

A Study on the English Translation Strategies of Idioms Based on Network—Taking *Xi Jinping: The Governance of China (Volume IV)* as an Example*

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The complexity of idioms poses challenges to online translation. From the perspective of online translation, this study conducts an in-depth exploration of idiom translation strategies by taking *Xi Jinping: The Governance of China (Volume IV)* as the research object and extracts 649 idioms from this work, conducting 1,947 translation queries on three major platforms. It helps to reveal the strategic differences and effectiveness of online translation in handling idioms and emphasizes the importance of cultural adaptability in translation practice, which provides theoretical support and practical guidance for optimizing online translation technology and improving the quality of idiom translation into English.

Keywords: online translation, idiom translation, *Xi Jinping: The Governance of China*, strategy research

Introduction

As the workload of translation continues to increase, the accuracy and speed of translation pose severe challenges to translators. Therefore, online translation emerges as the times require, with well-known platforms such as Youdao Dictionary, Eudic and Baidu Translate.

When translating idioms, an important component of China's excellent traditional culture, online translation currently struggles to accurately understand their fixed structures and cultural connotations. Based on this, to deeply explore the mechanism behind it, selecting a comprehensive and highly representative work is particularly important. *Xi Jinping: The Governance of China (Volume IV)* happens to meet this requirement. The linguistic features and idiom usage in this work are highly consistent with the expressive habits of China's excellent traditional culture, making it representative.

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Analysis

By selecting idioms from *Xi Jinping: The Governance of China (Volume IV)* as the research sample, using statistical survey method as the research approach and assisted by manual integration processing with Excel spreadsheets, a total of 649 idioms are sorted out and extracted from the entire work. Translation queries are conducted on three platforms: Youdao Dictionary, Eudic and Baidu Translate amounting to 1947 times (including repeated translation parts).

成语	欧陆词典	网易有道词典	百度翻译
勇往直前	Go ahead	Move forward	Move forward courageously
风雨无阻	Come rain come shine	Rain or shine	No obstruction in wind or rain
守正创新	Integrity and innovation	Integrity innovation	uphold fundamental principles and break new ground
开拓创新	Pioneering and innovative	Pioneering and innovative	Pioneering and innovating
互惠共享	Reciprocal sharing	Reciprocal sharing	Reciprocal sharing
互利共赢	Mutual benefit and win-win	Mutual benefit and win-win	Mutual benefit and win-win situation
以诚相待	Honest	Treat each other honestly	Treat each other with sincerity
普惠共享	Inclusive sharing	Inclusive sharing	Inclusive sharing
一往无前	Indomitable	Move forward indomitable	Keep moving forward without hesitation
乘势而上	Take advantage of the momentum	Ride the wave	Seize the opportunity and move forward

Figure 1. Selected idioms integration from *Xi Jinping: The Governance of China (Volume IV)*.

The three types of online translation platforms each have distinct characteristics and their overall effectiveness in translation also varies.

Table 1
Characteristics and Advantages/Disadvantages of Idiom Translations on Three Platforms

Name of Platform	Main characteristics	Advantages	Disadvantages
Eudic Dictionary	The main approach is free translation, with literal translation as a supplement.	faithfulness, expressiveness	The structure of the translation results can still be optimized, and the implications can be further explored.
Youdao Dictionary	Combination of free translation and literal translation	faithfulness, expressiveness, elegance	When pursuing idiomatic translation, ignore the completeness of the idiom's original meaning.
Baidu Translate	Literal translation is the main approach, with a few idioms intentionally translated in a free form.	faithfulness, completeness	The level of translating localization is low, and cultural characteristics have not been well represented.

After analysis, it has been discovered that online translation possesses a certain degree of inaccuracy and deviation. It tends to execute a literal, mechanical conversion rather than a nuanced interpretation. Youdao Dictionary's translation of the culturally rich idiom “内忧外患” as “State of Flux” is a typical example of improper translation, revealing significant shortcomings and defects in cultural adaptation and contextual understanding. Given that the majority of Chinese idioms originate from ancient stories, historical events or folk tales, these kinds of background knowledge are often little known in English culture. Therefore, in the process of translation, it is necessary to consider factors of cultural adaptability through appropriate

paraphrasing or explanations to help English readers better understand and appreciate the unique connotations of the idiom.

