

Study on the English Translation of Guangxi Ethnic Costumes and Handicrafts

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Abstract

With the increasing frequency of global exchanges, Chinese ethnic culture is receiving more and more attention from the world, and ethnic costumes have become a carrier of ethnic history and culture. Guangxi is the autonomous region with the largest population of ethnic groups in China, and the costume handicraft culture of various ethnic groups has a long history. The characteristics of Guangxi's ethnic handicrafts are explored from the perspective of cultural translation view, and corresponding translation strategies are pointed out in order to provide reference for traditional ethnic handicrafts.

Keywords

Ethnic Costumes; Handicrafts; Cultural Translation Theory; Translation Strategy.

1. Introduction

The colorful ethnic cultures of China's 56 ethnic groups have given birth to a wide range of ethnic costumes. As an important part of Chinese costume culture, ethnic costume culture is an epic scroll reflecting ethnic groups, covering a wide range of cultural information such as history and culture, geographical environment, living customs, religious beliefs and aesthetic interests. Nowadays, Chinese ethnic culture is receiving more and more attention from the world, and the culture of ethnic costumes among them is gaining universal attention. Ethnic costumes and handicrafts are important forms of national culture, which has two characteristics of material culture and spiritual culture.

Guangxi, the region with the largest population of ethnic groups in China, including Zhuang, Yao, Miao, Dong and Yi, etc. There is a rich and fascinating culture of costume craftsmanship, with each ethnic group having their own unique costume craftsmanship, showing off the charm of their ethnic group. These handicrafts are both means of livelihood and carriers of civilization. (Yao, 2012) The colorful patterns and textures and the unique and exquisite craftsmanship show the world a unique regional cultural characteristic of Guangxi, which are rich in historical social and cultural values, and plays an important role in the rich and colorful ethnic costume culture of China, as well as in maintaining the integrity and diversity of Chinese ethnic culture. (Li, 2021)

However, there are still a few studies focus the translation of ethnic costumes and handicrafts. Therefore, this article will explore the practical application of translation strategies in the Chinese to English translation of ethnic costumes and handicrafts, providing examples from several representative Chinese to English translations of ethnic minority costume features to illustrate the importance of translation in cultural exchange. For the five thousand years of Chinese culture to flow better to the world, the bridge of translation needs to be made better in the Chinese to English translation of ethnic minority costumes.

2. Cultural Translation Theory

In the 1990s, Susan Bassnett proposed a “cultural turn in translation” in her book *Translation, History and Culture*. She claimed that the process of translation is not just a two-way communication in language, but should belong to an exchange between cultures; translation should achieve the purpose of overcoming the language communication barrier and promoting cultural exchange between the two sides; the main theme of translation should be the transplantation and intermingling of cultures; the object of translation operation should be cultural information. (Bassnett, 1990)

Bassnett’s view of cultural translation requires the translator to fully grasp the cultural background factors of the language, the reciprocal processing of language and cultural translation (Bassnett, 2004). On the one hand, it is necessary to provide an accurate explanation of the meaning of the original text; on the other hand, it is necessary to accurately grasp the cultural connotation and historical background of the translated text and to retain its cultural characteristics to the greatest extent possible, so that the reader can fully feel the differences between cultures and the charm of foreign cultures. By analyzing the characteristics of the names and descriptions of minority costumes, which mostly expresses deep cultural connotations. In addition, the names of different minority costume have taken root from the soil of traditional Chinese culture, so they can be translated into English from the perspective of cultural translation, thus accurately conveying the inner message and realizing linguistic conversion and cultural reciprocal output.

3. Translation Strategies of Ethnic Costumes and Handicrafts in Guangxi

When translating ethnic costumes, the translator is required to use words precisely according to the characteristics of the different ethnic introductory words and to ensure a uniform style of translation. At the same time, the translation must be concise and focused, and some culturally specific loaded words may be omitted to help the reader focus on the costume presentation itself. Finally, when translating, the translator can draw on the English terminology used for cultural objects in foreign museums, making the translation more in line with the habits of the target language readers.

3.1. Literal Translation

Literal translation is a method that completely retains the referential meaning of Chinese words in English translation without violating the Cultural traditions of English, so as to achieve consistency between content and form (Chen, 1998). Literal translation does not mean dead translation or hard translation. Besides, literal translation can pursue the basic equivalence of content and form, which is easy for readers to understand and feel. In order to remain the cultural connotations, on the basis of cultural information, if the form and connotation of the corresponding English expression could be found, there is a direct corresponding or similar to the concept of image, target language readers can get close or equal to the source language readers to understand and feel. That is “[t]he SL grammatical constructions are converted to their nearest TL equivalents but the lexical words are again translated singly, out of context” (Newmark, 2001).

For example, Dong people worship the sun and regard the sun as the source of all things. Their kerchiefs are usually decorated with “太阳纹”. The translator chooses the method of literal translation, and use the adjective “sun-striped”, which can concisely and vividly show the classical style of Dong’s kerchiefs. Yi people in Guangxi worship black color, Yi men tie “英雄结” on their heads. In order to achieve a balance between the two languages, the translator translates the Chinese “英雄” as its original meaning, because it conveys the heroic spirit, good

luck and blessing. Besides, embroidery is a long-established manual art of the Miao people, and is the main means of decoration of Miao costumes. “辫绣” is a kind of one of the embroidery techniques, and the translator translate it as “braid embroidery”, presenting a vivid image of Miao embroidery in Guangxi.

