Approaches to Cultural Factors in German-Chinese Translation: A Theoretical and Practical Exploration

Yi Qu

School of European Studies, Tianjin Foreign Studies University, Tianjin, China

Abstracts: Under the background of globalisation, cross-cultural exchanges are becoming more and more frequent, and German-Chinese translation, as an important bridge between Chinese and German cultural exchanges, is facing many challenges. Cultural factors occupy a central position in the translation process, and the way they are handled directly affects the translation effect and the quality of cultural communication. This paper discusses the classification of cultural factors in German-Chinese translation, their treatment strategies and their theoretical basis, aiming to provide reference for the teaching and practice of German media translation, to improve the quality of translation, and to promote Sino-German cultural exchanges.

Keywords: German-Chinese Translation; Cultural Factors; Translation Strategies; Intercultural Communication; Cultural Proprietary Items

1. Introduction

Translation is not only the conversion of language, but also the transmission of culture. As an important part of cross-cultural communication, German-Chinese translation involves two very different cultural systems: German culture and Chinese culture. As there are significant differences between China and Germany in terms of history, customs, ways of thinking, religion and other aspects, the treatment of cultural factors in the translation process is particularly important. In recent years, with the deepening of Sino-German exchanges, the demand for German-Chinese translations in the fields of journalism, literature, academia, etc., how to deal with the cultural factors appropriately so as to make them not only retain the characteristics of the original culture, but also be accepted by the target culture, has become an important topic in translation research and practice.

2. Classification and Characteristics of Cultural Factors

2.1 Culture

Culture itself is a relatively large concept. Generally speaking, culture is a social phenomenon, a product of people's long-term creativity. At the same time, it is a historical phenomenon, an accumulation of social history. Academics consider culture as a universally acquired behaviour of a particular group of human beings, in which certain behaviours and consciousnesses are formed from one generation to the next. Thus, culture lies in the consciousness of all learned behaviours and in the template that precedes this consciousness of behaviours, which precedes the individual. The templates and acquired behaviours include linguistic systems of meaning, social forms of organisation (tribes, regiments), and the individual technologies and products of the group. They are all important components of a cultural system. In layman's terms, culture is "the complex whole of knowledge, beliefs, arts, laws, morals, customs, and the abilities and habits acquired as a member of a society". Culture is a phenomenon specific to human societies.

The term "culture" is usually understood in a broad and a narrow sense, whereas the general public understands culture in a narrow sense to refer to activities such as language, literature, art and so on, which are visible in our daily lives, and culture in the field of cultural studies to refer to the broader sense of the larger culture. Culture in the broad sense is the sum of all the material and spiritual wealth created by human beings. It includes not only ideological parts such as world view, life view and values, but also non-ideological parts such as natural science and technology, language and writing. To be precise, culture refers to the history, geography, customs, traditions,

lifestyles, literature and art, behavioural norms, ways of thinking and values of a country or nation.

Scholars at home and abroad have successively given various definitions and interpretations from the perspective of their respective disciplines. It is said that there are now more than 200 definitions of culture in the world. For example, according to Taylor (1871), a Canadian philosopher, thinker and a leading communitarian, culture or civilisation is a complex whole that includes knowledge, beliefs, arts, laws, ethics, customs and any other abilities and habits acquired through learning by the people who are members of a society. He tends to emphasise the complexity of culture, which is made up of several factors. One of Taylor's main personal research arguments for multiculturalism, multiculturalism not only points to the coexistence of different cultures but also calls for recognising their differences and treating them equally. According to Parker and Burgess (1921) of the Chicago school of empirical sociology in the United States, the culture of a group refers to the sum of all the socio-genetic structures of the group, which in turn acquire their social significance as a result of the particular historical life and racial characteristics of the people of the group. Parker and Burgess had proposed humanistic locality, which focuses on the study of the effects of locality on forms of human organisation and behaviour. According to Wiesler (1929), the way of life followed by a particular society or tribe is known as culture, which includes all standardised socially traditional behaviours. Tribal culture is the sum total of common beliefs and traditional behaviours followed by the people of that tribe. According to Mencken (1936), culture is neither education nor legislation; it is an atmosphere, a tradition. According to Huntington (1945), by culture we mean every object, habit, idea, institution, mode of thinking and mode of behaviour that is produced or created by human beings and later passed on to others, especially to the next generation.

