Essays, he adopt many strategies to translate the place names, mainly including transliteration, liberal translation plus transliteration, liberal translation as well as literal translation.

1) Literal translation

For example: 红楼 Red Building 珍珠港 Pearl Harbor 白马湖 White Horse Lake 北国 North China 租界 foreign settlement 神女峰 Mount Goddess

Analysis: There are some place name expressions can be found in English equivalent words to describe, so the literal translation can be used. In the original prose, “红楼” refers to a red building rather than a social place as we understand it now, so the translation “red building” is more appropriate.

The literal translation of “珍珠港” and “白马湖” can easily help foreign readers receive information about the place names, and thus create their imagination of the place.

2) Amplification

For example: 北海 Beihai Park 前海 Qianhai Lake 玉泉 Yu Quan Shan Mountain

Analysis: As for the translation strategy of the above place names, Zhang Peiji uses the method of adding words, which requires the translator to have a good grasp of geographical knowledge. When translating such words, it is easy for us to literally translate them, but actually that is not accurate because Chinese people often use simple words to describe a place. As a result, we should use more proprietary word translations in our regular speech. When the source language does not express accurately, we should translate the missing parts.

B. Translation Methods of Salutations

China is a country that emphasizes identity, and the resources for the survival and development of members are mainly allocated according to identity and the relationship between identities. When translating address formats in literary works, it is important to consider the linguistic and cultural variances. In Zhang's Selected Modern Chinese Essays, he adopts many strategies to translate the place names, mainly including transliteration, liberal translation and omission.

1) Omission

For example:

ST: 外祖母大人因年老关系, 近年不必往年健康。

TT: Because of old age, grandma is no longer in good health.

ST: 我的二叔冯强士是个留学日本的医生。

TT: My uncle Feng Qiangshi, a returned student from Japan, was by profession a doctor.

ST: 从老师方面来说, 也应该像孔老夫子那样, 有一点“三人行, 则必有我师”的雅量。

TT: Teachers should be so open-minded as to be ready to learn from anyone who knows, just as Confucius says, “Out of three men, there must be one who can teach me.”

Analysis: In old times, we often call people with high ranks or high status “大人” or call others with ranks according to their age like “二哥”, “三姑”, “二弟” because people are all afraid of authority and look for respect. But we can't find such similar salutations in foreign cultures. So when translate them, we should adopt the strategy of omission, that is omit the polite words.

2) Liberal translation

For example:

ST: 我们几姊弟和小丫头们都很喜欢——买种的买种, 动土的动土, 灌园的灌园。

TT: That exhilarated us children and our servant girls as well, and soon we started buying seeds, ploughing the land and watering the plants.

ST: 手是大家给他取个死后的法号, 叫他做圆通大师。

TT: So they called him a virtuous man and honored him with the posthumous reverent title Master of Easy-Going.

ST: 祖父聘请了一位前清的老秀才来管教我们。

TT: I was then studying at home under the tutorship of an old scholar of the Qing Dynasty whom my grandfather had

engaged.

Analysis: Judging by our inherent knowledge, we often consider the girls of young ages “丫头”, this expression can show people an image of a lovely and lively girl. But combining the source text, it means the girls hired in the rich families who should playing with the kids in these families and do some housework. So Mr Zhang translated it as servant girls, which is accurate and conform to the source text. In the sentence above, the man was called “圆通大师”, the expression “圆通” means people who stand to sense and easy to get along well with. So it was translated as the master of easy-going. The Chinese word “秀才” has the meaning of excellent people who are good at academy. So here, Mr. Zhang translated it as “scholar”.

C. Translation Methods of Four-character Idioms

Chinese four-character case, which comprises both idioms and non-fixed four-character structure, is a unique word combination phenomenon in the language. Ninety-seven percent of Chinese idioms use four-character cases. Considering all of its benefits, the four-character case has been frequently employed in English-Chinese translation. In Zhang's Selected Modern Chinese Essays, he adopts many strategies to translate the place names, mainly including literal translation, liberal translation, omission and substitution.

