

PROCEEDINGS ARTICLE

Analysis of Cultural Vacancy in the Translation of TCM Terms From the Perspective of Medio-Translatology

Qian Shan^{1,*}, Linxi Zhang¹¹ School of Foreign Languages, Hubei University of Chinese Medicine, Wuhan, China

ABSTRACT

Traditional Chinese Medicine (TCM) plays an important role in the treatment of COVID-19. More and more countries and regions realize the significance of traditional Chinese medicine culture. By analyzing the forms of creative treason from the perspective of medio-translatology, this article proposes to use literal translation and transliteration with annotation to translate TCM terms in order to compensate for the cultural vacancy and to promote the development of TCM culture.

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1. INTRODUCTION

Data show that the utilization rate of Traditional Chinese Medicine (TCM) in treatment of COVID-19 has reached 91.5%, and the total effective rate of TCM has exceeded 90% [1], thus opening up good opportunity for TCM development. The international community has also positively evaluated the anti-epidemic effects of TCM, which has brought good opportunities for the transmission of TCM culture. During this process, the accuracy of TCM terms translation, which embodies TCM culture, is particularly important. However, TCM language is difficult to understand, using extensive figures of speech, including rich cultural connotation, and the phenomenon of cultural default is ubiquitous. Translating this implicit cultural information [2] completely and accurately is a challenge. This article deals with the TCM terms translation from the perspective of medio-translatology, analyzing the various manifestations of creative treason, and proposes that the creative treason of translators should be used to compensate for cultural vacancy. Chinese stories need to be retold well with outstanding traditional culture in order to promote and spread Chinese medicine culture, elevating TCM translation to a new level.

2. REVIEW OF PREVIOUS STUDIES ON THE TRANSLATION OF TCM TERMS

Before 1980, TCM translation was in the initial stage. There were few Chinese translation works in English, and the translation activities were sporadic and spontaneous. No English dictionary or standard of TCM could be used as a reference to translate or write TCM articles. The compilation and issue of *Chinese and English Commonly Used Chinese Medicine Vocabularies* and *Standard Acupuncture Nomenclature* marked the beginning of standardization of TCM terms translation. The advent of Chinese medicine English dictionaries and glossaries signed that TCM terms translation has the transited from purely practice stage to theoretical stage [3].

In the previous period, the practical experience of TCM translation has been accumulated to a certain extent. From 1992 to 1999, two academic schools of TCM translation were gradually formed, including original-oriented and reader-oriented, which had an important impact on the English translation of TCM terms and their standardization [4]. Although no unified standard has been reached, a certain degree of consensus has been concluded on the translation of

*Corresponding author. Email: 1074748202@qq.com

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different TCM terms, the expression of TCM cultural concepts, as well as how to use Western terminology when translating TCM terms.

In 2000, the compilation of translation standards for several TCM terms began successively. However, since 2001, more attention has been paid to the cultural connotation information, and the study of related TCM culture has become a hot topic in TCM terms translation. From 2001–2015, a series of culture-related keywords appeared, which mainly involved the translation of culture-loaded words from a cross-cultural perspective, as well as the discussion on the influence of cultural default, cultural vacancy and compensation strategy [5] on standardization of TCM translation. The author believes that the study on the cultural connotation of TCM is obviously beneficial to research and development of TCM terms translation.

3. CULTURAL VACANCY IN TRANSLATION OF TCM TERMS FROM MEDIOTRANSLATOLOGY PERSPECTIVE

"Cultural default" means that in the process of communication between the author and his intended readers, the same social and cultural background knowledge shared by both sides is deliberately omitted [6]. "Cultural vacancy" is an important linguistic and cultural phenomenon in cross-cultural communication. The concept processed by a certain nation does not have similar word corresponding to it in another nation [7]. Lots of culture-loaded words are used in TCM terms, and a wealth of figures of speech in TCM terms are also crucial reasons for the cultural default. Chinese and Western medicine have different social and cultural backgrounds which definitely causes cultural vacancy.

3.1. Creative Treason of Translators in the Translation of TCM Terms

Translators play an irreplaceable role in TCM terms translation. First of all, translators are readers who have a thorough understanding of original text. When it comes to translation, the translators reorganize the original text in order to express not only denotation, but cultural connotation.

