Translation of Words with Chinese Characteristics from the Perspective of Eco-translatology

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Abstract: Eco-translatology is an emerging interdisciplinary theory proposed by Professor Hu Gengshen, who applies Darwin's evolution theory "Natural Selection, Survival of the Fittest" to analyze translation activities. It focuses on maximizing translator's subjective initiative to better adapt and select in the eco-environment of translation, thus to produce a highly integrated translated text. Words with Chinese characteristics, a unique language phenomenon in Chinese, are the most common expressions in political publicity including government reports, public speeches delivered by national leaders, other political documents and the like. Translation of such words definitely affects the world's understanding and interpretation towards China. Taking words with Chinese characteristics from Xi Jinping: The Governance of China and Government Work Reports as an example, this paper probes into the translator's transformation in the translation process of selective adaptation and adaptive selection from linguistic, cultural and communicative dimensions, so as to make English translation of words with Chinese characteristics be more accurate and convictive.

1. Introduction

Eco-translatology is a new paradigm of translation proposed by a Chinese scholar Hu Gengshen under the guidance of ecological holism. Professor Hu Gengshen [5] pointed out that "The paradigm of Eco-translatology research is based on the concept of ecological integrity, on oriental ecological wisdom, and on the theory of 'adaptation/selection'. It systematically discusses the translation ecology, text ecology, the ecology of the 'translation community' and their mutual relations and interactions, and devotes to the overview and description of translation ecological integrity and translation ecological theory from an ecological perspective."

Because of its unique characteristics, word with Chinese characteristics has always been the focus of translation research and translation activities. Xi Jinping: The Governance of China and Government Work Reports, full of words with Chinese characteristics, represent a panorama of the development of socialist China in various fields in the current period. Most of these words are synchronic, appearing with the latest development in China, thus there are almost no equivalence in English. In addition, having undergone diachronic reforms, some Chinese words have new connotations, which causes difficulties for translators to ensure the accuracy of their translation, let alone to innovate [9]. Therefore, it is very necessary to review the study on the translation of words with Chinese characteristics in order to promote Chinese participation in the global dialogue.

2. Introduction to Eco-translatology

Eco-translatology is an interdisciplinary study of ecology and translatology, namely a translation study from the perspective of ecology [3]. This theory applies the scientific principles, conceptions and methods of ecology into the translation activities. Its research focuses and theoretical perspectives include: (1) Eco-environment of Translation; (2) Adaptation and Selection; (3) Transformation of "Three Dimensions"[10].

2.1 Eco-environment of Translation

"Eco-environment of Translation" refers to the world, which is composed of the original text, the source language and the target language, that is, the connection and interaction between language, communication, culture, society, as well as the author, the reader, the client, and so on [2]. In recent years, the definition of "Eco-environment of Translation" is more extensive, which refers to the text, the cultural context and the translation community, as well as the aggregation of the spiritual and material environment. It can be said that all aspects can be regarded as the ecological environment of translation.

2.2 Adaptation and Selection

Eco-translatology holds the view that the whole translating process is a cyclical alternation of translator's adaptation and selection. This process includes two parts: first, the translator is selected by Eco-environment for his/her adaptation to the source text; second, the translator, as an indispensable part of Eco-environment now, selects the form and style of the translated texts, within the adaptation to the Eco-environment [7].

According to Hu Gengshen [5], translator should do both adaptation and selection. When adapting, the translator should select, namely selective adaptation. And when selecting, the translator should adapt, i.e adaptive selection.

To summarize, the purpose of adaptation is to survive, which calls for optimized selection: survival of the fittest. The translation criticism criteria also give expression to the corresponding statement from the perspective of "adaptation and selection": the best adaptation is selective adaptation; and the best selection is adaptive selection. Therefore, the best translation is one with the highest degree of the integration of adaptation and selection [4]. And both translator's adaptation and selection are dynamic, for the Eco-environment is complex and the ultimate goal is to achieve balance.

2.3 The Transformation of "Three Dimensions"

Ecological translation concentrates on linguistic dimension, cultural dimension, and communicative dimension under the principle of Multi-dimensional adaptation and adaptive selection.