Language and culture are closely related. Translation is not only the conversion of language, but also the communication of culture. Translators will meet language problems and cultural conversion problems in the process of translation. The content of news reports covers a wide range of topics and inevitably contains a lot of cultural background information. Therefore, in the process of news translation, the treatment of cultural factors is particularly important. Differences in ways of thinking and habits of thought, differences in history, religion, customs and culture, and even contrasts in geography, mentality and physical culture are all parts that should be paid special attention to and reflected in news translation.

2.2 Cultural Factors in the Sino-German Language

Factors refer to the reasons or conditions that determine the success or failure of a matter, and cultural factors here refer to the reasons that determine the specific meanings of certain languages in the Sino-German language. Generally speaking, the cultural factors contained in the Hande language, which is the carrier of national culture, include the following: historical culture, customary culture, thinking culture, environmental culture, religious culture, and physical culture.

History and culture

Historical culture refers to a culture that has been shaped by a particular process of historical development and the accumulation of social heritage over a long period of time. Every country has its own history, and therefore there are people as well as events of special historical significance, which are manifestations of historical as well as cultural identity.

Example: "über den Tisch ziehen" - meaning to deceive or swindle someone, probably derived from the use of tables for deception in games or trading in medieval Europe.

"Den Rubikon überschreiten" - meaning to take irreversible action, derived from Julius Caesar's crossing of the Rubicon to begin the conquest of Rome in ancient Rome.

"In trockenen Tüchern sein" - meaning that everything has been organised or agreed upon, from the ancient age of navigation, referring to the measures taken to avoid flooding during a voyage.

"Ein Schlaraffenland" - meaning a place of extreme wealth or carefreeness - derives from the medieval mythological and literary work *Schlaraffenland*, which depicts an ideal place of gastronomic delights and hedonistic pleasures.

Customary culture

Customary culture refers to the accumulation of customs and habits that permeate daily social life and communicative activities. Language is the source of life, and therefore language expression is to some extent limited by human conditions as well as customs.

Example: "Da liegt der Hase im Pfeffer" - meaning the situation has become tricky or complicated, derived from the traditional German Easter custom of hiding cooked rabbit meat in peppers to signify hidden difficulties or challenges.

"Die Kirche im Dorf lassen" - meaning to keep your head on straight, derived from German village life where people returned home after attending church, implying moderation and rationality.

"Alles in Butter" - meaning everything is good - comes from the fact that butter is a common ingredient in German catering customs, hence the association of "butter" with "good". and therefore "butter" is associated with "good".

"Ein Brett vor dem Kopf haben" - meaning slow thinking, derived from the German woodworking craft of indicating that the mind is blocked as if by a plank of wood.

Culture of thinking

A culture of thought is a culture shaped by ways of thinking and habits of thought. Thinking and language interact with each other, and differences in ways of thinking determine the diversity of linguistic expressions and constitute barriers to interaction between different peoples.

Example: "Mit Kanonen auf Spatzen schießen" - means to solve a small problem by overkill, derived from the metaphor of a hunter using a cannon to shoot a small sparrow.

"Den Teufel an die Wand malen" - meaning to worry excessively or to predict bad things, derives from the belief in medieval times that demons could enter a person's life through walls.

"Eulen nach Athen tragen" - meaning to do nothing, derived from ancient Greek times when it was redundant to bring an owl to Athens because Athens was a symbol of Van Gogh.

