

Discussion on the Translation Methods of Culture-loaded Words in *Lu Xun Selected Essays*

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Abstract—Culture-loaded words are glossaries that reflect the distinctive culture and history of a nation and an important feature differing itself from other nations. Culture-loaded words reflect various aspects of a society and can be seen in many literary works. Cultural difference among nations is a huge challenge faced by the translator in translating culture-loaded words, and the translation of them will influence the quality of the whole translated work and the communication of different cultures. *Lu Xun Selected Essays*, translated by Yang Xianyi and Gladys Yang, contains many culture-loaded words reflecting the historical background and social life, and analyzing the translation methods used in this work can be constructive for other translators to deal with similar situations.

Keywords—*Lu Xun Selected Essays*; culture-loaded words; translation methods

I. INTRODUCTION

Lu Xun Selected Essays includes 38 representative essays of Lu Xun, showing his understanding of Chinese culture and the social situation at that time. Lu Xun's essay is the momentum of Chinese modern literature and has great value of research. His essay contains a wide range of culture-loaded words regarding various aspects of Chinese traditional culture. These words are given profound cultural connotations, playing an important role in spreading linguistic and social culture, thus the translation of these words will have a great impact on the target readers' understanding towards the original work. While for the differences between Chinese and western cultures, translators have difficulty in matching these culture-loaded words with their counterpart in English when translating these Chinese culture-loaded words. Therefore, special attention should be paid to the translation of culture-loaded words for spreading Chinese culture and promoting cultural exchanges.

II. BACKGROUND INFORMATION

A. Culture-loaded Words

Culture-loaded words exist in social life and literary works in spoken or written forms. Scholars have defined "culture-loaded words" from different aspects based on their understanding. According to Mona Baker, "the readers in

target language may not understand the source-language words. Such words and expressions may reflect people's religion, social customs, or diet and these words are often called 'culture-loaded words and expressions'" (Mona Baker, 2000, p.21). Liao Qiyi, a Chinese scholar, defines "culture loaded words" as words, phrases and idioms that indicate the specific things in a culture and reflect the specific activities different from other nations that the nation has accumulated in the long historical course (Liao Qiyi, 2002, p.232). Culture-loaded words reflect various aspects of social life, including religious belief, political activities, and social connection and linguistic culture.

B. *Lu Xun Selected Essays*

Lu Xun Selected Essays collects 38 representative essays of Lu Xun, a famous litterateur, ideologist and revolutionist in the modern China, reflecting the social condition of China at that time. Lu Xun injects vitality to Chinese literary circles and inspires Chinese people with his literary works. In view of the influence of Lu Xun himself and the literary values of his works, many of his writings have been translated into other languages and *Lu Xun Selected Essays* is one of them. The book is translated by the well-known couple of translator — Yang Xianyi and Gladys Yang. Profound knowledge about Chinese culture of Yang Xianyi together with idiomatic English of Gladys Yang makes it possible for them to introduce Chinese culture to western readers in an acceptable and professional way. Yang Xianyi and Gladys Yang have worked together to translate literary works both at home and abroad and have promoted cultural communication among nations. Though they haven't put forward any translation theory, their excellent and popular translated works have a say in the mention of translation methods, and analyzing the translation methods they use in these works can be instructive to deal with similar situations.

III. CASE STUDY

Culture-loaded words in *Lu Xun Selected Essays* are divided into three types in this paper, namely, religious culture, political culture and social culture. Specific examples of each type are provided and translation methods are given accordingly in the paper.

A. Religious Culture Type

China is a nation where freedom of religious belief is guaranteed and where no universal or uniform religious belief exists among its citizens. China is not only the home of Taoism but also the place where Buddhism enjoys a further development. Though no specific religion is believed by Chinese people, religion-related words are common in both literary works and social life. This kind of words can also be seen in *Lu Xun Selected Essays*, and "Table I" lists several words and analyzes the corresponding translation methods.

TABLE I. RELIGIOUS CULTURE TYPE

Religious culture type		
Source language	Target language	Translation methods
活无常	Life-is-Transient	literal translation
死有分	Death-is-Predestined	literal translation
城隍庙	the Tutelary God's Temple	substitution
道士	Taoists	transliteration
升西	immortality	free translation

“活无常”和“死有分”，the names of two devils in Chinese folk beliefs, come from the hell and will lead away the spirit of dead people. The two devils “活无常”和“死有分” are unfamiliar to western readers, so the translators utilize literal translation to translate their literal meaning and capitalize content words to indicate name. “城隍庙” is a Taoist temple worshipping “城隍” (also known as “守护神” in Chinese), whose duty is believed to safeguard the city in folklore and Taoism. No equivalent can be found in western religion, so the translators substitute the duty for the name in translating the words and make the substitution of “God” for “神”. “升西” is a Buddhist word and its literal meaning is “ascend to the west”. “西”, short for “西天”, is a pure land where Buddha exists according to the Buddhist Scriptures. It's also believed to be the place where the spirit goes after people die, so here comes its another connotation — death. “西” isn't attached with special meanings except its literal one in other countries, thus free translation is employed by the translators to convey its implication. “道士” refers to the clergy of Taoism, a religion that is unique to China. Since China is the cradle of Taoism, no equivalent can be found around the world, and the translators use transliteration to deal with such situation, achieving the vocal similarity and introducing Chinese culture at the same time.