3.2. Free Translation

Free translation refers to the method in which the translator has to abandon the literal meaning of the source text in order to make the target text conform to the content of the source text and have similar main language functions when the translator is limited by the social and cultural differences of the target language (Chen, 1998). When literal translation cannot solve the problem, it can only get rid of the constraints of the language form of the original text, and on the premise of being faithful to the spiritual essence of the original text, the intentional translation can convey the meaning of the original image according to the context. Cai (2007) stated that the translation of Chinese-English cultural images is not only a conversion of linguistic forms, but also a cross-cultural communication process of cognitive reasoning in two different cognitive contexts across linguistic levels.

In the description of Yao's costume handicrafts, the Chinese word “土” in “土布” means “native” instead of “earth”, “clay” or “dirt”. According to the cultural uniqueness of a nation, it can be solved through free translation. Besides, in Hui's costumes description, the Chinese word “礼拜” actually means Muslim. Therefore, the translator translates “礼拜帽” as “Muslim hat”. There is no need to pursue formal equivalence of source language. Information equivalence is the most important. This can help target readers to better understand the description and remove obstacles in reading.

3.3. Transliteration

Transliteration is “[t]he one-by-one rendering of individual letters and signs of an SL item in one alphabet with the closest corresponding letters and signs of another alphabet.” (Munday, 2016) Transliteration method refers to the translation method that retains the Chinese pronunciation in the Phonemic English translation so as to highlight the main linguistic functions of the original text. (Chen, 1998). There are great differences between Chinese and English culture, and it is difficult to find the direct corresponding words and sentences in English for some word names and their translations. In this case, the translation is usually translated by transliteration or transliteration + annotation, which not only retains the Chinese characteristics, but also conveys the cultural connotation of cultural relics, so as to achieve the purpose of cross-cultural communication.

In Yi people's sacrificial ceremonies for ancestors, the respected female elders would wear a kind of costume to show solemnity and beauty. However, the understanding of “贯头” without annotation may be difficult. In this case, “贯头” can be considered as “套头”. “贯头衣” is transliterated with annotations as “Guantou Clothes (pullover)”. It is of vital importance to help target readers to continue their reading. Zhuang people in Guangxi use a lot of embroidery techniques when sewing clothes, such as “打籽绣”. However, it does not have direct translation in English, which sets obstacles for readers to understand. Aiming to simplify the expression, it can be translated as “Dazi Embroidery”. In Chinese-English translation practice, if the corresponding expression cannot be found, it is necessary to adopt transliteration method to retain the characteristics and charm.

3.4. Amplification

Adopting the strategy of Amplification is to enhance the interpretation of traditional minority cultures and the reader's understanding of the content by adding to and expanding the translation where necessary. Amplification requires the translation and original text to be equal

in content and spirit (Feng, 1997). It is often necessary to add to and clarify passages that lack coherence or sentence structure after a full understanding of the text, taking into account the context and emotion. In *A Dictionary of Translation Studies in China*, Amplification is to add translation according to semantic, rhetorical or syntactic requirement, so the content of the original text can be fluently and faithfully conveyed. (Fang, 2011)

Miao's costume involves a kind of dress called “百鸟衣” when they dance at festivals. It is also called “hundred-bird coat of Miao Ethnic Group”. But such literal translation lacks cultural connotation. Therefore, in order to display the valuable clothing culture of the Miao, it can be translated by annotating method as follows: “hundred-bird coat (Miao ancient bird totem).” It can help readers understand which bird it refers to. Additionally, in another description of Miao's costumes, it also mentions “长命富贵锁”, which is translated as “silver lock representing longevity and wealth”. If not add the “silver”, foreign readers may be confused. Therefore, in the translation of ethnic minority costumes, appropriate cultural significance is added to help target readers understand the meaning and stimulate their interest.

Above all, Translation of ethnic costumes is not simply a matter of converting between two languages, but rather a matter of taking into account the characteristics and difficulties of translating costumes, as well as the acceptability and comprehensibility of the target language. In the translation process, translators should pay attention to cultural factors and bear in mind their mission to build a bridge between the source language and the target language and to promote cultural exchange. In intercultural translation, in order to overcome these barriers, the interpreter must make the necessary adjustments to the vocabulary, sentence structure, parts of speech, logical coherence and cultural imagery of the original language in order to satisfy the reader's reading psychology and achieve intercultural communication.

4. Conclusion

Through the analysis of the English translation of the introduction of ethnic costume and handicrafts in Guangxi, we can see that it is not easy to have translation containing rich explicit and implicit cultural information. The translator must not only accurately convey the literal and intertextual cultural information of the cultural object in the target language, but also appropriately present the cultural information contained in the object itself. In the cultural dimension, folkloric handicrafts are the product of a fusion of national wisdom with a specific cultural background, so English translations also need to take into account the cultural background of the target language readers and fill in the cultural gaps, creating an ecological balance between the two languages. (She and Meng, 2022)

Basnett's view of cultural translation advocates that translation should take culture as the basic unit, highlighting the reciprocal exchange of cultural functions and requiring the translator to exercise subjective initiative. Translation strategies including literal translation, free translation, transliteration and amplification can be adopted in minority costume handicrafts to adapt the translation to the needs of contemporary readers and achieve the purpose of promoting cultural exchange. In addition, the essential characteristics and cultural connotations of the relics can be accurately, faithfully and vividly conveyed through the appropriate translation. This article provides a reference for the English translation of costume handicrafts of other ethnic minorities and realizes cross-cultural communication of traditional Chinese history and culture.

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