

A Study on the English Translation of Chinese Marine Culture-loaded Expressions

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Abstract: As an indispensable part of Chinese culture, Chinese marine culture has been drawing much more attention from people over the world. With the intention to widely propagandize the core essence and charm of Chinese marine culture, a highly-qualified English translation of Chinese marine culture is thus of great significance. The author of this paper takes an in-depth analysis of typical Chinese marine culture-loaded expressions from the perspective of Eco-translatology. Three-dimensional transformation strategies under the Eco-translatology theory are investigated with translation examples, attempting to provide effective guidance for the translation of marine culture-loaded expressions and to help English speakers better experience the inherent charm of Chinese marine culture.

1. Introduction

In the long run of history, the industrious and intelligent Chinese people in coastal areas have created, accumulated, and transmitted brilliant marine culture, reflecting all their wisdom acquired in the livelihood of sailing at sea, braving the weather, harvesting fish, etc. As an integral part of Chinese culture, marine culture is the collection of material and spiritual wealth, including technology, production, living habits, customs, art, language, belief and many other aspects of people who live along coasts and make living at sea.

Nowadays, under the background of cultural globalization, the exchange of different cultures has been growing every single day. The effective output and spread of marine culture plays an essential role in the transmission of Chinese culture, and relies highly on proficient C-E translation, which is virtually the most efficient tool of introducing Chinese culture, the key facilitator for westerners to comprehend Chinese culture and is now becoming the ambassador to introduce China's unique marine culture.

However, due to the abundant differences between east and west, the English translation of Chinese marine culture-loaded words is not easy. How to translate words and expressions with Chinese marine cultural characteristics into English is the question that this paper attempts to answer. Under the guidance of Eco-translatology, some valuable strategies are proposed for the effective translation of marine culture-loaded expressions.

2. A Brief Review of Chinese Marine Culture

Ever since the pre-Qin period (from Paleolithic to 221 BC), Chinese had never stopped working on the exploration of ocean, thus nurtured profound marine culture. Xu Fu's east journey, which is now taken as the inchoative overseas travel, and the well-known Ancient Maritime Silk Road--the business road sprawling the north and south coast of China to the outside world, are the typical examples of Chinese marine culture in the early stage.

Later on, China's maritime power has been gradually growing together with the enrichment of marine culture. The development of fishing and salt industry and the facilitation of marine traffic were once the general policy of the ancient Chinese state Qi to boost marine economy, turning it as "the King of the sea" during the Warring States times of China. Qi's emphasis on marine economy greatly enhanced the cultivation and accumulation of Chinese marine culture. Many mythological stories related to the sea were created and inherited, such as "精卫填海"-- the mythical bird Jingwei trying to fill up the sea with pebbles, a symbol of dogged determination, "哪吒闹海"-- Prince Nezha's triumph against Dragon King, a representative of rebellion and so on.

In Ming Dynasty, China owned the world's most powerful ocean-going fleet under the command of General Zheng He who set off seven ocean voyages down through all of south-east Asia to both coasts of India and as far to Africa's eastern coast, displaying the greatest marine power at that time and also giving birth to the brightest marine culture. The magnificent navigation greatly promoted the Chinese marine belief in "妈祖" -- the Goddess of the ocean. There came a great feat in the Ming dynasty to communicate with the western world. It can be seen that the development of the ocean not only strengthens China's marine power but also promotes cultural exchanges with other countries and spreads the cultural deposits of China. However, in the following Qing Dynasty, the feudal rulers adopted the policy of seclusion, hampering China's progress and its exchanges with the outside world. The continuous development and accumulation of Chinese maritime culture had thus been seriously impeded, darkening its once brightness.

With the fast growing of cultural exchanges in today's globalized world, the strategy of Chinese culture "going out" highly boosts the publicity of Chinese marine culture and also demands all the opportunities to fully introduce Chinese marine culture to the world. A 21st century Maritime Silk Road has yet been put forward to restore the glory of the ancient Silk Road and a set of measures would be taken to refresh the great Chinese marine culture.

