

A Study on the International Communication of Traditional Chinese Medicine Culture from the Perspective of Frame Semantics

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Abstract: *The international communication of Traditional Chinese Medicine culture is an important topic discussed by scholars. As a new theory of language cognition, Frame Semantics has a strong explanatory power for the translating behavior aiming at cultural communication. From the perspective of Frame Semantics, the new challenges of the international communication of Traditional Chinese Medicine culture will be analyzed. According to challenges TCM faced, strategy of TCM translation will be put forward to improve the efficiency of TCM culture international communication.*

Keywords: *Frame Semantics, Traditional Chinese Medicine, International Communication*

1. Introduction

In recent years, the international communication of TCM culture has become the focus of domestic scholars, which can be divided into three categories according to different research perspectives. The first type of research focuses on the path of international transmission of Chinese medicine culture. Scholars find problems and propose corresponding countermeasures by analyzing the current situation. In the face of the new opportunities and challenges of the international communication of Chinese medicine culture, some scholars put forward suggestions at the strategic level, thinking that the development of Chinese medicine culture must attach importance to international communication, including actively developing Chinese medicine culture, forming a complete industrial chain, and expanding the external communication channels of Chinese medicine culture. The second type of research discusses the international spread of TCM culture from the perspective of TCM translation, including emphasizing the importance of TCM translation, the translation principles of TCM terminology, the problems faced by TCM translation and relevant countermeasures. The quality of translation has greatly influenced the efficiency of international transmission of TCM culture. At there are some problems in TCM translation, such as unclear conception and lack of translation. The third category studies the favorable situation and unfavorable factors of the international communication of Chinese medicine culture under the background of the “Belt and Road” Initiative, proposes that the international communication of Chinese medicine culture must be based on national interests, guided by the market law, and carried out through the platform of Chinese medicine academic and cultural exchanges and charitable activities. In addition, in the face of the new brought by the “Belt and Road” initiative, there have been a large number of studies on the path and of the international dissemination of Chinese medicine culture and the development of local Chinese medicine industry.

In conclusion, most studies on the international communication of Chinese medicine culture are the macro level and theoretical level. The author has not found any strategic issues on the international communication of Chinese medicine culture from the perspective of frame semantics, and few studies related to cultural communication and cognitive linguistics. Therefore, this paper will analyze the cultural translation of traditional Chinese medicine from the perspective of frame semantics and the strategies to improve its construction of international communication discourse system.

2. Frame Semantics

Frame semantics, as a prominent branch within cognitive linguistics, has applied in the analysis of various language phenomena. Initially, Fillmore^[1] defined a “frame” as any system of linguistic choices, with the earliest cases encompassing not just collections of words but also selections of grammatical

rules for linguistic categories. It can be associated with prototypical instances of scenes. This implies that a frame was viewed as an array of linguistic options connected to concepts such as “scene,” “script,” and “cognitive model.” From a linguistic perspective, the conception of the term “frame” has evolved towards a cognitive interpretation, which becomes more apparent in Fillmore’s publication *Frame Semantics* (1982), where he defined a frame as “a system of categories structured in accordance with some motivating context^[2]”. Subsequently, in 1985, Fillmore refined the definition of a frame to specify unified frameworks of knowledge or coherent schematizations of experience.

Frame semantics, one of the most significant and influential branches within cognitive linguistics, focuses on the continuities between language and experience, offering a scaffold for representing the outcomes of these continuities^[6]. Frame elements are usually closely related with each other. In Fillmore’s [COMMERCIAL TRANSACTION] frame, several frame elements such as BUYER, SELLER, MONEY as well as GOODS are included. Each of them plays a different but connected conceptual role in one schematic situation. Any frame element will activate the entire frame; meanwhile, all the frame elements are closely connected to each other. In the [COMMERCIAL TRANSACTION] frame, the buyer and seller are the two parties of a transaction. The buyer exchanges money for goods and the seller exchanges goods for money. Each element serves as background knowledge to support the understanding of the others.

