



《外国语言文学研究丛书》 郭涛 主编

中英文学作品中的 文化翻译研究

宋蕾 杨丽君 高黎 / 著

*Culture and Translation Studies in Chinese
and English Literary Works*



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前 言

北方工业大学外国语言文学一级学科下设日语语言文学、外国语言学及应用语言学、英语语言文学三个二级学科,涉及的研究领域有语言学、文学、语言与文化、外语教育与教学、翻译理论与实践。现有导师20人,教授8人,副教授12人,还聘任了日本大阪大学古川裕教授、美国密西西比大学陈卫星教授、美国东田纳西州立大学 Roz Gann 教授等兼职教授5名。

近年来科研成果显著,2011—2015年共承担了国家、省、市各类科学研究课题40余项,出版专著和教材54本,在各类学术杂志上发表论文368篇,一批优秀专著、论文和教材获国家、省部级奖励。外国语言文学一级学科与文法学院中文专业、法律专业相互融合、相互支撑,已形成以法庭同传研究为特色的翻译研究、以文艺批评为特色的中西方文艺理论研究、以中国学生外语习得研究为特色的外语教学理论与实践研究、以句式与隐喻研究为特色的中外语言研究团队。其中,文艺理论研究团队和翻译研究团队的学术成果在国内外产生了一定影响,获得了鲁迅文学奖和国家社会科学基金资助。外语教学理论与实践团队获得了北京市创新团队奖,中外语言研究也发表了不少高水平论文,形成了自己的特色。

外国语言文学学科每年招收10—15名硕士研究生,和国外大学联合培养,设有优厚的奖助学金制度;遵循因材施教、个性化培养的原则,根据每一名学生的特点制定个性化的培养方案,培养德、智、体全面发展,具有坚实的基础理论和系统的专门知识,严谨、求实的学风,综合素质较高的能胜任学校外语教学与研究的研究型人才或综合能力较强的能胜任外事、旅游、新闻、出版、翻译等行业

工作的应用型人才。

此次外国语言文学研究的系列学术成果能够出版，得到了学校出版基金的资助，研究内容涉及了语言、文学、翻译以及教育等方面，作者均为我校外国语言文学学科青年教师。该书的出版，既能检阅我校外国语言文学学科师资队伍建设和研究成果，也将促进我校外国语言文学学科的发展。

北方工业大学外国语言文学学科

2015年6月

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Part One

Foreignization Strategy in the Translation of Chinese Culture-
Specific Items—A Case Study of *Moment in Peking*

Chapter 1 Factors in the Translation of Chinese Culture-Specific Items

As a civilized country with a history of more than five-thousand years, China boasts its long-standing cultural traditions as well as abundant cultural heritages. As Chinese translators, it's our responsibility to retain the uniqueness of Chinese culture and introduce it to the outside world. In this chapter, the author will discuss the definition of culture-specific items, the relationships of language, culture and translation, as well as certain influential factors in the process of cultural translation.

1.1 Introduction to Culture-Specific Items

Spanish translator and translation theorist J. F. Aixelá provided a definition for culture-specific items in his article "Culture-Specific Items in Translation" published in 1996. And in the article "A Critical Introduction to Aixelá's Strategies for Translating Culture-Specific Items", Professor Chang Nam Fung of Lingnan University, Hong Kong, introduced Aixelá's eleven types of strategies for translating culture-specific items.

Aixelá defines culture-specific items as follows:

Some items that appear in the source text do not have equivalent items in the target reader's cultural system, or have different textual status with their equivalence in the target reader's cultural system; thus it is difficult to translate them while transferring the function and meaning of the source text to the target text.^[1]

(Chang Nam Fung 2004: 19)

[1] “在文本中出现的某些项目，由于在译语读者的文化系统中不存在对应项目或者与该项目有不同的文本地位，因此其在源文中的功能和涵义转移到译文时发生翻译困难。”参见张南峰. 艾克西拉的文化专有项翻译策略评价 [J]. 中国翻译, 2004 (1): 19。

"Different textual status, according to Aixelá, refers to a different value caused by diversified ideology, habit or frequency of use." (ibid)^[1] He also explained in his book his intention of giving such a definition:

In translation a culture-specific item does not exist of itself, but as the result of a conflict arising from any linguistically represented reference in a source text which, when transferred to a target language, poses a translation problem due to the nonexistence or to the different value (whether determined by ideology, usage, frequency, etc.) of the given item in the target language culture.

