

# Exploration on Chinese-English Translation of Network Buzzwords

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**Abstract.** Intercultural communication has become more and more frequent since globalization and internet have been in high-speed development. Internet buzzwords thus play significant roles in conveying certain cultural meanings and translation of buzzwords has to be considered carefully. In this paper, the writer endeavors to explore how to translate Chinese network buzzwords from the perspective of Bassnett's cultural translation theory through method of qualitative research. Conclusions have been drawn that Bassnett's cultural translation theory is appropriate for applying in translating Chinese network buzzwords and different translation strategies should be adopted into different types of buzzwords.

## 1. Introduction

With fast improvement of internet technology and enhancement of communication between people in different countries, network buzzwords become a tool to show unique culture of a country. As a result, translating those buzzwords to English is regarded as a way of culture export and intercultural communication. Meanwhile, network buzzwords have carried cultural elements, which makes translation of them perplexing. Thus, conducting a research of how to translate buzzwords properly and express their cultural meaning is needed.

In this paper, the writer is intend to conduct the research of translation strategies of Chinese network buzzwords from the perspective of cultural translation theory, using 2018-2019 Chinese network buzzwords as materials. In this paper, the research method of qualitative analysis will be used to analyze mentioned translation strategies. Conclusions on how to select translation theories while translating Chinese buzzwords will be drawn after the whole analysis. This paper proceeds as follow. First, applied theory will be introduced. Then features of Chinese network buzzword will be mentioned to provide a certain angle to study carrying cultural elements. Translation strategies are followed and conclusions will be drawn as well.

## 2. Bassnett's cultural translation theory

In her co-written book with Andre Lefevere, *Translation, History and Culture*, Susan Bassnett first brought up with the concept of cultural translation theory. Firstly, translation should be conducted under cultural concept rather than simple transforming of text content; secondly, translation is more than a process of decoding or recoding, but a course of intercultural communication; thirdly, translation does not only realize description and retelling of target context, but also reach equivalence of cultural function in 2 languages; finally, principles and criterions of translation should change to meet with different cultural needs in different times and that of different groups.

The core of Bassnett's cultural translation theory is that translating should be processing in the unit of culture and then form is under consideration. This theory is no longer stressing on text or context, but proposing that translators have to consider cultural function which target text carries to realize cultural equivalence and transformation.

In this perspective, the theory can be appropriate to apply on research of network buzzwords, which are timely and containing many certain cultural elements.

### **3. Features of Chinese network buzzwords**

According to the cultural translation theory, translating should be conducted with consideration of cultural background of target context. In this perspective, culture performs in many forms in buzzwords, such as dialects and spoken language. In this section, we will discuss features of Chinese network buzzwords and after analyzing these, we are able to choose proper translation strategies to apply in later translation. There are various features of Chinese network buzzwords, and four of them are discussed in this paper.

#### **3.1 Usage of dialect**

There are a lot of network buzzwords originating from dialects. Booming development of internet makes it easier for netizens from different regions getting connected with each other, which also makes dialects not only appear in their own originated regions but wider areas. Some netizens may happen to post with dialects while communicating with other people on the internet, and this certain word with dialects may get prevalent and wildly used by other netizens for its funny accents, meaning, or just for its simply form. In this case, “yu nv wu gua” which means “it is none of your business”, containing dialects and getting popular for its funny way of pronouncing, is an exact example for this dialect feature

#### **3.2 Usage of abbreviations**

Buzzwords are spoken languages and usually in a simply form. Thus abbreviations are easily seen on the internet, such as abbreviations of numbers, like “996”, which means a working system, abbreviations of letters, like “awsl”, which literally means “ah, I can die for it” to show speakers’ love. Those abbreviations are simply, catchy, and adorable and which makes them get popular quickly.

#### **3.3 Mixture of English**

Some of buzzwords are a mixture of English and Chinese, or just coming from English, like “gou dai” which has the same pronunciation with “go die” in English.

#### **3.4 Chinese characteristics**

Network buzzwords are frequently related with certain news or hotspot events on the internet in native country, which causes difficulties when translators want to translate those buzzwords into a language with no background information. For example, phrases like “ling ren pen fan” which means something is too laughable to let you spit out of your meal, having been mentioned in Chinese national news broadcasts are typical buzzwords with Chinese characteristics.

### **4. Translation strategies**

After sorting buzzwords by their features, translation strategies can be selected according to these features. In this section, three translation strategies will be introduced into the procedure which are literal translation, free translation and annotation.

