A Study of Culture-loaded Words in Chinese-English Translation

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Abstract: In recent years, translation studies have shifted from linguistic translation to cultural inclusion. The biggest difficulty in translation is not the language itself, but the cultural implications that language carries. In every language, there are such vocabularies loaded with certain cultural connotations. The so-called culture-loaded words, also known as vocabulary vacancies, refer to phrases and idioms that mark something peculiar to a culture, that is, the cultural information carried by the original vocabulary has no corresponding language in the target language. This kind of vocabulary plays an important role in translation. However, due to the great differences between Chinese and Western traditional cultures, it is difficult for translators to find full equivalence in translating culturally loaded words.

1. Introduction

At present, to promote Chinese culture through translating Chinese literature has become one of the ways of "Chinese culture going out" [1]. Chinese culture-loaded words are also an important manifestation of Chinese traditional culture, but due to the influence of living environment and other factors, all ethnic groups have their unique cultural characteristics in the historical process [2]. The profound national cultural connotations of culture-loaded words make them unique. However, the translation of culture-loaded words has always been a research hot spot in translation studies because of the incomplete docking between eastern and Western cultures [3]. Due to the existence of geographical environment, historical development, social structure and many other factors, there are essential differences between Chinese culture and British traditional culture [4]. Chinese traditional culture is a social culture based on individual agriculture, with patriarchal clan family as its core and Confucian ethics as its standard; while, British traditional culture is a social culture based on maritime trade, with equality of personality as its core and Christian ethics as its standard, thus producing different cultural focus and their respective culture-loaded vocabulary [5].

Because each nation has its own cultural focus, vocabulary always develops in detail and complexity around the focus of characteristic culture [6]. And cultural differences lead to semantic conflicts and vacancies between words of language, which naturally makes translation more difficult [7]. The best goal of cross-cultural translation is to make the communicative information that the target language reader can obtain from the target text equal to the communicative information that the source language reader can obtain from the source text [8]. When there is a huge cultural gap between the source language and the target language, it is very difficult for the translation to correspond to the original text, and the translation can only approach the source language to the maximum extent [9].

2. The Guidance of Newmark's Communicative Translation Theory to the Translation of Culture-Loaded Words

Due to the great differences between eastern and Western cultures, it is difficult to find a complete equivalence of some culturally loaded words in the translation of Chinese traditional literary works into English [10]. Newmark once defined translation as "translation fills the gap between languages". Semantic translation and communicative translation, which he proposed, are regarded as a contribution to translation theory and play a guiding role in translating culturally loaded words [11]. Newmark once used a very concise chart (Fig.1) to illustrate the origin of the

evolution of "semantic translation" and "communicative translation" and the differences between them.
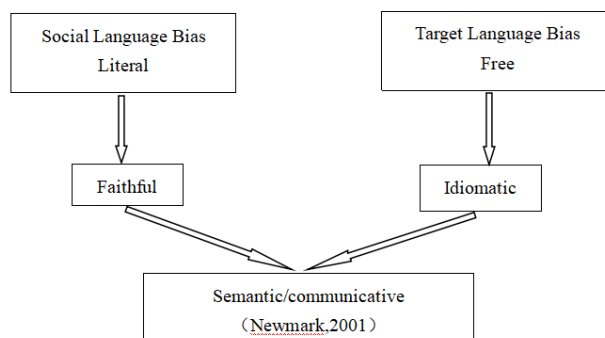

Fig.1. The origin of the evolution of "semantic translation" and "communicative translation" and the differences between them

As can be seen from the figure above, "semantic translation" pays attention to the faithfulness of the original work, which is literal in its treatment, while "communicative translation" emphasizes that the translation should conform to the linguistic habits of the target language and that the processing method should be free-translation [12]. However, they can't be completely separated. In the process of translating a work, semantic translation and communicative translation often complement each other. It is difficult to find a translation that adopts either "semantic translation" or "communicative translation" completely, usually a combination of the two strategies. Over the past decades, there has been a heated debate between literal translation and free translation in the translation circles of our country. It is not true that neither translation strategy is absolute, nor is it relative. During translating, flexible methods should be adopted to deal with specific situations.

3. Classification of Cultural Words

The study of language and culture contains abundant contents. It involves a series of complex and mutually changing factors, such as the psychological consciousness represented by a language, the formation process of culture, historical customs and traditions, and the characteristics of special zones of regional features. Newmark slightly changed Nida's classification of culture-loaded words and divided them into the following categories: (1) Ecology: This kind of culture-loaded words refer to plants, animals, monsoon, hills and other related words in a specific region; (2) Material culture: the main part of material culture, such as clothing, food, housing and transportation; (3) Social culture: the name of social etiquette and recreation; (4) Social, political, economic and administrative institutions; (5) Gestures.