According to Prof. Hu [5], the adaptive selection and transformation in linguistic level is embodied in the form of language, which can be presented in various aspects and levels, such as vocabulary, figures of speech, and syntax. As we all know, there are differences between English and Chinese. The former emphasizes hypotaxis, while the later stresses the parataxis. Because of these discrepancies, it is necessary for the translator to make appropriate selections and transformations during the translating process.

The adaptive selection and transformation in cultural level requires the translator to do a good job in explaining and spreading the bi-cultural implications. Apparently, translating activity is cross-cultural communication [1]. To successfully communicate with each other, the translator should take cultural elements into consideration. Only when cultural barriers are overcome, can harmony and balance between the source texts and the target texts be achieved.

As for the adaptive selection and transformation in communicative level, it refers to translator's adaptive selection and transformation with his/her concern to realize the communicative intention [4]. Theoretically speaking, this dimension is an upgrade of the above two, for it not only deals with the source text's general intention, but also the communicative intention of the linguistic forms and cultural elements in the original version.

In summary, Eco-translatology concentrates on the three above dimensional adaptive selection and transformation. When applied in translating practices, these three dimensions are chosen by the translator from specific Eco-environment. Although they are of the same importance in this theory, some dimensions are weighed against the others for balance reasons.

3. Introduction to Words with Chinese Characteristics

Compared with some terms or vocabulary in English, word with Chinese characteristics is widely regarded as a unique language phenomenon in Chinese culture. Broadly speaking, words with Chinese characteristics refer to Chinese-related concepts, terms, or jargon, phrases, and culturally-loaded words, which have no equivalence in English [9]. Words with Chinese characteristics can be diachronic or synchronic. They change with the social changes in different fields of China at different times.

Words with Chinese characteristics are the most common expressions in political publicity, including government reports, public speeches delivered by national leaders, other political documents and the like. As the most authoritative political texts, Xi Jinping: The Governance of China and Government Work Reports are full of words with Chinese characteristics being classified as follows:

1) Formal words: Political texts are official documents which require solemnity and authoritativeness. Therefore, formal words are employed to meet this demand. By adopting this kind of words, extensive and unmistakable understanding among all walks of people can be achieved, while elusive and obscure terminology can also be avoided.

2) Four-character expressions: Chinese culture has a preference for four-character expressions to show balance and neatness. Such expressions are particular and exclusive to Chinese culture.

3) Terminology/Jargon: Terminology refers to something specific and professional. As political texts involve many fields like economy, politics, technology and agriculture. So it is inevitable that there will be more than one terminology in those texts.

4) Condensed expressions with numbers: With a glimpse of Xi Jinping: The Governance of China and annual Government Work Reports, we have no trouble to find some condensed expressions with numbers, i.e, abbreviated expressions added by numbers. Usually, these expressions are familiar to Chinese readers and condensed for compactness and efficiency.

5) Coinage: Coinage refers to newly invented words. These words are spread quickly through the Internet and frequently used by Chinese people. They are so popular in daily life that even the officials use them in their speeches and papers. We can easily find some, such as "Yidai Yilu" (the Belt and Road), "Hulianwang+"(Internet Plus) and "Pinzhi Geming" (a revolution in the quality) [6]. When translating such new words, the translator should bear in mind that simplicity and readability is of utmost importance.

4. Analysis of Adaptation and Selection in Translation of Words with Chinese Characteristics

The adaptive selection theory of translation emphasizes multi-dimensional selective adaptation and adaptive selection, that is, balance among different dimensions, namely linguistic dimension, cultural dimension, and communicative dimension. To achieve this, some dimensions should be weighted over the others and some even be sacrificed [10]. All is upon the translator, i.e, the translator's selection.

4.1 Adaptation and Selection in Linguistic Dimension

The first problem that the translator confronts in the process of translation is language. The adaptive selection and transformation of linguistic dimension requires that the translator should adapt to the linguistic ecology of the target language, have an intimate knowledge of the linguistic features of the target language and the language preference of the target language readers.

When it comes to a specific translation, it is the linguistic dimension that first pops into the translator's mind. As a formal typology, political publicity is cautious in word diction. In the beginning of the 21st century, China advocates "Heping Jueqi", which was translated as "peaceful rise of China", causing quite a stir among the world. Some even speculated it as a threat from China, and such censures didn't subside until this translated text was corrected into "peaceful development". From this case, we can see that cautious diction should never be neglected or

underestimated. And correct diction should be valued as a forever pursuit of words with Chinese characteristics.