What's more, cultural vacancy caused by cultural differences between China and the West is the very obstacle. Words with unique Chinese culture implication cannot find their equivalents in English, and vice versa. Therefore, translators need to deal not only with literal information, but also much vacant cultural information. To make foreigners understand, translators need to master the information of TCM

culture, play a creative role in treason [8], and reprocess the TCM culture implication, translating both TCM knowledge and its culture.

TCM translation can reflect translators' creative treason, summarized by Xie Tianzhen, including the following four types.

3.1.1. Personalized Translation

Translation is a bridge across different cultures. In this process, translators creatively choose different methods to achieve the purpose of spreading the culture of the source language. Translator's creative choice of translation strategies is his personalized translation featuring with two main characteristics of "domestication" and "foreignization".

Domestication prefers the style and expression habits of the target language in translation, while foreignization retains characteristics of the source language [9] to a greater extent, making readers try to understand the author.

In the field of TCM translation, the debate between domestication and foreignization has a long history. In the early stage of TCM translation, the strategy of domestication was largely applied, aiming to introduce basic TCM knowledge to overseas readers. Due to various factors such as language and culture, cultural vacancy will inevitably appear in the translation of TCM terms. In the old days, translators emphasized the dissemination of TCM knowledge, borrowing words from the target language to explain TCM meanings. But in recent years, with the deepening of the TCM translation studies, TCM translation standardization was gradually formed. As the increase of self-confidence in national culture and international discourse power, translators attach more importance to the cultural connotation. When translating, they also make their works full of cultural significance, as well as using foreignization as much as possible to reveal personalized translation features.

Xie Zhufan mostly follows the Western medicine terms in the translation of TCM terms. For example, compared with Western terms, he translates "风火眼" into "acute conjunctivitis" by using the stagey of domestication. "Acute conjunctivitis" is a completely a Western term. Although it is easy for Western readers to understand, the meaning of disease diagnosis in TCM has lost. "风火眼" in TCM is a disease of red, swollen and painful eyes caused by evil wind and heat. Wei Naijie translates it as "wind-fire eye" in a foreignization way, preserving the implication of etiology, which is caused by wind and heat. The foreignization and literal translation not only retain cultural connotation, but also make it easy to understand without confusion. If blindly translating

cultural vacancy in domestication, the original meaning of TCM will lose. TCM translation is to transmit complete images rather than single terms. The specific translation strategy should be adopted according to different situations. When it is necessary, annotations can be used to explain the TCM cultural connotation in detail.

3.1.2. Mistranslation and Omission

When communicating in the same language, people will inevitably have some misunderstanding, thus more would be caused in bilingual communication and transformation. That is, in the process of bilingual translation, mistranslation and omission are unavoidable, both of which belong to unconscious creative treason [10]. Due to the cultural differences between two languages, foreign translators often mistranslate TCM terms.

In *Huangdi Neijing (Yellow Emperor's Canon of Internal Medicine)*, translated and published in 1949, Ms. Weiss mostly applied domestication translation strategy. Taking the acceptance of overseas readers as the standard, she applied a large number of Western medical terms when translating the concepts of TCM, ignoring the abundant metaphors and cultural connotations in TCM terms. For example, she translated "脾" into "stomach", "经脉" into "arteries", "经络" into "vessels", which were all mistranslation. Ms. Weiss is an American medical historian, lacking TCM background. With cultural vacancy cannot be overlooked, during the process of TCM terms translation, she directly used ready-made Western medicine terms without real understanding TCM terms implication, resulting in many mistranslations which hinder the spread of TCM culture.

3.1.3. Abridged Translation and Compilation

Generally speaking, translators choose to abridge or compile in order to seek aesthetic reflection of the form in translation or to cater for recipients. The early translation works of *Huangdi Neijing* are mainly compiled, abridged and abstracted. Meanwhile, the language style manifests the feature of domestication. Also, it is closer to linguistic and cultural habits of the target language readers. The translation of Weiss is in this form, with only the first 34 chapters has been abridged, in which TCM terms translation reflects the Western norms. In the early stage, this method is conducive to promoting the preliminary understanding of TCM in the Western countries, and facilitates TCM to enter the overseas market smoothly. However, its disadvantages are also very

obvious, which easily cause the mixture of TCM and Western medicine [11]. The complete TCM culture cannot be recurred.

3.1.4. Translation and Adaptation

Both translation¹ and adaptation belong to the special creative treason, and all the originals withstand "second deformation". At one time, TCM terms were translated into Japanese, then Japanese into Dutch, and finally into Latin. Cross-cultural translation easily gives rise to the distortion and misunderstanding of the source culture. TCM terms have undergone so many translating processes that a large amount of cultural information and relevant traditional culture must be damaged. Although in most cases, translation is carried out of necessity, there are still many examples of distortion due to translation.

