A Study on the English Translation of Culture-Loaded Words From the Perspective of Relevance-Theoretic Translation Theory—A Case Study of Yang Xianyi's *The True Story of Ah Q*

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Culture-loaded words reveal the basic features of a country's social life, customs and habits, religious beliefs, and so on. The meanings of culture-loaded words contain the profound cultural connotation of a country or a nation. However, due to the influence of different cultures, the original author and the target readers lack a common cognitive context, which means they cannot successfully conduct a cultural communication. Therefore, correctly understanding and translating these culture-loaded words have become a major problem for translators in the translation process of literary works. Under the guidance of the dual ostensive-inferential model in relevance-theoretical translation theory, this paper, by emphasizing the importance of common cognitive context to a successful translation, analyzes the translation process of five categories of culture-loaded words and summarizes the translation strategies that can accurately convey the writing intention of the original author, which provides a new perspective for the translation of culture-loaded words.

Keywords: culture-loaded words, ostensive-inferential view, cognitive context

Introduction

Definition of Culture-Loaded Words

The differences in ecology, material culture, lifestyles, religious beliefs, and customs among countries or ethnic groups have led to the creation of a large number of culture-loaded words which refer to those words that are beyond their original meaning or conceptual meaning and contain rich socio-cultural meaning. Lu Xun's novel *The True Story of Ah Q* contains a large number of culture-loaded words which directly reflect Chinese national cultural characteristics. However, since the original author and the readers of the translated language are influenced by their own cultures and lack a common cultural cognitive context, correctly understanding and translating culture-loaded words have become a major problem for translators in the process of translating literary works.

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Previous Studies on Culture-Loaded Words

The continuous enrichment and development of western linguistic and translatological theories provide a variety of perspectives for the translation of Chinese culture-loaded words. Newmark (2001) put forward the theory of communicative translation in his book *Translation Course*, and stressed that translator should pay attention to the literal meaning and connotative meaning of culture-loaded words; Sperber and Wilson (2015) put forward the relevance theory in *Relevance: Communication and Cognition*. This theory holds that culture is translatable to a certain extent, and emphasizes the principle of optimal relevance as the basis of translation, which provides new ideas for the accurate translation of culture-loaded words; Nida and Taber (2004) proposed the theory of functional equivalence, which emphasized the equivalence of the target readers in three aspects: meaning, function, and response.

Domestic researchers have also discussed and studied the translation of Chinese culture-loaded words from different theoretical perspectives. In recent years, the research on the translation of culture-loaded words has basically focused on the schema theory, the communicative theory, the relevance theory, and the functional equivalence theory. In terms of the relevance theory, many scholars have conducted a large number of in-depth researches. Deng Yiwei (2018) studied the Chinese translation of *Alices Adventures in Wonderland* according to communicative intention of relevance theory and proposed that translators should reduce readers' processing effort when they realize that readers have difficulty in understanding; Li Hui (2018) summarized the English translation strategies of culture-loaded words in *The Classic Mountains and Seas* from the aspects of information intention and the communicative intention of relevance theory through case analysis and comparative analysis.

The previous studies reveal that although many scholars at home and abroad have noticed that translators should pay attention to the cognitive context of the target readers in translating culture-loaded words, they fail to recognize the importance of the original author' cognitive context. Therefore, while translating culture-loaded words, translators should attach more importance to the common cognitive context of both the target readers and the original author.

Theoretical Framework

Translation as a Dual Ostensive-Inferential Process

Relevance theory views communication as an ostensive-inferential process, which focuses on the dynamic reasoning of discourse and contextual information. Translation as one form of communication, is in itself, a dual ostensive-inferential process.

In the first ostensive-inferential process, the author of the source language makes an ostensiveness to the translator, and then the translator analyzes and reasons on the basis of the ostensiveness given by the original author. In the second ostensive-inferential process, the translator gives the target readers an ostensiveness based on the inference obtained in the first ostensive-inferential process, and then the target readers make further inferences after receiving the ostensiveness from the translator.

Common Cognitive Context

In relevance theory, "context" not only refers to the text that comes before or after an utterance, or the immediate environment in which the utterance is produced, but also refers to "a psychological construct, a subset of the hearers' assumptions about the world" (Sperber & Wilson, 2015 p. 63). It is these assumptions, rather than the actual state of the world, that affect the interpretation of an utterance.

