



English Translation of Culture in Folk Terms

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Abstract

The English translation of culture in folk terms plays an important role in translating and introducing China's excellent traditional culture and promoting Chinese flourishing culture from the long history to go modern world. The standardization of folk culture terms is not only about the unified expressions of the glossary, but also about the transmission of cultural connotation behind them. This article focuses on the perspective of cultural interpretation, analyzing the translation norms of folk culture terms in Shaanxi Province, exploring the translation skills of folk culture terms, and trying to promote the translation of China's excellent folk culture.

Subject Areas

Culture

Keywords

Terminology Translation, Folk Culture, Translation Skill

1. Introduction

Terminology is a language symbol that combines form and meaning. The meaning of a term must be based on a clearly defined scientific concept, with a single rational meaning and a perceptual color [1]. It is a basic element for describing and communicating scientific concepts, definitions, and laws. Accordingly, a term should be accurate (clearly define the concept of the subject), unambiguous (a term has a referential relationship with only one specific object), systematic (the composition and combination of terms must conform to the established norms of the terminology in the corresponding field), concise (concise word formation to ensure the readability and acceptance of the terminology), rationale (the form of the terminology should remind people of the corresponding representation and concept), stable (once the name of the terminology is established, it cannot be

easily changed), and productive (the terminology used to express the basic concepts in a certain discipline must have a strong word formation ability) [2]. Terminology provides a basis and path for research in professional fields, and its characteristics are what distinguish it from ordinary vocabulary in daily communication.

2. Translation of Terms

The translation of terms should be based on accuracy and readability, but it should not exceed the constraints of its own univocity and systematicity, and should not be used without restriction in different disciplines or industries [3]. However, the interdisciplinary borrowing of terms, the differences in word usage between regions, and the replacement of old and new terms have caused the terms to present a confusing dilemma. In the ever-changing modern society, words expressing emerging phenomena emerge in an endless stream, and the borrowing of terms is also common. For example, “involution” as a sociological term originated from a study of the dilemma of stagnant agricultural economic development and the inability to evolve to high-quality development. Now it has penetrated into various fields such as education, science and technology, and its connotation has extended to the concept of repetitive competition, gradually becoming generalized, and also eliminating its accuracy and univocity. “Radiation” as a scientific and technological term has gradually evolved into a general meaning with an expanded scope, and can be used as a verb to refer to the driving effect of core cities on surrounding towns. In the process of globalization, international trade and cultural exchange, foreign words have also entered the terminology system of local languages. For example, radar is derived from the transliteration of “radar”, and the Internet exists due to the spread of “Internet”.

In addition, synonymous terms (the same professional concept has different expressions) and polysemous terms (the same word with multiple meanings) also bring more challenges to term translation. For example, “El Nino phenomenon” is also known as “Holy Child phenomenon”. This nickname was created several centuries ago because this warming periods in the South American Pacific Ocean usually occurred around Christmas, peruvian fishermen associated this climate phenomenon with Jesus. The former is derived from the Spanish El Niño and belongs to a minority language, while the latter is more catchy and has a wider range of use.

In the medical field, the terms “infectious disease,” “communicable disease,” and “contagious disease” are often used interchangeably to describe diseases that can be transmitted from one person to another. However, these terms have nuances that are important in specific contexts. “Infectious disease” refers broadly to diseases caused by pathogens that can be transmitted through various vectors, not only directly between individuals. “Communicable disease” is a subset of infectious diseases that are transmitted specifically from person to person or through contact with contaminated surfaces. “Contagious disease” usually refers to infec-

tious diseases that are very easily transmitted directly between individuals. Misunderstanding or misusing these terms can lead to significant errors in medical communication and public health information [4].

When it comes to translating terms derived from folk culture, ignoring the cultural context will lead to a significant misinterpretation. Take “抬楼子” in Shaanbei Dialect for example, which means “hoisting up a building” in literal, always misguide the outlander because of their lack of local culture. In fact, “抬楼子” refers to a specific rite among peasants in the dry season by lifting a sedan made of willow sticks to invite the god who can bring raindrops for them. Therefore, “the ceremony of praying for rain” is regarded as an appropriate translation considering the unique culture background, otherwise the image of local people will be misunderstood as barbarian who have a tendency to destroy architecture.

