

A Study on the Strategies for Handling Culture-Loaded Words in the Japanese Translation of China Keywords

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Abstract: *Analysis of Culture-loaded Words in the Japanese Translation of "China Keywords", Semantic Correspondence Relationships, Classification Models and Optimisation Paths for Strategies. Based on the different semantic fields and cultural schemas, this paper finds that there are three types of mappings for image overlap: overlap, mismatch and vacancy; it studies the generation mechanism of semantic vacancies and the three-level classification of lexeme, sememe and pragmatics, and finally proposes a three-dimensional compensation framework for semantics, aesthetics and cognition. The system of weighing parameters for the theory of equivalence has been set up in this paper for functional equivalence and formal correspondence; the scope of domestication and foreignisation strategies has been clarified, and a three-level processing scheme of high, medium and low for culture-specific items has been established. Based on the three categories of retention evaluation indicators, the principles of cognitive context adaptation and strategies for improving communication effectiveness put forward in this paper offer some practical suggestions and provide a theoretical basis for the Japanese translation practice of culture-loaded words.*

Keywords: *culture-loaded words, Japanese translation strategies, semantic correspondence, equivalence theory, communication effectiveness*

Introduction

Culture-loaded words are vocabulary units that have rich meanings and imagery in a particular cultural system, and the quality of their cross-linguistic conversion directly affects the validity of cultural transmission in the translated work. Chinese and Japanese belong to different language families and have different cultural traditions, so for a long time, many problems have existed in handling culture-loaded words in Chinese-Japanese translation, such as image mismatch, semantic vacancy and information attenuation. Most of the previous studies have only focused on the translation of individual words or general translation rules; they have not built an organised system of classifications or quantitative evaluation indices, and thus have failed to meet the high demands for translation quality in cross-cultural communication between China and Japan. Therefore, we need to develop a plan that can carry forward the cultural attributes of the original language and be suitable for the cognitive environment of the target language. Typological analysis of semantic correspondence relations serves as the starting point for this study, the equivalence theory is applied to classify the strategies, and then based on the three dimensions of evaluation indicators, adaptation principles and effectiveness enhancement, optimisation paths are proposed to provide an organised analytical tool and a referenceable operational scheme for the study of Japanese translation of culture-loaded words.

1. Semantic Correspondence Relations of Culture-loaded Words in Japanese Translation

1.1 Cross-linguistic Mapping: Types of Cultural Images

When translating the images in the culture-loaded words from Chinese to Japanese, all sorts of cross-linguistic correspondences occur. Given that the three types of mappings have different semantic fields and cultural schemas, they are referred to as image overlap, image mismatch and image vacancy in this paper. A high degree of consistency in the referents, cultural associations and emotional connotations of the source language and the target language is called image overlap. For such words, the Japanese translation can directly use the corresponding existing expressions without mediation or

alteration. Image mismatch is when the same reference leads to different mental pictures or values in the two languages. For example, if some plants or animals have partially overlapping symbolic meanings in Chinese and Japanese but different main connotations, then some modification of the image should be made in light of the cultural context^[1].

Image vacancy type is the most difficult mapping category in the process of Japanese translation, and it refers to the situation where a Chinese culture-loaded word cannot be matched with any corresponding image carrier in the Japanese lexical system. This type of vacancy is due to the different ways the two languages classify specific objects or concepts, and to the lack of corresponding material bases or customary traditions in Japanese society; thus, the image cannot be cognitively activated through literal translation or loan translation. For vacancy-type mapping, the translation strategy should deal with the problem from the perspective of image reconstruction, and approximate images in the target language can be obtained by means of annotations, substitutions or the addition of new semantic features. The three kinds of mappings are not the same; based on this difference, we can study the relations among semantics, and they can also be used for classification later.

1.2 Generation Mechanism and Typological Classification of Semantic Vacancy

Semantic vacancy is not a random translation problem; rather, it is the result of systematic differences in conceptual structure, cognitive categories and cultural norms between Chinese and Japanese. The main origins of generation for semantic gaps are: lack of referents, that is, the entities or activities mentioned in Chinese do not exist in Japanese culture; differences in conceptualisation, that is, the same referent is given different semantic features or boundaries in the two languages; and asymmetry of associative meanings, which refers to the inability to carry over metaphorical, symbolic or affective meanings of a word through cross-linguistic transmission in the target language vocabulary. In combination with the above mechanisms, one can either divide or interrupt the semantics of culture-loaded words in Japanese translation.

