

A Review of Standardization of TCM Terminology Translation

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Abstract: This paper generally divides the process of traditional Chinese medicine(TCM) terminology translation into three stages: individual free translation period, national organization period, and international cooperation period. Based on representative experts and social events, the methods, principles, and standards of translation of TCM terms in different stages were expounded, and its development trend was discussed, to promote the further international standardization of TCM terms. The study found that the development of TCM terminology standards generally developed from early methods that did not meet the needs of the contemporary era to cultural and professional reference methods, from uncoordinated research to systematic research, and from immature individual work to professional teamwork. The current international standard of TCM terminology was formed with the efforts of many scholars and experts in the history of this field, and a more comprehensive and recognized standard will be issued soon.

1. Introduction

Over the past several decades, Traditional Chinese medicine (TCM) has spread rapidly in some English-speaking countries and regions of the world. Many countries have begun to accept TCM, and some countries have incorporated TCM into their healthcare systems, such as Britain and some states in the United States. TCM has been fully or partially accepted in the west, and a growing number of countries are considering incorporating TCM into their healthcare systems. However, TCM originated in China and its source language is Chinese that contains traditional classical culture, even ancient Chinese. Those who study TCM can easily and quickly find that TCM terms may have common and similar translations, including mistranslated literature, which has caused confusion in academic communication and clinical research. To address this problem, linguists, doctors who are anxious to learn, and medical experts around the world, individually and collectively, are seeking to establish a standard English version of TCM terms. This work and progress has been going on for decades, and some outstanding and excellent achievement have been made. However, so far, there is no agreed international standard for translation. A summary of the work before may help to sum up the errors mistakes we have made, the experiences scholars have accumulated in their studying and practice, and the problems and difficulties scholars still have to

solve [1].

2. Course of History

2.1. 1960s and 1970s

For hundreds of years, the spread of TCM in western countries has experienced many twists and turns. Some TCM books were translated and spread in the West countries, and TCM translations were mostly in written language in the 1960s and 1970s. According to literature findings, it was not until the 1960s that some scholars got the importance of standardized translation of TCM terms and tried to establish a standard translation of TCM terms.

2.1.1. Manfred Porkert

Manfred Porkert were born in the Czech Republic in 1933 and received his doctorate in Chinese studies from the Sorbonne University in Paris in 1957. He is now emeritus Professor at Ludwig-Maximilians University [2]. He praises traditional Chinese medicine as a true life science. He devotes himself to establishing a standard and practical system of TCM terms. His system of standardized terms may be accurate in expressing meaning, but his translations are difficult to read, recognize, remember, and popularize. This difficulty extends to the application of the terminology systems in teaching, research, and academic communication among countries. Therefore, his system of terminology was not adopted.

2.1.2. Joseph Needham

Born in England in 1900, Needham is a scientist and Sinologist. He is a fellow of the Royal Society and works at Cambridge University [3]. His contribution and achievements is the study of Chinese science and technology. Much of this work is the history of Chinese medicine. He also recognizes the translation problems of TCM terms and discusses the strategies to solve the problems. He has almost gone straight to Latin. Needham [4] tries to create a semantically based vocabulary that would be better understood and learned. At the same time, he adopts a more practicable and flexible approach. For example, he objects to transliteration but adopts transliteration for some untranslatable terms, such as Dao and Qi. Qi used to be translated as energy. Although Manfred Porkert and Joseph Needham use different strategies and methods to standardize TCM terms [5], their methods are limited to the use of roots. However, both strategies introduce new words and difficult words to modern readers. Although it is difficult for them to establish a standardized terminology system, these initial efforts and endeavors provide valuable experience and establish the demand for standardized English translations of TCM terms [6].

2.2 1980s and 1990s

During this trip, when US President Richard Nixon was to establish a cooperative relationship with China in 1972, The New York Times reported on acupuncture as a way to control pain, which sparked a boom in the study of TCM throughout the Western world [7]. In the beginning, many Westerners who are interested in acupuncture went to China(Hong Kong and Taiwan) and Japan to learn effective acupuncture. After China's Cultural Revolution (1966-1976), Westerners began to visit doctors to get acupuncture in mainland China. With the development of TCM, the standardized translations of TCM terminology may have to keep pace with it. Some standards emerged and were widely adopted.

