

Analysis of the English Translation about Cultural Relics in Museums from the Perspective of Eco-translatology: A Case Study of the National Museum of China

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Abstract: Eco-translatology is based on the isomorphic metaphor of translation ecology and natural ecology. It is considered to be an interdisciplinary study between ecology and translatology, which conduct a holistic study of translation process from the perspective of ecology through the application of ecological rationality. Therefore, this theory has the characteristics of adaptive, scientific and universal in allusion to the text of Chinese cultural relics. The translation of cultural relics not only involves the conversion between two languages, but also shoulders the mission of transmitting cultural information. It is urgent to alleviate the relative untranslatability of turning Chinese culture-loaded words into English. Based on the transformation principles in terms of linguistic, cultural and communicative dimensions, this paper attempts to translate the cultural relics in the Ancient China exhibition hall of the National Museum of China, in order to construct feasible strategies and alleviate semantic loss and semantic ambiguity.

Keywords: Eco-translatology; Multi-dimensional Transformation; Cultural Relics; Cultural-loaded Words

1. Introduction

1.1 Background of the Study

Nowadays, the rosy pictures of prosperity and globalization as well as the initiative of a community with shared future act as a shot of adrenaline for the pursuit of multidimensional relationships among countries in terms of politics, economy and culture. It's true that China—the nation's comprehensive strength is gradually improving while pulling up its international communication power. The

English translation about cultural relics of museums can also undeniably strengthen the inheritance and international communication of that mysterious Oriental culture.

Museums have changed over the years from a social public service to an important carrier of urban civilization, nourishing urban character, expressing urban spirit, shaping urban image, and enhancing urban life. Out of the constraints of time and space, once the English introductions of Chinese cultural relics that have gradually accumulated cultural experience in the long history are made, there will be amount additional cultural value. Therefore, the building of a translation system about cultural relics is of incalculable importance in order to provide international friends with a more accurate and thorough understanding of time-honored, extensive and profound Chinese culture.

1.2 Significance of the Study

1.2.1 Theoretical Significance

Currently, the academia has a lot of achievements in the study of English translation related to museum propaganda language, cultural relics nameplates, introductory words, etc. However, most studies lack the perspective of deducing the social and historical features embodied in the cultural relics in order to investigate the English translation of the cultural relics.

From the theoretical perspective of selection adaptation, balance harmony, multidimensional transformation and other considerations in ecological translation, increasing the importance of cultural, contextual, cultural differences and other factors in the process of this sort of translation can reduce the phenomenon of semantic loss of culture-loaded words caused by improper use of translation strategies.

1.2.2 Practical Significance

This thesis conducts the research precisely for alleviating the current phenomenon of relatively untranslatable language due to the lack of contrast between the translations in the original language in the process of reporting by collecting museum symbols in different historical backgrounds, religious beliefs and living habits.

The English translation of the artifacts presented in museums is not only a conversion between two languages, but also a symbolic mission to transmit cultural information. In the process of carrying forward Chinese traditional culture, due to application of inappropriate translation strategies, it is easy to cause semantic loss to the English translation of cultural relics. Therefore, this research is conducive to improving the acceptance of foreign tourists towards the translation of relics and its introduction during their visits, thereby enhancing the historical initiative, building a historical highland of cultural museums, and promote the dissemination and promotion of the profound traditional culture of Chinese civilization. It also tries to alleviate the relative untranslatability caused by the lack of corresponding language in the target language due to the cultural connotation carried by the source language.

2. Review of Eco-translatology

Eco-translatology is a research paradigm that explores and reveals the ecological rationality and significance in translation activities from an ecological perspective. It is guided by Neo-ecologism and oriented by the metaphorical and ostensive definition of Eco-translatology, so as to promote ecological rationality and thought as a sustainable methodology that guides and updates translation behaviors and translation studies.

