

On the Instruction and Translation of Culture-loaded Terms in Wolf Totem

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Abstract. The Chinese version and English version of Wolf Totem have achieved success. Many factors contribute to the success, one of which is the appropriate transmission of peculiar culture. There are many culture-loaded terms in Wolf Totem reflecting peculiar culture of China. This paper attempts to explore and elaborate the translation strategies and instruction strategies for the purpose of transmitting Chinese culture into the world.

Introduction

Language reflects a unique cultural phenomenon of a nation in the process of its formation and development[1]. Words are the building materials of language, through which we can see through the state of a national culture. Culture-loaded terms refer to words, phrases and idioms that mark something peculiar to a culture. Therefore, in the process of foreign translation, translators should be cautious in dealing with such words, and strive to accurately transmit the essence of traditional Chinese culture abroad in order to achieve the goal of spreading Chinese culture. Translators in the choice of translation strategies and translation methods of Chinese culture-loaded words should take into account the principle of equality in cross-cultural communication and expand the influence of Chinese culture in the international arena so as to improve the soft power of our country[2].

Culture-Loaded Words

Culture-loaded terms refer to words, phrases and idioms that mark something peculiar to a culture. These words reflect the unique ways of activities that a particular nation has accumulated over a long historical process, which are different from those of other nations[3]. Chinese culture-loaded terms are the concentrated embodiment of traditional Chinese culture and the core external form of expression of traditional culture.

Translation Strategies of Culture-Loaded Words

There are many culture-loaded words in Wolf Totem. The translator [4]Ge Haowen employs different strategies to present and illustrate connotation of culture-loaded words in order to make the work acceptable and popular among target readers.

Omission.

The quoted text before each story is omitted and the translator intentionally omits the content containing culture-loaded words. Because the quoted texts are all ancient texts and involve many ancient cultures, this will affect the compactness of the whole translation if translated and thus also add more pressure to target readers. From the

perspective of reception theory[5], the translator combines domestication with foreignization with domestication as the main means to achieve fluency and reader acceptance. Many traces of omission emerge in the translation.

Example 1

And he knew how important it was not to show fear. That was the only way to avoid an attack by these grassland killers. (2008: 5)

Example 2

A palpitating fear from his first encounter coursed through his veins. (2008 : 2)

Example 3

He was always happy when his apprentices came back loaded with curiosity and doubts. Bilgee flashed a crafty smile. Chen forgot the cold the moment he spotted the wolves; blood seemed to race through his veins, and the terror he'd experienced the first time he saw the big wolves vanished. (2008: 21)

Some parts are omitted to keep the fluency of narration. Superficially in this way peculiar culture is hidden from foreigners. In fact, it is because of nervous plot arrangements and brief narration that suits the taste of target readers, thus lead to successful transmission of Chinese culture.

Replacement.

Example 4

Humans, dogs, and carts formed a scene on the snow like a Gypsy carnival.(2008:35)

Example 5

The horse team finally made it up to the ridge, where they reacted as if they'd discovered a cornucopia, whooping it up like mad.(2008:37)

Gypsy carnival and cornucopia are equal to the implication of Chinese original, which are familiar to target readers. Thus replacement is employed here.

Amplification.

Example 6

Two years earlier, in late November, he had arrived in the border region pasture as a production team member from Beijing; snow covered the land as far as the eye could see. The Olonbulag is located southwest of the Great Xing'an mountain range, directly north of Beijing; it shares a border with Outer Mongolia. Historically, it was the southern passage between Manchuria and the Mongolian steppes, and, as such, the site of battles between a host of peoples and nomadic tribes, as well as a territory in which the potential struggles for dominance by nomads and farmers was ever present (2008 : 2) .

An additional translation of the Erlun Grassland is essential for Western readers. Not only can the reader understand its geographical location, but also its historical background. The extra part is added by the translator. Here Ge Haowen explains the Erlun grassland but omit the translation of cha dui, thus leaving readers ignorant of peculiar culture of China. If not, Western readers will feel abrupt and confused about the background of grassland, thus affecting the comprehension of the work[7].

