

A Pragmatic Equivalence Approach to Chinese Minorities Costume Translation

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Abstract: *Chinese minorities' clothing, one of unique achievements of the mankind's work, contains different national living customs, aesthetic tastes, color preference, etc. Therefore, to understand the dress culture of various Chinese ethnic groups is to understand Chinese history and culture. To ensure that the target language reader will reach the same level of understanding as the source language readers, this paper attempts to discuss whether the English translation of clothing ornaments, patterns and styles in Chinese Minority Costumes can meet the requirements of pragmalinguistics and sociopragmatics, to make the relationship between target text and its audience basically the same as that between source text and its readers.*

Keywords: *Pragmatic Equivalence Approach, Chinese Minorities Costume, Costume Translation*

1. Introduction

1.1 Research Object

Chinese minority costumes are important carriers of the historical changes of all ethnic groups. Their colors, styles and patterns contain different historical culture, religious beliefs and aesthetic tastes. As a rising cultural power, publicizing China's ethnic minority unique clothing culture is one of effective ways to enhance international influence and status.

Among numerous editions of Chinese minority costumes introduction contents, Chinese Minority Costumes, compiled by Zang Yingchun and translated by Yu Hong, records the basic dress styles of 55 Chinese minorities and their corresponding English translations^[1]. The book interprets the history and current situation of each group's costumes with their external characteristics and cultural connotation separately. According to the framework of pragmatic equivalent effect (PEE) in translation, this paper analyzes the translation strategies and linguistic choices of Chinese minority costumes' ornaments, patterns and dress styles, which expounds whether pragmalinguistic and sociopragmatic effects are achieved through the translation.

1.2 Research Rationale

From the perspective of PEE, there can be some new theoretical discoveries in translation of Chinese minority costumes. At present, studies on Chinese minority costumes translation from perspective of PEE is investigated merely. Therefore, this paper aims to analyze the clothing translation strategies of Chinese minorities from it, which can be used as an example of its application in traditional Chinese terms translation.

Meanwhile, the translation strategies summarized from Chinese Minority Costumes can be used as a reference for the translation of similar texts, to provide theoretical application instructions for PEE. This paper intends to analyze that whether the English translation of clothing elements in the chosen text can meet the requirements of pragmalinguistics and sociopragmatics, that is, to make the relationship between target text and its audience basically the same as that between source text and its readers.

1.3 Research Questions

Through the study of Chinese Minority Costumes, the author aims to publicize rich culture of Chinese minority costumes. Therefore, under the guidance of PEE, this paper analyzes the translation

of clothing color, pattern and shape of Chinese minorities costume and answers the following questions:

How does the translator make linguistic choices to convey the author's literal meaning and implicate meaning?

How does pragmatic equivalent effect interpret the translator's linguistic choice in translation?

1.4 Research Methodology

Methodologically speaking, this study is qualitative. It is all a matter of study of English translation of Chinese minorities costume by means of theoretical deduction and example analysis. According to PEE in translation, its aim is to translate meaning in full, taking full account of differences between the target language (TL) and source language (SL) in pragmalinguistics and sociopragmatics [2]. Based on this approach, we select 6 renderings from Chinese Minority Costumes to demonstrate how the translators make linguistic choices to translate ornaments, patterns and clothing styles by means of theoretical deduction and example analysis.

1.5 Research Objectives

As a nation composed by various ethnic groups, the rich culture and unique images of each group should be introduced to the world clearly. This paper takes the translation of clothing ornaments, patterns and styles as examples and studies them from the perspective of PEE, which provides a new perspective for the further study of the translation of similar cultural texts. We try to explain how translator makes linguistic choices to convey the customary expressions literal and implicate meanings, which will contribute to the spread of Chinese culture abroad. Meanwhile, this research will also be a supplement materials for the study of PEE and further proves the strong explanatory power of it to translation.

2. Literature Review

As an integral part of excellent Chinese culture, the study and research on ethnic minority culture are rich and colorful. Among them, there are countless clothing studies represented by Mongolian, Tibetan, Manchu and Miao. Here we chose two of them to illustrate the status of research on the translation of that.

2.1 Previous Studies on the Translation of Chinese Minorities Costume

2.1.1 Skopos Theoretic Approach

Su Rina takes skopos theory as the guiding theory to translate Illustrated Collection of Mongolian Costumes, explores the translation of Mongolian costumes from multiple angles, so as to emphasize the feasibility and application value of the theory in the translation of Mongolian costumes [3]. In the part of vocabulary translation, author uses transliteration, literal translation, free translation, etc; in terms of sentence structure, in view of the large number of non subject sentences and juxtaposed ones in the text, the author transfers it by means of sequential translation, adding subjects and using passivity, so as to transform the sentence into the usual expression of English readers.