In this sense, context is not limited to information about the direct physical environment or previous discourse, such as expectations about the future, scientific assumptions or religious beliefs, anecdotal memories, general cultural assumptions, and beliefs about the speaker's state of mind, which may all play a role in interpretation (Sperber & Wilson, 2015, p. 28). According to this definition, "context" is a comprehensive concept that involves almost all the external and internal factors that may affect the readers' interpretation of an utterance: (1) information that can be perceived in the physical environment, (2) information that can be extracted from memory, and (3) information that can be inferred from the above two sources (Gutt, 1991 p. 24).

Obviously, not all assumptions derived from the underlying context are equally easy to obtain. Like other human activities, communication depends on the desire to optimize resources. In terms of contextual choice, readers naturally start with the contextual information that is most easily accessible. How to make it easy for readers to obtain contextual information? Firstly, the translator receives the ostensiveness from the original author; secondly, the translator considers the original author's cognitive context and makes an inference from the ostensiveness given by the original author; thirdly, the translator takes target readers' cognitive context into consideration and gives them an ostensiveness; finally, the target readers make an inference from the ostensiveness given by the translator.

Dual Roles of Translator

In the framework of relevance theory, translation consists of two ostensive-inferential processes. In the first process, the translator deduces the meaning expressed by the source language text according to the original author's cognitive context. In the second process, based on the cognitive ability and expectations of the target readers, the translator seeks a good way to present to the target language reader what he deduced in the first process. That is to say, the translator plays two different roles in the translation process: as a reader/receiver of the source text and as a communicator/translator of the target text, as shown in the following Figure 1.
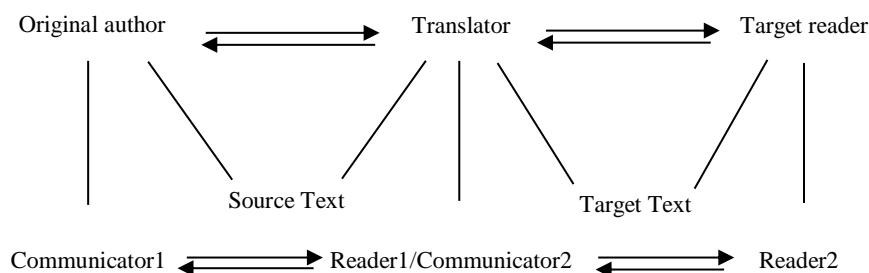

Figure 1. Dual roles of translator.

Above all, in the first ostensive-inferential process, the translator plays the role of a reader of the source language text. First of all, he is supposed to have a good knowledge of the source language that he can completely understand the source text well. Besides, he is supposed to be familiar with the source language culture because it is not easy for people who live in different regions to get to know the local people's traditional customs, lifestyles, religious beliefs, and so on. And finally, the translator tries his best to perceive and store all the contextual effects he gets from the original author as his inference which is communicated to the target readers.

The explanation of the translator's second role is as follows: First, the translator should explicitly know his inference from the first ostensive-inferential process. Secondly, the translator has to consider the target readers'

cognitive context and make the target text consistent with the principle of relevance by closely resembling the original. Finally, considering the intention of the original author and the expectation of the target reader, the translator makes some necessary and appreciate changes to the original and convey the understandable information to the target readers, meeting their expectation.

Translation of Culture-Loaded Words in *The True Story of Ah Q* From the Relevance-Theoretic Translation Theory

Translation Strategies for Material Culture-Loaded Words

"Material culture-loaded words are related to food, dress, tools for production, transportation, medicine, daily appliances and money which are filled with national color. Commerce, agriculture and industry would not proceed without those words" (Newmark, 2001, p. 95). These words are usually peculiar to a specific language community and they could reflect some aspects of the culture in detail with objects.