(Aixelá 1996: 57)

That is to say, the definition of culture-specific item depends not only on the item itself, but also on the function of the item in the text, which should be understood in a particular target-language culture. Therefore, "culture-specific item can be any item that is not understandable or acceptable by the average readers in the target-language culture or by those in power of the nation considering the ideological and cultural background of the target-language culture" (Chang Nam Fung 2004: 19).^[2]

Accordingly, Chinese culture-specific items can be any character, phrase, or sentence which are loaded with specific information and connotations rooted in the Chinese culture. Special attention should be paid to these items, which are difficult to understand or accept by foreign readers.

1.2 Relationship of Language, Culture and Translation

There is hardly anything new when talking about the subjects of language, culture and translation, which have already been discussed by numerous scholars. However, it is an unavoidable subject in translation studies.

As we all know, "translation is a cross-cultural communication event, it concerns not only the

[1] “所谓有不同的文本地位，也就是因意识形态、惯用法或使用频率等方面的差异而有不同的价值 (Aixelá 1996: 57)。”参见张南峰，艾克西拉的文化专有项翻译策略评价 [J]，中国翻译，2004 (1)：19。

[2] “凡是译语文化中的一般读者或者任何当权者觉得在意识形态或者文化上不可理解或接受的，就是文化专有项。”(Aixelá 1996: 58) 参见张南峰，艾克西拉的文化专有项翻译策略评价 [J]，中国翻译，2004 (1)：19。

transfer between languages, but also the transfer between cultures" (Chen Hongwei 2000: 256). Therefore, for the sake of further studying of culture-specific items used in *Moment in Peking*, it is still necessary to discuss the concept of culture and clarify the relationships of language, culture and translation.

1.2.1 Definition of Culture

Culture is a complex concept, which still remains controversial among translation theorists. So far scholars and experts in different fields have provided more than two hundred different definitions of culture. However, none of them is universally recognized as authoritative.

The concept of culture was first developed by anthropologists toward the end of the nineteenth century. In his work *Primitive Cultures*, British anthropologist Edward B. Tylor gives the first comprehensive definition of culture. "Culture is that complex whole which includes knowledge, belief, art, law, morals, customs, and any other capabilities and habits acquired by man as a member of society." (as cited in Zhao Dong 2006: 15) Although the definition served anthropologists well for more than 50 years, some scholars argue that the definition is too broad and vague to distinguish culture from human instinct.

To facilitate our discussion, we will pay more attention to those definitions that contain the theme of how culture and communication are linked together.

According to Daniel Bates and Fred Plog, "culture is a system of shared beliefs, values, customs, behaviors, and artifacts that the members of a society use to cope with their world and with one another, and that are transmitted from generation to generation through learning" (as cited in Samovar 2004: 36). This definition includes not only patterns of behavior but also patterns of thought, artifacts (tools, pottery, house, machines, works of art etc.), and the culturally transmitted skills and techniques used to make the artifacts.

Peter Newmark (2001: 94) defines culture as "the way of life and its manifestations that are peculiar to a community that uses a particular language as its means of expression". This definition indicates that each language group has its unique cultural features.

Moreover, Mary Snell-Hornby holds the view that:

Culture is everything one needs to know, master and feel in order to judge where people's

behavior conforms to or deviates from what is expected from them in their social roles, and in order to make one's own behavior conform to the expectation of the society concerned—unless one is prepared to take the consequence of deviant behavior.

(Mary Snell-Hornby 2001: 39)

This definition indicates that culture is an all-encompassing form for living. What people do, and how they live and communicate are all responses to their culture.