Example 1:

English version: *Without ideals and convictions, one's **spirit becomes weak**.*[8]

English is a language with strong logic, so the transformation of linguistic dimension not only refers to the conversion in the nominal word level, also includes the implicit part.

As this example, the semantic meaning of "Quegai"is very clear, but the translation "the spirit will be lack of calcium" is very vague, and unintelligible. "Quegai"refers to the weak spirit. At this point, the translator has grasped the keynote and the invisible part, and the supplementary content is precise.

There are plentiful examples in the 2015 Government Work Report, which are dealt with in linguistic level. The following is an example that can prove the translator's annular and reciprocal adaptation and selection in vocabulary.

Example 2:

English version: *The growth rate was **steady**. China's GDP reached 63.6 trillion yuan... Employment remained **robust**, with 13.22 million new urban jobs created... Prices were **stable**, with the CPI rising by 2%...* [6]

The above sentences have one common word, that is "Wen" in Chinese. And it has different collocations. The first one collocates with speed, translated as "steady". The second one collocates with employment rate, translated as "robust". And the third one collocates with price, its English counterpart is "stable". Same word in Chinese, once collocated with different nouns, its meaning varies with the change. Therefore, when translating, collocation merits our attention. The translator should choose an appropriate word for its English counterpart in a specific Eco-environment.

From these above examples we can observe the differences between English and Chinese, English words tend to be manifest, while Chinese attaches importance to the infinite significance. The most basic part of linguistic dimension transformation is the conversion of meaning. However, it is not only to simply express the same words in different languages, but to seize the meaning of the word.

4.2 Adaptation and Selection in Cultural Dimension

Adaptation and selection in cultural dimension refers to a sound grasp of bi-cultural implications. That means when translating words with Chinese characteristics into English,   cultural elements should be taken into account.

One of the distinct disparities between Chinese and English is the culture-loaded words. Words as basic components of language, are an important part of culture, for they not only reflect and record the development of culture, but also in turn get amplified in meaning and quality by its development.

Example 1:

English version: *We must be tough in cracking down on corruption, and ensure that all cases of corruption are investigated and that all corrupt officials are punished, **catching "tigers" as well as "flies"—senior officials as well as junior ones** guilty of corruption.* [8]

English speaking countries are familiar with the Chinese vocabulary "Zhi Laohu" (paper tiger). When Chairman Mao Zedong heard it was domesticated as "the scarecrow", he suggested translating it directly as "paper tiger". And because of its vividness and accuracy, the foreign readers have added it into the English language lexicon. President Xi Jinping also adopts intensively the images "tigers and flies" in his discussion. Although "catching 'tigers' as well as 'flies'" is political neologism in the new era of China's anti-corruption activity, it is vivid and appropriate to compare the different sizes of the two animals to the different leading positions of the corrupt officials. The resolution of Chinese government to fight against corruption has been effectively conveyed to the international community.

Example 2:

English version: *We have established the notion that **lucid waters** and **lush mountains***

*are **invaluable assets** ... We have improved fuel quality, and taken over 20 million **high-emission** and old vehicles off the roads.* [6]

In Chinese culture, people prefer to use colors "Lv" and "Qing" as modifiers of "water" and "mountain" in expression. That doesn't mean the color of water is green or the color of mountain is cyan but water is lucid and mountain is lush. Similarly, "Jinshan" and "Yinshan" refer to something valuable to a great extent. If the translator translates them into "golden mountain" or "silver mountain" literally, it may confuse the target readers why waters and mountains become "golden mountain" and "silver mountain". "Huangbiaoche" is also a culturally-loaded word in Chinese. In translating these words, we should adopt an appropriate way which can get the hold of the intended meaning as well as alleviate readers' burden. If the translator expounds these words in context, it will do some help to the target readers to get across the connotations. Therefore, grasp its symbolic meaning is quite enough.

