

A Study on the Strategies for Translating Place Names in Lingnan Folk Tales with the Perspective of Eco-translatology

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ABSTRACT: Lingnan folk tales reflect the folk customs of the Lingnan region. The places involved in the tales are named in various ways, either reflecting the geographical location, or reflecting the people's livelihood. Taking the differences in language and culture between Chinese and English into consideration, this paper analyzes the eco-translatology theory and several general strategies for translating the place names in China into English before applying the framework constructed by the language dimension, the culture dimension and the communication dimension from the perspective of eco-translatology to translate the place names in Lingnan folk tales. The cases in point show that the translation methods such as direct translation, free translation, and annotation can be applied according to the specific cultural context and the communicative intention in the folk tales with the ultimate goal to let the translation survive effectively in the translation ecology of the target language, spread the culture in the source text and make readers of the target language arouse the same feeling brought by the source text.

1. Introduction

Lingnan folk tales are part of Chinese folk culture. With rich historical culture, strong local flavor, and unique cultural characters, they tell the living conditions, social morality and living customs of Lingnan people. Holding the historical inheritance value, they are also an important and interesting cultural window for the dissemination of Lingnan culture; at the same time, translation, as the intermediary of communication between different cultures, can realize cultural transmission.

Folk tales all take place in specific places, whose names usually have certain meanings. The translation of these place names in China usually practices the rule of "being named after the master"^[1], and adopts the corresponding Chinese pinyin for translation. Chinese pinyin and English belong to the same code, both using the Roman alphabet. With the rapid development of the world and the increasing exchanges between countries, the appropriate translation of place names is of great significance for foreigners living and working in China.

However, at present, many English translations of Chinese place names directly use pinyin translation, which, especially in the context of folk tales, may lead to the inability to understand the cultural information behind the names. The place names, on most occasions, are named originally according to the local historical and cultural characteristics. Therefore, the success of the English translation of those place names depends on whether the translator can combine the relevant cultural

factors, so as to better arouse foreign readers' interest in the stories and the culture behind them. This paper is to study the translation of the place names from the perspective of eco-translatology.

2. Theoretical Rationale

2.1. Eco-translatology

Eco-translatology, namely ecological translation, is an interdisciplinary research paradigm of comprehensive translation from an ecological perspective proposed by the Chinese scholar, Professor Hu Gengshen, in 2004^[2]. Ecological translation is an ecological paradigm and the research field of "translation is the selection activities of translators to adapt to the ecological environment"^[3]. It mainly emphasizes two aspects of the translation process—the translation ecological environment and the translator's adaptation choice. Its core concept is translation as the ecological balance, translation as textual transplant, and translation as adaptation and selection^[4]. It takes the metaphorical reference and the literal reference as the research orientation, with the goal to lead and observe the research of translation behavior and the translation with the ecological world outlook and methodology. "Metaphorical reference" refers to the translation ecology to the natural ecology, while "literal reference" refers to the relationship between the translator and the translation ecological environment^[5]. The metaphorical reference of ecological translation possesses various connotations. The research practice

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shows that the metaphorical research of ecological translation is mainly reflected in the following three aspects: analogizing the translation ecology to the natural ecology, interpreting translation phenomena by ecological principles, projecting ecological ideas into the construction of translation theory.

Due to the correlation, similarity and isomorphism between the translation ecology and the natural ecology, the translation ecology can be metaphorically regarded as a natural ecological situation, and the terms, concepts and principles of ecology can also be used to interpret and describe the translation problems^[6].

Put “textual transplant” into focus. If only from the perspective of the text, ecological translation can narrowly refer to the “textual transplant” based on the ecology of the source language and the translated language ecology^[7]. In this sense, translation is quite similar to the ecological migration of an animal or a plant from one place to another, namely, the transfer of “living organisms” — the text from a linguistic ecosystem into another linguistic ecosystem. The “transplant” here thus has a “metaphorical” meaning.

What we call “textual transplant” is the understanding of the nature of translation in ecological translation science, which focuses on the internal “transplantability” of the source text. Specifically, before the implementation of transplantation, focus on the transplantability of the original text and thus start to choose the translated text. In the process of transplanting the text, focus on the language ecological transplantation, cultural ecological transplantation and communicative ecological transplantation, and the ecological environment reconstruction of the translation language and the reconstruction of the translation environment. After the completion of the textual transplant, focus on the life of the translated text, namely the translated text in the translation ecological environment, and focus on the cultivation of the ecological environment for the transplanted text to survive^[8].