2.2.1. Standard Naming of Acupuncture by the World Health Organization (WHO)

To reach a global agreement on acupuncture naming, the WHO Regional Office for the Western Pacific organized four meetings from 1982 to 1987 [8]. After reaching basic agreement in this region, a group meeting that adopts the suitable international nomenclature for acupuncture was held in October-November 1989. Two editions of the standard acupuncture nomenclature were published in 1984 and 1993 [9]. Thanks to the rapid development of the news media, this international acupuncture standard has been widely disseminated. However, this standard is limited to the names of meridian points. A large part of the total terminology of TCM is not covered. In addition, the new standards established by the experts has differences with some TCM terms already used in practice[10].

2.2.2. Xie Zhufan

Born in 1924 in China, he began his medical education in western medicine. However, later his study region is TCM. Currently, he is an honorary Director of Beijing Institute of Integrated Chinese and Western Medicine [11]. In 1994, he compiled the Chinese-English Traditional Chinese Medicine Classification Dictionary on the basis of the original one. However, the translation of some terms between the two dictionaries has some differences. The former head of China's National Administration of Traditional Chinese Medicine says in the foreword: "... The terms in this dictionary can be closer to the meaning of the source language in practice. Although constantly in the term, it gradually becomes the standard of TCM terms." From the words, a conclusion that some government agencies are gradually accepting his system can be got. To communicate conveniently in medical circles, he tends to advocate the widespread use of modern medical terms to translate TCM[12]. At the same time, he holds that a combination of single Chinese characters has different meanings in TCM terms. Therefore, he does not agree with the literal translation. His views have caused much debate with Nigel Wiseman in a series of papers [13].

2.2.3. Nigel Wiseman

Born in 1954 in the UK, he is a famous linguist[14]. He has own understanding about the translation of TCM terms. He writes a dictionary named The Practical Dictionary of TCM that is quietly popular and has various knowledge and culture of TCM. Because it covers comprehensive knowledge, Paradigm Publications and Blue Poppy Press that are two of the largest traditional Chinese medicine, publishers in the US regard it as the English standard [15]. He mainly advocates literal translation. His terminology system is the most comprehensive and detailed at that time, so many countries are using his dictionary and translation theory when translating TCM terms[16]. However, his terminology system has some flaws and does not meet the international standards.

2.2.4. Li Zhaoguo

Li Zhaoguo holds a master's degree in applied Linguistics from Shanghai University of Traditional Chinese Medicine and a PhD in Ancient Chinese culture and translation [17]. In 1996, People's Medical Publishing House published TCM Translation Skills. In this book, he explains the special principles of translating TCM terms according to own understanding and previous experience. He has also published several Chinese-English dictionaries of TCM terms. It put forward five principles for the English translation of TCM terms, namely, naturalness, conciseness, national characteristics, posttranslation and standardization [18]. He has achieved remarkable results about translating Chinese in China. In addition to this, he has promoted the development of establishing many national and international standards for Chinese medicine terms. Wiseman's

dictionary is used in many countries, but it has some flaws and does not meet the international standards. Debates about its suitability have begun to emerge in the 21st century [19]. Even the World Health Organization has encountered resistance in translating many TCM terms. However, using these dictionaries, the World Health Organization standards for acupuncture and translation theory, provide a good foundation for the standards of TCM terms.

2.3. Application Standards as of Early 2000

In the 21st century, TCM has been widely and deeply accepted and applied worldwide. In 2002, the World Health Organization issued the Traditional Medicine Strategy [20]. In controlled trials, acupuncture can treat 28 diseases, symptoms, or conditions, according to this report. Therefore, increasingly international organizations are interested in establishing standards for TCM terminology.

2.3.1. English Translation of Commonly Used Terms of TCM by the State Administration of Traditional Chinese Medicine

In 2000, a study project on the standardization of English translation of TCM terms was undertaken by Xie Zhufan and his team[21]. In 2002, the Foreign Languages Press published the new Chinese-English Dictionary of Traditional Chinese Medicine. In 2004, the China Traditional Chinese Medicine Press published the English Translation of Commonly Used Terms of Traditional Chinese Medicine. Adopting scientific, precise, practical, and acceptable principles, the latter is the result of an analysis and summary of previous works. This dictionary is so popular in China that many experts will use it.