#### **4.1 Literal translation**

To translate word to word directly can express full meaning of source text but also keep consistency in form and structure of the text at the same time. Thus, literal translation should be the best choice when there is a counterpart existing in target text, which realizes translation in context, form and cultural perspective.

For those Chinese network buzzwords originated from English or mixed with English, like “gou dai”, we just translate back as “go die”, keeping its own characteristics. Another example goes to “ni xing ni shang”, which means “if you think you can handle, then please prove it”, and it is translated word by word into “you can you up”. Although it is atactic and grammatically wrong, it is still accepted by foreigners and playing a great role in showing Chinese characteristics in this phrase.

Besides, for some buzzwords with strong Chinese characteristics while having counterparts in English itself, literal translation also can be chosen to apply in translation. For example, “tao lu”. The word means deceive or practical methodology that someone is applying in his/her behavior to reach the goal in Chinese, while in English there is also a word expressing exact the meaning “trick”. So in this condition, “tao lu” can be translated into “trick” directly.

#### **4.2 Free translation**

From Bassnett’s theory, translation is for creating possibility of communication and understanding of meaning. Though there they are, counterparts are hard to find in 2 completely different language because some words, especially new words invented on network, are rooted in their own culture. For those words, literal translation strategy causes deficiency of cultural elements carried in those words while free translation can make up. Free translation breaks restrict of form and conveys full cultural meaning successfully, which is more important from Bassnett’s cultural translation theory. Thus, for those Chinese buzzwords with no counterparts in English, free translation can be applied in translating, such like buzzwords with usage of dialect and strong Chinese characteristics.

“Yu nv wu gua” mentioned before is an example of usage of dialect. The essence of this buzzword is about its accent which is impossible to translate into English, so it can be translated as “none of your business” to convey its meaning. “Lan shou xiang gu” is another example. This buzzword means “I am upset and want to cry”, but after adding accent, the phrase goes as “blue, thin and mushrooms” which is confusing in English. So here free translation is applied to translate it into “I feel very blue”.

There are also some buzzwords with strong Chinese characteristics and no counterpart in English, like “liang liang”, which comes from lyrics of a Chinese song meaning something is gone down. For this, “dead duck” is proper for the translation.

#### **4.3 Annotation**

Annotation can be a universe rule of translating because it hardly can be wrong adding notes when you translate. Annotation always appears together with literal translation or free translation. Network buzzwords sometimes have relation to a piece of certain news or event, and those serves as a background. In this condition, nor literal translation or free translation can express their meaning and cultural implication fully. Annotation can make translating more accurate in this case. Thus, when we translate buzzwords with features of abbreviations, we can consider to apply this strategy.

“996” is a buzzword in 2019. Considering translating it, literal translation can be confusing while free translation causes loss of Chinese characteristics. Thus, it can be translated into “996, which means working from 9:00 am to 9:00 pm, 6 days per week” by using strategy of annotation.

### **5. Limitations**

The findings of this paper have to be seen in light of some limitations. The most influenced limitation is caused by timely feature of network buzzwords. For this feature, network buzzwords are changeable and findings of this paper may have been not applicable for some newly invented buzzwords. The second limitation concerns perspective of the exploration. This paper chooses Bassnett’s cultural translation theory as study perspective, while there are other perspective can be considered. Under this perspective, cultural elements are stressed while other factors are underestimated a little. In the future study, these two limitations are able to offer two directions to explore more depending on existing research.

### **6. Conclusions**

Network buzzwords, showing innovation of a nation, have reflected cultural characteristics of a time, and thus energized people’s way of thinking. Therefore, translation of network buzzwords should convey those cultural elements and cultural equivalence should be set as the purpose. Intercultural communication has become more and more booming nowadays, and under this context, Bassnett’s cultural translation theory offers a new perspective to study methodology of translating those new

words carrying abundant cultural meanings. Through this perspective, culture has been emphasized in translation, and the equivalence of culture in both target language and source language has been realized, which promotes process of intercultural communication smoothly. To reach the goal, translators can select different strategies to deal with translation of network buzzwords with various features. As internet language, network buzzwords are new, innovative and spread-fast, this makes it challenging when translators want to translate them into a completely different language. Translators have to hold good knowledge of features of network buzzwords and keep learning about translation theories so that they can finish transfer between 2 languages perfectly. While the writer hopes that by using method of categorizing buzzwords and translating them from perspective of cultural translation theory, other researchers can get inspired and enlightened in their future study in translation.

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