What is cultural adaptability? Cultural adaptability emphasizes the concept of mutual adaptation between different cultures, advocating that cultural entities should accommodate each other in terms of customs, lifestyles, thought patterns and other aspects. Cultural adaptability manifests in various fields, such as multinational corporations, international education, language translation and so on. As societal progress demands corresponding requirements for cultural development, cultural adaptability also exhibits its dynamic nature.

Even if certain idioms have similar versions in English culture, due to profound cultural differences, the connotations of these idioms and the emotional responses they evoke can still be vastly different. Taking “细节决定成败” as an example, in the Chinese context, this phrase can sometimes be misunderstood as emphasizing an excessive focus on trivial matters, implying “多此一举”. However, in English, the closest expression “The devil is in the details” also conveys an understanding of the importance of details, but its cultural connotations point more towards hidden problems or challenges within the minutiae, emphasizing that meticulous observation is key to avoiding failure or achieving success. Therefore, although they may seem similar on the surface, the cultural essence and emotional tone they embody are actually quite different, which requires that in translation, one should not only pursue literal correspondence but also deeply understand and convey the underlying meaning of the idioms. Thus, when translating idioms, choosing appropriate translation strategies and methods becomes particularly important.

Translation Methods Under the Domestication Strategy

Domestication refers to the translation approach that disregards the linguistic form of the original text and instead uses familiar language and forms to the target audience to explain, aiming to achieve the meaning and function of the original text as closely as possible. This strategy is particularly important in the translation of idioms, as it builds a bridge for understanding the same thing in different cultural contexts. Not only does it yield a better translation effect, but it also, in the long term, facilitates communication and understanding between different cultures.

Liberal/Free Translation

The method of liberal/free translation is mainly reflected in the transliteration of lexical meanings and rhetorical devices during the translation process, resulting in a fluent and idiomatic translation of the original text. It refers to the process of reorganizing the original text based on the target language, with the aim of better adapting to the context and culture of the target language.

Liberal translation can be further divided into two types: paraphrasing and idiomatic translation. Both are explanatory translations of the original text, but the difference lies in that paraphrasing does not use idiomatic expressions of the target language for substitution, whereas idiomatic translation does the opposite. For example, the translation and explanation of the phrase “不入虎穴，焉得虎子” is “One can not expect to achieve anything if he risks nothing”; the idiomatic translation explanation is “Nothing venture, nothing gain”. Liberal translation facilitates the expression of deeper meanings and a better understanding of the inherent meaning of idioms.

Initiation

Initiation refers to the practice where the translator is not confined to the details of meaning, vocabulary and syntactic structure of the original text. Instead, the translator employs techniques such as amplification or omission to enhance the target language reader's understanding of the original message. The outcome of paraphrasing is similar in content and theme to the original text. The best application of this translation method is often seen in the English translation of traditional Chinese poetry. Due to the unique characteristics of our poetic culture, such as parallelism in sentence structure, harmony in rhythm, and rich connotations, the English translation often involves sacrificing a certain degree of syntactic structure to prioritize the conveyance of the main idea.

Variation and Recreation

The difference between variation and initiation lies in the fact that the content and theme of the translated text in variation differ from the original. The practical purpose of variation is often to achieve certain specific translation outcomes or to meet the particular needs of the target language readers. Variation frequently occurs in the translation of international news information, where the semantic focus of the original text is altered, potentially imbuing the translation with a sense of irony or disparagement.

Recreation refers to the creative reprocessing of the original text during the translation process, with little connection in form and meaning to the original. As a purpose-driven translation method, recreation is a very free approach to translation and is commonly used in the translation of book titles, movie titles, similar contexts and so on.

Translation Methods Under the Strategy of Foreignization

Foreignization, as a translation strategy, focuses on the translator's effort to closely adhere to and convey the original author's intention. In the process of idiom translation, the foreignization strategy is embodied in preserving the unique cultural imagery contained in idioms and using this opportunity to disseminate the source language culture—namely, Chinese culture—as widely as possible, thereby enriching the linguistic and cultural connotations of the target language. The essential attribute of the foreignization translation strategy lies in its adherence to the “original author-oriented” approach, where the translator strives to closely align with the thoughts and expressions of the original author in translation practice. The concrete application of this strategy in translation is reflected in the translator's attempt to maintain the original text's linguistic style, literary charm, and cultural characteristics as much as possible, so that the translation can exhibit a strong exotic flavor.