Based on how frequently they occur, the three types of semantic vacancies in this paper are lexeme vacancies, sememe vacancies and pragmatic vacancies. Lexeme vacancy is the absence of a corresponding word form or morpheme combination for a particular object in the target language, and it is regarded as one of the most superficial types of vacancy. Semantic vacancy is a case in which the target language has a corresponding word form, but its semantic features do not match those of the source language item; that is to say, there is no extension of meaning or cultural connotation. Pragmatic vacancy refers to the rules of use, suitable conditions and implicit purposes of a word in particular situations of communication; even if it is conceptually the same, its pragmatic effect may still be different. The classification above provides a theoretical basis for all kinds of processing methods in practice, and the different types of semantic vacancies need to be handled in different ways^[2].

1.3 Compensation Dimensions for the Attenuation of Cultural Information

Due to the characteristics of Japanese translation, the semantic information in culture-loaded words is often lost; thus, there is usually a decline in cultural specificity, reduced emotional resonance and a loss of imagery. Loss of cultural specificity is a type of phenomenon in which information closely associated with a particular place, history or folklore in the original language is generalised or made neutral in translation. A reduction in the intensity of emotion can be shown by reducing laudatory or disparaging words and expressions of wonder or humour. A decrease in the brightness of the picture is often due to paraphrasing or translation for functional reasons, and thus some metaphors are frequently replaced by general descriptions. The above attenuation cannot be eliminated entirely, but it can be compensated for by the following compensation measures.

The three kinds of compensation operations are as follows: The goal of a semantic dimension is to add missing conceptual information, and by means of annotations, translations or explanations of cultural knowledge, one can be added to the surface structure of the target text. The aesthetic factor is the reproduction of images and rhetorical effects; it maintains the artistic appeal of the original language by means of rhetorical devices or image substitution that have similar functions in Japanese. Cognitive factors refer to the processing load of target-language readers; thus, in order to reduce the cognitive barrier of cultural difference, one should adjust both the amount and organisation of information. The three dimensions are not independent of each other, and in fact, they are often used together in actual translation work. A systematic review of the components of remuneration can be employed to build a quantitative evaluation model for the reduction of cultural information and thus

improve the relevance and practicality of Japanese translation strategies.

2. A Classification Model of Japanese Translation Strategies Based on Equivalence Theory

2.1 Weighting Parameters in Functional Equivalence and Formal Correspondence

Equivalence theory can be employed to study the strategies of Japanese translation for culture-loaded words in general; that is to say, the two poles of selection are functional equivalence and formal correspondence. Functional equivalence is to reproduce the communicative function and reader response of culture-loaded words in the source language in the target language by making only minor modifications to linguistic forms and cultural images. The form of formal correspondence should be the same as that in the original language in terms of vocabulary, syntax and imagery to keep the cultural load of these words. The choice of the two poles should be based on a number of quantifiable factors, such as the convertibility of cultural information, the cognitive familiarity of the target-language readers, and the acceptable degree of semantic loss^[3].

That is, the convertibility parameter shows whether the particular information in a source-language culture-loaded word can be expressed in Japanese without violating the grammatical norms of Japanese. The cognitive familiarity index indicates how well the target-language readers are familiar with the cultural concept; the higher this index is, the more practical the formal correspondence will be. The upper bound of the information loss in the process of functional equivalence is the semantic loss threshold. The three are in a certain way. When the convertibility of a culture-loaded word is low and readers are not familiar with it, then the functional equivalence strategy should be used. If the threshold of semantic loss is too small, then formal correspondence should be used. A Parametrisation Weighing Model can be used to select one of the strategies according to the general idea of the equivalence theory.

2.2 Determination of the Applicable Boundaries for Domestication and Foreignisation Strategies

As the two basic orientations of cultural translation, domestication and foreignisation each have their own use cases in the process of Japanese translation of culture-loaded words. Domestication usually adds culturally rich words from the source language to Japanese expressions and cognitive systems to reduce cultural unfamiliarity by means of substitution, generalisation or functional correspondence. The strategy of foreignisation is to maintain the cultural differences of the source language and create a sense of defamiliarisation in the target language through direct translation, loan translation or transliteration. The two strategies are not in conflict with each other, and they are also not; rather, they form a continuum, and the choice of which to use depends on how compatible the culture-loaded words are with the cultural system of the target language.