1) Literal translation

For example:

ST: 你有了决心要研究一个问题, 自然会撙衣节食去买书。

TT: As long as you set your mind on studies, you will naturally cut down on food and clothing to buy books.

Analysis: This four-character idiom contains two verbs, it is easy to understand, so we can only try to explain each action according to our understanding. “撙衣” means decrease the number of food, while “节食” means save food, so we can use one phrase to express, that is “cut down”.

ST: 可不免要故态复萌, 想买这种, 想买那种。

TT: Nevertheless, I still cannot help slipping back into the same old rut, eager to buy this and that book.

Analysis: The expression “故态复萌” is easy to master according to its face value, it means resume the former image or repeat the old process. To preserve the tone of the original text, Mr. Zhang translated the material literally. “Slip back” has the meaning of occasional, which better convey the style of Chinese characters.

ST: 黄与绿主宰着, 无边无垠, 坦荡如砥。

TT: The boundless highland, with dominant yellow and green, is flat like a whetstone.

Analysis: For Chinese readers, it is easy to understand this four-character idiom, because we can just translate it according to its face value. There is a character that is a little difficult to get, that is “砥”, it exactly means a stone that can be used to sharpen the knife. Here, Mr. Zhang translated it directly as whetstone, very simple.

2) Liberal translation

For example:

ST: 趁现在年富力强的时候, 努力做一种专门学问。

TT: While you are in the prime of life, why not devote yourselves to a special field of study?

Analysis: The idiom “年富力强”, if translated with literal translation methods, means one who are strong and young enough. But in the passage, Zhang [11] used the method of liberal translation, he used only one word “prime” to express such a state of people. It is accurate and conveys the spirit of the source text.

ST: 这并不一定是“人心不古”, 实可以说是人生的悲剧。

TT: Though this is not necessarily due to “degeneration of public morality”, I do have good reasons to call it the tragedy of life.

Analysis: This idiom “人心不古” has the same meaning with the other idiom “世风日下”, they mean that the social morality is declining. People may feel difficult to deal with the character “古” if he or she hasn’t master enough language knowledge. We can’t translate it word for word but try to understand the deep connotation of it.

ST: 近几年来, 父亲和我都是东奔西走, 家中光景是一日不如一日。

TT: In recent years, both father and I have been living an unsettled life, and the circumstances of our family going from bad to worse.

Analysis: If we don’t combine with the context of the source text, we would tend to translate this word as “hustle toward the east and west”. But when we put this idiom in the context, we can find that it means people who live an unsettled life, so they must make a living outside. Zhang’s translation better express such connotation.

V. CONCLUSION

Literary translation skills are significant skills in the study of translation, and in literary translation, the translation of prose is a relatively difficult aspect. A valuable tool for studying prose translation strategies is Zhang Peiji’s collection of modern Chinese essays.

In this series of prose translation works, the translation of culture-loaded words has caused troubles to many people, especially the people from other cultures. This essay provides an in-depth introduction and analysis of the translation techniques used for numerous cultural terminology. This paper gives the detailed translation methods of some certain kinds of culture-loaded words, including the translation of place names, salutations, four-character cases and other cultural words. After a lot of generalization and analysis, this essay concluded that the most important strategies for the

translation of culture-loaded words are literal translation and free translation. These two translation methods often appear in all kinds of text translation, providing reference for people who want to devote in this field. At the same time, we need to use some specific translation methods in the face of some specific words to express it’s deep cultural meanings.

Although the aforementioned achievements have been made, there are still many aspects of this paper that need improvement in the future. Due to the limitations of the paper’s length, only the translation of three specific cultural-loaded words is analyzed here, and merely some representative translation methods are listed. Therefore, in the future, more types of cultural-loaded words should be noticed especially in literature and the translation methods of them should be diversified and used commonly, so as to fill gaps in this field and provide guidance for others.

CONFLICT OF INTEREST

The author declares no conflict of interest.

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