

The English Translation of Guangxi Ethnic Handicrafts Under Eco-Translatology

-- A Case Study of Beihai Shell Carving

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Abstract

Ethnic handicrafts, which is categorized among intangible cultural heritage, partly mirror distinctive national and local culture. That means its related C-E translations of publicity materials play a big role in ethnic cultural transmission and inheritance. This paper takes Beihai shell carving as example, and analyses its publicity material, based on the so-called three dimensions of Eco-Translatology (language dimension, cultural dimension and communication dimension), with the intent to improve the quality of translation and pass on Ethnic handicrafts.

Keywords

Eco-Tranlatology; Beihai shell carving; Three dimensions of Eco-Translatology.

1. Introduction

The Guangxi Zhuang Autonomous Region houses many ethnic minorities, consisting of Zhuang, Miao, Hui, Jing, Dong and others (Jiajia Feng, 2017). Much explain why the city meets and melts colorful ethnic civilization, which can be embodied by seas of ethnic festivities and handicrafts. Amid the context of Belt and Road Initiative, Guangxi receives arrivals of numerous tourists across the world, which gives a boost to local economic growth and tourism business. Also, ethnic handicrafts of Guangxi, too, capture eyes of visitors. Take Beihai shell carving as example. As recorded, such time-honored ethnic handicraft derived from the Qin (221 -206 BC) and the Han Dynasties (202-220 BC), and flourished during the late Qing Dynasty. With its ingenious craftsmanship and design, the Beihai shell carving highly values in art and esthetic all along and now is utilized in the real life, ie, painting, and furniture, etc. It not only enriches the range of Guangxi Ethnic handicrafts; it also promote economic growth of local city --Beihai. In 2010, the Beihai shell carving was listed in intangible cultural heritage of Guangxi Zhuang Autonomous Region. Going forward, in 2011, ethnic handicrafts were included into intangible cultural heritage under Law of the People's Republic of China on Intangible Cultural Heritage (Lei Yao, 2012). Thus, what merits attention is the quality of English translation over the ethnic handicrafts.

However, most of websites fail to offer the relevant English translation on the one hand; the quality of relevant publicity materials is poor, not least in cultural dimension and language dimension. That means there is much room to promote the development of English translation of ethnic handicrafts, let alone that of ethnic handicrafts of Guangxi. The publicity translation of Beihai shell carving as example is a case in point. This is due to the fact that few studies on Guangxi ethnic handicrafts are carried out, and few relevant English translations emerge on the Internet. At length, it is found that Beihai Shell Carving Museum offers rare English translation of Beihai shell, and thus this paper will analyse this text, combined with the Eco-Translatology. Two purposes of this paper are as follows: first, given the fact that few scholars research English translation of intangible cultural heritages, based on the Eco-Translatology, this paper aims to

offer a novel theoretical perspective to related studies; Second, this paper seeks to find whether the text construed conforms to “three-dimensional transformation” of Eco-Translation, aiming to promote the the quality of English translation of ethnic handicraft and disseminate local culture.

2. “Three-Dimensional Transformation” of Eco-Translation

So-called Eco-translation is developed from an Approach to Translation as Adaption and Selection, put forth by Gengshen, Hu at the International Symposium on Global Cultural Translation in 2006. Besides, It can be deemed as an ecological approach to translation studies or translation studies from an ecological perspective (Gengshen Hu, 2008). That is to say, such interdisciplinary theory combines ecology and translation. This theory, guided by Darwin’s biological evolution theory, emphasizes the role of translators and explores how translators choose translation techniques to complete high-quality translation amid “ translational eco-environment”. The translational eco-environment refers to a world that spans language, interaction, culture, society, authors, translators and readers (Gengshen Hu, 2008).

On the other hand, such theory details something relevant to translation, such as its essences, processes, standards, principles, and methods. The translation methods refer to three dimensions, containing language dimension, cultural dimension and communication dimension (Gengshen Hu, 2011). Language dimension indicates that translators need to modify and select the form of language during the process of translation, given linguistic difference; Cultural dimension indicates that translators need to focus on how to deliver underlying cultural connotation correctly and avoid misunderstanding, given cultural difference; and communication dimension demonstrates that translators need to be concerned about bilingual communicative intention and how to realize it through translation. All three dimensions are intersected with one another, rather than independently, which demand higher professional level for translators (Qingming Li, 2021).

3. Problems of C-E Translation of Beihai Shell Carving

Beihai shell carving steeped in profound history, enriches traditional culture and boosts economic growth of Beihai. However, this old-aged ethnic handicraft is faced with challenges in the aspect of inheritance and cultural propaganda. Beihai Shell Carving Museum sets an example first, which introduces the origin, protection and inheritance of Beihai Shell Carving (Editorial office of this Journal, 2016). Also, related English translation can partly bridge the gap. According to the Eco-translation, this paper will analyse the English translation offered by Beihai Shell Carving Museum from three perspectives, that is, language, culture and communication, and find whether the translated text adapts to linguistic ecology of receptors.