Environmental culture

Environmental culture is a specific or different understanding of the same thing, arising from the geographical environment in which one lives, and is closely related to working life. For example, many money-related expressions in German are combined with combustible materials, such as "Kohle", "Holz" and "Asche", an expression which originated during the Second World War, when coal was regarded as the monetary equivalent due to the high price of raw materials in Germany at that time. In addition, due to the different environments, the understanding of certain things is also specific and different in different languages.

Religious culture

Religious culture is a culture formed by the religious beliefs and consciousness of different peoples. For example, Christianity is the dominant religion in Germany, and the two main denominations are Catholicism and Protestantism, each with 30 per cent of the German population, while China is a multireligious country with Buddhism, Taoism, Islam, Catholicism and Christianity. As a result, the two countries have developed different religion-specific vocabularies.

Examples: "der Rosenmontag", "der Faschingsdienstag", "der Aschermittwoch ", "Taoismus", "Dao", "Yin-Yang"

Example: "Morgen fahren Papa und ich endlich nach Essen. Die Spielemesse findet doch einmal im Jahr dort statt. Essen gilt als ein Mekka für Brettspiel-Freunde." "Mekka" is the first holy city of Islam, similar to "Pilgerstätte", which is similar to our pilgrimage site, Lhasa Potala Palace. The phrase "ein Mekka sein" means: a place that people with special interests like to visit, i.e. a popular place; a favourite among enthusiasts; a popular attraction that people find interesting.

Physical culture

Physical culture refers to the culture embodied in the language of the body or posture, which is closely related to specific situations, interpersonal relationships and cultural backgrounds. There are some special gestures in Sino-German intercultural communication.

Example: Akademisches Klopfen (Academic Knocking on the Table). German university students will clench their fists and knock on the table to show their appreciation at the end of a class, lecture or presentation, which is essentially just an alternative to clapping in academia.

Example: Ich drücke dir den Daumen. Unlike the Chinese who put their thumbs up in a gesture of "praise", Germans prefer to make a

fist of four fingers and press their thumbs together to give each other encouragement or blessings.

2.3 Strategies for Dealing with Cultural Factors

It is because of the factors of history and culture, custom and culture, thinking culture, geography and culture, religion and culture and physical culture that the source language and target language of news translation are bound to have different characteristics. In news translation, translators need to take into account the accuracy and image of the language, and analyse specific problems. Although it is not necessary to consider every word like literary translation, translators need to be careful and pursue accurate meaning and rigorous wording.

Direct translation (supplemented by explanations or notes)

When translating sentences and words with specific meanings in a particular national culture, the background culture of the original word must be taken into account, so explanatory expressions should be added on the basis of a direct translation. When the cultural background of the original text is too complex and covers too many elements, a form of direct translation with annotation is needed to facilitate the reader's understanding.

Example: Unswervingly "fighting tigers", "swatting flies" and "hunting foxes". "Tiger" und "Fliegen" - also korrupte Funktionäre von hohem und niedrigem Rang - wurden entschlossen geschlagen und "Füchse" - sprich ins Ausland geflüchtete korrupte Funktionäre - kontinuierlich verfolgt.

The translator here directly translates "tiger, fly, fox" and adds dashes in the text to incorporate the corresponding explanations, that is, corrupt senior and junior officials as well as those who have fled overseas, so that the reader can see at a glance, clear and concise.

Free translation (supplemented by direct translation)

Considering the different image thinking brought by environmental culture, religious culture, physical culture and other cultural backgrounds to different linguistic nationalities, for readers who do not understand the cultural colours, it is simply impossible to understand the meaning from the literal meaning, and the choice of the Italian translation plus the direct

translation can express the real meaning.

Example: Militarism is a hegemonic practice that can only lead to stoning oneself. jene, die der selbstherrlichen Einstellung folgen, Gewalt einzusetzen, werden merken, dass sei einen Felsbrocken nur dafü r gestemmt haben, damit er ihnen auf die eignen Füße fällt.

