

Study on the Translation of Culture-loaded Terms under the Translation-environment Ecology -- Taking the Chinese-English Version of Poem *Meige* as an Example

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Abstract: Eco-translatology promotes the development of research activities by focusing on textual life, the translator's survival, and translation-environment ecology. The cultural classics of ethnic minorities have unique culture-loaded terms. Through translation studies, we can analyze the translation effect of cultural classics and the performance of translation-environment ecology in translation. To realize the understanding of the relationship between translation, language, and culture.

1. Introduction

Culture is the product that carries the social and historical development and change of human beings, and it is the fruit of the integration of values, ways of thinking, lifestyles, culture, and art.^[1] China's diverse ethnic cultures are a unique and valuable treasure that is a unique material and spiritual wealth, a power source of development, which was produced and created by each ethnic group in the long-term production and life. If we want to understand the culture of a nation, literature is the best entry point. Because the language of the literature carries the culture, builds and improves the value of culture, and culture also promotes the survival and development of language. When we analyze the culture-loaded terms in literary classics, we can also understand the unique way of cultural activities behind them in a certain, which properly reflects the nation's culture that has gradually accumulated over a long historical process. Translation activity is not only the interaction between languages but also represents the exchange of culture and transmission of information behind the language. Therefore, the relationship between translation, language, and culture is inseparable.

Although translation, language, and culture are closely linked, it is inevitable that to achieve the purpose of cultural dissemination in the process of translation, the source text will be processed under the influence of the culture of the translated language, which will lead to an imbalance in the role of translation intermediary. Therefore, it is especially crucial to analyze translation activities rationally and find optimization methods. In this paper, under the guidance of the theory of "Eco-translatology" proposed by Professor Hu Gengshen, and with the concept of "translation as eco-balance" mentioned in his integration of "eco-life", I will discuss

how to deal with the Chinese-English translation of the distinctive culture-loaded terms in the classics.

2. Eco-translatology Theory

Ecology has become a productive model for the innovative reconceptualization of translation processes and translatorial action in the last two decades^[2]. When Prof. Hu put forward the theory of "Eco-translatology", he already paid attention to the multidisciplinary and interdisciplinary characteristics of contemporary translation and literature.

2.1. Definition of Eco-translatology Theory

Eco-translatology is a new ecological paradigm, which takes ecological holism as its concept, oriental ecological wisdom as its source, and translation adaptation and selection theory as its basis. It is an attempt at integral research in translation studies and a scientific exploration of ecological paradigms.

Eco-translatology is oriented to the connotations of a harmonious symbiosis of "translator's survival" (life), "textual life" (life), and "translation-environment ecology" (eco-) and brings us a new research direction and a new development tendency for translation field. Hu's thinking on the construction of eco-translatology starts from the four translation problems which center on what is translation, how to translate, who is translating, and why to translate^[3]. In the process of solving the problems, he constructs a set of relatively systematic theoretical discourse systems by "taking textual life, translator's survival, and translation-environment ecology as the objects of research, and describe and explain translation activities from the perspective of ecology"^[4].

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The interactive eco-life integration constitutes a life-oriented way of thinking, which runs through the whole idea of eco-translation and influences the development of eco-translation research. This is the eco-paradigm, and prof. Hu has located three interrelated core translation concepts, namely, “translation as adaptation and selection”, “translation as textual transplant” and “translation as eco-balance”. These three core concepts are hailed as “a discourse composed of core words that can be recognized and understood by the community in a broader sense” [5].

2.2. Meaning of Translation-environment Ecology

In the view of Eco-translatology all translational situations are ‘translational ecoenvironments’. These environments refer to the worlds of the source and target languages and comprise the linguistic, communicative, cultural aspects of translating as well as the author, client and readers [6]. One of the paradigms of eco-translatology is to pay attention to “translation as eco-balance”, i.e. the translation-environment ecology, which aims to maintain the balance and harmony between translation ecology, the survival of the translator and the life of the text, which is exactly in line with the principle of “ecology is the balance and harmony of the whole” [7]. In short, the harmony of translation is achieved through the attributes of coordination, integration, harmonization, and complementarity. The harmony needs to achieve a balance between “translator’s survival”, “textual life” and “translation-environment ecology” in the process of translation. Therefore, translation becomes an ecological activity based on the driven factors of harmony and balance, and emerges from the regional interaction to work on the original language ecology and the translation ecology, which ultimately constitutes a translation ecosystem generated by the joint action of the text, the translator and the translation context [8].

