

Research on the Translation of Culture-Loaded Items of *To Live* from a Relevance-Pragmatic Approach

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ABSTRACT

The translation of political culture-loaded items about the Cultural Revolution of the novel *To Live* is discussed from a relevance-pragmatic approach. The translator of the novel flexibly employed different translation methods to make the translation accurate and fluent while attempting to retain the cultural "otherness". The findings of this study may hopefully provide some insights into translation of culture-loaded words. In general, when rendering these items, the translator must follow the "politically correct" narrative strategy.

Keywords: *To Live*, political culture-loaded items, the Cultural Revolution, Relevance-Pragmatic Theory

I. INTRODUCTION

Culture-specific items refer to "Those textually actualised items whose function and connotations in a source text involve a translation problem in their transference to a target text, whenever this problem is a product of the non-existence of the referred item or of its different intertextual status in the cultural system of the readers of the target text." (Aixelá 1996: 58). This term may have such synonyms as "culturally-loaded terms", "culture-bound terms", "cultural terms" or "culture-loaded items". The culture-specific items for this study are political culture-loaded items of *To Live* which refer to political events or states during the period of the Cultural Revolution (1966-1976). Their uniqueness and the qualitative differences between Chinese and Western cultures bring about many obstacles and problems for translation, making it difficult for the translator to achieve full equivalence, if any, between SL and TL. If the translation is not appropriate, it will easily cause failure of intercultural communication. Consequently, in dealing with political culture-loaded words, the translator should seriously contemplate the differences between Chinese and Western cultures, the cognitive environment and acceptability of target readers to achieve the optimal relevance. Firstly, he should find the strongest correlation between ST and its context. Secondly, given a good command of the cognitive environment of the target readers, the translator is to analyze the author's informative intention before communicative intention, and then conveys them to the target readers, thus avoiding any huge cultural loss in the translation process, other things being equal. This paper studies the translation of political culture-loaded items from the perspective of relevance-pragmatic translation (theory).

II. PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

To Live is a Chinese novel by Yu Hua, translated into English by Michael Berry. *To Live* presents a general view of all the sufferings of China that occurred in the mid-20th century, hence, because the Cultural Revolution was a special historical period of China, contributing to a bunch of specific Chinese culture-loaded items. These items preserved the discourse characteristics of the Cultural Revolution, which has significant importance to learn about (part of) the Chinese history. "The Cultural Revolution occupies a very special page in China's history and deserves careful study" (Shapiro 2002: 450).

To Live (the English version) are marketable in America, which won rave reviews from the mainstream media in the world (such as *Washington Post*). "His translation works have become another window which draws Western readers closer to Chinese culture" (Zhu & Yang 2016: 89). A discussion of this topic is supposed to highlight the significance of the translation of Chinese political culture-loaded items, provide people approaches to their translation, maintain the alterity of the world culture and promote culture communication between China and other countries.

Thus, I attempt to answer the following questions in the paper:

- Which contexts does the translator take into consideration when translating *To Live*?
- What specific translation methods has the translator employed when rendering political culture-loaded items related to the Cultural Revolution?

- What deficiencies are there of the translation of Chinese political culture-loaded items?

III. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study is a descriptive quantitative research that gives the renderings of political culture-loaded items of *To Live*, with a case study of Chinese political culture-specific items rendered from Chinese into English. To achieve the objectives of this research, the following steps are taken to analyze the translation of culture-loaded items:

- The chosen novel in Chinese and English were read line by line to find the political culture-loaded items (the political culture-loaded items refer to words and set phrases that often appear in statesmen's discourses).
- The next step was to extract the rendering of culture-specific items from the books (Chinese and English versions) in order to determine to what extent Chinese-to-English translators have succeeded in using the most natural equivalents of the culture-loaded items. That is, the culture-loaded items were rendered and compared in both ST and TT and the applied strategies were determined by different contexts translated by different translators.
- The third step is to examine what strategies (if any) have been most frequently used by the translators as seen from a relevance-pragmatic approach? Are there special considerations for translating political culture-loaded words?

