

On the Essence of Translation from Cultural Perspectives

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Abstract

It is acknowledged that our languages are influenced by cultures. Also, culture is the mirror of society and a symbol of language at that time. Different countries have different culture, which can influence and change our way of thinking, and lead the diversity of world. The different nationality has different culture, history, manners, customs and so on, but various nationalities' culture and the social custom all display in this nationality's language. Translation is the transition of languages and the culture between two different cultures in order to communication smoothly. Cultural distinction gives rise to cultural clash and bring a great challenge in translation so that the role of culture in translation is essential and significant. The translator, as a matchmaker, must obey the rule of cultural differences to finish the translation from source language to target language by reading purpose, literary genre, the readers. In this circumstances, Functional equivalence prove the possibly to make compensation to cultural distinction and act as a generally established translation principle in translation. In the article that follows, I will discuss why the culture plays an important role in translation, how we should deal with these translation problems in different way of thinking and emphasize their own unique language features to avoid unnecessary repetition and achieve the beauty of language. Of course, some images may not found out in another language so that we should find one equivalent images by loanwords as possible as we can to fill the lexical gap.

Keywords

translation, culture, cultural distinction, functional equivalence.

1. Introduction

Translation is both the changes between languages and the communication between cultures. According to the theory of Sapir-Whorf, language and culture are interrelated. Language is determined by culture, and culture is a reflection of language. As a result, we usually regard language as a social sign. Speaking of translation, it naturally is in connection with the transformation of two kinds of languages. That is to say, the transition of cultural concept by virtue of cultural clash formed by different cultural origin comes into existence. Historically, there appears some world-renowned translators in large numbers in the West and East, such as the faithfulness, expressiveness, elegance by Yan Fu, the Nida' dynamic equivalence, the picturesque scene by Qian Zhongshu. They all give us a way to translate different texts from the aspect of discourse analysis in order to make the language clear, fluent and understandable, but disregard the cultural discrepancy existing in different languages. The different way of thinking, mode of thought, expression and diction lead to the contradiction and obscurity in translation. On the grounds of these theories, I put forward the cultural equivalent theory of translation to make the articles more nature and suitable. Accordingly, I will analyze the cultural differences in different way of thinking from three aspects and pay attention to language appropriate to the target language readers. Only in this way, we can have a better understanding of the language distinction and solve the problems of David's deer to make language and diction authentic as well as purity the language environment.

2. The Denifition of Culture

Culture, as an integrated compound of translation, have different meanings in western and eastern culture. The item "culture" in Ci Hai has three senses of dictionary entry. 1. In broad sense, it refers to the whole total of material and mental wealth in the source of practices in human society. In narrow sense, it refers to the social ideology. 2. In general, it refers to common knowledge.3.the traditional cultural concept and custom in feudal society. In Merit Encyclopedia, culture is defined as the pattern of behavior acquired by man through social learning, the culture of a group of people is its entire way of life. Culture includes economic, technological, and scientific methods of dealing with the physical environment; rules for regulating political and social life and also language, moral values, and aesthetic and religious beliefs and practices. So, it is clear that culture is related to every social factor as a whole. One American translator thinks, culture can be concisely defined as "the totality of beliefs and practices of a society" (Language, Culture and Translating, p.105).

2.1. The Relationship and Distinction of Culture and Language

Each culture has its own peculiarities and throws special influence on the language system. For example, He has no Mercury in him. You cannot make a Mercury of every log. In these two sentences, you cannot count on readers to look for encyclopedia to make it sense or else the translators will have made a mistake, and add degree of difficulty to the TL readers because English reader have better understanding than the TL readers. If so, you will run counter to the communicative goal. Thinking about again and again, if you translate one passage that is very different for most readers except savvy, it will have a loss of the value of translation. In addition, referring to the same common domestic animal, English chooses the word "dog", while Chinese has its own character; Chinese has the phrase "Zou Gou" while English has the expression "running dog", but the meanings attributed to the two expressions are completely different according to Chinese culture and Western culture respectively. To Westerners, "running dog" has a positive meaning since the word "dog", in most cases, is associated with an image of an animal pet-the favorite friend, thus they have the phrases "lucky dog", "top dog", "old dog", "gay dog", and it is usually used to describe everyday life and behavior, as in "Love me, love my dog", "Every dog has its day". But in Chinese "Zou Gou" refers to a lackey, an obsequious person. Since Chinese associates derogatory meaning to the character "Gou" depending on the cultural difference