2.1.2 Cultural Studies Approach

Ganfei believes that Susan Bassnett's concept of cultural translation has important reference significance for promoting the standardized and diversified translation of ethnic minority costume culture in Guangxi [4]. Therefore, the author believes that the translation strategies used should take culture as the basic unit, and comprehensively adopt the collaborative translation method such as annotation method. In the process of translation, in order to fulfill the equivalent exchange of cultural functions, author flexibly uses the strategies of adding, subtracting or modifying translation, and give full play to the subjectivity of the translator as much as possible.

2.2 Comment

In previous studies, scholars have studied Chinese minorities costume and English translation of that from different perspectives, such as Skoposthesrie and the cultural studies. However, little is

investigated from the perspective of PEE, and the research materials are limited. This paper will analyze the translation strategies of ornaments, patterns and dress styles from multiple Chinese ethnic groups, which will be supplement of the study of minorities costume under the PEE.

3. Theoretical Framework: Pragmatic Equivalent Effect

3.1 Key Concepts

3.1.1 The Principle of Equivalent Effect

According to Nida, the principle of equivalent effect is “the relationship between receptor and message should be substantially the same as that which existed between the original receptors and the message” [5]. To achieve a complete naturalness of expression, the message can be adapted in accordance with language needs and cultural expectations of target readers. As a result, Nida defines the goal of dynamic equivalence as seeking the closest natural equivalent to the source language message [6].

3.1.2 Pragmalinguistics in Translation

Pragmalinguistics in translation refers to the study of pragmatic force or language use in the context from the viewpoint of linguistic sources [2]. Pragmatic force is the intended meaning for a given message. There are two major kinds of that, implicit and explicit. Pragmalinguistics in translation is not confined to the language form of the text, and emphasizes the use of the most natural and appropriate equivalent in the target language to express its content in order to achieve natural equivalence, which is to identify the true intent of the implicit force as they appear in their various social contexts. It includes choosing appropriate forms to convey the intended meaning or the force of the given message.

3.1.3 Sociopragmatics in Translation

Sociopragmatic refers to the pragmatic studies which examine the conditions on language use that derive from the social and cultural situation [2]. In translation, this consideration depends on the translator’s beliefs and his / her social and cross-cultural knowledge. The equivalent effect of sociopragmatics in translation usually occurs when the translator holds a correct conception of the different social institutions or cultural backgrounds between the SL and the TL, and adequately represents one for the other. In order to avoid causing cross-cultural understanding obstacles to the target readers, the translator is fully considering the cultural concepts and value standards of the target readers.

3.2 Application of Pragmatic Equivalent Effect in Translation

3.2.1 Direct Translation

Direct translation occurs when source and target texts interpretively resemble each other in terms of communicative clues and semantic representation [7]. The content of equivalence includes part of speech, word order, way of expression, rhetorical devices, style, national and cultural characteristics and so on. Its ideal goal is to achieve both “form” and “spirit” of the SL could be maintained in TL equivalently.

3.2.2 Indirect Translation

Indirect translation occurs when source and target texts descriptively resemble each other only in terms of function, but not necessarily in terms of communicative clues and semantic representation [7]. Due to the cultural differences between languages readers, it is often necessary to break the language form of the original text through the literal meaning of the original one and deal with it with appropriate TL expression methods in translation, otherwise it will not be able to effectively convey the original information, especially for many customary expressions caused by cultural differences.

4. Pragmatic Equivalent Effect - based Analysis in Chinese Minority Costumes

4.1 Translation Strategy for Ornament Renderings

As for important components of costume, ornaments carry not only decorative purpose but also emotional sustenance, which would enrich the figure of Chinese minority people in details. Target

readers may find it hard to distinguish the expressions of various types of ornaments from different minorities. Therefore, we choose 2 fragments to illustrate which translation strategy is used to achieved the level of understanding on ornaments between TL and SL readers.

(1) Men wear and wrap head with white or black cloth. Old men wear Chinese skullcaps(瓜皮帽) [1].

“瓜皮帽” in Hani minority group is a type of cap with no brim, whose look is similar to skullcap, a small white close-fitting cap wore by Catholic bishop. As for target readers, using the word “skullcap” is efficiently described the shape of cap. In SL, “瓜皮” means watermelon-like pattern, which is patterned with dark and curvy stripes. However, the translator chooses the word “Chinese” to describe it, which makes the image even more blurry. Therefore, target readers can not build image of an old man with dark color skullcap like the SL readers, which would be a failure in terms of pragmalinguistics. Furthermore, “Chinese skullcap” actually has another meaning which is a traditional Chinese medicine, “中国黄芩”. And it will lead to a situation that people may imagine an old man with some brown roots over his head instead of a cap, which will also be a failure from sociopragmatic aspect.

(2) Women wear and after marriage, they make “Z”-shaped(乙字形) phoenix whorl hair bun or high tube hairstyle [1].

