

Research on C-E Translation Techniques of Culture-loaded Expressions*

Yinping Lv

School of Foreign Language
Ningxia Normal University
Guyuan, China 756000

Abstract—Translation of Chinese culture-loaded expressions are decided by the context if the equivalence can be found in the target language. Sometimes culture expressions in English are similar to Chinese, some are not, so exploration on translation techniques can solve the problems in transferring the culture information. The paper aims to convey and analyze the source of culture difference which have decisive influence on shaping people's mind and culture in English and Chinese, offering related translation techniques by categorizing the culture-loaded expressions from the perspectives of culture reflection, culture loss, and culture transferring, thus make Chinese culture easily understood on basis of readers acceptance and make communication successfully both in Chinese and English, meanwhile enhance students recognition on the distinction between Chinese and English.

Keywords—culture differences; culture reflection; culture transferring; culture loss

I. INTRODUCTION

Translation is somewhat the tool of communication, specifically also a way to accomplish the communication in different cultural background. It is another step to help students have deep understanding about Chinese and English. The aim of learning English is to apply the language, differences and similarities of the two languages will be apparently as a cultural part in learning and also a major section in translation.

Appropriately transferring the two languages well is unlackable in learning. Students who learn translation well must experience the beauty and charm of human's language, also sense the marvelous culture that human being create, so translation of the culture information is a vital component in cultivating students' abilities in language application. Exploration the concerned knowledge that shapes the culture difference in English and Chinese can deepen student recognition on the two languages.

II. EXPLORATION OF CULTURE DIFFERENCES IN ENGLISH AND CHINESE

“In order to understand and appreciate the related roles of language and culture which are considered as two interdependent symbolic systems, it may be helpful to describe some of their relevant similarities, differences and interrelations”. [1] It points out the necessity for paying attention to the relation of language and culture. Culture exist in many aspects in communication, geographical speaking, English and China are in different location, which has the decisive influence on their culture, habits and customs, so the ways to reflect their life and living are different. When we translate the material into the target language, one must analyze the factors concerned with translation. Literature is the number one on the list for obtaining the origin of culture differences for learners of English. Many classics in literature loads information about people's life, customs, beliefs, spreading the culture generation by generation. Each nation owns its culture and beliefs, English are mainly Christianity, while Chinese are influenced by Buddhism and Confucianism, so things demonstrate in their culture are definitely different, of course similarities can be found too.

A. Some Culture Differences in Literature

Literature record and transmit civilization for human beings, it also includes different style about the masterpiece which deeply shape people's mind. Idioms, fixed phrases, sayings from literature record elements in culture. Legend, fairy tales, stories, poetry, prose and novel are the major forms. Many culture spread to the world or inherited by literature. The follows are two perspectives from Chinese literature and English ones which deeply influence people's recognition in culture, and from the differences translators can seek different ways in translation of the culture-loaded words and expressions.

1) *Culture-loaded words “Dragon” in epic in English:* Once dragon has the same cultural image in Britain and China, before the Christian it appeared as the totem and symbol of Vikings, Celts and Saxons. Beowulf, the first epic in English literature, it depicts dragon as an evil or devil, it is described that the dragon threatened the safety and killed people, Beowulf, who voluntarily protected his tribes and

*Fund Project, the research is sponsored by the Construction of First Class Discipline (Pedagogy), Ningxia Institution of High Education, “Research on the development of English Teachers English and Chinese Cultural Competence”. Project Number: NXYLXK2017B11

fight with the dragon and eventually the dragon was killed by him and he was deeply wounded and died. So, after the spreading of Christian, it formed the deep-rooted idea that it was regarded as devil and monster in the New Testament. It was described as the ugly beast with wings, spitting out fire. Just as Liu Teqing writes in the book, *Outline of Cultural Translation*, “each nation has its special psychological feature, which is shaped in the special cultural environment”. [2]

Culture is inherited, dragon cannot be a friendly creature from the epic in people’s mind, and the rules in New Testament carved it into people’s belief and thought dragon as devil. So, from the very beginning the ideal was deeply planted into people’s mind.