2.3.2. Glossary of Terms of TCM published by China National Committee for Scientific and Technical Terms

In 2000, the Chinese Medicine Terms Committee under the National Commission for Scientific and Technical Terms of China was set up. Soon afterwards, it undertook a research project on the standardization of basic Chinese medicine terms. Many documents and regulations regulating Chinese and English terms of TCM have been formulated. After a lot of work, the main achievement is the Chinese Traditional Medicine Terms. It puts forward five translation principles when the scholars are translating, namely, equivalence, conciseness, consistency, posttranslation and standardization [22]. It adopted two translation methods successively, first free translation and then literal translation. After improvement, the standard was used as international standard.

2.3.3. The International Standard for World Health Organization of the Western Pacific Regional Traditional Medicine in the Western Pacific Region

In 2004, the main function of the standard was to remain the dependability, efficiency, and commutativity of the English translation level of traditional Chinese medicine terms unchanged. In the various standards of traditional Chinese medicine terms, such as acupuncture positions, information, and clinical practice, formulating an international standard of traditional Chinese medicine terms is regarded as the first step in the comprehensive standardization of traditional Chinese medicine. The terminology of traditional Chinese medicine terms is taking another step on the road to standardization. The term standards are planned to revise every 3 to 5 years. This means that the standardized international cooperation of traditional Chinese medicine terms has taken a new step.

2.3.4. The World Federation of the Chinese Medicine Society and "International Standard of Hanying Traditional Chinese Medicine Basic Naming Law"

The World Federation of Chinese Medicine Societies (WFCMS) is an international academic organization which was established by the State Council. Since it was founded in 2003, it has been applying itself to the international standardization of traditional Chinese medicine terms all time. The complement of the international standard of the "Traditional Chinese Medicine Basic Naming Law" was announced at the end of 2007. And it was officially published by the People's Health Publishing House in 2008. This research is mainly subsidized by the State Administration of Traditional Chinese Medicine [23]. With the involvement of the Chinese government and international organizations, the standardization of the terms of traditional Chinese medicine is increasingly systematical, cooperative, and formalized.

3. Discussion

Through the above review of historical documents and materials, the standardization process of English translation of Chinese medicine terms from the initial uncoordinated research to the current exhaustive research, from the work of unilateral individuals to the work of multiparty cooperation, has made great achievements. While there may be a consensus open standard within the next few years, there are still some cases we cannot ignore. The first question is to what extent this standard should be applied. Many well-known TCM experts have maintained an objection to the standardized research of TCM terminology. For example, according to Benskey, standardized translations of any kind in TCM terms cannot account for the multiple meanings inherent in them. Although the diversity of terminology creates a kind of "terminology confusion", it is beneficial for students to learn and explore the depth of TCM concepts covered by these terms to some extent. Giovanni Maciocia believes that for clinical practitioners, the most significant thing is not to study TCM language carefully, but the clinical experience. In other words, he does not pay attention to the standard English translation of TCM terms. He believes that the focus of translation of TCM terms is to understand the implied meaning of language in the corresponding context, rather than paying attention to the translation of characters. The second problem is the lack of terminology in traditional Chinese medical literature. Traditional Chinese medicine has been passed down in China for thousands of years. It has a lot of cultural wisdom, and it also provides a lot of experience in preventing and treating diseases for modern medicine. The standard of modern TCM terminology is not perfect, which is reflected in the translation of several English versions of the Yellow Emperor's Classic of Internal Medicine. It has been partially or fully translated into at least 13 English versions from 1925 to 2015, and new versions are emerging constantly. However, compared with the vast amount of ancient Chinese literature, this may only be a small step in the English translation of Chinese medicine terms. We all hope sincerely that more dictionaries or standards can reflect the cultural context and language context according to the era background.

The third problem is that it ignores the cultural connotation of TCM terminology. Unlike the English alphabet, each Chinese character has its unique shape, own pronunciation, and special connotations. Understanding the multiple meanings of each word will certainly help to better understand the terminology, each word in TCM terms has heavy cultural connotations and multiple meanings, and these terms are difficult to translate. And if a word with rich meaning is fixedly translated into a corresponding English word, it is inevitable that the original meaning will not be explained in place. Nigel Wiseman may have made some fallacies in his study. He has expressed an English term in the dictionary for each of the 638 Chinese characters and uses the same English term for each character independently of the accompanying characters. Despite the coexistence of some standards of TCM terminology and a few internal problems, we are optimistic that

comprehensive and accepted standards will eventually expand their use in TCM around the world, and deeper integration of TCM terminology will lead to further participation in international organizations.

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