3. An Introduction of Chinese Marine Culture-loaded Expressions

3.1 The Definition of Chinese Marine Culture-loaded Expressions

To study the English translation of Chinese marine culture-loaded expressions, the definition about it should be clarified first. Ever since the 20th century, scholars in China have been working hard on the concrete definition, which is now generally accepted. According to the previous studies, Chinese marine culture-loaded expressions are the language expressions produced by people in the marine environment of China, as carriers of Chinese marine culture reflecting all the material and spiritual aspects of it. The essence of marine culture is the interactions between human and ocean and its product. [1] For the uniqueness of Chinese marine culture, it is hard to find the English equivalences to those marine culture-loaded expressions, thus making the translation even more difficult and demanding.

3.2 The Characteristics of Chinese Marine Culture-loaded Expressions

3.2.1 The Uniqueness of Cultural Expression

Due to the special marine environment, living habits and social beliefs, Chinese marine culture distinguishes itself from others and also gives births to an abundance of culture-loaded language expressions. Chinese marine culture-loaded expressions are the language forms rooted in the unique culture of people who live along coasts with special features attributing to the living environment and production mode. Its uniqueness lies in the fact that such language expressions referring either material products or spiritual concepts cannot find their equivalences in another language, thus makes them narcissistic and could be hardly appreciated by the outsiders. Take the word “谢洋” for example, it is culture-loaded expression referring to the special custom held in coastal China by fishermen to express their gratitude to the ocean for the great harvest. It is the one-and-only language expression belongs to people in coastal China.

3.2.2 The Embeddedness of Cultural Connotation

Marine culture-loaded expressions are the carriers of cultural connotations, embodying strong cultural color and rich cultural images. In the coastal area of south China, people worship the ocean, bringing forth the language expression “妈祖”, which is a mirror of the cultural heritage -- “Matsu Culture”. The expression “妈祖” survives, refreshes and vibrates with the development of Chinese language only because of the nourishment by Matsu Culture. Rooted deeply in marine culture, Chinese marine culture-loaded expressions are more than carrier or mirror but part of the Chinese marine culture.

3.2.3 The Lack of Counterparts in English Language

For the purpose of cross-cultural communication, speakers of the source language always work hard to find the equivalences in the target language, but only find all the efforts go in vain as culture-loaded expressions could rarely have their counterparts in another language. Due to the lack of equivalences in English language, the cultural information embodied in Chinese would be locked up and isolated from the outsiders. Without any cultural bridge, speakers would always find themselves tongue-tied in intercultural communication. Besides the wide differences between two languages, there are also some similarities between them for the common rules of the world. Speakers would be glad to find the seemingly equivalent expressions in target language. However, without ground of culture, even such seeming equivalence may result in semantic mismatch, failing speakers in their cross-culture and cross-language communication.

For the fact that there is zero equivalence or only partial equivalence with culture-loaded expression in the target language, the translation as the way of communication between people from different cultures now turns out to be an impossible mission.

4. The Theoretical Concept of Eco-translatology

4.1 An Overview of Eco-translatology

Ever since the 1960s, the development patterns of human society began to shift from industrial civilization to ecological civilization. Great attention has been attached to the study of ecology. Many scholars adopt an ecological view in their researches, setting off a new research orientation in academic circles, among which ecological translation study combines ecology with translation, featuring itself with strong interdisciplinary quality and being a new research hotspot.

The theoretical prototype of ecological translation is assumed to derive from the theory of adaptation and selection in Darwin's *The Origin of Species*. In 1988, Peter Newmark, a famous translation theorist, stated that ecological characteristic of translation was one of the important

aspects a translator should handle with in the process of translation, which brought ecological translation under the spotlight. Many scholars worked hard to enrich the theory of ecological translatology. In China, Professor Hu Gengshen proposed Eco-translatology under the guidance of the basic principles and ideas of Darwin's "adaptation/selection" theory. He expounded Eco-translatology with the thematic concept of "translation is adaptation and selection" and centered on the concept of translator-oriented translation. (2003)

According to the "adaptation/selection" translation principle of Eco-translatology, Hu takes the transformation of three dimensions among language, communication and culture as the translation methods to maintain the beauty of ecological balance and harmony in a specific translation environment. Translational eco-environment refers to all aspects involving translation, including linguistic, communicative, cultural and social factors of source and target languages. In the process of translation, translators are highly demanded to play a dual role, namely, accepting the selection and restriction of the translation ecological environment and meanwhile implementing the selection and manipulation of the target language. Required by the ecological conditions of translation, through the ways of selective adaptation and adaptive selection, translators work to achieve the maximized adaptation to the ecological environment from "three-dimensional" perspectives--linguistic dimension, cultural dimension and communicative dimension.