Nowadays, translation studies have encountered “cognitive turn” and cultural turn. The combination of cognitive linguistics and translation has become a new trend and a new paradigm. The cognitive view of translation attends to both the meaning and the psychological or cognitive mechanisms involved. Specifically, translation is not merely a simple conversion between different languages, but a cognitive activity rooted in the experience of the cognitive subject. As a main branch of cognitive semantics, Frame Semantics holds that meaning has the characteristics of integrity and structure, and emphasizes the functions of frame experience cognition and semantic interpretation^[5]. Frame Semantics pays attention to the importance of the knowledge stored in the human mind. At the cognitive level, translation emphasizes the fundamental mechanism related to how translators comprehend the source text and construct the target text. By virtue of the knowledge structure stored in the translators’ mind, translators get a full comprehension of the source text and then endeavor to find an identical or correspondent frame in the target language via bilingual knowledge. They generate linguistic expressions by invoking the frame knowledge in target text transformed from the original frame in source texts. Finally, the current cognitive linguistics research on translation is mostly macro research, and less from the perspective of traditional Chinese medicine, which needs more in-depth and systematic research. In addition, frame semantics makes translation studies better with a descriptive approach out of the conventional prescriptive approach, which aims at revealing and describing the nature of translation activities.

3. Opportunities and Challenges for the International Communication of TCM Culture

3.1 Opportunities

3.1.1 Policy Support

In 2015, the National Development and Reform Commission and other departments jointly issued the Vision and Action on Jointly Building the Silk Road Economic Belt and the 21st Century Maritime Silk Road, proposing to expand cooperation in the field of traditional medicine. By 2021, a total of 34 countries jointly building the Belt and Road will list acupuncture as a legal treatment. In 2021, the State Administration of Traditional Chinese Medicine issued a notice on “Promoting High-quality Integration of Traditional Chinese Medicine into the Development Plan of Jointly building the Belt and Road (2021-2025)”, proposing to strengthen international communication. Governments have published popular science books of traditional Chinese medicine, *Can be Understood at a Look*, for different groups in the international community, and created bright brands of traditional Chinese medicine with global influence. It has cooperated with countries building the “Belt and Road” to build 10 overseas brand projects of Traditional Chinese Medicine culture^[8].

The joint construction of the “Belt and Road” has created opportunities for the international communication of TCM translation. The construction of the discourse system of TCM translation and international communication should help China to jointly build the “Belt and Road” countries and popularize TCM science, international cooperation of TCM, and create the highlight brand of TCM.

3.1.2 International Recognition of TCM

In 2008, the European Union reported that more than 60% of Europeans use traditional medicines, and Europe accounts for 44.5% of the global herbal medicine market, with a share of about \$30 billion^[3]. On March 14, 2024, Yu Yanhong, director of the State Administration of Traditional Chinese Medicine of China, pointed out in a speech that the overseas centers of Traditional Chinese Medicine have accumulated nearly 1 million foreign people for science popularization and training. Some scholars have pointed out that the characteristics and advantages of TCM are very attractive to overseas people^[9]. In addition, after the COVID-19 epidemic, the Belt and Road countries have more positive feelings toward TCM, and they recognize the identity of TCM doctors and their medical capabilities. However, many non-co-building countries gradually adopted TCM as a complementary program in the later stages of the epidemic^[7].

3.1.3 Good Communication Environment

Communication tools and communication effects all belong to the category of communication environment. A good communication environment is the lubricant for the internationalization of Chinese medicine culture. As the body of the international dissemination of TCM culture, TCM culture embodies the spirit of the Chinese nation and provides rich resources for the international dissemination of TCM culture^[4]. The “Internet +” era of new media has provided various instant and efficient communication tools for the international dissemination of traditional Chinese medicine culture. From the perspective of communication effects, more and more people like and trust Chinese medicine in the international community. The upsurge of learning traditional Chinese medicine from time to time also shows that traditional Chinese medicine culture has achieved good results in the international dissemination. According to relevant reports, the culture of traditional Chinese medicine has been spread in nearly 190 countries and regions. People in nearly 180 countries and regions recognize Chinese medicine products and have received Chinese medicine treatment and services. There are nearly 100,000 TCM medical institutions overseas. A large number of TCM cooperation agreements have been signed, about 500,000 people have participated in TCM training, and there are more than 1,500 teaching institutions capable of TCM teaching and training. This series of figures is sufficient to show that the international dissemination of traditional Chinese medicine culture has a good communication environment.