B. Political Culture Type

As a kind of social ideology, political culture is formed in the course of people's participation in the political life and it is also closely related to political system, whose features can be reflected by the former. Political culture of a nation consists of its past and present and includes the economic and political activities during the historical course. The components of political culture not only endow the nation with distinctive characteristics that distinguish it from other countries, but also generate some politics-related words that have a wide use in public life. This kind of words can also be

seen in *Lu Xun Selected Essays*, and "Table II" lists several words and analyzes the corresponding translation methods.

TABLE II. POLITICAL CULTURE TYPE

Political culture type		
Source language	Target language	Translation methods
都督	general	substitution
五四运动	the May the Fourth Movement	literal translation
“拳匪”事件	the Boxer Rebellion	literal translation
民元革命	the 1911 Revolution	literal translation
清流,东林	scholars	free translation

“都督” is a title of the municipal or provincial military leader in China from Wei and Jin dynasties to the Republic of China. Due to the differences in official position among countries, the translators use “general” as the counterpart despite its wider range of position, which is obviously an example of substitution, one of frequently-used translation methods. “五四运动” was a patriotic movement launched by young Chinese students on May 4, 1919 in Beijing, China. It is a particular movement for China, and here literal translation is utilized to convey its literal meaning, the same method being used to translate other campaigns such as ““拳匪”事件” (the Boxer Rebellion) and “民元革命” (the 1911 Revolution). “清流”和“东林” refer to the same bureaucratic political group in the late Ming dynasty with its main members composed of the scholar-officials in the south of the Yangtze River. For such culture-loaded words with no counterpart in other countries, the translators employ free translation to convey the extended meaning rather than the literal meaning for an easy understanding.

C. Social Culture Type

Social culture consists of various cultural phenomena and cultural activities which have broad influence on social groups. Though social culture varies among different societies, it always complies with its own social form and evolves along with the development of society. It reflects certain social and economic forms, while on the other hand it also reflects the interests and needs of different classes or social groups. Social culture-loaded words mainly exist in social activities and can also be seen in literary works. "Table III" lists several words chosen from *Lu Xun Selected Essays* and analyzes the corresponding translation methods.

TABLE III. SOCIAL CULTURE TYPE

Social culture type		
Source language	Target language	Translation methods
人伦之中	the third of the five relationships	free translation
斗蟋蟀	cricket-fighting	literal translation
二丑	Number-two Clown	literal translation
燧人氏	Sui Jen	transliteration
神农氏	Shen Nung	transliteration

“人伦” means five human relationships in China, namely, relationships between emperor and official, father and son, husband and wife, brothers, and friends. “中” in the phrase

“人伦之中” is a noun of location and means the middle of an object, here it refers to the third one of five relations, namely relationship between husband and wife. There is no counterpart expression of “人伦之中”, so the translator utilizes free translation to convey its deep connotation. “斗蟋蟀” is a kind of entertainment dating back to Tang dynasty and prevalent in Song dynasty as well as a folk activity that still exists in China even today. Two male crickets fight with each other, and the first one to chirp is the winner after parting from each other for more than one inch. This public entertainment is unique to China and is similar to the bullfighting in Spanish. Literal translation is used here to convey its literal meaning, which is easy to understand for the target readers and fires their imagination for similar experience about bullfighting. “燧人氏”, the god of fire in Chinese mythology, produces fire from wood by friction, from which China’s written history originates and is the first tracked ancestor of Chinese people. “神农氏”, also known as Yan Emperor, together with Huang Emperor are regarded as the ancestors of Chinese people, and that’s why Chinese people call themselves the descendants of the Yan and Huang Emperors. They are two figures peculiar to China and have a high place in Chinese history, and no counterpart can be found in other countries, so the translators utilize transliteration to deal with such situation and reserve its cultural connotation to the utmost.

IV. CONCLUSION

Each culture-loaded word reflects the cultural accumulation and development of a nation, which may or may not find its counterpart in other culture, and substitution can be used when such equivalent is found in the target language; other translation methods including transliteration, free translation as well as literal translation are advisable in case of no counterpart is found in another culture. Transliteration is the best way the translator can utilize when translating the name of certain figures with distinctive or irreplaceable importance in a nation. Literal translation is frequently employed when target readers have no difficulty in understanding the cultural words even with their literal meaning conveyed. While the true connotation of culture-loaded words can’t be expressed through its literal meaning, the translator had better utilize free translation to convey its implied meaning so as to achieve an easy understanding for target readers and to promote cultural communication. Translation methods vary even in translating the same type of culture-loaded words, which means the translator needs to equip profound knowledge about the culture of both source and target languages and adopt different methods flexibly to translate culture-loaded words accordingly. The translation of culture-loaded words in *Lu Xun Selected Essays* is easily understood and achieves cultural communication among different cultures on the other hand, so inspiration can be drawn from analyzing the translation methods used by Yang Xianyi and Gladys Yang in translating these words to deal with other similar situations.

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