Although the above definitions differ in some degree from each other, they all point out the fact that culture consists of various factors that are shared by a given group. When we talk about culture, we usually define it in two ways. In a narrow sense, culture means intellectual and conceptual culture. In a broad sense, culture means human culture in contrast with nature, such as the sum of a people's customs, material and spiritual products, ways of thinking and so on.

In this thesis, the broad meaning of culture is adopted, that is, the total pattern of beliefs, customs, institutions, objects, techniques and so on, which characterize the life of a human community.

1.2.2 Language and Culture

"Translation is a kind of activity which inevitably involves at least two languages and two cultural traditions." (Toury 1995: 200) As this statement implies, translators are forever faced with the problems of how to deal with cultural conflicts between the source language and the target language. Thus, we will firstly go into the relationship between language and culture, because understanding of such relationship serves as a prerequisite in the understanding of translation which necessarily involves bilingualism.

In *American Heritage Dictionary of the English Language*, language is defined as "the use by human beings of voice sounds, and often written symbols representing these sounds, in organized combinations and patterns in order to express and communicate thoughts and feelings" (as cited in Qiu Jin 2005: 23). This definition clearly shows that language is a means of communication and a characteristic human act that distinguishes us from animals. Therefore, the use of a language depends on its specific culture, and studies on a language should be put in the cultural context in which the language is inextricably embedded.

Common opinions on the relationship between language and culture can be summarized as: language is a part of culture and one of the most important carriers of culture. Bassnett's (2001: 13) statement that language is "the heart within the body of culture" may be the best manifestation of the interdependent relationship between them.

On the one hand, language is a part of culture which plays an important role in it. "Language is not seen as an isolated phenomenon suspended in a vacuum but as an integral part of culture" (Snell-Hornby 2001: 40). It is a unique feature of human society. People use language to express ideas and feelings, and to further communicate with those belonging to different language groups. Language is the carrier of culture, through which the history of human civilization and social progress are recorded. It expresses culture, mirrors culture, transmits culture and helps develop culture. As Nida puts it, "language reflects the culture, provides access to the culture, and in many respects constitutes a model of the culture" (as cited in Schäffner 1995: 1). Some social scientists once claimed that language is the keystone of culture; without language, culture would not be possible. On the other hand, language is influenced and shaped by the culture which it stems from. Any language, especially the words and expressions in it, is influenced and controlled by various cultural elements like social status, politics, geographical setting, and customs etc. Changes in culture often give rise to new words or new meanings. For example, the word "mouse" originally meant a small and dirty animal which makes people feel sick, but today it comes to further represent a necessary part of a computer, without which it will be difficult for people to operate their operating system.

All of these prove that "a language is a part of a culture and a culture is a part of a language; the two are intricately interwoven so that one cannot separate two without losing the significance of either language or culture" (Samovar 2004: 120). So in order to understand a language, one must know well about the cultural context in which the language is spoken.

1.2.3 Translation and Culture

There are close relationships between translation and culture. On the one hand, translation is not merely a transfer between languages, but also an act of communication across culture barriers. Translation involves two different cultures rather than only two languages because in linguistic

forms it serves to exchange and communicate culture. Culture has already become an essential element in successful translation and will influence the whole process of translation from the beginning to the end. Therefore, translation can never be done successfully without sufficient considerations of both the source culture and the target culture.

As is known, translation is a decision-making process. The translator's decision not only depends on the language he or she learns, but also on the specific cultural context in which the language is inextricably embedded. Just as Nida (1993: 110) points out, "for truly successful translating, biculturalism is even more important than bilingualism, since words only have meanings in terms of the cultures in which they function, the translator cannot understand them adequately without careful consideration of their cultural backgrounds". We can't imagine someone who can do a good translation without truly understanding both the target and the source cultures.

On the other hand, translation is an important factor in the development of the target culture. As language is a tool for cultural communication, translation serves as a bridge and an essential means for cultural promotion. Translation never ceases to be influenced by culture, and translation in return has a strong effect on the target culture. For example, if the translator uses foreignization strategy in most cases, more alien cultural elements from the source text will be preserved through the translating process. And finally, these preserved foreign cultural elements may influence the target culture and further change its way of speaking.