4. The Treatment of Culture-Loaded Words in Translation

Throughout the existing translation theories and practical explorations, there are two approaches which are almost opposite to the translation of culturally loaded words. The first approach tends to find words belonging to the culture of the source language, advocates respecting the culture of the source language and transferring the culture-loaded words from the source language to the target language intact. This approach considers that language translation should try to maintain the characteristics of the source language so that the target readers can understand or at least expose them to the original culture of the source language. However, this method has higher requirements for readers'cultural accomplishment and is not easy for ordinary target language readers to understand. And the other approach is almost exclusive in translation, focusing only on the transmission of information, emphasizing the readability of the target language, and failing to produce the same pragmatic effect as the original language. Taking "Fuwa" as the most cultural-loaded word with Chinese characteristics, the first way translated it directly into "Fuwa"

while the second way translated it into "Friendlies". The former can't make the target language reader understand the meaning, while the latter loses its original flavor.

5. Translation Strategies of Culture-loaded Words in English Translation

According to Newmark's theory of communicative translation and semantic translation, it is found that there are regular translation approaches: semantic translation, communicative translation, sememe splitting of source words and image transformation are combined to achieve the best goal of cross-cultural translation.

5.1. Communicative translation

Communicative translation refers to the effect of the translated text on the target readers as much as possible as the effect of the original on the target readers. The method of communicative translation is reader-centered, focusing on reproducing the essence of the original text, taking the reader's acceptance as the criterion, and attaching importance to the social impact and value of the translation. In order to enable English readers to understand the target text accurately, the implied meanings of some words in the source text should be converted into non-implied meanings in the target text. Because readers' understanding of the form and content of information depends to a certain extent on their own cultural presuppositions, Chinese readers can understand the whole content of communication information through the superficial form of words because they have the same cultural presuppositions as the author of the original text, while English readers are usually not familiar with Chinese culture and will understand the translated vocabulary according to their own cultural presupposition. Therefore, the associations generated are also different, and may even misunderstand the original text. Therefore, when translating such vocabulary, it is necessary to change its form and express or supplement the information related to the connotation of the source language directly in the translated text.

5.2. Semantic translation

Semantic translation refers to focusing on the lexical and syntactic structure of the original text and pursuing the subtle differences in meaning, so as to make the translation as close as possible to the original text. Some Chinese culture-loaded words contain distinct national cultural features, which have corresponding meanings in specific contexts. Due to the limitation of English grammatical structure, semantic translation can be adopted first, followed by explanation.

5.3. Separation of sememes

Newmark believes that translation also includes the transfer of lexical sememes, namely separation, transfer and synthesis. Separation is a componential analysis of the lexical sememes of the source language. Sememe analysis in linguistics refers to dividing the meanings of several words that need to be contrasted into several components, and then comparing these components to find out the difference in meaning. Sememe analysis in translation refers to subdividing the meanings of a word into several meanings, linking the context and finding the most appropriate meanings. The correct meaning of a word is "the meaning most appropriate to a particular context".

5.4. The Significance of image conversion

Because of the differences between language and culture, many images in Chinese can't find corresponding images in English. If the main cultural information is clearly expressed in the translation, it will lead to infinite expansion and extension of the translated sentences, thus becoming a lengthy interpretation of Chinese vocabulary. Otherwise, it is difficult to maintain the original images in English. For such images, it is important to reduce the image to sense.

6. Conclusion

How to overcome the obstacles and achieve cultural equivalence is still a major issue in

translation. Facts have proved that blindly catering to the target and reader's convenience and forcibly domesticating the values of the target culture from the cultural behavior is not respectful to the reader in a sense, because this translation method conceals the cultural and artistic facts of the original text, and in fact deceives the readers of the translated text. At present, people have begun to reflect on this cultural hegemonism in translation. In addition to the above methods, culture-loaded words can also be translated by domestication and image substitution, but it is not easy to achieve formal, functional and cultural equivalence. Only when translators are familiar with English and Chinese cultures, accurately understand the ideological theme of the original text according to different text types, and flexibly adopt different methods, can they achieve the best goal of cross-cultural translation and reproduce the cultural connotation of the source language. When translating, translators should consider whether the meaning, function, scope, emotion and color of the source language and the target language are equivalent in their respective cultures. When translating the source language, effective means should be taken to achieve communication and understanding between different cultures. When dealing with culturally loaded words, translators must have a keen cultural awareness and make a comprehensive analysis of the grammar, pragmatics and style of the source language vocabulary.

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