Take a look at the translator’s adaptation / selection. In nature, species can only survive if they adapt to the natural ecological environment. It is at this point that we bring in “the Sequential Chain”. “The Sequential Chain” is the basis of eco-translatology and the premise of ecological translation theory innovation. It is a chain with internal logical correlation from translation to nature, expressing a cycle of backtracking to nature, society / human, culture, language and even translation, setting up a platform for the dialogue between humanities and natural science, and thus revealing the correlation between the translation ecology and the natural ecology. As a correlation domain from natural ecology to translation ecology, “the Sequential Chain” ensures the integration and interoperability of various elements in the correlation domain, and ensures their predetermined correlation and their similar structure. With this chain, in the process of translation, the “life” (i. e., “human” and “text”) can “survive” only when they adapt to the translation ecological environment where they are located. Therefore, translation adaptation / selection theory interprets translation in this way: the process of translation is a conscious or unconscious selection

activity of translators, influenced by the ecological environment factors of translation. Such choices occur in various aspects of the translation activity at various stages of the translation process, and at various levels of translation. “Translation as adaptation and selection” can be interpreted as the translator’s selective adaptation and the translator’s adaptive selection. Namely when the translation criteria of “faithfulness, expressiveness and elegance” is difficult to be all reached, “resemblance in spirit” and “resemblance in form” is difficult to get balanced as a whole, and “preciseness in sense, beauty in sound, and accuracy in form” is difficult to exist at the same time, it all depends on the translator to make independent judgment and adaptive choices on the basis of selectively adapting to the specific translation ecological environment^[9].

It is not difficult to understand that in ecological translation, the concept of “ecological environment” far exceeds the traditional concept of context. It is not only the language environment, but also covers the original world of culture, communication, society and other aspects and the world faced by the translator. “Translation ecological environment” refers to the world composed of the original text, the source language and the translated language, namely all the relevant factors including the society, the language, culture, communication, and the author, readers and clients^[10]. It is a collection of these multiple factors that influences the best adaptation and the optimal choice of the translator. The main principle of ecological translation theory is the principle of “multi-dimensional integration”, which mainly refers to the transformation of “three dimensions”, that is, in the process of translation, “the translator’s adaptation / choice” mainly centers on the translator and carries out selective activities in three dimensions — the language dimension, the culture dimension and the communication dimension^[11]. It is these three dimensions that construct a framework for the study on the translation strategies to translate place names in this paper.

2.2. The current strategies for translating Chinese place names

Chinese place names are generally composed of two parts: the proper name and the common name, and their English translation usually follows the practice of “transliteration of the proper name and free translation of the common name”^[12]. Proper names refer to the special terms, and most places have the corresponding special terms. Common names refer to the general names, and most of the suffixes possess common names. Here are some ways commonly used for translating Chinese place names^[13].

First, “Proper name (pinyin) + Common name (free translation) method”, that is, the proper name is translated by using Chinese pinyin, while the common name uses the free translation method. For example, “北京路 (běi jīng lù)” was translated as “Beijing Road”. “路 (lù)” in Chinese means road in English. The names of

many provinces, municipalities and urban roads in China are usually translated in this way.

Second, “Proper name (pinyin) + Common name (pinyin) method”, which means that the translation of the whole name uses Chinese pinyin. In 1958, China promulgated the Chinese Pinyin Scheme, which started the use of Pinyin in the English translation of place names in China. In 1986, China issued the Regulations on the Management of Place Names, which emphasizes the use of the pinyin method for place names in China. In 2000, the National People’s Congress promulgated the Law of the People’s Republic of China on the Chinese People’s Language, which stipulates: “The Pinyin Scheme is a unified standard for the spelling of Chinese names, place names and Chinese documents, and is used in areas where Chinese characters are inconvenient or cannot be used.” There are many examples of this complete pinyin method, such as “武汉 (wǔ hàn)” translated as “Wuhan”. Although the complete pinyin method is used frequently, the effect is not satisfactory. It does not effectively show the cultural and historical connotation behind the names, but simply translate the place names according to the pinyin pronunciation, which is not easy for foreign tourists to read.

