

Analysis of the Domestication and Foreignization of Culture Loaded Words in the English Version of “Call To Arms” by Yang Xianyi and Dai Naidie

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Abstract

Nowadays, a large number of English version of literary works with Chinese as the source language spread overseas, which has become an important way for the West to understand the oriental culture. Therefore, the proper translation of culture loaded words with Chinese local characteristics is particularly crucial. This paper mainly takes the English version of “Call To Arms” by Yang and Dai as an example, and combines the theories of domestication and foreignization to extract several culture loaded words with high translation quality. Hoped that readers can be more clear about the strategic choices of culture loaded words in translation through the exploration of this thesis.

Keywords

Domestication; Foreignization; Culture loaded words; Lu Xun; “Call To Arms”.

1. Introduction

1.1. Culture Loaded Words

Culture loaded words refer to the products gradually accumulated in the historical process under the restriction and influence of spiritual civilization, material civilization and traditional customs in a specific region. They are words that express unique things and concepts in a certain culture. This kind of words not only carry rich cultural connotations, but only exist in a specific culture. It is precisely because of this uniqueness that they are often obstacles to cross-cultural communication. However, with the increasingly close cross-cultural communication in the world, a large number of English version of literary works with Chinese as the source language spread overseas, which has become an important way for the West to understand the oriental culture. Therefore, the proper translation of culture loaded words with Chinese local characteristics is particularly crucial.

1.2. Domestication and Foreignization

Due to the cultural differences between China and the West, there is often no complete equivalence between the source language and the target language of culture loaded words. In order to solve this problem, scholars at home and abroad have proposed that domestication and foreignization can be used in the translation of culture loaded words. The so-called domestication and foreignization is the translation theory put forward by the American translator Lawrence Venuti in his book *The Translator's Invisibility: A History of Translation*. In a word, domestication means that the extensive use of commonly used expressions in the target language by the translator, with the main purpose of the reader's ability to understand the meaning of the text. And foreignization means that the translator retains the expression used by the original author as far as possible, with the main purpose of spreading the culture of the source language. The two are different, but both aim to make the reader understand the source language better.

2. The Applications of Domestication and Foreignization of Culture Loaded Words in the “Call To Arms”

The Call To Arms is a collection of Lu Xun’s short stories, which contains 14 well-known stories such as A Madman’s Diary, Kong Yiji and The True Story of Ah Q. In the process of reading this anthology, we often encounter some sayings and allusions rich in cultural characteristics of the Chinese nation, such as “Twenty-five two silver”, “The little ghost saw the king of Yan”, “Ju ren (a successful candidate in the imperial examinations at the provincial level in the Ming and Qing dynasties)”, “Change paper”, etc. These are all typical culture loaded words. Taking the English version of “Call To Arms” by Yang and Dai as an example, this paper extracts several high-quality translation of culture loaded words in order to analyze the specific translation methods used by Yang and Dai under the guidance of domestication and foreignization translation strategies.

2.1. Case Analysis: Domestication Translation of Culture Loaded Words

Example 1: 他（赵秀才）写了一封“黄伞格”的信，托假洋鬼子带上城，而且托他给自己介绍介绍，去进自由党。（selected from The True Story of Ah Q）

Yang: He had written an extremely formal letter, and asked the Bogus Foreign to take it to town; he had also asked the latter to introduce him to the Freedom Party.

The “黄伞格” in the original text is actually an old letter format, which is called “黄伞格” because its text is arranged like a yellow umbrella in the old officials’ ceremonial guard. This kind of letter format is more rigorous and often shows respect to others. If the translator adopts the method of foreignization to translate it into “yellow umbrella frame” in order to preserve its language format in Chinese, since there is no concept of “黄伞格” in the target language, foreign audiences who do not understand Chinese culture are very likely to think that Zhao has written a letter related to the “yellow umbrella frame” to others, which will bring some obstacles to the reader’s understanding of the article. In this case, it is a better choice to give up the translation of foreignization and try to paraphrase the implied meaning of this culture loaded word. Therefore, the translator flexibly translated “黄伞格的信” into “an extremely formal letter”, so that the source language and the target language of this culture loaded word are equivalent in cultural function.

Example 2: 阿Q没有家，住在未庄的土谷祠里。（selected from The True Story of Ah Q）

Yang: Ah Q had no family but lived in the Tutelary God’s Temple at Weizhuang.

Example 3: 这是未庄赛神的晚上。（selected from The True Story of Ah Q）

Yang: This is the evening of the Festival of the Gods in Weizhuang.

The above two examples are related to the translation of “神” in Chinese traditional culture. In example 2, the “土谷祠” is what we often call the “land temple”. “土” and “谷” refer to the land deity and the grain deity respectively, which are the deities who guard the peace of the place and protect the harvest of the crops. In example 3, “赛神” is a unique folk custom of paying back deity’s grace in Shaoxing, Zhejiang Province. The main activity of this custom is carrying the statue out of the temple and holding a sacrificial rites in order to avoid disasters and pray for blessings. Due to the differences in values and mythological systems between the East and the West, there are no such equivalent mythological images or customs in Western myths and legends. Therefore, Yang and Dai translated the “神” of these two places into “God”, referring to the Western God, in the hope that the Western audience could intuitively feel the sacred significance of the temples and festivals in China.

