



COMMENT ON “CHINESE VALUES IN ENGLISH TRANSLATIONS: ISSUES ON CULTURAL ACCURACY AND COMPATIBILITY AND THEIR IMPACT ON COMMUNICATION”


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Commented article: XIE, L. Chinese values in English translations: issues on cultural accuracy and compatibility and their impact on communication. **Trans/Form/Ação:** revista de filosofia da Unesp, v. 47, n. 4, “Eastern thought”, e02400121, 2024. Available at: <https://revistas.marilia.unesp.br/index.php/transformacao/article/view/15025>.

Received: 10/08/2024 | Approved: 13/08/2024 | Published: 30/09/2024

 <https://doi.org/10.1590/0101-3173.2024.v47.n4.e02400256>



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COMMENT ON “CHINESE VALUES IN ENGLISH TRANSLATIONS: ISSUES ON CULTURAL ACCURACY AND COMPATIBILITY AND THEIR IMPACT ON COMMUNICATION”

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Essentially, translation involves conveying the original text’s meaning into another language. However, this seemingly simple task is not easy to achieve. Language is the product of culture and society. During language exchange, successful communication between people from different cultural backgrounds depends on their language proficiency and their understanding of the cultural nuances embedded in the language. Cultural exchange will be impeded and thwarted if the cultural differences between Chinese and Western contexts are overlooked in translation. Xie (2024) explores the necessity of incorporating Chinese philosophy and culture into English-Chinese translation to enhance accuracy and compatibility, thus promoting cultural exchange between China and the West.

In English-Chinese translation practice, comparing cultural differences and understanding their characteristics to address translation challenges is vital. We learn from Guo (2012) and Li (2023) how cultural differences between China and the West lead to translation differences.

Firstly, word association and imagery impact English-Chinese translation. Words evoke different associative memories in specific cultural contexts. For instance, in Chinese culture, matchmaker refers to someone who brings about a good marriage, often evoking the image of the maid from the classic novel “The Romance of the West Chamber”. In Western

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culture, terms like go-between and matchmaker not only mean “matchmaker” but also “intermediary” or “broker”. Inappropriate cultural imagery or word association can result in mistranslation or misinterpretation and that’s a natural corollary of this translating process.

Secondly, differences in understanding and thinking affect English-Chinese translation. Each nation has unique and novel ways of understanding and thinking, leading to differences in observation, comprehension, and expression. For example, color terms in English and Chinese have the same references but different cultural connotations due to varying understandings. 红茶 is translated as “black tea” in English, and “white lie” is translated as 善意的谎言 in Chinese.

Thirdly, metaphors and idiomatic expressions influence English-Chinese translation. Metaphors and idiomatic expressions are rich in cultural characteristics, which can create comprehension barriers due to cultural differences. For instance, the English translation of 昙花一现 is “a flash in a pan”, and 风烛残年 is translated as “have one foot in the grave” to indicate the transitoriness of life.

Lastly, religious beliefs impact English-Chinese translation. There are significant differences between Eastern and Western cultures regarding religious beliefs. Western culture, dominated by Christianity, includes many religious terms such as “Bible”, “baptism”, “nun”, “church”, and “God”. “A suspicious person” is translated as “doubting Thomas” in English, referring to Thomas, one of Jesus’s twelve apostles, known for his skepticism. Without understanding such cultural backgrounds, accurately translating “suspicious person” would be difficult. In contrast, China is a multi-religious culture without a dominant religion. Taoism, native to China, has deities like the “Jade Emperor” and “True Warrior Great Emperor”. Additionally, Buddhism, Islam, Christianity, and other traditional religions have flourished in China, contributing to a rich tolerant religious culture.

Generally, there are basic strategies for Chinese-Western translation: literal translation, free translation, and literal translation with annotation.

Literal translation is the most common method for translating English and Chinese idioms, maintaining the content, structure, meaning, and rhetorical methods of the original text. If the form and meaning are literally the same, or acceptable to readers of both languages, the translator can adopt the literal translation method. For example, “a gentleman’s agreement”, “like father, like son”, and “All roads lead to Rome”. Direct translation can accurately convey the metaphorical imagery of the original text while preserving its rhetorical impact and cultural nuances.

Free translation is not constrained by the sentence structure of the original text, translating based on the general idea. Some English expressions are very expressive, their literal meaning differing significantly from their intended meaning in Chinese; in such cases,

free translation is more appropriate. For instance, “fight like cat and dog”, “There is no smoke without fire”, “Nothing venture, nothing have”.

Many English expressions come from historical allusions or fables, and literal translation alone cannot fully convey their imagery and cultural information. Annotated literal translation can enhance the transmission of cultural connotations by providing essential cultural information and explanations, enabling readers to fully grasp the underlying knowledge of the original text. For example, “Pampering is building into what is called the ‘four-two-one syndrome’ - four grandparents and two parents doting on an only child.” The translator can provide a detailed explanation in the text or a footnote to explain its meaning and background, enabling readers to better understand idioms with historical allusions and connotations.

Therefore, studying the respective philosophies and cultures of China and the West, and deeply understanding them, can improve the accuracy and compatibility of translation. Cultural context awareness requires translators to be highly sensitive to cultural differences and conflicts, be equipped with precision in translation language, keen translation intuition, scientific translation cognition, and technical translation handling. Cultural context awareness, as a theoretical and methodological guide, must not only be expressed through translation as a communication action or outcome but also be internalized as a cultural essence. This requires translators to understand different value systems in the translation process, feel different traditional cultures, and establish a sense of national identity through translation activities.

To avoid cultural exchange barriers caused by cultural differences in translation, translators need to be cognizant of: First, they must not only be proficient in both languages but also in both cultures, figuring out cultural terms, and continuously cultivating their “cultural awareness”. Excellent translation should overcome language problems in cross-cultural translation and solve cultural issues in “cross-language communication”. Second, translators should recognize that culture has inclusivity, which promotes cross-cultural communication. Third, translators should adopt different translation methods depending on the specific situation. Domestication and foreignization translation methods complement and enrich each other. Fourth, translators, acting as cultural exchange facilitators, must possess not only advanced language proficiency but also a comprehensive understanding of the audience’s cross-cultural interpretation. This entails accurately gauging the audience’s acceptance habits and enhancing the translation’s acceptability in both linguistic and cultural aspects. Fifth, translators should fully realize that different contexts can lead to cultural misunderstandings. Translators from high-context cultures should pay special attention to the discourse expression methods, concepts, customs, and logic of low-context countries’ authors or audiences when conducting translation activities (Cao; Yang, 2020).

In today's context of promoting Chinese culture to the world, it is necessary to consider language, culture, and cultural context within a broader framework. When conducting cross-cultural translation, it is important to compare not only the languages and cultures but also to study the cultural contexts of the source and target languages, eliminating potential cultural contextual misunderstandings. This will help reduce cultural conflicts and better facilitate the effective dissemination of traditional and modern Chinese culture throughout the world.

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