3. Yi’s classical oral poem - *Meige*

English translation of ethnic classics is an important way to spread Chinese culture, literature, and civilization, and a necessary way for Chinese culture to go out. The improvement of national cultural soft power relies on cultural exchanges, literary dissemination, and civilization achievements. Chinese ethnic groups are unique and are an organic part of China’s diversified culture. Yunnan, as the only province that has a large number of ethnic minorities, has abundant resources of ethnic culture and classics. The brilliant culture local people created is also indispensable to Chinese culture. By exploring the cases of Chinese-English translation of ethnic texts, we can think about the value of English translations for the transmission of their cultures when we use Chinese to understand their cultures.

Cases in this paper come from the English translation of the Yunnan ethnic classic “*Meige*”. *Meige* is a folk oral poem (i.e., a poem without written records) circulating in the Yi minority area of Yunnan. It is regarded as the “root score” of the Yi people and is known as the encyclopedia

of the history and life of them. The locals have preserved it by singing it in the festivals and other traditional days.

Meige is mainly composed of four parts: “Genesis”, “Creation”, “Marriage and Love Songs” and “Funeral”. The content includes the Yi people’s understanding of the creation of the world and the origin of all things, as well as accounts of work, marriages, funerals, and local customs. Although the whole poem is not a complete story from beginning to end, each part of it is composed of many pieces, each of which can be sung independently; however, each of them is an inseparable part of the whole masterpiece. In the transmission, the senior singers customarily sing in Yi language while the young like the Han language. The poem is common sung five-word and seven-word phrases, with five-word phrases predominating, which summarize the life and ideas of the Yi people and their history in detail, to help us appreciate the simplicity and intrinsic beauty of this ethnic group.

4. Example Analysis

The following cases are chosen from The Creation of the World, Book One Genesis in *Meige*.

Example 1:

God Gezi was going to create the sky.
He dropped nine gold apples,
Which became his nine sons ...
God Gezi was going to create the earth.
He dropped seven silver apples,
Which became his seven daughters ... [9]

Taking the number words in this section as an example, “seven” and “nine” can be associated with female and male respectively in Yi culture, and the Yi people believe that the odd number represents auspiciousness. When they describe the decision of the God Gezi to create the world from nothing, they use these two numbers, which proves the cultural perception of reverence for the god and their hopes of obtaining the favor of the god. It happens that there is a similar case in the Han culture regarding the understanding of numbers. In addition to the preference for even numbers like “six” and “eight”; Han people also have similar feelings to Yi people for “seven” and “nine”. For example, the number “seven” reminds us of the story of Nvwa, a goddess in Chinese mythology, who created chickens on the first day, dogs on the second day, and human beings on the seventh day. This number can be linked to the origin of mankind in both Yi and Han cultures, and it is also in line with the theme of “the creation of the world” in this oral poem. In this way, although our ancestors have developed different ethnic groups, they all share a common cultural origin in the choice of specific numbers, and thus we can feel the similarities in the myths they conceived and the customs they created at different times.

The number preferences of various groups in China have a common origin. What about the preference for numbers in Western culture? When we analyze the influence of Western culture, we find that their preference for numbers is different from that of Chinese culture. In contrast to our view of even numbers, they prefer odd numbers, such as three and multiples of three, seven, etc.,

and consider them auspicious and peaceful. So when we analyze the Chinese-English translation, we can see that the translator follows the original expression without any change, which is easy for readers to understand in the context of their cultural backgrounds. Furthermore, we also need to consider where Yi culture has landed in China, and even in the world. If we want to ensure the translation-environment ecology and achieve the balance between the survival of the translator and the life of the text, and even the translation ecology, we can appropriately explain the reason why the Yi culture is fond of these two numbers, for example, they use “seven” and “nine” as lucky numbers to refer to the female and the male separately. By doing so, this not only breaks the perception that Chinese people only like even numbers, but also facilitates readers to further familiarize themselves with the differences and similarities of numerical preferences between Eastern and Western cultures. What’s more, it facilitates the understanding of the national cultures carried by the frequently occurring numbers in the subsequent verses, realizes the respect for the textual life, doesn’t affect the problem of the translator’s survival, and promotes the eco-balance of translation, and ultimately achieve the purpose of communication and exchange more effectively.