Example 4: 他于是重新再在十二张榜的圆图里细细地搜寻，看的人全已散尽了，而陈士成在榜上终于没有见，单站在试院的照壁的面前。（selected from The White Light）

Yang: He made a careful search through all twelve lists. Even after everyone else had left, the name Chen Shicheng had not appeared on the list but the man was still standing there, a solitary figure before the front wall of the examination school.

“圆图”和“照壁” in this example are both unique expressions in old China. The “圆图” refers to the list publishing candidates' names of the preliminary examination of the county examination in the era of imperial examinations. Since there is no imperial examination system in the West, and the word “圆图” does not exist in the West, the translator adopted the method of free translation and translated it into “all twelve lists”, making the meaning of the source language consistent with the target language, so that let them achieve functional equivalence. “照壁” is a kind of building built in front of the courtyard by rich families in ancient China. Similarly, because the ancient architectural styles of the East and the West are quite different, and there is no word “照壁” in the western culture, translator still used the method of free translation simplifying it to “the front wall”. The above two translations not only clearly express the meaning of the original text, but make the expression of the target text more fluent and natural. Both of them belong to the ingenious application of domestication translation.

2.2. Case Analysis: Foreignization Translation of Culture Loaded Words

Example 5: 榨不出一点油水，已经气破肚皮了。他还要老虎头上搔痒，便给他两个嘴巴。
(selected from Medicine)

Yang: He couldn't squeeze anything out of him; he was already good and angry, and then the young fool would 'scratch the tiger's head', so he gave him a couple of slaps.”

“老虎头上搔痒” is Kang's comment on Xia Yu's rude remarks about Ah Yi, which means bold and reckless. Normally, the translator will paraphrase it as “too sure of himself” 或者 “overreach himself” directly. Although this way of translation can ensure the fluency of reading, the unique extended meaning contained in Chinese idioms will disappear. Therefore, in order to preserve the feature of the original work, the translator adopted the method of foreignization and translated it into “scratch the tiger's head”. At the same time, since tigers are beasts in both China and the West, scratching on the beast's head is a very dangerous move, so this kind of translation will not cause misunderstanding among foreign audiences, but may bring them interesting associations. The purpose of the translator is to tell readers if we want to describe a person's behavior overreaching his or her ability in Chinese, we can say “ You are just scratching the tiger's head.” It can enable foreign readers to better understand the use of Chinese idioms.

Example 6: 掌柜说，样子太傻，怕侍候不了长衫主顾，就在外面做点事罢。外面的短衣主顾，虽然容易说话，但唠唠叨叨缠夹不清的也很不少。(selected from Kong Yiji)

Yang: The boss put me to work in the outer room, saying that I looked too much of a fool to serve long-gowned customers. The short-coated customers there were easier to deal with, it is true, but among them were quite a few pernickety ones.

In the old days, people used to judge the status of others by their clothes. The long clothes represent the wealthy or educated upper class, while the short clothes represent the poor people of the lower class who work hard every day to make a living. In order to retain the unique Chinese appellation in the original text, the translator still adopted the method of foreignization, which made the translation more authentic and show the actual style of the novel to foreign readers who want to learn Chinese culture.

Example 7: 然而也偶有大可佩服的地方，即如未庄的乡下人不过打三十二张的竹牌，只有假洋鬼子能够叉“麻酱”，城里却连小乌龟子都叉得精熟的。(selected from The True Story of Ah Q)

Yang: However, the town had its good points too; for instance, in Weizhuang everyone played with thirty-two bamboo counters and only the Bogus Foreign Devil could play mahjong, but in town even the street urchins excelled at mahjong.

“叉麻酱” belongs to Jiangsu and Zhejiang dialect, which is another expression for “playing mahjong”. It is a leisure game originated in China, and “mahjong” is the transliteration of “麻将”. Although the translator’s foreignization translation retained the original language charm of the cultural noun, it may bring reading obstacles to the reader to a certain extent. Because there is only a single transliteration word in the translation without relevant annotations, it will lead to the non-equivalence between the source language culture and the target language culture. If the translator can add notes after it, such as “Mahjong is a Chinese game played by 4 people with 144 tiles”, it will not only facilitate readers to absorb the essence of Chinese culture more deeply, but also inject Chinese elements into the target language culture, so as to enrich and develop the corpus of western countries.

3. Conclusion

Through the analysis of the translation strategies in the English version of “Call To Arms” by Yang and Dai, we can see that in a version, in order to achieve its language is a unity of form and spirit, we cannot unilaterally translate culture loaded words in the way of domestication or foreignization. Translators must choose proper translation mode according to culture loaded words’ connotations and functions in a particular context. The purpose is to combine the advantages of domestication strategy, which is easy for readers to understand, with the advantage of foreignization strategy, which can promote cultural exchanges and learn from each other, so as to make the translation of culture loaded words more accurate and fluent, and improve the translation quality of versions. This strategy can not only better promote the external dissemination of Chinese culture, but enhance the exchange and integration of world culture.

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