Dollerup Cay stated that exploring Eco-translatology in the context of western translation studies, "Eco-translatology is closely related to the three mainstream schools of translation studies in the West."^[1] That is, equivalence, teleology and description translation schools. Eco-translatology is in line with the reality of translation context, including the western language environment, and has better explanatory power than existing translation theories^[2]. Meanwhile, Eco-translatology is an interdisciplinary

research paradigm that differs significantly from previous research paradigms. It is based on ecology and incorporates contemporary ecological theory into philosophical understanding, as well as integrating translation studies into an organic translation ecosystem^[3]. Thus, Eco-translatology forms a systematic research focus and translation ethics that emphasizes a holistic and multi-dimensional integration^[4]. In terms of the connection between Eco-translatology and the translation of culture-loaded words, some scholars believe that there is a theoretical and practical fit and linkage as a main line to impenetrate in the translation process^[5].

The realization of symbiotic coexistence with other cultures in a heterogeneous cultural environment is undoubtedly an ecological issue at the cultural level^[6]. In addition, the multi-level translation research system constructed by Eco-translatology can not only point out the direction of intangible cultural heritage translation at the macro level, but also provide a feasible way for translators to choose suitable strategies at the micro text level^[7]. It could be concluded that there is also a theoretical and practical fit and interaction between Eco-translatology and intangible cultural heritage translation.

3. Specific Analyses of Translation about Cultural Relics According Eco-translatology

Three-dimensional transformation theory refers to the transformation in view of linguistic, cultural and communicative dimensions. The linguistic dimension refers to the translator's adaptive selection and transformation of linguistic forms in the process of translation. This transformation can occur at different stages, levels and aspects of the translation process. The cultural dimension transformation refers to the translator's attention to the transmission and interpretation of the connotation of bilingual culture in the process of translation. It focuses on the differences between the culture of source language and that of the target language in terms of their nature and content, on the basis of avoidance of misinterpretation of the meaning of the original text.

It should be noted that communicative dimension transformation refers to the translator's attention to the adaptation of bilingual communicative intention in the

process of translation. In addition to the conversion of linguistic information and the transmission of cultural connotation, the translator also focuses on the conversion of translation choices at the communicative level, paying attention to whether the communicative intention in the original text is reflected in the translation. “Three-dimensional transformation” occurs at the level of translation operation, which is used to guide the way of translation.

3.1 Linguistic Dimension Level

From the perspective of Eco-translatology, the value of words is not only expressed in static structure, but also expressed through subjective practice in communication. The translator needs to start from the linguistic dimension, giving consideration to the differences in the expression habits of the original text and the translation, as well as the cultural background, and make changes in vocabulary, sentence patterns, expression methods, etc., so that the translation flow smoothly and coherently rather than mechanically. Simply carry out the conversion of literary meaning and language type, that is, the use value of words can be accurately revealed in the Eco-translatology. Therefore, in the process of translation, the adaptive transformation of language dimension requires the translator to complete the transformation of language form.

Taking into account the cultural conditions and Eco-translatology of different languages, the translator translates the source language from the perspective of readers in the process of translation.

Case 1:

The Chinese text: Qing Qinyu Liuqingting Huaner Shuanglianxi

The English version: *Jade Double Brush Washer with Six Dragon Fly Rings, Qing Dynasty*

Analysis: The word order of the English translation of the names of cultural relics can refer to the format of color / craft / shape + material + head word + with + decoration / local feature or material + style + with + inscription / modeling feature / belonging + use^[8]. In this example, the second English translation format of cultural relics names is followed.

From the perspective of language, the Chinese text of “Shuanglianxi” implies that the usage of this cultural relic is Brush Washer. If the

translation leaves out the meaning of “for the purpose of cleaning the pen and ink” as the implicit information in the original text, the target language readers will not understand the production process or use of this cultural relic. Therefore, the translator should not only translate the explicit information of the original text, but also translate the implicit information.