“乙字形” is known as a shape of with two obvious turning points. When translating it, the literal meaning of “乙”, the second place of traditional Chinese sequence words, has nothing to do with. As for this culture-specific expression, translator uses “‘Z’-shaped” as a synonymous one accepted by the target reader to deliver the message, which could retain an equivalent effect.

4.2 Translation Strategy for Pattern Renderings

Each ethnic group has their own clothing pattern, which represent different beliefs and best wishes for their people. With the unique Chinese national complex of culture and history, the translation of lucky meaning patterns with Chinese characteristics is difficult and complex. Therefore, we choose 2 fragments with detailed information to demonstrate whether the TL reader could understand the meaning of clothing patterns as the SL reader.

(1)The back part of men’s jacket is embroidered with round shape patterns, called “Kongming seal(孔明印)” [1].

“孔明印” in Jino minority group is a type of moon flower design embroidered at the back of the men’s top clothing. This pattern is uniquely represented the worship of Zhuge Liang, a famous outstanding politician, strategist, inventor and writer in ancient China during the Three Kingdoms period. Therefore, to meet the requirement of both pragmalinguistics and sociopragmatics under the context, transliteration is not specific enough to describe the pattern and annotation of Zhuge Liang is needed here and a footnote of the history of Jino people’s admiration to Zhuge Liang is need as well.

(2)They drape sheepskin shawl decorated with seven round lucky sign pattern representing the seven stars, and the pattern of moon and sun on two shoulders. This dressing style symbolizes the diligence of women who sleep as late as moon and stars and get up as early as sun(披星戴月) [1].

“披星戴月” is a term to describe people who run around for work day and night or go out early and come back at dusk, in another word, describing people with diligent, hard-working characteristic, which its literal meaning is “wearing stars and moon”. If the direct translation strategy is used here, the implicit meaning will not be delivered. Therefore, the translator uses synonymous expression of sleeping routine to explain the hard-working characteristic represented by the seven lucky round sign pattern and the patterns of sun and moon, which matches the requirement of pragmalinguistics.

4.3 Translation Strategy for Clothing Style Renderings

When it comes to the clothing styles, they could be described simple in form but complex in feelings and moods. Each type of styles represents the people’s living attitude, which is full of unaffected, pure wishes for better life. We choose two more fragments of clothing styles’ translation to define whether the PEE is achieved.

(1) Besides the different styles of short sleeve and long sleeve, a mandarin jacket also has different buttoning ways. For waistcoat, there are “button in the middle” “button to the sides” “front garment part in the shape of pipa” and “Yizi Jin” styles and etc [1].

In the TL, English, there is a no specific term to be the corresponding translation of “襟”, which is the front part where the buttons are positioned and sewed. From above SL examples, they all could describe both the direction and position of the clothes opening front by one or two characters. Here the translator uses direct translation strategy, transliteration and annotation separately to demonstrate the shape of top clothing clearly. As for this combination of translation strategies, TL readers could easily distinguish how many forms of the clothing front been mentioned, which will be considerate as a successful example of achieving pragmalinguistics.

(2) Women wear “button in the middle”-style white collarless tight short jackets over diamond shape Chinese style belly bands and loose trousers. Outside they wear coats with high vents in two sides. They usually bare feet [1].

As for Jing women clothing styles, translator changes the words order, attached with a preposition “over” to make the translation of the juxtaposition description of top suit more natural for the target readers to understand. In addition, translator adds the subject “they” for the last part of changed punctuation to be a complete hypotaxis between the Jing women and the clothing. In another word, multiple translation strategies are used, which matches the requirements of pragmalinguistics- seeking for closest natural equivalent to the SL message.

4.4 Summary

Through the analysis, the translator of Chinese Minority Costumes uses more literal translation than free translation to convey the original text’s essence from both pragmalinguistics and sociopragmatics under the given context. As for renderings of ornaments, patterns and clothing styles of Chinese minorities costume, most of translated versions do not meet the requirement of PEE in sociopragmatics, but in pragmalinguistics, which demonstrate that the translator is not with fully social and cross-cultural knowledge in certain aspect.

5. Conclusion

Within the framework of pragmatic equivalent effect, this paper has studied Chinese Minority Costumes and expounded different translation strategies and linguistic choices in order to convey the original meaning under the context to achieve pragmalinguistic and sociopragmatic effects, which reflected the explanatory power of this pragmatics approach.

Although PEE has the strong explanatory power to translate both the intended meaning in the context and the cultural, linguistic aspects of the original message, it still has many defects and can not reach the truly same level of understanding. The reason is that it is dependent on translator’s beliefs as well as his social and cross-cultural knowledge. The empirical research is not enough to support the view of this paper, so it is necessary to further explore this theory applied on translating Chinese cultural terms. Anyhow, PEE has definite guiding significance for the translation of Chinese Minority Costumes, which reflects its importance in translation.

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