Unlike the animal vocabulary in the previous sentence, the original Chinese text here is an idiom involving historical allusions, which is too complicated, so the translator adopts the strategy of paraphrasing to convey the metaphorical meaning of the idiom.

Example: The reform of the science and technology system should be tightly focused on the "hard bones" to overcome the difficulties. Bei der Reform des Wissenschaftssystems habe wir schwierige Probleme zu lösen.

The original Chinese text employs rhetorical devices to highlight the difficulty of attacking the problem, while the translator translates into German to present it to the German readers, there is no need to use rhetoric again, but to translate its essence according to his own understanding.

Phonetic translations (supplemented by explanations or notes)

Many foreign words have been accepted by the native language and culture. For example, some traditional Chinese cultural words contain too much cultural heritage and too distinctive national characteristics, so that if interpretive translation is done, it will be too wordy and confusing for people.

Examples: Jiaozi, Baozi, Gongfu, Taiji, Fengshui.

3. Culturally Specific Items

3.1 Definition of Cultural Appropriations

The emergence and development of cultures are influenced by a number of factors such as their geographical location and the stage of historical development of the societies in which they live, so that each individual culture has its own unique cultural factors, which Javier Franco Aixelá called "cultural specificities". Aixelá called them "cultural specificities". Aixelá first introduced the concept of cultural specificities in 1996. He defines culturally specific items as "certain items that appear in a text and whose function and meaning in the source text are transferred

to the translated text with translation difficulties because their counterparts do not exist in the translator-reader's cultural system or have a different textual status from that item."

In layman's terms, cultural appropriations refer to a specific cultural symbol, practice, tradition or object, usually closely associated with a particular region, nation or group. They are not only symbols of cultural identity, but also carriers of people's emotional identity and are often used to convey and promote the values and beliefs of a particular culture.

One of the most representative scholars in China on the study of cultural specifics is Wang Dongfeng, who proposed the concept of "situational default" from the communicative function of the text in his 1997 article "Cultural Default and Coherence Reconstruction in Translation", i.e., "the part of the text that is omitted by the two parties to the communication as a shared background knowledge", and subdivided it into "contextual default" and "cultural default". The concept of "situational default" is proposed in the article "Reconstructing Texts" from the perspective of communicative function, that is, "the part that is omitted by the communicating parties as shared background knowledge", and is subdivided into "contextual default" and "cultural default". The so-called "cultural omissions" refer to those parts of the "situational omissions" that are "related to the cultural context outside the discourse", while "cultural omissions" are those parts of the "situational omissions" that are "related to the cultural context outside the discourse". "This cultural tacit understanding between author and reader is often unique to a single culture.

Culture-specific terms are words that signify things that are unique to a certain culture and directly reflect the particular context in which a particular culture is distinguished from others. It includes region, religion, conceptual patterns, customs, history, cultural background, body language and patterns. Examples include the Great Wall of China, the Japanese kimono, the Statue of Liberty in the United States, the Eiffel Tower in France, and the meaning of "pig" in Germany.

3.2 Application of Cultural Appropriations in Other Areas

The theoretical interpretation of cultural properted items involves a synthesis of theories from semiotics, psychology, and other fields. The following is a theoretical explanation of cultural specificity:

Semiotic perspective: In semiotic theory, culturally proprietary items are seen as signs or symbols that are used to convey the meaning and values of a particular culture. These symbols can be material, such as buildings and artefacts, or non-material, such as language, rituals or customs. Through the use and understanding of these symbols, people are able to recognise the identity and recognition of a particular culture.

Psychological perspective: From a psychological perspective, culturally specific items play an important role in shaping individual identity and emotions. They can trigger an individual's sense of belonging and pride in a particular culture, as well as emotional resonance and identity.

Taken together, the theoretical interpretations of cultural proprietary items cover a wide range of disciplinary fields and theoretical frameworks, and explore the functions, meanings, and impacts of cultural symbols from different perspectives.