We can obviously see that the meaning attributed to language is cultural-specific. A great deal of cross-cultural misunderstanding occurs when the "meanings" of words in two languages are assumed to be the same, but actually reflect different cultural patterns. Some are humorous as when a Turkish visitor to the U.S. refused to eat a hot dog because it was against his beliefs to eat dog meat. Some are much more serious as when a French couple on a trip to China took their pet poodle into a restaurant and requested some dog food. The dog was cooked and returned to their table on a platter!

We can summarize the relationship between culture and language as the following: language is a key component of culture. It is the primary medium for transmitting much of culture. Without language, culture would not be possible. Children learning their native language are learning their own culture; learning a second language also involves learning a second culture to varying degrees. On the other hand, language is influenced and shaped by culture. It reflects culture. Cultural differences are the most serious areas causing misunderstanding, unpleasantness and even conflict in cross-cultural communication.

2.2. Cultural Difference in West and East

The fundamental difference between western and eastern culture is the origin. The major source of western culture has three parts: Hellenism, Judaism, modern industrialism. However,

the four cardinal virtues (humanity, justice, propriety and wisdom) are the major content in Confucianism. Chinese put morals above all values, and that is opposed to the ideas of western people. The way of thinking in two different cultures lies in the thinking including analytical thinking and synthetical thinking, abstract thinking and concrete thinking, reverse thinking and consequent thinking. In essence, any nation have not just one single thinking pattern. However, owing to different history, metropolitical, literature, survival mode, religions, customs, different nations tend to have different some mode of thinking, and other aspects are not so obvious in 1 century at least. As a whole, Chinese people and western people have distinct thinking habit.

2.3. Analytical Thinking and Synthetical Thinking

Eastern people, especially Chinese people have synthetical thinking rooted in traditional Chinese philosophical thought which thinks cosmic is the whole consisting of heaven, earth, human being and the ideal state is the theory that man is an integral part of nature. Chinese people have been accustomed to seek unity of opposites in the heaven and people, Yin and Yang, spirit and matter in order to the harmony and stability of social relations. The analytical mode of thinking of western people is closely related to western philosophy. Western philosophy thinks, cosmic is always the cognition object of human. They solve the mystery of cosmic, and having knowledge of the law of nature is the fundamental task of human being. In the course of recognizing nature, cognitive level and analytical ability have strengthened. Therefore, in the endless exploration of human, nature science is gradually divided to many independent subjects like maths, physics, chemistry, astronomy and medicine. With the deep exploration of objective world, many subjects are further divided into all kinds of sub-discipline. All in all, analytical way of thinking is obviously embodied in western culture. In this way, it plays a significant role in the establishment and development of modern science. However, this way of thinking has its view of the important overshadowed by the trivial.

2.4. Abstract Thinking and Concrete Thinking

For ages China lay stress on philosophical ideology, in particular the inheritance of Taoist culture and Taoism so that Chinese people is more pragmatic and hope to find out answers to problem as nature and its laws and in the end form eternal Chinese culture in the long river of history. However, this thinking pattern has its weakness like the loss of imagination. Although we know people use languages to refer to the objective world, different nations have different ways in perceiving their surroundings and in interpreting what they see and feel. Each language reflects its unique culture and its way of saying things and expressing feelings. That is why there are different perspectives behind different languages including syntax, morphology, word formation and structure.