The two main reasons for the limit are the two factors of cultural distance and the environment of discourse reception. The cultural distance coefficient is determined by how understandable the images, values and customs carried by the culture-loaded words are in Japanese culture; the higher this coefficient is, the more necessary a domestication strategy is. The environment in which the discourse is received depends on the expected readers of the translated works and their reasons for reading; for example, academic papers or those with cultural differences are generally translated using foreignisation, and texts for the general public are more likely to be translated domestically. The division line is not fixed; instead, according to the type of culture-loaded word and its position in the sentence, it will be moved accordingly. A reasonable switch between the strategies of domestication and foreignisation can improve the reading efficiency of target-language learners without losing the original meaning^[4].

2.3 A Hierarchical Processing Scheme for Culture-Specific Items

Culture-specific items are vocabulary units that have special reference functions or associative values in the cultural system of the source language, and their Japanese translations need to be built hierarchically to cover the different attributes of all kinds of culture-specific items. According to how closely related culture-specific items are to the Japanese cultural system, they can be divided into three categories: at the high-compatibility level, there are Chinese words that are unique to Chinese but have similar concepts or approximate expressions in Japanese culture; at the medium-compatibility level, there are words with some overlap in semantic features but different core images, and compromise measures such as substitution or annotation are required; and at the low-compatibility level, there are

words that have no equivalent in the Japanese cultural system, so reconstruction or creative translation needs to be carried out.

Processing Plans at all levels are not independent; rather, they are a gradient design based on the two indices of the extent of semantic retention and the degree of reception fluency. The proportion of the original meaning of the source-language culture-specific item that is retained in the translated text is the semantic retention index, and the cognitive load on target-language readers when understanding the translated text is the reception fluency index. First, we need to improve the retention of meaning, so we will use a formal correspondence handling method. At the level of medium compatibility, the two should be balanced, and the strategies of domestication and foreignisation should be employed alternately. If the degree of compatibility is low, more weight will be given to the fluency of reception and some semantic retention may be lost in the interest of comprehensibility. A single strategy is no longer needed for the Japanese translation of culture-specific items in the form of a hierarchical processing scheme; instead, according to the inherent characteristics of the words themselves, all kinds of different conversion paths can be taken to improve the overall translation efficiency and the quality of information transmission.

3. Optimization Paths for Japanese Translation Strategies of Culture-loaded Words

3.1 Evaluation Indicators for the Retention Degree of Source Language Cultural Features

First, an objective index of how well the cultural connotations of Japanese words are preserved in the translated text needs to be developed to improve translation strategies for culture-loaded words in Japanese. The three indices that will be used to determine the degree of retention are as follows: First, there is the semantic integrity index; it checks whether the original idea of a culture-loaded word has been fully conveyed by considering the clarity of its reference and the definiteness of the concept boundary; Second, there is the image specificity index, which aims to determine whether specific metaphorical, symbolic or analogical attributes of the source language have been retained after translation and not replaced by general expressions; that is to say, the translated work should still have the particular cognitive schema of the source-language culture; Finally, there is the emotional valence index, and it considers how far the pragmatic coloring of a word—such as praise or blame, closeness or distance, seriousness or humour—has been reproduced in the target language, including the accuracy of cross-linguistic conversion for the intensity of tone, social distance and emotional orientation. The three indices together offer a general sense of the extent of retention, and each of these indices can be further divided into several levels according to how far it deviates semantically, to provide more detailed analysis of the retention situation^[5].

The three indices do not work alone; they are related to each other and have different weights. The weights of the three indicators should be different for different kinds of culture-loaded words; more weight should be given to the semantic integrity index for referential culture-loaded words, to strengthen the image specificity index for abstract culture-loaded words, and, for communicative culture-loaded words, the emotional valence index should be taken as the main focus. At the time of actual strategy optimisation, the translated text can be scored item by item according to the above indicators, the dimensions with weak retention degrees can be identified, and corresponding adjustments can be made. An index-based evaluation system has been introduced to replace the old subjective judgment by intuition with an objective and comparative one, and it will now provide a reference for the selection of translation strategies.

3.2 Adaptation Principles for the Cognitive Context of Target Language Recipients

Japanese translation strategies for culture-loaded words should consider the characteristics of the cognitive environment of the target-language readers, that is, their knowledge reserves, reasoning abilities and cultural schemas for understanding Chinese cultural information in Japanese. The first purpose of the adaptation rule is to reduce the need for reasoning in cross-cultural communication, and at the same time, it should not omit essential cultural knowledge by oversimplification. That is to say, adaptation operations should be in line with the principle of cognitive accessibility; that is, more weight should be given to activating existing relevant cultural nodes in the cognitive structure of target-language readers and unfamiliar information should be anchored in a familiar knowledge network. When the concepts carried by a word in the culture of the source language are completely out of reach for readers of the target language, contextual clues need to be provided to help them make

inferences.