3.3 Strategies for Translating Culturally Specific Items

At the heart of the problem of classifying culturally exclusive items lies the interpretation and classification of cultural concepts. In response to these problems, Eksila proposes eleven translation strategies. Among them, the first five are retention and the last six are substitution. The retention strategy means that the translator tries his best to keep the cultural specifics of the original language in the target language during the translation process to ensure that the target language readers can accurately identify and understand them, and the final effect is to make the translated text "read like the original source language", while the replacement strategy is the opposite, in which the translator replaces cultural specifics of the original language with the expressions closer to the target language, and the translation is then translated into the target language. On the other hand, the substitution strategy, on the contrary, the translator replaces the culturally specific items of the original language with expressions closer to those of the target language to ensure

that similar cultural information is conveyed in the target language text, so that the translated text "reads like the target language original". Eleven of Exira's strategies are listed below, along with their respective explanations, and some of the more complex strategies are explained with examples.

(1) Repetition (copying the original word without changing any form)

(2) Conversion of spelling (change of alphabetical system or transliteration)

(3) Linguistic translation (retaining the indicative meaning of the original, but still understood by the target language reader as a cultural item in the source language)

Example: I decided to go to the liberated areas; it was already the winter of 1948. Im Winter 1948 beschloss ich, in die Befreiten Gebiete zu gehen.

Example: However, 18 municipalities, provinces and autonomous regions want to implement new emission standards from 1 July this year. Doch 18 regierungsunmittelbare Städte und Provinzen sowie Autonome Gebiete wollen schon ab 1. Juli des laufenden Jahres die neuen Abgasnomen erfüllen.

In the two examples above, the vocabulary is unique to China and cannot be replaced in the German context, so the translators used a linguistic translation strategy that preserves the meaning of the words at the directive level. The term "liberated area" is directly translated as "liberated area", and the term "municipality" is translated as "city under the direct jurisdiction of the government", thus preserving the meaning of the text. "This maintains the accuracy and cultural content of the text, while providing German-speaking readers with the necessary cultural information to better understand the meaning and cultural context of the original text.

(4) Extra-textual translation (footnotes, endnotes, comments, etc.)

(5) In-text interpretation (placing the interpretation within the text, integrating the interpretation with the translation)

Example: The Party has always made solving the "Three Rural Issues" the top priority of the Party's work. Nach wie vor betrachtet die Partei die gute Lösung der Frage der Landwirtschaft, der ländlichen Gebiete und der Bauern als allerwichtigste Arbeit der ganzen Partei.

This strategy is similar to the direct translation and interpretation strategy mentioned in the above book, in which the translator interprets "three rural areas" directly in the text as "agriculture, rural areas, and farmers", and similar terms appear in party political literature, such as "five-in-one", "four self-confidence", "two safeguards", etc. The translator of our party-political translation course "Understanding Contemporary China" also adopts in-text interpretation when such terms appear for the first time. Similar terms are often found in Party politics literature, such as "five-in-one", "four self-confidence", "two safeguards", etc. The translators of our Party Politics Translation Course "Understanding Contemporary China" also use in-text explanations for the first time such terms appear, explaining the concepts clearly, and then use abbreviations if they appear again subsequently. reappear, then use abbreviations.

(6) Synonyms (different ways of referring to the same culturally specific item)

Example: "Let's try a bit of 'The White-Haired Girl'", the female student sings as she pulls back her voice. "Sing uns mal was aus *dem Weißhaarigen Mädchen* vor." Das Mädchen konnte die Oper natürlich und schmetterte ohne zu zögern los.

The original Chinese text actually omits the object of singing, the opera "The White Haired Girl", so when translating into German, the imagery needs to be completed. However, the translation of "The White-haired Girl" is originally a direct translation, and if it is repeated, it will easily bring reading difficulties to German readers. Therefore, the translator cleverly uses "die Oper" to refer to "das Weißhaarigen Mädchen", which not only explains that "The White-Haired Girl" is an opera, but also reduces the difficulty of the text.