3.2 Challenges

3.2.1 Language Ambiguity

Chinese medicine is a profound and complex systematic science, with its own independent theoretical system, and its unique language has a series of exact and immutable words. Chinese medicine often uses concise words or words to express some complex medical symptoms and medical terminology, such as “Tan Yu”, “zheng Sheng”, “Kou Dan Bu Ke” etc. Words are concise but rich in meaning, which makes the language of TCM ambiguous and difficult to understand, and it is difficult to find corresponding words in English. The most common examples are Yin and Yang, five elements, qi, etc., which are difficult to find words that can accurately express their concepts in English. If you translate “Yin Xu” as yin-deficiency, it looks like a combination of Chinese and Western deficiency, but in fact, it is not the same, and the audience without the knowledge of Yin and Yang will be confused. Another example: “Wu Xing” is an important theory in traditional Chinese medicine culture, which not only refers to the five substances “Jin, Mu, Shui, Huo, Tu”, but also contains the connotation of movement changes among the five elements. Whether it is translated as “Wu Xing” or “five elements” or “metal, wood, water, fire and metal”, the domestic translation community has not yet reached a conclusion, and foreign readers without background knowledge can not understand its specific meaning, and often feel confused.

3.2.2 Culture Barriers

Due to the different historical and cultural backgrounds of the East and the West, it will take a long time for the West and even the international community to understand and accept Chinese medicine. This is not only the difference between Chinese medicine and Western medicine, but also the result of long-term comprehensive effects of many historical, cultural and social factors. Many terms of traditional Chinese medicine are actually the concrete expression of traditional Chinese medicine theory and culture. However, the language barrier caused by the difference between Chinese and Western cultures makes it difficult to translate them accurately due to the lack of corresponding concepts and terms in Western culture. For example, the Chinese medicine term “Ming Men” is an

important part of the human body in Chinese medicine, its position has not been determined so far, including two meanings: one refers to the kidney (that is, the left kidney and the right life gate), the second refers to the lifegate point, translated as “life-gate” will undoubtedly cause difficulties in understanding and communication. Cultural differences can also lead to cultural taboos and misunderstandings, such as “Wu Ji Bai Feng Wan” being translated as “black cock and white phoenix pill” in many dictionaries, while the minimum ethical code followed by Western society prohibits the use of “cock, piss, shit, fuck” and so on.

3.2.3 Lack of Standards

Traditional Chinese medicine is developed on the basis of Chinese philosophy and has maintained its own unique theoretical system in the long history of thousands of years. The same word in TCM terminology often has different meanings in different occasions, such as “Qi”. TCM believes that “Qi” is not only the basic substance constituting the world, but also the basic substance of the human body, and can be transformed into blood, essence, body fluid, etc. Most TCM terms are related to “Qi”, such as “Zhen Qi”, “Yuan Qi”, “Jing Qi”, “Yin Qi”, etc. The same word in TCM terminology often has different meanings in different occasions, such as “qi”. TCM believes that “qi” is not only the basic substance constituting the world, but also the basic substance of the human body, and can be transformed into blood, essence, body fluid, etc. There are different translations of “Qi”, such as “vital energy”, “qi”, “chi” and so on. It can be seen that the translation norms of TCM terms have not yet been confirmed, and the translation can be described as various terms, which will inevitably affect the spread of TCM culture.