4.2 Three Dimensions of Eco-translatology

According to the theory of Eco-translatology, language, culture and communication are the most crucial factors in the course of translation in a specific translational eco-environment, namely the three dimensions of Eco-translatology.

4.2.1 Linguistic Dimension

As carrier of culture and mirror of society, language differs due to the social, cultural, geographical and historical reasons. English and Chinese are sharply diverse languages. From the linguistic dimension, Chinese and English differs in all the linguistic aspects, including character, structure and mode of expression. Firstly, Chinese characters are an ideograph different from the alphabetic writing of English. As the only existing ideogram in the world today, Chinese characters have close relation with culture and society. Secondly, Chinese expression is a typical parataxis while English sentence is featured as hypo-taxis. Chinese sentences use fewer conjunction words but focus on the logical coherence of components and rhetorical skill of delivering information. Whereas, English sentences generally display a tree form with the wide use of conjunctions, subordinate clauses and modifying words attached to the main structure of sentence, demonstrating English speaker's linear and direct expression pattern.

Chinese and English belong to two different language families. The Chinese-English translation is surely not pictograph or letters of simple conversion. The differences in on linguistic dimension present huge challenges and difficulties for translators. As Nida once pointed out that "Translation consists in reproducing in the receptor language the closest natural equivalent of the source language message, first in terms of meaning and secondly in terms of style".¹(1982) Hu mentions that to realize linguistic adaptation in C-E translation, translators better have acquired a knowledge of the two languages and been deeply aware of the differences in linguistic dimension between the source and target language, thus avoid resulting in misunderstandings and language or literacy disabilities of target readers. (2006)

4.2.2 Cultural Dimension

Translation is more than a cross-linguistic activity, but a cross-cultural communication. The toughest thing in translation is not language itself but the cultural connotation it bears. In the process of ecological translation, translators are not only required to switch from one language to

another, but to well decode and convey all the cultural connotations beneath words to target readers. Chinese and western cultures growing up and blooming in quite different worlds are at polar opposite. The differences between Chinese and western cultures would undoubtedly influence Chinese-English translation, and bring difficulties in the comprehension and expression. Thus cultural awareness of translators matters much during the translation process, sometimes, learning other cultures could form the reflection of own culture and help better understand the differences and similarities between them.

Chinese is a high-context culture while English a low-context one. The dialogue and conversation between speakers of two languages cannot merely focus on the literal meaning or that of the intention to locutionary act, but pay more attention to what happens in and around the message than to the message itself. Faced with various linguistic and cultural restrictions and barriers, translators should save no efforts to make linguistic and cultural transformation, so as to maintain the balance and harmony of translation ecology.

4.2.3 Communicative Dimension

Communication is the center of human existence. It is through communication that people learn what the world around is like. Translation is the essential channel for people speaking different languages to communicate. Translators should always bear in mind the communicative purpose or intention they are required to realize. In the process of translation, in addition to the linguistic transformation and cultural dissemination, the successful realization of communicative intention is the key to keep communication going smoothly. To realize the communicative function, translation strategies should be adopted for the adaptation to the communicative dimension in the process of translation. Through the ways of communicative transformation, the communicative intention of speaker from the source language could be fully conveyed to the reader of the target language, so as to sustain communicative ecology and avoid any possible misunderstandings. Eco-translatology lays great importance on the level of communication by focusing on whether the speaker's overall is in the source language system and whether it is faithfully delivered to the target readers.²

In the concrete process of translation, language, culture and communication are the dimensions closely interwoven and interrelated. Professor Hu elaborates the interrelation and connotation of them as "translation is the transformation of language, language is the carrier of culture, and culture is the accumulation of communication." (2008) The basic principle of eco-translatology is thus concluded as multidimensional adaptation and adaptive selection implemented by translators to well balance the ecology of source and target language on linguistic, cultural and communicative dimensions. The three-dimensional transformation as required by Eco-translatology is a challenging activity, for the fact that the speakers and receivers have different levels of language acquisition ability, cross-cultural background knowledge and various communicative intentions.