In addition to the characteristics of numbers, “the gold apples” and “the silver apples” also have the culture-loaded value to highlight the way of maintaining the eco-balance of translation. In Yi culture and Yunnan culture, “guozi” (fruit in English) is a generalized concept to replace any certain fruit that the local people don’t know. If the translator follows the original version, the readers will be curious about what kind of fruit it is and will wonder if the translation mistake is made. Therefore, “guozi” was translated into the apple according to the theme “the creation of the world” in this poem, taking the meaning of the apple as youth, breeding, spring in English culture, which is convenient for the readers to understand; at the same time, it also leads the readers to think of the enlightenment effect of apples in the Garden of Eden; and then guiding the following verses that the God Gezi transformed the apples into children to assist him in realizing the goal of creating the world. It is not difficult to see that the translator has reconciled the expression differences between the Eastern and Western cultures and found objects that can complement each other, to achieve a harmonious state of translation and maintain the balance of the translation-environment ecology.

Example 2:

The five sons responsible for creating the sky
Were all hedonistic. ...

The five brothers who created the sky
Were extremely bold.^[9]

The idiom “dandarudou” (full of courage in English) comes from “The Story of Three Kingdoms”, describing someone who is extremely bold. In Yi and Yunnan cultures, this idiom also carries on its original meaning and refers to someone who dares to do something. In example 2, it is translated into two distinct meanings. The former means relating to hedonism with irony, while the latter expresses someone who is not afraid to do things that involve risk or danger which is faithful to the Chinese context. The reason for this change comes from the following story. Hedonism

depicts the five brothers who come to the new world and do nothing but eat, drink, and entertain. It is not difficult to notice that they do not have a firm sense of responsibility to fulfill the task assigned by the God Gezi at the beginning; however, there is the climax of the story, a fierce tiger. With the order of the God Gezi, they have to kill the tiger and use its limbs as pillars of the sky, so their image instantly reverses from dandies to heroes, and be hailed as the five brothers who have guts to do something.

The concept of translation-environment ecology mentioned in eco-translatology is not difficult to analyze because the translation activity is an ecological activity, which is based on the driving factor of “harmonious and balanced”. The formation and effect of translation-environment ecology also depend on the regional interaction between translators and texts. If the translation follows the prose structure in the original Chinese text, it will make the English readers misunderstand why the brave people would only care about enjoyment but not heroic action, so it should be handled appropriately in the context.

Example 3:

The eldest daughter did the work at a gallop.

The second daughter did the work like a bee.^[9]

Take the words used in this verse to describe the work of the daughters of the goddess Gezi as an example. “feikuaidizuo” originally means that someone does things quickly and neatly, which matches the difficulty of the work, and the affirmation of their work in the verse. However, “at a gallop” refers to hurried and hasty that are emotionally pejorative. Objective speaking, it does not emphasize the ecological harmony of the translation. In contrast, “shuaituandizuo” is an excellent example to prove the translation-environment ecology. Its literal meaning in Yi and Yunnan cultures refers to a person who does things as fast as a gyroscope; the specific meaning implies that someone doing things without stopping. To achieve the translation eco-balance, the translator has adopted the metaphorical approach in the English translation, viewing the second daughter’s laboring behavior as a bee’s honey-gathering business, which visually depicts the quality of her hard work and has a rhetorical sense of aesthetics in Chinese expression to ensure that the readers understand its meaning vividly in English.

Based on the analysis of the translation-environment ecology, the former can indeed be adjusted appropriately based on the content and textual emotion. Furthermore, the latter can also be slightly changed to ensure the smoothness and unity of the whole textual structure. Here I provide a version as “The eldest daughter is quite a fast worker. The second daughter is quite a busy bee.” The reasons are as follows a fast worker is someone who is able to navigate a complicated, nuanced, or difficult situation to gain an advantage for themselves. Its literal meaning is “one who can work quickly.” In addition, a busy bee retains the meaning intended to be expressed in Chinese, and the whole structure of the verses is more consistent with the textual harmony, which is unified with the ecological effect presented by the Chinese version.

5. Conclusion

Eco-translatology, as a rising translation theory, promotes the development of translation studies by focusing on textual life, the translator's survival, and translation-environment ecology. The cultural classics of ethnic minorities have distinctive features and contain rich culture-loaded terms. With the support of eco-translation, targeted analysis of the translation effect of cultural classics will help us understand the method of realizing translation-environment ecology, and will also be conducive to further exploring the influence of other perspectives on the translation under the theory, and help us to better achieve cultural translation.

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