2) *Culture-loaded words “Dragon” in fairy tales in Chinese*: Dragon is the totem from ancient China and transmitted down in the long river of history, it’s the symbol of Chinese, the symbol of imperial power in tradition because king and emperor are the son of the heaven, and the Chinese consider ourselves as descendants of dragon. Now, the emperor is gone but the culture of dragon is deep-rooted in Chinese.

There are many idioms from “Long” or “dragon” in Chinese, according to the statistics that the idioms with “Long” are over three hundred, such as “sheng long huo hu, long teng hu yue, long fei feng wu etc.”

It is also recorded in many legend and novels, *Journey to the West*, one of the great literature classics, dragon is willing to help people, the horse of Xuan Zang was a little dragon carried him to the west for pilgrimage in the long journey, it’s so important for the success of pilgrimage of Xuan Zang in the Tang Dynasty, everybody who knows the novel can sense the significance of dragon in Chinese culture.

Dragon was another governor who was in charge of the rain for the earth and people and very diligently protected people, dragon was kind and warm-hearted, show mercy to the earth. Because it is quite a different image in Chinese, some experts suggest that it should be translated as the Chinese dragon to distinguish with the dragon in English culture.

3) *Culture-loaded words “Dragon” in fairy tales or novel in English*: Since dragon in English act as devil, killing the devil will be people’s idea to judge a hero, or action a prince took in fairy tales, it tells the story that the devil loved beautiful princess too, and robbed away the princess, so the prince undauntedly killed the dragon to save the beautiful princess, after killing the dragon, the prince happily lived with the princess. It seems a little similar with Chinese hero who loves beauty, or the good win the evil.

Evidence can be found in *Romeo and Juliet* by Shakespeare. One of the stanza describes her feeling when she knew about Romeo killed her cousin, she expressed her feeling, “O serpent heart, hid with a flowering face! Did ever *dragon* keep so fair a cave? Beautiful tyrant! Fiend angelical!” Romeo and Juliet loved each other but their love

was in a dilemma because of the hatred of two families, so, understanding between the two were full of difficulties and conflicts.

Because significance and influence of literature on people’ mind are deep-rooted, example derived from the fairy tale, epic and drama we can understand the dragon’s culture in English.

B. Similarities in Poems of Two Culture

Because of location and condition around the two countries are different, natural phenomena are also varied, but sometimes, the denoted meaning of words is the same, these can be exemplified by the word “wind” in the literature. Everybody knows the famous sentence, if winter comes can spring be far behind? It’s from the poem *Ode to the West Wind*.

It blows east wind in UK in winter, but West wind in China, the wind direction is different, east wind is often connected for spring in China, we can get the instances in the poem *chuncan daosi sifangjing* by Li Shangying, a famous poet in Tang Dynasty who wrote east wind in the poem. The wide known stanza in it is “Its unbearable to meet as well as depart, flowers withered for the weak east wind”.

Although culture is different, the hope and wishes are similar in the two cultures. The famous sentence is “If spring comes can winter be far behind?” *Ode to the West Wind* by Persy Bysshe Shelley in UK. We know that it often blows west wind in UK in winter. Quite opposite to China, we feel chilly in the west wind in winter, so we dislike it. But west wind is hope for British. Because the influence of Atlantic Ocean, so, while blowing the west wind, its hope for warm weather and new life, it means something new will occur, so, we can conclude that the representatives for hope and new life for spring from the “wind” in both cultures.

Based on the differences and similarities in culture mentioned above, it’s a big task for translator to choose the appropriate techniques to appropriately translate the culture-loaded information to make communication easy.

III. TRANSLATION TECHNIQUES OF CULTURE-LOADED EXPRESSION

Culture is quite an abstract phenomenon in translation, and words cannot be wholly transferred equally from the source language to the target language. Sometimes we can translate them word by word and find the similar words in both Chinese and English, but some can’t. Alternatives are quite different in both language, this is a big obstacle for cultural communication. The follows are the three main aspects for transferring the culture-loaded information from Chinese o English in translation.