IV. LITERATURE REVIEW

At present, previous studies of *To Live* focused on literary research (such as the narrative method [Yang 2014], the realistic transformation of the pioneering literature [Kong 2016], comparative study of literature [Zhu & Li 2010; Huang & Jin 2015]) and the philosophy of life (the attitude towards life and death [Huang & Jin 2015]; human tribute in cool narrative [Guo 2015]). Gao (2012); Han (2014); Zhu & Yang (2016) centered on the culture-loaded items and the translator's cultural responsibility. There is few studies of the translation of political culture-loaded items about the Cultural Revolution of *To Live*. Therefore, this research has certain practical significance.

V. THE RELEVANCE-PRAGMATIC THEORY

Based on J. L. Austin's Speech Act Theory, H.P. Grice's Cooperative Principle and the relevant theory of cognitive linguistics, Dan Sperber and Deirdre Wilson put forward Relevance Theory in their collaborated monograph *Relevance: Communication and Cognition* (1986). Relevance theory regards verbal

communication as an ostensive-inferential process, focusing on communication and cognition.

Relevance Theory has two fundamental claims: "1) Human cognition tends to be geared to the maximisation of relevance. 2) Every act of ostensive communication communicates a presumption of its own optimal relevance." (Sperber & Wilson 1995: 260) Optimal relevance refers to "an expectation on the part of the hearer that his attempt at interpretation will yield adequate contextual effects at minimal processing cost" (Gutt 1991: 30-31). Gutt (1991) supplemented the Relevance theory by his relevance translation theory (in his Doctoral Dissertation *Translation and Relevance: Cognition and Context*). According to the relevance translation theory, "translation is a communicative process of cognitive inference based on relevance". (Gutt 1998: 2) Translation is information processing in the brains. When translating, the translators should strive to search for the optimal relevance to ensure that the intentions of the author comply with the expectations of the readers. Furthermore, he came up with "direct translation" to convey all the language features the original text possesses and "indirect translation" to achieve similar cognitive effects. Gutt also claimed that "no matter what it is, the phonological features, the morphological features, the syntactical features or the semantic features, they are all communicative clues to guide the readers to search for the intentions of the communicators. Therefore, these features should be retained as much as possible" (Gutt 1991: 23).

Some Chinese scholars gradually add to this relevance translation theory. "The translator should consider if the degree of relevance that the SL readers achieve is equal to that of the TL readers" (Li & Luo 2004: 14). Zhao (1999, 2001, 2002, 2003) wrote articles to illustrate the explanatory power of relevance theory to explore the untranslatability, equivalence principle, the default of translation and many other controversial problems in translation studies.

Hou pointed out the relativity and mutuality of relevance and non-relevance (2004) and postulated Multi-Level Quadratic Ostensive Inference and Extensive Implication Hypothesis Pragmatic Markedness Relevance-Model (PMRM) of CP (2006). They make a breakthrough of the relevance theory because these promote the relevance translation theory to account for the inference of relevance-equivalent translation of complicated utterance implication, hence a relevance-pragmatic approach.

VI. THE POLITICAL CULTURAL-LOADED ITEMS OF *TO LIVE*

The political cultural-loaded items of *To Live* are shown in "Table I"