Case 2:

The Chinese text: Chongshouwen Tongbijia

The English version: *Bronze Brassard with Insect and Animal Motifs*

Analysis: The translator take “Brassard” as the central word, and notice the plural form of “Motifs”, which is combined with the actual situation of the pattern. The preposition “with” is also used to modify the local feature of Insect and Animal Motifs. And bronze, the material of the cultural relic is also fully reflected in the translation text as an adjective to modify the central word. The translation changes the linguistic structure of the original language and follows the way of English expressions to convey the cultural features of the relic, improving the naturalness and smoothness of the translation text and being more accessible to Western readers. Thus, the content and communicative purpose of the original text are completely adapted. The dimension also emphasize the consideration of the language dimension, that is, the translator can grasp the language features of the English translation of cultural relics, as well as lexical items, semantics logic, sentence structure and other language habits.

3.2 Cultural Dimension Level

The strategy of “Chinese Culture Going Global” is a comprehensive national strategy put forward to promote economic development and cultural exchanges. Correspond with it, international publicity translation has become a hot topic in translation studies. One of the focuses of the international publicity translation boom is the untranslatability of cross-cultural communication. Moreover, translation is a cross-cultural communication activity from a certain perspective, so the second level that translators should consider is the cultural dimension.

The transformation of cultural dimension requires the translator to focus on the transmission of cultural connotation between languages and avoid confusing or

misinterpreting the source language from the perspective of the target language culture. Thus, in the process of English-Chinese translation, the translation should adapt to the cultural system of Chinese, so that Chinese readers can better understand the cultural connotation of the original work [9].

Case 3:

The Chinese text: Xihan Cuojinyin Yunwen Qingtong Xizun

The English version: *Bronze Rhino-shaped Zun (wine vessel) Inlaid with Gold and Silver Cloud Designs, Western Han Dynasty*

Analysis: On account of animal-shaped wine vessels in ancient China, such as ox-shaped Zun, elephant-shaped Zun, and pig-shaped Zun among the bronze wares of the Shang Dynasty, are all endowed with the connotation of “divine right of kings” as a kind of ritual ware, their production craftsmanship is naturally more sophisticated. Through the analysis of the original text, we can see that the main difficulty lies in the translation of the word “Cuojinyin”. The author knows the basic definition of the word by referring to the book *Origin of Chinese Characters* by Xu Shen of Eastern Han Dynasty and other literature: The “Cuojinyin” craftsmanship is one of the traditional metal decoration techniques in ancient China. It was first found in the Shang-Zhou Dynasties, and was used to decorate various vessels, carriages, utensils, weapons and other utilitarian objects. Therefore, using amplification and paraphrase in the translation text, the translator can not only express that the “Zun” was intended to be a wine container, but also describe that the pattern of the relic is clearly explained in the translation, ensuring that visitors can easily understand the artistic characteristics of the relic, which is made by an ancient Chinese traditional craft of metal inlay.

In the whole, the English version conveys the basic information about the relic especially its practical use and its decoration with inlaid gold and silver cloud patterns, which are exquisite and gorgeous.

3.3 Communicative Dimension Level

According to Katharina Reiss’s classification of text types, cultural relics belong to content-focused text. The translation of such texts has two characteristics: effective communication and accuracy of information [10].

Translation of cultural relics also needs to meet these two conditions. Meanwhile, based on the adaptive selection and transformation of the communicative dimension, the translator needs to take into account the communicative intention of the bilingual. In addition to conveying the linguistic information and cultural connotation of the original language, the translator should also shine a spotlight on whether the communicative intention of the original text can be presented [11].

If the English version cannot make the visitors clearly understand the information contained in the cultural relics, it is easy to cause communicative problems. The specific performance is that the visitors cannot accept the information contained in the signs of the cultural relics, or unable to accept it smoothly, or receive wrong information, etc [12].

Case 4:

The Chinese text: Qingci Bixie Zhutai

The English version: *Celadon Candle Holder in the Shape of Bixie (mythical beast)*

Analysis: The broad sense of “Bixie” normally refer to a folkloric behavior and some ritual forms it derives. The term is generally used in a narrow sense in art history, as it is physical form of the intention of exorcising evil spirits, or a tool or a realistic expression formed in the time-honored Chinese folk custom. According to this background, the “Bixie” mentioned here is a type of figurative artwork to ward off evil in the folklore act - “the mythical beast named ward off evil”. Thus, it can be known that the translator has followed the English communicative custom by means of combining transliteration and amplification in order to meet the needs of the audience to directly appreciate the characteristics of the candlestick’s form, i.e., the candlestick is in the shape of the deity who named Bixie that is conceived to ward off evil spirits rather than the object itself.