Example 1: 他先前跑上城里去进**洋学堂**，不知怎么又跑到东洋去了，半年之后他回到家里来，腿也直了，辫子也不见了，他的母亲大哭了十几场，他的老婆跳了三回井。 (Lu, 2017, p. 199)

"洋学", as a product that conformed to the historical trend of "The Western Learning Spreading to the East", promoted the progress of modern Chinese society. According to relevance-theoretic translation theory, the whole process of translation can be divided into the following three steps: Firstly, the translator accepts the author's ostensiveness and makes an inference of "洋" according to the author's cognitive context: "洋" is usually used to describe something alien, like "洋车", "洋楼", and "洋葱"; secondly, the translator, considering the target readers' cognitive context, gives the ostensiveness to them and manages to find the corresponding word in the target language. "洋学堂" is regarded as "a foreign school" based on the target readers' cognitive context; and thirdly, the target readers make an inference from the ostensiveness "a foreign school" and they understand the meaning of the expression. Thus, the whole process of the translation is completed.

Obviously, the translator could not change the writing intention of the original author during the translation process. Meanwhile, the translator tries his best to make the target readers overcome the cultural differences. The translation strategy used in translating "洋" is called domestication which could bring the target readers close to the original author.

Translation Strategies for Social Culture-Loaded Words

Different societies have different ways of life, customs and habits, ideology, politeness standards, education systems, and so on. Social culture-loaded words are filled with special cultural flavor and vividly express their social features. If material culture-loaded words can be regarded as words that stand for visible and concrete objects, social culture-loaded words can be thought as the reflections of things that are invisible but can always influence people in every work of life.

Example 2: 赵太爷愈看愈生气，抢进几步说："你敢胡说！我怎么会有你这样的本家？你姓赵么？" (Lu, 2017, p. 191)

In China, "太爷" is regarded as a respectful title for the elders or for people who have a higher social status. But in western countries, Mr. Zhao is a common name for any man whose family name is Zhao regardless of age and position. Therefore, the translation of "太爷" is complex because it is an expression full of Chinese characteristics. When the translator deals with the translation, first of all, he is supposed to know some expressions of Chinese address. In other words, he needs to consider the original author's cognitive context and

make an inference from the ostensiveness, so as not to directly translate "太爷" into English "great-grandfather"; and then, the translator will choose the most appropriate word in English to describe people with higher social status and give the ostensiveness to the target readers. While in English, "Lord" is usually used as a title in front of the names of male peers and officials of very high rank to express respect. According to the target reader's cognitive context, "Lord" is more suitable than the word "great-grandfather" in conveying the meaning of "太爷". Finally, when they receive the ostensiveness "Lord Zhao", they will infer that "太爷" is someone with higher social position and is respected by people. That means they receive the ostensiveness and the translation is perfect. The translation strategy adopted here is domestication which could avoid the culture conflict and make the source text close to the world of target readers.

Translation Strategies for Ecological Culture-Loaded Words

According to the new edition of the *Longman Dictionary of Contemporary English*, the word "ecology" is defined as "the pattern of relations of animals, plants, people to each other and their relations". The definition indicates that ecology touches on various aspects of people's life. These words usually reflect climate conditions, geographic environment, and natural surroundings in a certain language community.

Example 3: 况且未庄的一群**鸟男女**的慌张神情，也使阿Q更快意。 (Lu, 2017, p. 215)

"鸟男女" is a nasty word which has the same meaning as the expression 狗男女. These two expressions do not mean that men and women who are birds or dogs. Actually, it is a negative expression which is used to show people's great anger and disgust to someone. So, the translation of "鸟男女" is also complicated and it requires the translator should take the following steps: Firstly, he makes an inference from the expression "鸟男女" and get the ostensiveness according to original author's cognitive context. He understands that 鸟男女 is a nasty expression in Chinese; secondly, he tries to find the best words to translate 鸟男女 according to the target readers' cognitive context; thirdly, "鸟男女" is translated as "villagers" by Yang Xianyi in *The True Story of Ah Q*. Even though the target readers could not understand the negative feeling from the ostensivness "villagers", they could make an inference from the preceding and the following text and feel this loathing attitude. Therefore, while dealing with some nasty words which contains some animals in Chinese, the translator could flexibly adopt domestication strategy which helps the target readers understand the source language text and avoid the influence of cultural conflicts.