It can be seen from this that translators not only need to have a wealth of terminological knowledge reserves, subject matter expertise and relevant professional knowledge, but also need to master a variety of search channels and be good at using information technology to process terminological data; pay attention to subtle differences between terms, and solve potential misinterpretation caused by terminological ambiguity; and improve communication to smoothly disseminate terminological knowledge.

3. English Translation of Folk Culture Terms

As a cross-cultural communication activity, translation not only needs to convey the information contained in different languages, but also needs to promote the acceptance of the social culture behind different languages. In the context of promoting Chinese culture to go global, the translation of folk culture is regarded as an important part of the dissemination of China’s excellent traditional culture. The translation of folk culture has a value that cannot be ignored [5]. Folk culture is closely connected with the lives of local people, such as the seasons, weddings and funerals, and religious sacrifices. The corresponding folk characteristic words such as “合龙口”, “拜堂成亲”, “抬龙王祈雨” and so on have entered the field of cultural communication. The translation of folk culture can make the local characteristics more distinct, and make the local customs and folk customs easier to understand and accept, leaving a deeper impression on the target readers, thereby promoting the spread of China’s excellent traditional culture.

During this translation process, due to the differences in cultural soil, the translation of folk culture terms brings great challenges to translators. For a large number of culturally loaded words in folk activities, translators need to grasp two characteristics: lexical gap and semantic lacuna. The former refers to words that lack equivalent meanings in English, such as “妈祖” and “扭秧歌”, while the latter refers to the same words with different cultural meanings. For example, the “cake” in “步步糕升” is homophonic to “Gao”, which means to wish others a bright future in China, and “红包”, also known as lucky money, has a mythological story behind it to drive away evil spirits. Translators need to combine the field of the

text and pay attention to the context to give the most appropriate translation. When it comes to more Chinese-specific folk music, characteristic architecture and other fields, there are a lot of gaps in foreign translation. This paper aims to discuss the skills of translating Chinese folk culture into English from the perspective of terminology and concept naming.

Skopos theory tends to be a general theoretical framework for translators to deal with predicaments originating from semantic lacunas. For example, when translators have to deliver the connotation of “岑彭马武”, a scarce idiom even in standard Mandarin but familiar among local residents in Shaanxi province, they choose to retain the speakers’ purpose of mocking someone who is bluffing while quitting the history behind this phrase.

4. The Translation Practice of Folk Culture Terms

In the translation of folk culture, the translator must be sensitive to cultural differences and adopt different translation methods in a targeted manner. First, the source of the name must be clear to avoid mistranslation; second, the principle of focusing on the readers of the translation and spreading Chinese culture must be followed [Zhu Yiping, Ma Caimei, English Translation of Folk Religious Culture and Tourism Materials from a Cross-Cultural Perspective, [J] Journal of Northwest University, 2007(06)]. This article introduces the translation skills of folk culture terms from two perspectives: transliteration + annotation and interpretation.

4.1. Transliteration Plus Annotation

Example 1: Source Text: 阳歌首先是一种宗教仪式，这不但从阳歌队的崇拜图腾“日照”可印证，也可从陕北闹阳歌的仪式程序看到端倪。正月初一，阳歌队出场第一仪式是谒庙，叫“谒庙阳歌”，“猪呀羊呀送到哪里去？”首先送到庙上去。接下来阳歌队逐户拜年，叫“排门子阳歌”；阳歌互相走访交流双方唱对台戏，是阳歌队的才艺大比拼，叫“彩门阳歌” [6]。

Translation: Primarily, the Yangge is a religion ritual. Two reasons explain this opinion: the totem “sunlight” worshiped by chorus, as well as the procedures of celebrating Yangge in northwestern China. First of all, Perform “**Yemiao Yangge**” (**Pay respect to god’s temple by chanting**) at the New Year’s Day of the Chinese lunar calendar. The chorus entered with singing lyrics like “Where should we bring these pigs and sheep to?” “The god’s temple!” Secondly, the “**Paimenzi Yangge**” (**chanting Yangge in the front door**) is about to display be played, the chorus give new year’s greetings from door to door. Thirdly, they pay a visit to each other and put on a rival show. This talent competition is called “**Caimen Yangge**” (**the competition of Yangge teams**).