A. Reflection of Culture

Reflection of culture means the culture information of the source language can be kept in the target language in translation. it is often very obvious and can easily find the alternatives in the target language without ambiguity or

misunderstandings. One can find the equivalence in both language while translating, literal translation and literal translation with explaining are the two basic techniques which are often adopted for readers' acceptance in the translation.

1) *Literal translation*: Literal translation is on the top list for keeping equivalence in translation of culture-loaded expression for readers acceptance. In order to clearly illustrate the techniques, here are some idioms written by Chinese Pin yin for easily pronounced for the readers of target language. The denotative meaning of the culture words are the same in Chinese and English, which have the same effect on expressing and understanding the culture information, for example:

“Jian Feng Shi Duo” *to steer according to the wind*

“Zou ma guan hua” *to ride on horse' back to look at flowers*

“Ru huo zhi bao” *as if one has found a treasure*

Literal translation is also widely adopted in the translation of book names of classics, more examples here about translation of Chinese culture to English.

“san guo yan yi” *Three Kingdoms*

“shui hu” *The Outlaws of the Marsh for*

“xi you ji” *Journey to the West*

“Hong lou meng” *A Dream in Red Mansions*

“Liao zhai zhi yi” *Strange Stories from a Scholar's Studio*

“shi ji” *Records of the Grand Historian*

2) *Literal translation with explaining*: Literal translation with explaining is a technique for translator to make the translation clearer and easier to understand. The technique is applied for some special culture-loaded expressions in transmitting the culture to the foreigners, for instances, Chinese idiom, sayings and proverbs. Besides the literal translation, translation of culture-loaded words or expression with blankets is often used to make a thorough explanation, ordinarily speaking, it is followed after the culture words. The explanation is also appeared as footnote or endnote which composed of signal of quotes and the content explained or added in translation. The following examples are added explanation for idioms, sayings and proverb, the special culture in China.

- Ban men nong fu, the idiom means to show off one's proficiency with the axe before Lu Ban, the master carpenter---display one's slight skill before an expert. The same expression is *never offer to teach fish to swim* in English. [3] Swimming is fish's instinct, it is quite a genius in swimming, which is just like Lu Ban, the master carpenter. As Lu Xun said, translation must have the flavor of exotic. So, when we translate the idiom, explanation with a

hyphen is followed by its connotative meanings can offer readers a clear cultural expression.

The following three examples adopt the techniques of explanation with blanket in translation.

- Lan yu chong shu, an idiom means to pretend to be one of the players in an ensembles---be there just to make up the number (used as incompetent or inferior goods.)
- Three cobblers with their wits combined surpass Zhuge Liang, the mastermind. (Zhuge Liang was the strategist in three kingdom (220AD-280AD) of ancient China.
- Sima Zhao's trick is obvious to every man in the street. (Sima Zhao: a prime minister of Wei(220--265)who nursed a secret ambition to usurp the throne).

Examples (3) and (4) take blanks to explain the characters Zhuge Liang and Sima Zhao, the two politicians who had big influence in history of ancient China.

B. *Transferring of Culture*

There are many culture-loaded expressions which can't replace or find the equivalent, that's because of the untranslatability in translation. Untranslatability is caused by inequivalence in different culture. In order to transfer the untranslatable culture information, translators often transfer the image and flexibly replace the words and seek something that readers can accept, clearly express the meaning according to culture in target languages. In transferring the culture, two techniques are often used, one is image transferring, and the other is replacement transferring.

1) *Image transferring*: Image transferring is applied because differences exist in variety of aspects between Chinese and English. It is decided by the living habit or environment of the two countries, translators have to deal with them well in translation, and changes the images of cultural words or expressions for keeping the exotic flavor. Ordinarily the exotic flavor is obtained flexibly in changing the image according to expressions of English language. It makes the translation easy for readers to understand. According to Hervey & Haggins that all types of cultural transposition are alternatives to a literal translation, and any degree of cultural transposition selects target culture rather than those of SL and the source culture.[4] so, image transferring is just abide by the statements of Hervey and Haggins idea in translation for the culture transferring. For example,

- Gua yang tou, mai gou rou means sell the fake goods in the butchers' shop. It cannot be literally translated as cry up goat head and sell dog's meat. It can be expressed as "selling dog-meat under the label of a sheep's head.