5. The Application of Eco-translatology in the English Translation of Marine Culture-Loaded Expressions

The concept of eco-translatology and translation principle of adaptive selection and selective adaptation on linguistic, cultural and communicative dimensions greatly facilitate the English translation of marine culture-loaded expressions. However, the process of translation is not easy when taking ecological features into account, especially in the translation of culture-loaded words.

5.1 The English Translation of Marine Culture-Loaded Expressions on Linguistic Dimension

Under the guidance of Eco-translatology, the adaptive transformation of linguistic dimension refers to the translator's adaptation of the original expression patterns to the target text. Flexible proficiency of expression habits and formulas of the Chinese language to adapt to its ecological

environment in the English text is highly demanded. In the translation of marine culture-loaded expressions, translators should fully consider the translation environment, the linguistic characteristics of both languages, and the expression habits of Chinese and English speakers so as to faithfully and artistically deliver the language information. Creative linguistic transformation at lexical and syntactic levels of expressions, such as omission, addition, conversion, or even coinage should be taken to reach the linguistic ecology between Chinese and English. Some examples concerning linguistic transformation in the translation of marine culture-loaded expressions are illustrated as follow:

Example (1): 海乌龟--frogman, 海碗--big bowl, 开洋--dried shrimp meat/the start of sea voyage when fishermen set off fishing.

At the lexical level, quite a few of the marine culture-loaded expressions could not find the lexical equivalences in English. Therefore, in C-E translation, literal translation of such expressions could only distort the meaning. Appropriate conversion should be taken for adaptation to the English readers. In example (1), the expression “海乌龟”, which literally refers to the sea turtle, but is actually the frogman who divers to the deep ocean with the purpose to observe the ocean environment or help people or vessels in trouble; and the word “海碗” referring to bowl with large capacity, should never be translated as “sea bowl” at all; while the expression “开洋” bears quite different connotations in different translation environment where speakers talking about seafood, it refers to the dried shrimp meat, when fishermen set off fishing “开洋” means the start of sea voyage.

Example (2): 海水黄牛叫, 必有大雨到.

Translation: When the ocean roars, storm is coming.

In example (2), “黄牛叫” is an imitation of cattle’s moo-moo, here Chinese people use it for the sound effect when the ocean roars. The translation strategy--omission is hereby employed as westerns could hardly relate the voice moo-moo with sea roaring.

Example (3): 有风吓煞, 无风摇煞; 热天晒煞, 冷天冻煞.

Translation: A seaman might be challenged by strong wind and get exhausted when there is no wind; he would be tanned in hot days and freezing in cold days.

People in the coastal areas of China have created various expressions based on their daily work and living habits. Such expressions not only contain working people’s wisdom but are also full of language beauty. With a bunch of short sentences and the repetition of modal particle or assonance word “煞”, the marine culture-loaded expression is now clear and easy to remember and retell. In translation, Chinese parataxis expressions should be converted into English hypo-taxis for the linguistic transformation at syntactic level. In example (3), the four short sentences in Chinese are combined together in English as components of the main sentence for the purpose of linguistic adaptation. What’s more, to preserve the alive tone and the strong sense of rhythm in the source text, antithesis and ellipsis are both employed in this case to fully demonstrate the unique charm of Chinese language to the English readers.

5.2 The English Translation of Marine Culture-Loaded Expressions from Cultural Dimension

For the rich cultural connotation, the English translation of Chinese marine culture-loaded expressions is bound to be challenging. In translation practice, cultural transformation enables translators smoothly present the glamour of Chinese marine culture to English readers. To achieve the translation ecology, translators have to make choices between literal translation and free translation to faithfully deliver Chinese marine culture meanwhile bridge target readers the possible cultural gaps, clarify the existing cultural puzzles, and finally exceed in the mission of cultural

transmission.