TABLE I. THE POLITICAL CULTURAL-LOADED ITEMS OF *TO LIVE*

Chinese	English
文化大革命 (wenhua da geming) (p149)	the Cultural Revolution (p192)
大字报 (da zi bao) (p149)	big character posters (p192) Footnote: Big character posters, or <i>da zi bao</i> , are large posters featuring handwritten slogans, announcements or protests, and are one of the key forms of political expression, and often political dissent, in modern China. They played an important role during the Cultural Revolution and the Democracy Wall Movement (1978-1979) (p192)
标语 (biaoyu) (p149)	posters (p192)
千万不要忘记阶级斗争 (qian wan bu yao wangji jieji douzheng) (p150)	Never Forget Class Struggle (p192)
在大风大浪中前进 (zai dafeng dalang zhong qianjin) (p150)	March Forward Through the Great Storms (p192)
红卫兵 (hong wei bing) (p150)	the Red Guards (p193)
红卫兵小将同志 (hong wei bing xiao jiang tongzhi) (p150)	Comrade Red Guard Leader (p193)
走资派 (zou zi pai) (p151)	capitalist roaders (p194)
你就是走资本主义道路的当权派。(ni jiushi zou ziben zhuyi daolu de dang quan pai) (p151)	You're the capitalist roader! Abusing your power to walk the road to capitalism. (p194)
纸帽子 (zhi maozi) (p153)	paper dunce hats (p197)
牌牌 (pai pai) (p153)	Signs (p197)
毛主席万岁 (Mao zhuxi wan sui) (p153)	Long Live Chairman Mao (p197)
红袖章 (hong xiuzhang) (p153)	red armbands (p197)

VII. THE TRANSLATION OF POLITICAL CULTURE-LOADED ITEMS OF *TO LIVE* FROM THE PERSPECTIVE OF RELEVANCE-PRAGMATIC THEORY

A. Literal translation

Literal translation requires the English version to convey accurately the clues of the original text. If a Chinese term and its English counterpart are almost equivalent, and it can be translated according to the original text. That is, when the extended meaning and pragmatics of source language and target language coincide with each other, words and phrases and their collocations can be directly translated. The method of literal translation is one of the effective ways to express cultural connotation of the Chinese nation.

(1) 城里的文化大革命是越闹越凶。(cheng li de wenhua dageming shi yue nao yue xiong) (Yu 2008: 149)

TT: Meanwhile, the Cultural Revolution was raging more and more intensely in town. (Berry 2003: 192)

(2) 千万不要忘记阶级斗争。(Qian wan buyao wangji jieji douzheng) (YU 2008: 150)

TT: Never Forget Class Struggle. (Berry 2003: 192)

(3) 在大风大浪中前进。(zai dafengdalang zhong qianjin) (Yu 2008: 150)

TT: March Forward Through the Great Storms. (Berry 2003: 192)

Analysis: The first example is a proper name. The following ones are the exclusive slogans of the Cultural Revolution. The capitalized initial letters highlight their characteristics, which are closely related to the political context at the time

(4) 那走资派有没有? (na zou zi pai you meiyou) (Yu 2008: 151)

TT: Then are there any *capitalist roaders*? (Berry 2003: 194)

(5) 几个戴红袖章的人冲上去对春生又打又踢。(ji ge dai hong xiuzhang de ren chong shangqu dui chunsheng you da you ti) (Yu 2008: 153)

TT: A couple of kids wearing *red armbands* rushed over to him. (Berry 2003: 197)

Analysis: "Relevance theory believes that when two people's cognitive environment shows the same facts or assumptions, that is, mutual manifestoes; or when both parties have their own facts or assumptions in the cognitive environment, that is, when both parties

psychologically shared common perceptions and judgments, the two parties reaches successful communication" (Tian 2013: 39). "Chinese novels have their own rules; both the textual and conceptual grids of other civilizations should not be reduced to those of the west" (Bassnett & Lefevere 2001: 11). This method preserves the alterity of the source text. It not only retains the vividness of the original text, it also engenders a new unique way of thinking, though foreign to the target readers.

B. Literal translation plus annotation

(6) 满街都是大字报。(manjie dou shi dazibao) (Yu 2008: 149)

TT: All the streets were filled with *big character posters*. (Berry 2003: 192)

Footnote: Big character posters, or *dazibao*, are large posters featuring handwritten slogans, announcements or protests, and are one of the key forms of political expression, and often political dissent, in modern China. They played an important role during the Cultural Revolution and the Democracy Wall Movement (1978-1979).

Analysis: The big character poster is a wall-wrapped poster. The footnote supplements this background for the readers. This method retains the original cultural image, reproduces the language characteristics, artistic style and aesthetic value. At the same time, it expands the reader's cognitive context by providing relevant cultural background knowledge, establishes cognitive connections, and minimizes cultural losses.