4.3 Adaptation and Selection in Communicative Dimension

This dimension emphasizes the final goal of political publicity: communication. That is to introduce China's policies, laws, standpoints and behaviors in international platform to the target country. As the most intended dimension, it fully embodies the differences between domestic publicity and international publicity.

Example 1:

English version: *Solid work has moved us forward in **the five priority tasks of cutting overcapacity, reducing excess inventory, deleveraging, lowering costs, and strengthening areas of weakness.*** [6]

In the above case, when translating the Chinese condensed expression with numbers into English, the translator explains what it is in words, to make up for the target readers' lack of certain knowledge. Without certain background information, it would be difficult for target readers to get hold of the intended meaning. By adding, the translator adapts to the Eco-environment of the target language, and achieve balance in communicative dimension.

Beside some simplified phrases, there are also some proverbs and idioms, which would be obstacles for fluent reading. When dealing with these sentences, communicative purposes should be given priority.

Example 2:

English version: *The extensive and profound schools of thoughts they established covered many important ideas, such as **the moral injuction of fidelity to one's parents and brothers, and to the monarch and friends. The sense of propriety, justice, integrity and honor, the emphasis on benevolence and kindness towards fellow human beings and believe that men should be in harmony with nature, follow nature's course, and constantly pursue self perfection.** These values and teachings still carry a profound impact on Chinese people's way of life today.* [8]

Just in one sentence, there are seven four-character idioms and each idiom is an independent philosophy. This is the characteristic of Chinese, concise and precise and abundant in content. In English, foreign readers know little about these philosophical ideas, and it is not realistic to put every idea clear in the translation. The translator chooses to extract the essence of these ideas, so as to achieve "convey ideas" as well as retain the cultural connotation to attain the "vividness". To better adapt to the target Eco-environment, the translator gives up the analogy which is witty in Chinese but strange and disputable in English. By doing so, communicative level is achieved.

The above analysis of the three dimensions is not to verify the opposite relationship among them, but to confirm that the translator should equilibrize those dimensions in the pursuit of optimal utility in the constrained translation ecology. According to Eco-translatology, the higher the degree of multi-dimensional adaptation and adaptive selection of the translation is, the higher the degree of the integrity of adaptation and selection will be. Therefore, the translator should exert more efforts in the integration of three-dimensional transformation. For example:

English version: *In expanding consumption, we need to **ensure every drop of spending builds to create a mighty river**, so that the potential contained in an ocean of private consumers will be*

channeled into a powerful force driving economic growth. [6]

In this example, the translator integrates the linguistic level and cultural level without mortifying the communicative level. In Chinese culture under this context, "Xiaoxi" means daily trifling spending, while "Dahe" means a drive of economy, and "Hui" means pool all the small spending into a big drive. Under such conditions, the source Eco-environment should be visualized in a detailed way so as to be understandable. By translating as "ensure every drop of spending builds to create a mighty river", the translator adheres to the original style and spreads the source language's culture implication, but at the same time, he also gives consideration to the communicative level by adding "spending" after "drop of". By doing so, the picture of pooling personal resources together is vividly represented in front of our foreign readers.

5. Conclusion

To conclude, the previous illustrations and example analysis do their part in verifying the pragmatic function of Eco-translatology in the translation of words with Chinese characteristics. In other words, the concepts of this theory are fully respected in the cases study. There are two points we should bear in minds:

First, having a good command of Eco-environment both in Chinese and English, i.e. being a competent translator. Having an acquaintance with both Eco-environment is a prerequisite in high standard translating. If the translator is not familiar with the political documents in both countries, he will probably fail to get across one country's message right to the other, especially when dealing with some sensitive words.

Second, ensuring optimized degree of Multi-dimensional integration. Prof. Hu illustrated in his paper that a high quality translation must be one with Multi-dimensional selection and adaptation, i.e, adaptive selection and selective adaptation [5]. But that does not mean we should always embody the three dimension simultaneously. Some dimensions should be weighted over the others and some even be sacrificed.

Due to the author's limited knowledge and the particularity of the cases, there are inevitably many defects and insufficiency in this paper, such as how to optimize the integration of three dimensions, how the Eco-environment affects the translator's adaptation and selection, etc. Hopefully, the general rules summarized in this paper contribute to further research on the translation of words with Chinese characteristics.

Acknowledgements

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