In the deposit of Chinese expressions, there are many marine culture-loaded expressions deriving from the basic meaning of “ocean”, such as “海客”, “海翁”, “海纳百川”, “名扬四海” and so on, which take the image of “ocean” to refer to vast horizon, ethereal realm or pure state of mind. In translation, to fully convey the original cultural information while adapt to the target English text, it’s common for translators to adopt free translation to achieve translation ecology on the cultural dimension.

Example (4): 仙人有待乘黄鹤, 海客无心随白鸥.

Translation: Immortals could not fly without their yellow crane; Unselfish men might follow white gulls to the main.

The main body of Chinese marine culture is contained in the form of literature, especially poems which display poets’ subjective feelings by the sea³, and take advantage of natural scene to express emotions. Example (4) is the lines from the poem *Song on the River* by Li Bai, an outstanding romantic poet in ancient China’s Tang dynasty. In this Chinese verse, “海客” literally means a man at sea or Li Bai himself, but considering all the characteristics of a seamen, who has been drifting on the sea for a long time, and having remained intimate contact with nature, it actually features people with detached and broad-minded personalities. In translation, after adaptive selection and for selective adaptation, the expression “海客” with unique characteristic of Chinese marine culture is then translated as “an unselfish men compared with the immortal”.

For the striking contrast the poem embodies, translation strategies, like antithesis and manifestation, are highly recommended in the process of translation, in that readers can intuitively feel the magnanimous and generous mind of the author. However, due to the fact that there is no English equivalence of “海客”, moreover, it could represent the poet himself or people with bold temperament, literal translation which is known as word-for-word translation and strives to reproduce the original antithesis will be put aside as it fails to fulfill the purpose of cultural transformation.

5.3 The English Translation of Marine Culture-Loaded Expressions from Communicative Dimension

Translation occurs whenever there is communication between people from different cultures. In addition to language rendering and cultural transmission, the English translation of Chinese marine culture-loaded expressions should also serve the communicative function. Eco-translatology highly emphasizes transformation on the communicative dimension for the purpose of realizing speakers’ communicative intention. In the communication about Chinese marine culture, translators serve as bridge for Chinese and English to carry out their communicative intention and achieve communicative effect.

Example (5): 凡海洋占候, 云合生风, 雷鸣风止.

Translation: In all astronomical divination, clouds gather, the wind blows; thunders crack, the wind dies.

To realize the communicative intention to target English readers as it is in the Chinese text, translators must correctly understand the speakers’ intention, and take target readers’ language acquisition level and cultural background into account. Example (5) is a typical utterance describing how experienced weathermen talk out the climatic regularity according to the changes of wind, cloud and thunder. Weather patterns are drawn based on big meteorological diversity as a warning to people in the coastal areas who make a living at sea and brave against both tides and storms. After catching the speaker’s communicative intention, now its better that translators make communicative transformation to send intentional content over the preservation of original wording

intactness. In translation, the English expression “*clouds gather, the wind blows; thunders crack, the wind dies*” is clearly structured and concisely worded to deliver the weather information and achieve the purpose of warning.

Example (6): 春汛, 夏汛, 秋汛, 冬汛分别代表四季渔汛.

Translation: Spring fishing season, summer fishing season, autumn fishing season, and winter fishing season, altogether constitute the four seasons of fishing in a year.

This example tries to communicate target English readers the working practice customs of fishermen in Chinese coastal areas. Instead of sticking to the original wording of Chinese text which refers to a very different meaning if literally translated as “*spring flood, summer flood, autumn flood, and winter flood*”, translators must first take the communicative transformation based on the original Chinese language environment, together have linguistic transformation in the way of adding words and cultural transformation by differing fishing season from freshet, to accomplish the cross-language and cross-cultural communication.

6. Conclusion

The paper studies on the English translation of Chinese marine culture-loaded expressions under the theoretical guidance of eco-translatology. After reviewing the definition and characteristics of marine culture-loaded expressions in Chinese, some effective translating techniques are investigated with an abundance of translation examples, hopefully to contribute to the wide spread of Chinese marine culture and let the world see the brilliance of Chinese marine culture.

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