It is obvious that culture plays an important role in the process of translation. In the course of translating, whether the translator has the right understanding or not in some cases depends on his or her knowledge of the relevant culture instead of his or her linguistic proficiency. Moreover, once translation problems are properly solved, translation can promote cultural understanding and exchange. Most cultural communication is carried out via translation.

1.2.4 Summary

From the above statement, we can conclude that language, culture and translation are closely related and interdependent. Language is the carrier of culture and culture is the soil of language. At the same time, culture exerts an important influence on translation. Translation is viewed as a cross-cultural communication. In the process of intercultural exchanges, translators have to deal

with not only the language differences but also cultural differences reflected in languages. Lack of the knowledge of culture background will lead to mistakes and misunderstanding, and bicultural competence is a necessary requirement for a successful translator.

1.3 Factors Influencing the Translation of Chinese Culture-Specific Items

Chinese and English belong to two different language families: the former belongs to the Sino-Tibetan family of languages, and the latter belongs to the West Germanic branch in the Indo-European family of languages. Chinese characters are pictographic, which convey things and ideas vividly with images, while English is alphabetic, which is formed by the combination of its twenty-six letters. Obviously, the two languages are totally different and as a result difficult to render from one to the other. Although linguistic gaps are often found as a barrier in the process of Chinese-English translation, cultural barriers are greater. Nida (1993: 306) once said: "difficulties arising out of differences of culture constitute the most serious problems for translators and have produced the most far-reaching misunderstanding among readers. " Therefore, we will only focus on those cultural differences which might cause difficulties in the translation of Chinese culture-specific items.

Transmitting culture elements through translation is a complicated and vital task. Each language has its own profound cultural connotations relative to its history, religious belief, modes of thinking, living environment and experience and so on. It is difficult for target readers to comprehend all these culture-specific items in the source text completely, for what is portrayed in the source text can be quite unfamiliar to them. To make a good translation of Chinese culture-specific items, a translator should be aware of the following factors that can hinder the translation process.

1.3.1 Historical Factor

Every nation has its own history. To different nations, the same item may have different historical allusions. As a country with a history of more than five thousand years, China boasts its long-standing cultural traditions as well as abundant cultural heritages, which are all reflected in its

language. Some Chinese culture-specific items produced in this way are difficult for foreigners to understand, such as historical events, the name of some famous people or places and so on. When it comes to translating those items relating to the specific history, there might be great problems.

1.3.2 Religious Factor

Religion has great influence upon the lives of people. Religious belief in China is quite different from that in the western world. Buddhism and Taoism are the two dominating religions, which have been spread in China for over a thousand years and have already merged into the daily life of Chinese people. However, most of the people in English-speaking countries believe in Christianity. For example, the Chinese people often say “菩萨保佑” (Buddha bless you), as Buddhism has a far-reaching influence while the western people often say "God bless you" for Christianity is the dominant religion believed by most of the people. Problems may occur when translating such expressions.

1.3.3 Thinking-Mode Factor

People from different areas have different modes of thinking.

Modes of thinking refer to fixed patterns of thinking formulated in the mental process of receiving, reflecting, considering and processing outside information by a certain group of people, usually, in a particular society. Once coming into being, the modes of thinking become spiritual characteristics shared by people inside the society and will pass from generation to generation as the most stable or the key factor of the people's cultural tradition.^[1]

(Wang Ping 1994: 67)

Western people are prone to a logical and analytical thinking pattern, while Chinese people prefer intuition and integrity. Western people, placing more emphasis on individual heroism, are self-assertive and want to express things in a straightforward way. Chinese people, by contrast,

[1] “所谓思维模式，是指一定的社会人群在接收、反映、思考、加工外界信息过程中所形成的思维惯性定势。其本质是连接思维对象、思维工具和思维主体之间关系的定型化结构。思维模式一旦形成之后，就成为一定民族群体共有的特征，作为文化传统中的核心和稳定因素而长期绵延下去。”参见王平，论中国传统思维模式对古代小说的影响[J]，东岳论丛，1994（5）：67。