From the communicative perspective, the expression reflects and satisfies the effective communication and accuracy of information by highlighting the key point of the translation - the accurate interpretation of the word “Bixie”, and captures the essence of the cultural imagery of the relic in a concise way to enable visitors to accurately accept the message conveyed by the relic.

4. Supplement of Translation about

Cultural Relics

As Chinese native speakers, we have a preliminary understanding of these things with traditional cultural characteristics, but the target audience of the translation is not. Considering the universality and particularity, the translatability of culture-loaded words, and whether semantic loss is caused from the perspective of Eco-translatology are all requires that the translator would better to take care of the target audience in the process of translation, so that the visitors can understand the translation content with diverse traditional culture features in a great measure.

4.1 Examples and Analyses of Unreasonable Translation

With respect to multi-dimensional transformation, the translation methods used in the English texts of the Museum are analyzed. In order to explore a more systematic and reference translation strategy for these signs and reduce semantic loss of culture-loaded words caused by improper translation strategies, and thus have a positive impact on the dissemination of the profound traditional Chinese culture in other domestic museums.

In view of the unreasonable translation in other museums in China, this paper analyzes it through Eco-translatology. Take examples as follows:

Type 1: Wrong Wording

The official translation of “Dehuayao Wucan Yunlongwen Pan” is “Colorful Cloud and Dragon Pattern Plate”, but by consulting the Collins English Dictionary, the author was aware that the word “Polychrome” can refer to “Caihui” (made with or decorated in various colors). Firstly, polychrome is a term that is more in line with the meaning of colorful Chinese porcelain, and it is also a proper noun for porcelain. It not only achieves cultural equivalence, but also highlights the professionalism of porcelain translation. In combination with the equivalence of language form and artistic beauty in the communicative dimension, the word order can also be changed for the translation of modifiers related to its patterns. Secondly, it is necessary to supplement the translation of “Dehuayao”, which means the porcelain plate was fired in the Dehua area. Thirdly, “Wucan Yunlongwen” is the description of a pattern style of porcelain, so we normally take usage of the construction

of “with + decoration / local feature or material + style”. Meanwhile, it is worth noting that the Chinese characters “Wucan” here does not refer to the literal meaning of five colors, but refers to the brilliant colors in general, which are often found in Chinese descriptive terms and prone to machine translation errors. Therefore, the translation of this cultural relic is finally revised to “Polychrome Plate with Cloud and Dragon Pattern, Dehua Ware”.

This kind of translation therapy can also be applies to “Chanzhiwen”, which is a description of the appearance of a particular kind of porcelain, so in English it is usually translated as a component of the attribute guided by “with”, i.e. “sth. with interlaced floral design”.

Type 2: Omitted Translation

The official translation of “Jin Fajie” in Hubei Provincial Museums “Gold Ring”. “Fajie” is a Buddhist instrument, different from the general gold ring. Therefore, the translation of “Gold Ring” will lead to the lack of important characteristic information, and foreign tourists cannot know its connection with Buddhist culture. The translation of “Gold Ring (Buddhist instrument)” can effectively convey the significant information contained in cultural relics and help tourists distinguish the difference between Gold Ring and this kind of Buddhist instrument.

Type 3: Lexical misordering

After the example analyses in part 3.3 of this thesis, the translator needs to take breaking the linguistic structure of Chinese and using the lexical order that conforms to the English norms to explain the relevant information of the cultural relics while remaining faithful to the content of the original text into consideration, so as to meet the dual needs of the target readers in terms of information and communicative dimensions.