4. Strategies for International Communication of TCM Culture

Traditional Chinese medicine is an important carrier of China’s excellent traditional culture. With the development of world medical technology and the continuous improvement of Chinese cultural soft power, the cross-cultural communication of traditional Chinese medicine has become a characteristic business card of China to the world. At present, the Chinese medicine industry has fully realized the significance of translation of medical classics for cross-cultural communication and communication. Combining translation with cognitive linguistics is a major trend in translation studies in recent years. In response to the above problems in TCM cultural translation, this paper takes *Synopsis of Golden Chamber* as an example to explore the strategies of TCM cultural translation and cultural communication from the perspective of frame semantics.

4.1 Translation Strategies Based on Frame Semantics

4.1.1 Equivalent Replacement of the Same Frameworks

Although Chinese and western medicine belong to different medical systems and have strong differences, their research directions and service objects are exactly the same. Both aim to reveal the physiological functions and pathological phenomena of the human body, so as to prevent and treat diseases and protect people’s health, which determines that the framework scenes of Chinese and Western medicine are similar. Most of them are syndrome-related words based on symptoms, signs and etiology. As analyzed in the previous example, there are not only references in Western medicine, but also complete equivalence in connotation, which belongs to the same framework. Western Medicine words can be directly borrowed in English translation. For example, “Chang Yong” borrows the name of “acute appendicitis”, “Ou Tu” from “emesis” and “diarrhea”, which caters to the readers’ existing framework and makes it easy to understand and spread the word meaning of the disease.

4.1.2 Integration and Adjustment of Similar Frameworks

It is good to take part in the translation of disease and syndrome, but in *Synopsis of Golden Chamber*, there are many words with the same name but different disease and syndrome. On the surface, it seems that the language forms are equivalent, but in fact, the framework system triggered by each is completely different. In the process of translation, the replacement of the frame cannot be realized smoothly, so the translator needs to use the frame scene activated by the concept of the source language to represent, that is, to make the emerging frame apparent or popularize the unfamiliar frame, so as to provide the necessary frame support points or frame triggers for the target language readers.

The number of framework components varies. Many disease terms in *Synopsis of Golden Chamber* uphold the characteristics of traditional Chinese ancient words, simple words and long meanings, large

information load density, and most of them are represented by image meaning, pathogenesis naming and characteristic combination of disease terms. If it is impossible to take both form and spirit into consideration when translating, it can be translated flexibly and give up the name and follow the truth in order to master its implied culture. For example, there are four connotations of “Han Shan” : (1) refers to visceral deficiency cold, severe abdominal pain caused by invasion of cold evil; (2) refers to the scrotal induration, swelling and pain caused by cold evil invading Jueyin meridian; (3) Generally refers to the pain and abdominal distension caused by the body cavity contents, which is the same as Western medicine hernia; (4) refers to the general name of the seven hernias. Back to *Synopsis of Golden Chamber*, the meaning is the same with the first, so it can not be translated as “hernia”, and it is deliberately translated as “cold abdominal colic” or “abdominal pain” due to the context of the article “cold” will give readers a clear understanding of the pathogenesis.

4.1.3 Absolutely Different Frameworks

The framework is highly cultural. Abstract disease words, which reflect the unique thoughts, concepts and culture of a nation, often become the most difficult part of English translation because of the frame defect in the target language. According to the theory of frame semantics, transliteration (zero translation) should be the first step in transliteration, so as to preserve the origin of culture and make up for the blind spot of the frame of the target language. For example, “Xiong Bi” refers to the deficiency of positive qi, phlegm turbidness, blood stasis, qi stagnation, cold coagulation obstruction heart pulse resulting in chest pain, suffocating disease, belongs to the “disease position + disease mechanism” naming, translation difficulty lies in “impediment”. Although Western medicine has similar expressions of “impediment, arthralgia, arthritis, obstruction”, the analysis shows that “impediment” mostly refers to language impediment, namely stuttering. “Arthralgia” and “arthritis” are both knuckle pain, the difference lies in whether there is inflammatory reaction, limited to the body obstruction, while “chest obstruction” belongs to the viscera obstruction, so can not be replaced at will. “Obstruction” emphasizes obstruction caused by foreign body invasion, which is different from the functional disorder mentioned in Chinese medicine, so it belongs to the frame defect in Western medicine. It is better to transliterate “bi”, which is combined with “chest-bi syndrome”. Such expansion of the frame will help the target readers to expand their construction of the basic pathogenesis framework of Chinese medicine. To understand its meaning. In addition, when there is a frame defect, word-to-word literal translation is also a useful attempt, because literal translation is not only clear, concise, and back transliteration, but also can better retain the content and style of the original language, highlighting the unique way of naming diseases and diseases of Chinese medicine.