C. Free translation

Free translation is intended to convey the explicit and implied meaning of the original text. Explicit meaning is equivalent to the literal meaning of a sentence, while implicit meaning or communicative clue is equivalent to the implied meaning of a sentence. On the ground of a thorough understanding of the content of the original text, it is a translation method to get rid of the constraint of the structure of the original text and translate the meaning of the original text to make the translation conform to Chinese norms. The method of indirect translation is to represent in another language the profound connotation of the source text and the extended meaning of metaphor in accordance with the English expression, so the translator should make the greatest efforts to obtain a maximum contextual effect.

(7) 红卫兵小将同志。(hong weibing xiaojiang tongzhi) (Yu 2008: 150)

TT: Comrade Red Guard Leader. (Berry 2003: 193)

(8) 你就是走资本主义道路的当权派。(ni jiushi zou ziben zhuyi daolu de dang quan pai) (Yu 2008: 151)

TT: You're the capitalist roader! Abusing your power to walk the road to capitalism. (Berry 2003: 194)

Analysis: In example (7), "小将" (xiaojiang) is not translated as "young general", but "leader", because he/she was just the organizer of the activity, taking "register" into consideration. In (8), the translator breaks the sentence structure in halves which help to underscore the implicit meaning of "abuse your power". The above versions are natural and smooth without being constrained by the original details or form. This method lends a high degree of freedom to the translator. Given the transparency and readability, the reader can quickly decode the semantics, not to suspend the excitability of the reading flow.

D. Adaptation

Adaptation is to change and modify the original more or less, in form and meaning.

(9) 那女的没理他,朝我们喊:"他对你们进行白色统治,他欺压你们,你们要起来反抗,要砸断他的狗腿"。(na nv de mei li ta, chao women han: "Ta dui nimen jinxing baise tongzhi, ta qiya nimen, nimen yao qilai fankang, yao za duan ta de gou tui) (Yu 2008: 152)

TT: "He's been making you live through a white terror, oppressing and belittling you!" she shouted. "You must stand up and rebel! Break his fucking legs!" (Berry 2003: 195)

Analysis: "狗腿"(gou tui) is a scolding word in Chinese, a token of arrogance and rudeness on the part of the Red Guard in question. "Fucking" is a vulgar word in English with an affective connotation like that the original phrase "狗腿" (gou tui).

E. Borrowing

English expressions can be borrowed when translating Chinese culture-loaded words, if there is no big loss of semanticity.

(10) 在街上看到一会儿带着各种纸帽子,胸前挂着牌牌的人被押着游街。(zai jie shang kan dao yihui'er daizhe ge zhong zhi maizi, xiong qian guazhe pai pai de ren bei ya zhe you jie) (Yu 2008: 153)

TT: On my way there I saw a group of people being paraded around the street wearing signs around their necks and all different kinds of *paper dunce hats*. (Berry 2003: 197)

Analysis: According to the free dictionary, "dunce hat" means "a tall cone-shaped hat formally worn by slow or lazy students as a punishment". Paper dunce

hats match in shape and function, the paper hats (forcibly) worn during the Cultural Revolution, a token of shame like "The Scarlet Letter".

F. Substitution

According to the reader's ability to accept, the translator should coordinate between the reader and the text and make appropriate adjustments where possible. In other words, when the culture of the original language and the cultural image of the target language are different, the cultural-loaded words can be modified, that is, the language units that are embedded with the cultural characteristics of the original language are replaced by similar images of the target language. The language unit gives the readers a more complete contextual connection.