The other rule is to limit the increase in information; that is, the amount of new and unfamiliar knowledge in the translated text should be within the learning capacity of the readers in the target language. If too much culture-specific information is presented at once, the readers will be overwhelmed and lose interest in learning; only the general ideas will be learned, and a deep understanding will not be achieved. If the increase in the amount of information is too small, the unique value of the culture-loaded words will not be realised, and they will be reduced to mere carriers of culture. Adjustment plans will be modified at any time. Frequently used or necessary culture-bound words are given particular attention; in such cases, explanatory parts can be added to the translated text, such as appositive phrases or parenthetical remarks. Rare or peripheral culture-bound words can be left as they are; their cultural connotations will be learned naturally by the reader through reading. Adaptation to the cognitive context refers not only to the translation quality of individual words but also to the acceptability and communication depth of the entire translated text; otherwise, comprehension barriers at the level of a single word will accumulate into a feeling of resistance towards the whole work and thus prevent the effective transmission of cross-cultural knowledge.

3.3 Improving the Effectiveness of Cross-cultural Communication

To improve the effectiveness of cross-cultural communication, we hope to enhance the Japanese translation strategy for culture-loaded words, and in order to achieve this, aim to move from "translatability" to "accessibility". Good communication can be divided into two parts: the first is the range of information coverage, that is, how well the semantic connotations of culture-loaded words are understood by readers of the target language; the second is the degree of cultural influence, that is, whether the translated text can arouse the cognitive interest or emotional response of readers of the target language while keeping the cultural features of the source language. To improve the effectiveness of communication, the three ways are semantic explication, image modification and cultural embedding. Semantic Explication adds modifiers or explanatory sentences to increase the range of implicit cultural knowledge. Image substitution is a type of image replacement in Japanese culture that keeps the original metaphor but uses a different image carrier. Cultural embedding can offer some background knowledge for the readers that they would not need to learn independently from paratextual devices, such as annotations, appendices, prefaces and postscripts.

Based on the communication goals for the culture-loaded words, some or all of the above methods will be chosen and employed. If the purpose is to present the information correctly, then combining semantic explication and cultural embedding will be more effective; the former can solve the problem of immediate understanding, and the latter can meet the demand for in-depth knowledge. If the goal is to inspire a sense of beauty or culture, more weight should be given to image modification; resonance at the aesthetic level is usually achieved through vivid and familiar pictures rather than long explanations in text. Improving the effectiveness of communication is not to promote the inheritance of culture; rather, it is to find a balance between the accuracy of the information and its ease of understanding by different readers in different situations and for all kinds of texts. A feedback mechanism can be added to enhance the efficiency of communication in a cycle; that is to say, based on theoretical models, a strategy is first chosen, then modified according to empirical feedback, and finally, in a closed loop, this modification is repeated several times. Good communication can be used to lead the optimisation of strategy, and the study of Japanese translation of culture-loaded words can be extended from the level of language transfer to a macro level of cross-cultural communication; thus, it will provide an all-encompassing response to the essential characteristics of translation activities as acts of cultural mediation.

Conclusion

The three parts of this paper are: the correspondence relationship of meaning for culture-loaded words in Japanese translation of Chinese keywords, a classification model based on the equivalence theory, and optimisation paths. The three kinds of image overlap are divided into overlapping, non-overlapping and none; based on this, this paper identifies the origins and types of semantic vacancy generation and puts forward a three-dimensional compensation scheme for the attenuation of cultural information. In accordance with the theory of equivalence, this paper proposes weights for the parameters of functional equivalence and formal correspondence, sets out criteria to judge the degree of domestication and foreignisation strategies, and puts forward a hierarchical processing scheme for

culture-specific items. Optimization Paths: A general evaluation system has been established in this paper to determine the extent of inheritance of the cultural features of the source language; two adaptation principles for the cognitive context of target-language learners have been proposed; and three main ways to improve the effectiveness of cross-cultural communication have been put forward. The following studies will be carried out in the future: First, a large-scale bilingual parallel corpus will be used to obtain quantitative descriptions and statistical validation of the distribution of processing strategies for all kinds of culture-loaded words; second, acceptance tests with readers of the target language will be conducted to determine the actual effects of various combinations of strategies in communication situations; finally, a collaborative processing model of machine translation and human proofreading will be established to improve the large-scale processing efficiency of Japanese translation for culture-loaded words.

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