Adaptation and Illustration.

Example 7

You are like dog-father of yours. At school you kept to yourself, a member of the leisure class, but out here in the most primitive, backward spot. In the world, you are like a fish in water. You fit right in with the stinking Four Olds!(2008:104)

The “four olds” (old thought, old culture, old customs and old practices) were under attack, targeting, in particular, ideologically backward members of superstitious and conservative rural societies. This illustration on “four olds” is added by the translator.

Yurts had not yet been assigned to the Beijing students, the so-called educated youth, so Chen had been sent to live with Old Man Bilgee and his family, and given duties as a shepherd (2008 : 106).

The underlined parts are illustration of *zhi qing* in Chinese , for *zhiqing* is a new concept for target readers.

Literal Translation.

Example 8

The gazelles, with their keen sight and smell, were so terrified by this strategy-killing the chickens to frighten the monkeys-they broke for the mountain.(2008:28)

The content, namely the meaning is accurately expressed while the form is unchanged. Killing the chickens to frighten the monkeys is equivalent to *sha ji hai hou* in Chinese both in content and form.

Liberal translation.

Example 9

Looking for gazelles in that would be like searching for a needle in a haystack (2008 : 58) .

The content, namely the meaning is accurately expressed while the form is changed. A needle in a haystack is equal to *da hai lao zhen* in Chinese meaning.

Example 10

The Han have a peasant mentality that’s impossible to break down. (2008 : 33)
[8]The translation of target domain, *bu xiu gang* in Chinese has been omitted while the implied meaning is presented.

Instruction of Culture-Loaded Terms

The strategies of teaching culture-loaded terms.

Students are required to locate culture-loaded terms in the original and locate the corresponding translation in the work of Wolf Totem. Classify the strategies employed by the translator and comment on them. Some improvements can be put forward. For instance, there is a mistranslation.

Example 11

“Great, There’s the door. Now we ’ve got them, the mother and her litter.” Yang blurted out with a clap of his hands (2008:139)[8].

Youmen in Chinese being translated into “there is the door” is a mistranslation. *Youmen* implies there is a way out. Students are guided by teachers to discover misinterpretations in the work of Wolf Totem and evaluate good interpretations . In this way can they improve their ability to appreciate translated work and transmit culture as much as possible.

Teaching of Culture-loaded terms.

Spreading Chinese culture abroad is an urgent and significant task, which is related to the promotion of China’s soft power and the improvement of international discourse power. Translation is indispensable for Chinese culture to be known by the world[9]. Translators should keep this mission in mind when translating Chinese culture into foreign languages. Therefore, the translation of Chinese culture-loaded

words should embody Chinese characteristics as much as possible so as to enable foreign readers to truly appreciate the charm of Chinese culture, which is conducive to the gradual establishment and stabilization of Chinese culture on the world stage[10]. The unification of culture-loaded words translation is a long-term process, and we should not rush but spare no effort to achieve it. In addition, college students are the main force of cross-cultural communication and Chinese culture going out in the future. Therefore, in College English translation teaching, we should strengthen the teaching of translation of Chinese cultural content so that college students can master the basic translation strategies of culture-loaded terms and gradually accumulate them. This will also help to enhance their understanding of Chinese culture and their sense of national pride in the future. It lays a good foundation for their spreading Chinese culture in daily work and study.

Conclusion

To sum up, in the translation of culture-loaded terms, foreignization should be adopted as much as possible, because this can maximize the reflection of Chinese cultural characteristics, and ultimately help Chinese culture to go abroad. Of course, foreignization will sacrifice the understandability of the translation to some extent, which can be supplemented by adding annotations to compensate for the loss of understandability. In some cases, domestication can be combined with foreignization to transmit culture and make Chinese culture acceptable to foreigners. These translation strategies are indispensable for students to spread Chinese culture in written translation and oral interpretation, which teachers should take into consideration in teaching culture-loaded terms.

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