- Shui Zhong lao yue means no hope and hopeless to get something or fulfil one's dream. The idiom can be translated "fish in the air". "yue" can be replaced by fish, because fish lives in the water in reality.
- Hu jia hu wei can be translated as "An ass in lion's skin", "Hu" represents fox, "hu" is the pronunciation of tiger which is common in China. Lion is the symbol of braveness and power in west countries, "ass" is often paid little attention by people in English. So, images are extremely different in both cultures. It could be proper translation with the local flavor when use the expressions in English.

2) *Replacement translation*: Some existed expressions in the target language can be used or borrowed in translation. Because the existed words or expressions are quite familiar to the readers, vividness of the fixed sayings or proverbs can add color to the original, such as advertisement for commodities often imitate the fixed sayings or proverbs, with the little changes or substitutes of the similar words, for example.

- Where there is a way for car there is a Toyota. This one is from the sayings, *where there is a will, there is a way*. The sentence can make audience the desire to the car---Toyota, which is popular for the manufacture's good and high quality.
- Yu jia zhi zui, he huan wu ci. It means somebody finds excuse for its purpose of punishing or taking revenge to somebody. This can be translated as "He who has a mind to beat his dog will easily find his stick." "zui" and "ci" are replaced by "dog" and "stick" for its original meaning of "sin" and "excuse". Actually, the translation offers reader much imagination and eager to receive the culture. In some degree, the replacement can be explained as culture transplantation, a term used by Hervey & Higgins(1992) to denote the highest degree of Cultural Translation, in which details of the source culture contained in ST are replaced by target culture elements with the result that the text is partially rewritten in a target culture setting. [4] So by finding the alternatives or similar culture information, the culture loaded information can be put into the version that is easily understood by readers. Because vividly express by another words, we can sense the colorful culture of English and Chinese.

3) *Loss of culture*: It is not all culture-loaded expressions can find the equivalence or replaced by the related ones in translation. Translator must seek the appropriate ways to transfer the original to the target language for readers understanding, create an easy path for communication between Chinese and English. Free translation is the number one to be applied in order to translate the culture-loaded expressions clearly, the following idioms in Chinese pinyin which can only be translated by its meanings. Actually, loss of culture doesn't mean that the translation lost the culture flavor, it's just loss

the original image in the original culture-loaded expressions, and it cannot find the proper equivalence, so the translation only takes the meaning as the soul of the translation. For example,

- Yang mei tu qi, it means "to feel proud and elated" while somebody's feeling about the superior throwing away oppression, such as the foundation of People's Republic of China, all Chinese overthrow the big burden of oppression and feel very happy and proud that a new nation appeared in the world.
- Dan qiang pi ma, it means "to be single-handed in doing sth, somebody does something by him/herself nobody help him/her." Sometimes means the person is brave, the idiom is derived from the history the end of the Qin dynasty, when Xiang Yu who failed and only himself left, he cannot win Liu Bang, so, he killed himself.
- Shi chen da hai, means somebody cannot receive the message as they expected. "shi" means "stone", "Da hai" is equal to "sea" in English. It can be translated as "remain a dead letter" instead of "the stone sinks in the sea".

IV. CONCLUSION

Translation of culture-loaded expression is a special part for learners to grasp, the basic requirement one must keep in mind is the translation should be understandable and equivalent to the target language. This paper explores the concerned origin of culture differences in English and Chinese, then demonstrate the translation techniques which are commonly used in transferring the culture-loaded words. It is not so easy to use in practice, but one can remember as possible as the ways to transfer idioms, sayings and proverbs or other cultural information, when meet the similar Chinese expressions, one can utilize these methods to translate Chinese culture. Zhang Yousong gives the requirements to the translator in his book, *On Translation of Literature*, "Besides the bilingual abilities, one must have the strong sense of society, knowledgeable and rich experience in life".[5] thus, it is a comprehensive abilities to enhance the competence of translators, exploring the origin of the culture and select the appropriate techniques in translation.

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