(11) "毛主席万岁!" (*Mao zhuxi wansui*) (Yu 2008: 153)

TT: "Long Live Chairman Mao!" (Berry 2003: 197)

Analysis: In Chinese, "Long live" not only bears the meaning of longevity, but also is dedicated to the most respectable leader in ancient China. During the "Cultural Revolution", Chairman Mao was the emperor in the hearts of the Chinese people, so Mao Zedong was worthy of the "Long live" slogan wishes. In addition to "Long live", "Chitose" can be used to express longevity blessings for princes. Therefore, using "long live" is not as equivalent to Chinese "万岁" (*wansui*) as hoped for. This is caused by the differences between Chinese and western cultures. In the western world, there is no distinction between "Long live" and "Chitose". Therefore, the so-called "long live" is unified, and the conversion to "long live" not only removes the cognitive barriers of the target readers, but also preserves the cultural image. The target readers have access to the easiest possible connection and the greatest possible contextual effect.

The language units that are specific to the cultural features of the original language are replaced by target language units that have the same propositional meaning bearing similar pragmatic effects, hence a more accessible contextual association.

VIII. FURTHER DISCUSSION

The Cultural Revolution is a special historical period of China, which contributes a wealth of culture-specific items hard to render into another language. The translator must follow the "politically correct" narrative strategy when confronting western readers today (Xu 2004: 114-116). The translator (Berry) of *To Live* has followed this principle very well, linking the special historical period of the Cultural Revolution without increasing the reading burden of the target readers.

Berry puts "文化大革命" (*wenhua da geming*) into "the Cultural Revolution", without over-interpreting or annotation, which is associated with the literary context and the reading habits of the target readers. Searching COCA corpus for "Cultural Revolution", a total of 803 cases can be found, 529 thereof being "the Cultural Revolution". Sidney Shapiro (the famous translator of Chinese revolutionary literary) translated 《我的父亲邓小平：“文革”岁月》 (*wo de fuqin deng xiaoping: "Wenge" suiyue*) into *Deng Xiaoping and the Cultural Revolution — A Daughter Recalls the Critical Years*. (DIAO & HOU 2015: 102). "The Cultural Revolution" was twice read in the interview of CNN. Therefore, "China's Cultural Revolution" "Chinese Cultural Revolution" or "the great Cultural Revolution" are not the best suitable ones of "文化大革命" (*wenhua da geming*) of *To Live*.

Another example is "红卫兵" (*Hong weibing*), translated as "the Red Guards". There are 52 cases of "the Red Guards" in COCA. Shapiro's translation is "Red Guard", as in:

(12) 混乱就这样持续了一个多月, 一些学校出现了红卫兵组织。 (*Hunluan jiu zheyang chixule yige duo yue, yixie xuexiao chuxian le hong weibing zuzhi*) (Mao 2000: 21)

TT: The turmoil continued for more than a month. In some schools Red Guard Units were formed. (Shapiro 2002: 309)

Analysis: Admittedly, TT of example (12) reproduced the original language and cultural effect to the utmost extent, which may be one of the reasons why *To Live* gains popularity in the western countries. Translation should be related to the correctness of the language level as well as the appropriateness of the social pragmatic level. On the one hand, the translator must first correctly understand the meaning of the original vocabulary, grammar, semantics, etc., and then express it smoothly. On the other hand, the translator should also infer the implied meaning of the original and reproduce in English version. The above two versions (the Cultural Revolution and the Red Guards) indicate perfect combination of the conventional meaning and conversational implicature, for literal translation without any annotation or footnotes conceals some bad associations of these phrases.

The above examples are some cases in point to delineate the optimal relevance under different contexts, though some versions leave room for improvement.

(13) 连凤霞、二喜他们屋门上贴了标语。 (*lian feng xia, er xi tamen wu men shang tiele biaoyu*) (Yu 2008: 149)

TT: There were even posters hanging over Fengxia and Erxi's front door. (Berry 2003: 192)

(14) 为什么没有标语和大字报? (*weisheme meiyou biaoyu he dazibao*) (Yu 2008: 150)

TT: How come there are no *slogans* or big character posters? (Berry 2003: 193)

Analysis: "标语" (*biaoyu*) in the above two examples is translated into "poster" and "slogan" respectively. According to OED, poster means "a large notice, often with a picture on it, that is put in a public place to advertise sth"; while the definition of slogan is "a word or phrase that is easy to remember, used for example by a political party or in advertising to attract people's attention or to suggest an idea quickly." According to the background of the Cultural Revolution, "slogan" is preferable. Another example is "dazibao", which Berry translated as "big character posters" plus a footnote, while Shapiro rendered into "the posters".