3.1. On Language Dimension

Chinese is a Sino-Tibetan language, while English is an Indo-European one. Namely, both languages have great differences in phone, lexicon, discourse, etc. That entails translators to have excellent linguistic proficiency, and assign priority to linguistic ecology amid translation. In other words, translators need to deliver the meaning of source text and meanwhile select appropriate language, with considering the mind-set of receptors.

Example1:

Source text: 这个右旋白螺，亦称“定风珠”。

Translated text: This white shell with dextrorotation, was also called “wind fix bead”

Revised text: This right-handed white conch, was also called “ Dingfengzhu (The wind-stopping pearl)”.

Based on language dimension, “youxuan” in source text was translated into “dextrorotation”, which is an error because “dextrorotation” is a term describing circular direction of rotating plane-polarized light. “Dingfengzhu” was translated literally yet illogically, to great extent misguiding receptors. The word indeed has appeared in the Journey to the West, that is, the wind-stopping pearl. Besides, when translating cultural-specific language, the translator need to disseminate special culture and consider the mind-set of receptors. Then, transcription and brief explanation is advisable.

Example 2:

Source text: 文革期间，专业技术人才受政策和大学停课的影响，造成技术人才青黄不接的严重状况。

Translated text: During the Cultural Revolution, the impact of policy and close of university on professional and technical personnel caused the serious temporary shortage of technical personnel.

Revised text: During the Cultural Revolution (1966-1976), a confluence of poor policies and closed universities on professional caused the serious temporary shortage of technical personnel.

This sentence touches on two dimensions, that is, language dimension and cultural dimension. From the perspective of cultural one, “the Cultural Revolution” is advisable to add its historical epoch; From the perspective of language one, the translator adopts free translation, translating “qinghuangbujie” into “shortage”, which embodies the underling meaning. Overall, the translator utilizes literal translation, which roughly express the original meaning, yet some minor errors linger.

3.2. On Cultural Dimension

The cultural dimension serves as the core of “three-dimensional transformation” of Eco-Tranlatology, which requires translators to transmit culture via translated texts. In this respect, difference of “translational eco-enviroment” should be taken into consideration, and translators should adopt feasible translation strategy in a way to minimize misunderstanding of readers via recreating the translation with local color.

Example 3:

Source text: 此庙主奉祀济公和十八罗汉与圣母娘娘。

Translated text: The head priest of the temple enshrines Monk Jigong, the Eighteen Disciples of the Buddha and Madame the Virgin.

Revised text: The head priest of the temple enshrines Chai gong (a mad monk), the Eighteen Arhats (eighteen disciples of buddha) and Sanshengmu (Chinese goddess of marriage and love)

This sentence is a matter of cultural dimension, not least cultural-specific items, and communication dimension. Aixelá (1996), a Spanish translator, pointed out that something absent in receptors’ cultural systems may partly cause difficulties in the course of translation. Also, there are many cases in point. Similarly, it is inappropriate that the translator adopts literal translation over cultural-specific items, ie, “Monk Jigong”, “Eighteen Disciples of the Buddha” and “Madame the Virgin”. In other’s shoes, translators can utilize transcription and add non-cultural-specific items to explain cultural-specific (Fangrong Chen, 2011).

3.3. On Communication Dimension

The communication dimension emphasizes how the meaning of original texts is transformed, how culture is transmitted, and whether communicative intention is achieved. That means translators not only strike a balance between language and culture, but pay attention to how to realize communicative goals via language.

Example 4:

Source text: 天然海贝的品种也很多，有“货贝”、“拟枣贝”、“阿文绶贝”、“伶黠榧螺”等。

Translated text: Natural seashell breed is very much also, there are “goods”, “to date”, “text ribbon bei”, “itach fish” of the music.

Revised text: There are also many varieties of natural sea shellfish, ie, “Monetaria moneta”, “Erronea erronea”, “Mauritia arabica”, “Oliva mustelina” etc.

Considering the communication dimension, the source text aims to emphasize oceans of natural sea shellfish. Yet, there appear many mistakes, in grammar and lexicon. On grammar, two sentences admittedly must be conjoined by a connector, or others which follow grammatical rules. On lexicon, proper nouns have been endowed definite translation, which cannot be loosely translated. That is to say, to translators, the capability for searching information or data is much-needed. By and large, translators need to fulfill the mission to disseminate original meaning and culture, with a certain professional level.

4. Conclusion

The Guangxi Zhuang Autonomous Region is abundant with variant ethnic handicrafts, ie, Beihai Beidiao, the embroidery ball, ceramics, cutting-paper, etc. All emerge as the carrier of history, demonstrating distinctive culture of ethnic groups. Thereby, the roles of relevant English translation cannot go unnoticed, paving the way for innovation-driven development, economic growth and going global. The quality of translation, however, is unsatisfactory, and namely society pays little attention to the publicity translation of ethnic handicrafts. Take English translation of Beihai Shell Carving in Museum. There are quite a few problems in lexicon, grammar, and expression. To deal with such dilemma, it is only by joint efforts, rather than only translators that the ethnic handicrafts possibly leave great impression on tourists from China and beyond.

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