Zhang Shebang pointed out in his book *Approach to Translation between English and Chinese*, behind the way of expressing there exists the logic of thinking, or rather cultural philosophy deep rooted in languages and the perspectives from the world. Traditionally European philosopher strictly distinguished the subjective from the objective. With an open way of thinking, western people stress the effect and influence of the objective world on one's mind. However, traditional Chinese philosopher does not make such a distinction. The Chinese take human beings as the center in their thinking and seek harmony between people and nature.

2.5. Reverse Thinking and Consequence Thinking

Chinese people lay stress on consequent thinking while Western people especially American and British have a tendency to reverse thinking. For example,

- ① Past experience, if not forgotten, is a guide for the future.
- ② Lessons learned from the past can serve as a guide one in the future.

Looking back, I do not see the ancients.

Looking ahead, I cannot see the wise ones to come.

Brooding on the endless universe, alone, in my sorrow, tears stream down.

The above cited two examples are not translated word for word. “Qian” and “Hou” are not in accordance with English version in turn. The translators make full consideration about thinking and cultural difference between Chinese and Western people and the context of source language and are succeed in actualization of transformation from consequent thinking to reverse thinking. Such mode of thought can be seen obviously in these phrases, such as This treasury of silt, A scattering of houses, The European’s today and the glare of the sun. All this reflect the different way of thinking, so we should change our angle of thinking from consequence thinking to reverse thinking when we translate the articles in EC translation.

3. Lexical Gap

There are many different kinds of languages, which all have their own system for phonetics, grammar and morphology as well as its unique concepts and ideas. Its features will lead to the non-correspondence in expression and lexical gap in interlingua communication. The lexical gap bears relationship to natural environment, geographic location, way of life, and scientific and technological development. If we translate the technological documents of English, French and German into native Indian language, naturally a large number of lexical gaps come into being. In October, 4th, 1957, when Russia launched the first man-made earth satellite, the word “sputnik” led to lexical gap. In July, 21st, 1969, American astronaut Armstrong landed on the moon, after which human went into a new era of moon exploration. And some new words such as moon craft, moon bounce, lunar dust, lunar module, lunar mover and lunar soil cannot find the same words in other languages. For example, in the Amazon area, snow is not part of the environment;

Therefore, people in that region do not have a word for snow. It simply does not exist. In areas where it snows occasionally, people have a word for snow, but it may be just one word without any differentiations. Most Americans, for example, use terms such as snow, powder snow, sleet, slush, blizzard and ice. That’s the extent of most people’s snow vocabulary. In addition, with the development of social advance and scientific and technological development, there appears a lot of new words, leading to lexical gap, at least in a short time, so the “borrowing” and “lending” became the major way to fill its blanks, such as, nylon, laser, penicillin, computer, Trojan horse and In English, tea, kowtow, Kongfu, great leap, paper tiger.

American linguist Spair said: “the existence of language cannot separate from culture and its belief, and customs which are inherited from culture”. With a long history of feudal society, China formed unique and rigorous patriarchal relationship. For example, in Chinese we have many kinship terms, some of which seem to have no equivalence in English. Compared with Chinese, English has fewer kinship terms. For instance, in English, the words uncle or aunt has a far wider range of meaning than its Chinese counterparts respectively. Uncle is used to indicate all of the father’s and mother’s brothers. It would refer to what we call Shushu, Bofu, Jiujiu, Yifu, etc in Chinese. In the same way, aunt is used to refer to all of father’s and mother’s sisters. The difference is not just linguistic; it is fundamentally cultural. Little significance is attached by English-speaking people to make those dissections. In addition, there is no quantifier, reduplicative words, Chinese four-character idiom in English.

4. Conclusion

Language is a major component and supporter of culture as well as a primary tool for transferring message, which is inextricably bound with culture. Learning a second language also involves learning a second culture to varying degrees. On the other hand, language is

influenced and shaped by culture. It reflects culture. Cultural differences are the most serious areas causing misunderstanding, unpleasantness and even conflict in cross-cultural communication. So both foreign language learners and teachers should pay more attention to cultural communication information.

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