4.2 Cultural Communication Strategy

Translation is a bridge of cross-cultural communication, which promotes the communication and understanding between different cultures. In essence, translation is the translation of culture and the transmission of culture. When translating TCM classics, we should not only pay attention to the accurate grasp and interpretation of language and semantics, but more importantly, we should consider taking effective strategies to accurately put the profound cultural connotations and rich cultural deposits contained in TCM classics into the translation. The author believes that there are three intercultural communication strategies for the English translation of TCM classics: cultural self-confidence, cultural introspection and cultural adaptation.

4.2.1 Cultural Confidence

The traditional Chinese medicine culture comes from the traditional Chinese culture, embodies the spirit of Confucianism, Taoism and other classical culture, and the organic unified system of human-centered and Yin and Yang harmonious established by the traditional Chinese medicine books is both humanistic and scientific. Confidence in the transmission of traditional Chinese medicine culture is essentially confidence in the excellent culture of the Chinese nation that has been deposited for thousands of years. Only with this confidence can we be confident in the external communication and future development of traditional Chinese medicine culture, and can we multiply the traditional Chinese medicine classic cultural heritage from generation to generation.

4.2.2 Cultural Self-reflection

Since traditional Chinese classics are often expressed in ancient Chinese, there are many difficulties in understanding for ordinary readers. If the translator is not complied with the original text and does not have an accurate grasp or full understanding, Western readers will be even more unable to understand and accept it. Therefore, translators must have enough cultural introspection, improve their

cultural quality and translation level through learning and researching TCM professional knowledge, fully explore the cultural value rich in TCM classics, and try their best to eliminate the misunderstanding caused by their own limitations of understanding and cultural bias, so as to make external communication truly modern and scientific. More accurate expression of the cultural concepts in classics, better complete the dissemination of traditional Chinese medicine culture.

4.2.3 Cultural Adaptation

In the process of translation of TCM classics into English, the inherent cultural characteristics of TCM should be preserved as much as possible, so that overseas audiences can have a deeper and more comprehensive understanding of TCM culture and traditional Chinese culture. To achieve this, cultural adaptation is needed in the process of communication, that is, attention should be paid to the acceptability of Western readers in terms of different cultures, and how to translate more effectively from the perspective of the cultural identity of the recipient. The origin, development and maturity of the different cultures of Chinese medicine and Western medicine are not the same, and there are differences in the way of thinking, basic concepts and research methods between them. In order to spread the culture of traditional Chinese medicine more widely, the translation of traditional Chinese medicine classics bearing the characteristics of Chinese thinking should be adapted to other cultures. The translation of traditional Chinese medicine classics should be logical, readable and acceptable to readers, which is the key to the effective dissemination of traditional Chinese medicine culture.

5. Conclusion

With the development of the global integration process, a variety of cultural views and values interact and blend with each other. The spread of Traditional Chinese medicine culture, which carries the essence of Chinese national culture, has ushered in its own opportunity, whether from the perspective of historical development, or from the perspective of China's status in the world. The development of integrated Chinese and Western medicine is a useful way to promote the perfection of medical technology system, and it is imperative to carry out cross-cultural communication of Chinese medicine science in a larger scope and at a deeper level. As Chinese medicine translators, on the premise of standardizing the translation standards of Chinese medicine, they should overcome cultural barriers, actively adjust translation strategies on the basis of understanding the cultural knowledge of Chinese medicine, consider the target audience and methods of Chinese medicine translation from an open perspective, and strive to improve the level of Chinese medicine translation, so as to promote the healthy development of Chinese medicine translation.

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