3.2. Creative Treason of Readers and the Environment in TCM Terms Translation

The reader and the translation environment also get involved in this creative treason. People from different cultural backgrounds may have different understandings of original works, generating different creative treason. When translated works are introduced to societies with different cultures, they may be reshaped into different forms in which creative treason is also common.

Different countries have different views and policies on the acceptance of TCM. Some European countries are very strict about Chinese herbs. In Denmark, the use of Chinese herbs is banned in clinics; In the United States, TCM can be used to treat various diseases, even cancer. The difference lies in the acceptance of Chinese herbal medicine in the translation environment.

In general, in the post-epidemic era, the translation environment of TCM confront with both challenges and opportunities. On the one hand, modern medicine takes Western medicine as core, while TCM is defined as "alternative medicine" and "complementary medicine" [12] in the West, which is in a weak position. At the same time, TCM classics are profound and complex with distinct cultural, literary and disciplinary characteristics, and they are difficult to translate, which is beyond the ability of ordinary translators. On the other hand, with the continuous enhancement of comprehensive national strength and the improvement of international status under globalization, TCM culture has gained guarantees and supports for development. The dynamic role of

1. Here it means translating other versions of the source language.

creative treason of translators, readers and environment is fully stimulated to accelerate the development of TCM culture.

4. SUGGESTIONS FOR CULTURAL COMPENSATION

To better promote the exchange and communication between different cultures, keeping the target language convey maximum meanings of the originals and retaining implication, cultural compensation [13] should be taken in translation. Translator should pay attention to cultural default and cultural vacancy, fully considering the social and cultural background of the source language and making corresponding cultural compensation, so that accurately original information can be expressed.

4.1. Literal Translation With Annotation

Literal translation, as the name implies, is a method of translating according to the literal meaning, which can better retain the relevant cultural information in the original language. For example, "五行学说" of traditional Chinese medicine is often translated as "five elements", "阴阳互根" as "mutual rooting of yin and yang", and "水生木" as "water generating wood", all of which belong to literal translation. It not only retains the meaning of the source language, but also allows readers to be clear at a glance.

The spread of TCM after the epidemic has made foreign recipients broadly aware of TCM knowledge. In addition, readers play a dominant role in the construction of text meaning. When it is difficult to understand the translation, readers can infer meaning according to their own common sense or context. If it is difficult to infer through context and literal translation makes understanding difficult, translators can add annotations after literal translation to explain the terms that easily give rise to misunderstanding. Literal translation is easy to understand and retains the aesthetic value of the original text.

4.2. Transliteration With Annotation

Transliteration is the most suitable way to preserve the simplicity of TCM terms and improve the efficiency of external communication of TCM terms. Transliteration, as the name implies, is to directly express the TCM terms with cultural vacancy in the way of similar sounds in the target language, and add annotations to explain the cultural vacancy.

For example, "白虎汤" is a prescription for clearing heat and dispersing fire. However, if it is literally

translated as "White Tiger Decoction", the target language reader lacking TCM cultural knowledge will misunderstand the decoction and doubt whether it contains "white tiger". "白虎汤" is a prescription used to clear heat at the *qi* stage with high fever, dire thirst, sweating and gigantic full pulse. White tiger symbolizes autumn, and "白虎汤" is a prescription for regulating clear and cool. If translating "白虎汤" as "Baihu Decoction" and adding annotations to explain the meaning of "baihu", it would be more appropriate to express the cultural connotation therein, in order to better spread TCM culture.

In TCM translation, it is necessary to not only think about readers with TCM knowledge background, but also pay attention to readers who are newly interested in TCM. In the process of translation, considering the impact of different translation strategies and the expected effect can promote the efficient TCM translation.

5. CONCLUSION

From the perspective of medio-translatology, this article makes a specific study on the translation of TCM terms, and analyses the various manifestations of creative treason. In the case of cultural vacancy, it is proposed that the method of literal translation and transliteration with annotations should be used, illustrating the possible misunderstandings in the annotations, in order to explain the hidden implication in the TCM terms in detail as well as spread more cultural information of TCM. In the post-epidemic era, it is also necessary to not only popularize the TCM knowledge, but also spread its culture, enrich its connotation, allowing the world to share the fruits of TCM culture.

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