Third, “Proper name (free translation) + Common name (free translation) method”, namely the complete free translation method. For instance, “黄河 (huáng hé)” is translated as “the Yellow River”, and “长城 (cháng chéng)” is translated as “the Great Wall”. These proper terms are translated into the corresponding English words. The advantage of this translation method is that the translator no longer simplifies the translation according to the pinyin method, which adds a phonetic beauty to the English translated place names. The disadvantage is that the translator only interprets Chinese words into the corresponding English words, which may easily cause misunderstanding among foreign tourists in terms of their connotations.

The above are the existing English translation methods of place names in China. At present, there is no unified standard to tell which translation method is the best, and there is no consistent choice among translators. The translator needs to consider various factors comprehensively, and optimize the translation methods for translating Chinese place name as far as possible in order to promote the spread of Chinese culture.

3. The Translation of the place names in Lingnan Folk Tales

Eco-translatology focuses on “the whole translation environment” and “the Sequential Chain” in association. When doing translation, the translator essentially has the responsibility to understand and ensure the balance in the original language ecology, the cultural ecology and the communication ecology, and at the same time should also make the translation realize the dynamic balance and the best correlation, ensuring the accuracy of the translation, and satisfying the needs of the translation management ecosystem, the translation market ecosystem and the translation education ecosystem. For

translating the place names in Lingnan folk stories, it is necessary to consider not only China’s provisions and programs of using the national language, but also the equivalent functions the translation plays in the ecological environment of the target language so as to achieve the role of cultural communication. According to the principles of “multi-dimensional integration” of eco-translatology, including the adaptation and transformation of the language, the culture and the communication dimension, translators are supposed to carry out the “selective adaptation” and the “adaptive selection”, meeting the dynamic balance of translation through multi-level integration.

3.1 The adaptation and selection in the language dimension

At the level of language, translators need to choose and transform the language form in the process of translation. In order to make readers of the target language understand the information conveyed by the source language, we should pay attention to the adaptive choice of the target language during translation. The place names in Lingnan folk tales were designed with various reasons, some showing geographical location, some reflecting local characteristics, some having names, and some coming from the stories behind them. Therefore, for the English translation of the place names in Lingnan folk stories, it is necessary to fully understand the form and the content of the place names in the source language, and consider the language convention of the target language to transfer the cultural meaning, and choose the proper words according to the reading experience of the English readers, so as to avoid the ambiguity in the translation context.

Let’s look at the translation of a street called “豪贤路 (háo xián lù)” in a folk story about its origin. This street is located in Guangzhou, formerly named “濠弦里 (háo xián lǐ)”. Although the Chinese pronunciation of the two road names is basically the same, their meaning is very different. Originally, “濠弦 (háo xián)” indicates its geographical location. “濠 (háo)” refers to the moat, “里 (lǐ)” refers to the residential area or neighbourhood, and “弦 (xián)” shows that the neighbourhood is along the moat. Actually, this street, together with the east moat of Guangzhou and the Wenxi Stream, forms a shape of a bow, and “濠弦里 (háo xián lǐ)” is right located on the “string” of the bow. Later, “濠弦里 (háo xián lǐ)” was renamed “豪贤路 (háo xián lù)”. Although the Chinese pronunciation is consistent, it now refers to heroism, to commemorate a loyal martyr, Li Suiqiu, from Banqiao Township, Panyu, Guangdong Province. Therefore, from the source text, readers of the source language can easily understand the meanings of the two place names according to the different Chinese characters, but if the complete pinyin translation method is used, in the translated text, it is difficult for readers of the target language to distinguish the meaning of the original name from the present name. Here, for translating the original name, the direct description of the geographical location,

as one of the English ways to mark the place name, can be adopted. “濠弦里 (háo xián lǐ)” can thus be translated as “Neighbourhood-along-the-east-moat”, and for the present name, free translation can be applied. “豪贤路 (háo xián lù)” can be translated as “The Hero Road”. With these translations, readers of the target language will be able to receive the information and the feeling that the readers of the source language can get from the source text.

It can be seen that the language dimension of eco-translatology pays more attention to the functional equivalence of the source text and the translated text. Provided that there is no misunderstanding or no disobedience of the target language rules, with the method of direct translation, the translation is loyal to the original meaning and retains the original form in the source text. Direct translation can preserve the cultural characteristics of the source language as much as possible, at the same time providing readability for readers of the target language.