(15) 但是大字报语言恶毒, 上纲很高, 看后仍让人毛骨悚然。 (*danshi dazibao yuyan edu, shang gang hen gao, kan hou reng rang ren maogusongran*) (Mao 2000: 366)

TT: But the vicious tone of *the posters*, their effort to paint Papa in the worst light, made my hair stand on the end. (Shapiro 2002: 309)

(16) 从此, 数不清的悼词、标语、大字报、小字报、诗词, 一张接一张地张贴在纪念碑和天安门广场上。 (*congci, shu bu qing de daoci, biaoyu, dazibao, xiaozi bao, shici, yi zhang jie yi zhang de zhangtie zai jinianbei he tian'anmen guangchang shang*) (Mao 2000: 463)

TT: A flood of slogans, *posters*, and verses followed in the succeeding days, on the monument and all over the square... (Shapiro 2002: 393)

Analysis: According to the Relevance Pragmatic theory, the translator should find optical relevance between the original discourse and the contextual hypothesis, infer the context concealment through reasoning, and finally obtain the contextual effect to achieve communication success. *dazibao*, a Chinese political culture-loaded item, throttles the understanding of the target readers without necessary explanation, so Berry's version outwits Shapiro's because the former conveys the connotation of the original context.

From (13) to (16), Berry distinguished the differences of "标语" (*biaoyu*) and *dazibao*, unlike Shapiro. Target readers can get a larger contextual effect with less efforts by the differences and the footnote. Without relevant knowledge of the Cultural Revolution in the cognitive structure of foreign readers, they will fail to deduce the correct implied premise (say of *dazibao*). If "The pragmatic problem of the (micro) meaning of speech fragments is related to the cognitive structure and context of the communicator (especially

the context)" (Liao & Hou 2005: 10), the footnote here will compensate the detected deficiency.

(17) 我们是全国第二号"最大的走资派"的家人。 (*women shi quan guo di er hao "zui da de zou zi pai" de jia ren*) (Mao 2000: 72)

ST: We are the family of the "Second biggest *Capitalist-Roader*" in China. (Shapiro 2002: 64)

Analysis: Viewed on the pragmatic relevance equivalence principle, "走资派" (*zou zi pai*) as a culture-loaded word of the Cultural Revolution is a marked expression. In the COCA corpus, we can find three "capitalist roaders", including Berry's. Therefore, "Capitalist-Roader" best suits this context for the initial letters are capitalized to transmit its special, markedness equivalence.

IX. CONCLUSION

This is a study of the translation of political culture-loaded items of *To Live* from a relevance-pragmatic approach. The political culture-loaded items of *To Live* are an indispensable part of the novel, which not only reflect the historical characteristics of the time, but also promote the development of the story and the depiction of the fates of the characters. This paper explores the translation methods of these political culture-loaded items. The findings of the study are:

- When the author's and the target readers' cognition overlaps, the translation should try to converge to the original text and in this case direct translation enjoys priority.
- When the target readers can achieve the greatest possible effects for the smallest possible effort, indirect translation or direct translation plus annotation is recommended.
- As is shown in the above table, Berry employed literal translation to render most of these political culture-loaded items. The first reason is they go in line with the simple language style of the source text. The second one is to conform to historical facts. The Cultural Revolution is only a special historical period of modern China. Given some flaws, they all belong to an inseparable part of the development of Chinese history. Therefore, to respect history, the translator must follow the "politically correct" narrative strategy when rendering these items. In conclusion, to translate political culture-loaded words should take the internal and external contexts of the language into consideration and explore pragma-linguistically as well as socio-pragmatically the translation strategies and methods to interculturally communicate effectively.

This study may shed light on translating cultural-specific words, for it is the translators' responsibility to employ a relevant, equivalent foreign language version to coincide with the complicated utterance implications from the source-text terms of that kind.

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