Combination of Literal Translation and Word-for-word Translation

Literal translation refers to maintaining the form and meaning of the original text as much as possible while conveying its context and style during the translation process. Literal translation is characterized by fidelity to the original text and accurate conveyance of its meaning, but sometimes it may ignore idiomatic expressions in the target language. Word-for-word translation involves translating each word of the original text into the target language without considering factors such as grammar or semantic differences.

Literal translation ensures the integrity of the translation result, so that the overall basic meaning does not deviate significantly. Literal translation is particularly suitable for the translation of four-character idioms

composed of two verb-object phrases or two noun phrases with different meanings. For instance, in translating “立德树人” and “内忧外患”, the meanings of the two parts are translated separately and then combined, which actually ensures the integrity of the translation result and avoids conflicts, maximizing translation effectiveness.

In the translation practice of the term “精打细算”, Eudic Dictionary and Youdao Dictionary provide two different styles of translations: “pinch pennies” and “careful calculation and strict budgeting,” respectively. The former vividly depicts the strict control over money in meticulous calculation through a concise verb phrase, rich in colloquial and daily life flavors; the latter conveys the original meaning completely and rigorously through idiomatic expressions, leaning more towards the formality and precision of written language. Both translations embody the essence of literal and word-for-word translation, making appropriate adjustments and optimizations based on the target language’s expressive habits while maintaining the original meaning.

Combination of Zero Translation and Transliteration

Zero translation refers to not using readily available words in the target language to translate words in the source language; transliteration involves translating source language vocabulary into target language vocabulary based on pronunciation. When translating idioms with strong cultural connotations, translators can choose to replace the original idiom with an idiom or expression in the target language that has a similar or related imagery. For example, the Chinese proverb “猫哭老鼠——假慈悲” has no direct equivalent in English, so translators chose to replace it with “to shed crocodile tears,” an English idiom with a similar imagery. Although the images of “cat” and “mouse” in the original text are not directly presented, the English expression successfully conveys the deep meaning of “pretended sympathy,” achieving the conversion and transmission of cultural imagery. This is a vivid manifestation of “substitution” at the homogeneous cultural level in zero translation.

On the surface, zero translation may seem to involve no substantial translation, sometimes merely adopting arbitrarily chosen homophonic characters to transliterate the original text’s vocabulary or directly copying foreign words. However, exploring deeper, it actually preserves the full connotation of the source language and can be considered the most precise translation method. In the translation practice combining zero translation and transliteration, the classic opening lines of the *Tao Te Ching*: “道可道，非常道；名可名，非常名” are cleverly translated as: “Dao, which can be dao-ed, is not the ultimate Dao; Name, which can be named, is not the authentic Name.” In this translation, “Dao” and “Name” retain the original text’s transliteration characteristics, demonstrating respect for the cultural essence of the original text. Meanwhile, using the technique of zero translation, the word “dao-ed,” although not a standard English expression, cleverly mimics the structure of the original Chinese sentence, vividly conveying the beauty of the original text’s artistic conception. “Ultimate” and “authentic” accurately capture the profound philosophy contained in “非常,” ensuring that the translation is both faithful to the original text and smooth and natural.

Conclusion

By analyzing the differences and similarities in the online translations of idioms from *Xi Jinping: The Governance of China (Volume IV)* provided by three major translation platforms—Youdao Dictionary, Eudic and Baidu Translate—the English translation strategies employed demonstrate that despite the continuous

development and optimization of online translation technology, the accuracy and fluency of idiom translations have been significantly improved. However, due to the profound cultural connotations and unique linguistic forms of idioms, online translation still faces certain difficulties when dealing with complex idioms or those in specific contexts. Furthermore, online translation of idioms is influenced by various factors, including but not limited to the algorithm design of the translation platforms, the training data of language models, the professional expertise and cultural backgrounds of the translators, etc. In other words, online translation still has vulnerabilities and instability that need to be addressed, leaving room for the personal development of human translators.

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