(7) Limited generalisation (selecting culturally specific items of the source language that are more understandable to the target language reader to refer to the original item)

Example: Which table in the Grand View Garden was bought from "Old Zhengxing"? "Nehmen Sie den Traum der Roten Kammer - keins, aber auch keins von den vielen Banketten, die im Roman beschrieben werden, hat etwas mit einem Gasthaus zu tun!"

For German readers who have some knowledge of Chinese literature, they are more familiar with "Dream of the Red Chamber" than "Grand View Garden", which is originally

a garden in Jiafu. Therefore, the translator uses "Dream of the Red Chamber" as a cultural term to refer to the original cultural term, which also reduces the difficulty of reading.

(8) Absolute generalisation (selection of non-culturally specific items to refer to the original item)

Example: Which table in the Grand View Garden was bought from "Old Zhengxing"? "Nehmen Sie den Traum der Roten Kammer - keins, aber auch keins von den vielen Banketten, die im Roman beschrieben werden, hat etwas mit einem Gasthaus zu tun!"

In the same example, "Lao Zhengxing" is the name of a restaurant in the text, so the translator directly uses this non-cultural term "Gasthaus" to refer to the culturally specific item in the original text.

Example: Pheasant University. Das war so eine Privatuniversität, wo man sein Diplom auch kaufen konnte.

(9) Assimilation (selection of culturally specific items in the target language to translate culturally specific items in the source language)

Example: A lone tree does not make a forest: Eine Blume macht keinen Kranz.

All things come to an end: Vorsicht ist besser als Nachsicht.

Three feet of ice is not a day's cold: Auf den ersten Hieb fällt kein Baum.

A hundred miles of different winds, a thousand miles of different customs: Andere Länder, andere Sitten.

4. Summary

Translation itself is a selective process governed by a number of factors, and in today's information explosion, the ultimate effect of media translation is to help the cultural message of one country to be widely disseminated in another country. Whether it is the translation strategies given in our books or Ekstra's culturally specific translation strategies, the essence is to deal with cultural factors in order to help the target readers better understand the meaning of the text, and thus to ensure the accuracy and fluency of the translated text. The treatment of cultural factors in German-Chinese translation is based on a variety of theories, including Taylor's theory of cultural definition, Parker and Burgess's theory of socio-genetic structure, Wang Dongfeng's theory of situational default and cultural default, and Exira's theory of cultural exclusives. These theories provide solid theoretical support for translation practice and help translators better understand the role of cultural factors in translation. Proper handling of cultural factors not only helps to improve translation quality, but also promotes Sino-German cultural exchange. In the fields of journalism, literature and academics, accurate handling of cultural factors can avoid misunderstanding and cultural conflicts and enhance the effect of cross-cultural communication. In addition, it is of great practical significance for the teaching of German media translation to cultivate students' cross-cultural awareness and translation ability through case teaching.

Acknowledgments

References

[1] E.B. Tylor. Primitive Culture [M]. Shanghai: Shanghai Literature and Art Publishing House, 1871.

[2] R.E. Park & E.W. Burgess. Urban Sociology [M]. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1921.

[3] Javier Franco Aixelá. Cultural Proprietary Items and Translation Strategies[J]. Translation Studies, 1996.

[4] Wang Dongfeng. Cultural Introspection and Coherent Reconstruction in Translation[J]. Chinese Translation, 1997.

[5] Wang Dongfeng. Situational default and cultural default: the treatment of cultural factors in translation[J]. Foreign Language Teaching and Research, 1997.

[6] Zhang Meifang. Culture and Translation [M]. Beijing: Foreign Language Teaching and Research Press, 2005.

[7] Guo Jianzhong. Culture and Translation [M]. Beijing: China Foreign Translation and Publication Company, 1999.