For example, the official translation of “Hongshan Wenhua Xiekouqi” used to be “xiekouqi-cut-away vessel”. However, after consulting relevant literature, the author learned that when we describe a wan-bowl, guan-jar, ping-vase, etc., we use “mouth” to indicate the character “kou”, and accordingly “kouyan” should be translated as “mouth rim”. But when it is flat like a pan-plate, we just use rim. Here is an example from the British Museum: e.g. Three branches of cherry blossom on the rim; diaper borders on the edge

of the rim and in the well. Thus after deliberate thinking, “xiekouqi-slant-opening vessel” is a better English expression of the relic recently.

4.2 Suggestions for Improvement

Considering the cultural communication function of museums, the translation of cultural relics commentary should pay attention to cross-cultural translation. In the process of translating cultural relics commentary, only by adopting corresponding translation strategies according to the different cultural information contained in cultural relics can the translator accurately disseminate cultural information. It is not only necessary to translate the literal meaning and the meaning between words, but also to express the meaning contained in it to Western visitors, so as to call it a successful translation.

Taking the cultural relics commentary of the National Museum as an example, this paper summarizes such basic rules: Generally, in allusion to literal cultural information, we often use correspondence translation and essential feature translation methods; the cultural information contained in words usually need to be processed by interpretive translation, literal translation with explanation, annotation, transliteration, free translation and omission and other translation strategies. The essential procedures consist of four parts roughly: look up the dictionary, the analysis of sentence structure, the analysis of semantics and the translation system for a particular text.

For the phenomenon of wrong wording, improper lexical order and omission in the language dimension, these two methods can be adopted, that is, to complete the explicit omission; or study the implicit information of the original text and present it in words in order to embody its individual value. Corresponding to the most significance point in the cultural dimension, that is, the conversion of cultural images and culture-loaded words, there are generally two possibilities: conversion errors and lack of corresponding culture-loaded words. Therefore, in order to avoid visitors' misunderstanding of the production process and use of cultural relics, in terms of cultural dimension, translators need to accurately grasp different materials, uses, shapes and other adjectives and their modified core words, consult relevant dictionaries and literature, and have a certain grasp to choose the translation of

the corresponding interpretation in the target language. For the lack of information and ambiguity in the communicative dimension, translators need to pay more attention to the problems of missing translation and improper translation of culture-loaded words, and appropriately choose the accessibility, refinement and comprehensibility of the translation.

5. Conclusions

It mentioned by Professor Hu Gengshen, the Principal founder of Eco-translatology, that translators should have exceptional cultural awareness, strive to overcome obstacles caused by cultural differences, and promote the harmony between the two languages in the cultural ecology, so as to effectively achieve information exchange^[12]. If translators merely consider the accuracy of language and content and lack cross-cultural awareness when translating, it will lead to the content of the translation is too straightforward, making the translation a little stiff. Consequently, the translator must pay attention to the cultural default part implied by the cultural characteristic words in the source language for the sake of avoiding the semantic vacuum in the translation^[13].

In particular, in the translation of museum cultural relics and their signs, it should be noted that: firstly, due to the differences in cultural background and living environment between the visitors and translators, there is several common cultural background knowledge between the two; secondly, the text on the museum's cultural relic description needs to be clearly defined and short and powerful, which should highlight the implicit cultural connotation in the highly condensed translation text; thirdly, the translator needs to analyze the Chinese text one by one from three dimensions, enhance its interest and artistry on the basis of being faithful to the original text, improve the audiences' interest in visiting, and make the exhibition more vibrant and appealing.

Admittedly, inspecting the quality of the translation of the museum's cultural relics from the perspectives of linguistic, cultural and communicative dimension is a litter difficult. Thus it is necessary to highly concentrate the translation and not omit the extremely multiple cultural information. Under the guidance of

Eco-translatology theory, the translator comprehensively examines the relevant influencing factors, accurately transforms the basic information of the original text in the linguistic dimension, highlights the humanistic characteristics of cultural relics in the cultural dimension, and meets the expected needs of tourists in the communicative dimension.

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