Analysis: Transliteration is beneficial to maintaining the subjectivity of Chinese culture and making the world aware of China’s characteristics, while interpretation can preserve cultural information and ensure that the target language readers accept and understand the original meaning. In this paragraph, Yangge,

as a religious ritual with northern Shaanxi characteristics, retains the pronunciation of “Yangge” in translation, and then annotates it in brackets as “chanting”. The different types and processes of Yangge in festivals are also introduced, “Pay respect to god’s temple” is concretized as “Pay respect to god’s temple”, “Chanting in front door” is explained, and “Colorful door” is transformed into a talent competition, so that readers can understand the specific form and meaning of the ceremony, and it also promotes the external dissemination of Yangge, a folk culture.

4.2. Interpretation

Example 2: Source Text: 长城沿线**建安 36 堡**，是辅以长城的军事建置，曾经威风八面，雄踞边塞，经过几百年风雨侵蚀，时过境迁，今不是毁弃，就是变百姓居所。墩因为系**烽火台**，往往作为地标命名。到了近代，由于文物保护意识淡薄，部分百姓掘长城入住，称为“**边墙窑**”，抗日战争困难时期，八路军三五九旅在定边生产食盐，为陕甘宁边区的财政支柱之一，产盐军人只得向百姓学习，掘长城而居[6]。

Translation: The **36 Jian’an fortresses** along the Great Wall, special assisting military construction of the Great Wall, either were destroyed or became habitations of local people due to erosion of weather with changes for hundreds of years, leaving their domineering prestige in frontier behind. Dun, or stone mound, always be named as a landmark thanks to its function of **beacon tower**. In contemporary times, some people dig the Wall for settlement, which is called as **the cave dwelling aside the Great Wall** due to their lacking awareness of cultural relics protection. During the rough time in the War of Resistance Against Japanese Aggression, the brigade Sanwujiu of the Eight Route Army developed salt industry in Dingbian County, underpinning the financial pillar among the Shaanxi-Gansu-Ningxia Region. Thus, this soldiers who worked for the salt production had to imitate the indigenous people for accommodation.

Analysis: “建安 36 堡”，located in Daheta Township, Yuyang District, was a fort of the Great Wall in the Ming Dynasty to defend against foreign enemies, so the character “堡” cannot be translated literally as a “castle”. It should be translated as “fortress” here. According to the Oxford English-Chinese Dictionary, Fortress means “a building or a place that has been made stronger and protected against attack”, which fits the purpose of the expression here; “烽火台” is a high platform in ancient China that used fireworks to transmit military information. The translation here chooses “beacon tower” to emphasize its function of transmitting signals. Selecting the word “tower” instead of literal translation as table or stage is to give the target language readers an intuitive visual experience; “边墙窑” exhibits a unique human settlement culture in southern Shaanxi province which is rooted in its specific geographical condition, so there is no equivalent term in English. The translation here highlights the “cave dwelling” house system by pointing out the location of “aside the Great Wall”.

5. Conclusion

Due to differences in historical and cultural backgrounds, the translation of folk

culture faces more challenges than ordinary text translation. Therefore, translators should always maintain the awareness of cross-cultural communication, pay attention to the accuracy and standardization of the translation of folk cultural terms, pay attention to the audience's acceptance psychology, and convey the connotation behind the excellent folk culture in a concise form and clear text, so as to promote the "going out" of China's excellent folk culture.

Conflicts of Interest

The authors declare no conflicts of interest.

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