3.2 The adaptation and selection in the cultural dimension

Language is the carrier of culture, and the transformation between the two languages is actually the transmission and interpretation of the bilingual cultural connotation. Due to the different ways of thinking, moral cognition, values and social relations between Chinese and Western countries, there are many differences between Chinese and English expressions for the same thing, as well as their own culture-loaded words. Therefore, the adaptive transformation of the cultural dimension lies in the differences in the nature and the content of the source language culture and the translated language culture. In the translation following the principle of the cultural dimension, domestication and foreignization are the two important ways to deal with cultural differences. Domestication replaces the expression of the cultural identity of the source language with the one in the translated language, while foreignization keeps the expression in the source language culture and retains the cultural identity of the source language.

For example, in the translation of the folk tale of Zhang Zhensun, a native in Nanhai District in the late Southern Song Dynasty, there is a street named after his title, called “状元坊 (Zhuàng yuán fāng)”. The term “状元 (Zhuàng yuán)” is a loaded word of Chinese culture, which has Chinese cultural characteristics and is the product of the imperial examination system between the Sui Dynasty and the Qing Dynasty. In the history of Chinese imperial examination, there were thousands and millions of scholars, but the number of the top scholars of this huge group of intellectuals was small. In the process of translating this street name, with the purpose of spreading the local culture, if complete pinyin transliteration is applied as the way of foreignization, readers of the target language will get to know the Chinese language culture. However, for the English readers, pinyin has no understandable connotation. Therefore, in the translation of “状元坊 (Zhuàng yuán

fāng)” in this story, the “transliteration + annotation” method, i.e., the “proper name (pinyin) + common name (free translation)” method together with the additional interpretation, should be adopted. Thus, “状元坊 (Zhuàng yuán fāng)” can be translated as “Zhuang Yuan Lane—a lane to memorize the number one scholar who came first in the imperial examination”.

In Lingnan folk tales, there are a large number of words with local cultural characteristics. Applying the transliteration and annotation method can guarantee the translated text maintaining unique cultural characteristics in the source ecological environment, and at the same time, with the aid of the additional interpretation, helps the translation survive in the target language ecological environment, adapting to readers of the target language and meeting the demand of the translation market ecology.

3.3 The adaptation and selection in the communication dimension

Translation is a kind of communicative activity, and any kind of communicative activity has a communicative intention. In eco-translatology, the transformation of the communication dimension is to put the focus on the level of communication, and to pay attention to the communicative intention in the source text to be reflected in the translation. The purpose of communicative translation is to reproduce the same effect felt by the original text readers in the target language as much as possible. Therefore, the transformation at the communicative level can effectively realize the pragmatic function of the language and achieve the same “effect”.

There is an interesting example. In Guangzhou Xiaobei Road, there is a lane named “飞来对面巷 (fēi lái duì miàn xiàng)”. According to the folk tale related to the origin of this name, this name came from the dialogue between the people living in the lane and those living in the opposite street called “Fulai Street”, meaning a street with a lot of happiness and wealth coming in. Because most of the people living in “Fulai Street” were rich, high-spirited and often humiliate the people of this lane. Later, a Guangdong talent called Lun Wenxu designed a name for this lane, and called it “飞来对面巷 (fēi lái duì miàn xiàng)”, having the connotation that all the happiness, wealth, money and so on will come from “Fulai Street”, helping the people of this lane to respond to those of “Fulai Street” and quench their pride. Therefore, in the translation of this place name, the way of direct translation together with free translation can be used, and thus, “飞来对面巷 (fēi lái duì miàn xiàng)” can be translated as “Lane-with-wealth-flying-over”, combining the literal meaning of the source language, and adding the connotation of the source name, with readers of the target language being able to receive the communicative information and the feelings brought by the source language.

The communication dimension of adaptation and selection pays attention to the translation communication intention. Therefore, in view of the specific situation of

Lingnan folk tales, the translation of place names should consider the ecological environment provided by the target language, adopts the free translation method, conveying the same meaning and reaching the equivalent functions in the source language ecology.

4. Conclusion

Lingnan folk stories reflect the folk customs of Lingnan region. The places involved in the story are named in various ways, either reflecting the geographical location, or presenting the local people's qualities, or reflecting the people's livelihood. Therefore, it is difficult to satisfy the role of the translated culture with a single translation method. The place names in the folk tales were created and designed in different folk situations. To translate the place names from the source language to the target language ecology, maintaining the balance of the translation ecosystem, meeting the requirements of the ecological environment, the translator should apply the framework formed by the language dimension, the culture dimension, and the communication dimension, choosing the appropriate translation method according to the specific context in the folk tales, and thus realizing the adaptive selection and the selective adaptation.

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