Translation Strategies for Linguistic Culture-Loaded Words

Chinese and English belong to two different language families. Chinese belongs to the Sino-Tibetan language family, while English belongs to the Indo-European language family. Therefore, there are great differences between Chinese and English in phonetics, glyphs, grammar, semantics, and pragmatics. The four-character idiom, as a major feature of Chinese vocabulary, is concise in form and rich in meaning, and it is regarded as one of the representatives of Chinese traditional culture.

Example 4: 闲人还**不完**，只撩他，于是终而至于打。 (Lu, 2017, p. 194)

Expressions, such as "完" and "不完" are easy for Chinese readers to understand, with the former describing something that is finished and the latter something unfinished. However, their translation, as well as the translation of other linguistic culture-loaded words, is not so simple as the literal translation of each word. While the translator copes with such expression as "不完", he mainly abides by the following steps: Firstly, the translator receives the ostensiveness of "不完" and makes the inference in the light of the original author's cognitive context to know its deep meaning; and secondly, he seeks the corresponding words in the target

language according to the target readers' cognitive context. In Yang Xianyi's version, "不完" is translated into "not satisfied" in English; thirdly, the target readers make an inference from the ostensiveness "not satisfied" which is put in the full sentence: "If the idlers were still not satisfied but continued to pester him, they would in the end come to blows". In this process of translating the expression "不完", the translator adopts the domestication which makes the original author close to the target readers.

Translation Strategies for Religious Culture-Loaded Words

As Zhou Yi put it, "In various aspects, the shaping of Chinese splendid civilization has been influenced greatly by the three religions: Taoism, Confucianism and Buddhism which carry a large number of religious cultures" (Yu, 2012). Since culture and history in western countries are closely linked to and mainly affected by Christianity. the religious culture-loaded words are noteworthy.

Example 5: 说是"外传"，"内传"在哪里呢？倘用"内传"，阿Q又绝不是神仙。(Lu, 2017, p. 190)

As everyone knows that, "神仙" refers to the extraordinary existence who has a living body with "supernatural power" in human beings. *Modern Chinese Dictionary* explains it as follows: the characters in the myths and legends, who have the extraordinary ability which helps them live forever and never die. "神仙" as a religious culture-loaded word, is easy for Chinese readers to comprehend, but is a strange expression for western readers who believe in Christianity because it contains Chinese religious culture. The translator deals with the translation of "神仙" on the basis of the following steps: Firstly, he receives the ostensiveness of "神仙" from the original author and makes an inference according to the original author's cognitive context; secondly, he takes the target readers' cognitive context into consideration and looks for the corresponding words which are suitable to convey the meaning of "神仙" according to the target readers' cognitive context; and thirdly, he presents the ostensiveness "immortal" to the target readers because western people are accustomed to using it to describe someone extraordinary. The foreignization is the major strategy which is used in the translation of "神仙" and makes target readers close to the original author.

Conclusions

Based on the explanation of culture-loaded words and the analysis of the translation of culture-loaded words in the novel *The True Story of Ah Q* from the perspective of relevance-theoretic translation theory, this paper draws some conclusions as follows:

First of all, the culture contained in culture-loaded words is inherent in a particular language because language is the carrier of culture. The translator should have an in-depth understanding of the culture-loaded words in the source language when translating them. Under no circumstance should culture-loaded words be translated literally.

What's more, if the translator only considers the cognitive context of the original author or the cognitive context of the target language readers when translating culture-loaded words, he may not be able to accurately convey the writing intention of the original author. Therefore, it is necessary for translators to seek a common cognitive context when dealing with translation. From the perspective of common cognitive context, Yang Xianyi mainly adopted foreignization and domestication in the translation of culture-loaded words, which not only helps convey accurately the writing intention of the original author, but also bridge the gap between the two cultures.

Finally, to conduct a study on culture-loaded words by applying dual ostensive-inferential model in relevance-theoretical translation theory can not only explain the process of seeking common cognitive context

and successfully conveying the author's writing intention, but also demonstrate the dual roles of the translator: as a reader/receiver of the source text and as a communicator/translator of the target text.

To sum up, this paper uses the dual ostensive-inferential model to analyze the importance of common cognitive context in the translation of culture-loaded words and summarizes the most appropriate translation strategy for culture-loaded words, which enriches domestic and foreign scholars' studies on the translation of culture-loaded words and also provides guidance for the translator to successfully convey the writing intention of source language author.

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