

Translation of Chinese Political Terms in *Frog* From the Perspective of Cultural Identity of Translator

CHEN Rui^{[a],*}; ZHAO Yushan^[a]

^[a]School of Foreign Languages, North China Electric Power University, Beijing, China.

*Corresponding author.

Supported by the NCEPU “Double First-Class” Graduate Talent Cultivation Program, No. XM1805318.

Received 23 June 2018; accepted 28 August 2018

Published online 26 September 2018

Abstract

Mo Yan’s masterpiece *Frog* has a large number of Chinese political terms which reflect the characteristics of the times during the Cultural Revolution and family planning period. Howard Goldblatt translates this novel and achieves a big success in transmitting the meaning of the original text to English readers. Howard Goldblatt’s English translation version maintains the feature of Chinese culture and conforms to the expression habit of English readers, which conveys the Chinese culture and makes foreign readers easy to understand. This paper analyzes the translation of Chinese political terms in Mo Yan’s novel *Frog* in the light of cultural identity of translator in order to provide a new perspective for the translation of Chinese political terms. Some translation methods are adopted in translation: The method of literal translation maintains the feature of Chinese culture and makes the translated text faithful to the original text; Amplification can make the translated text clear for foreign readers to understand; Omission considers the cognitive context of foreign readers and omits some unnecessary words in the process of translation; Free translation is used to explain the meaning of Chinese political terms in the original text.

Key words: Chinese political terms; *Frog*; Cultural identity; Translation methods

Chen, R., & Zhao, Y. S. (2018). Title. *Higher Education of Social Science*, 15(1), 23-26. Available from: URL: <http://www.cscanada.net/index.php/hess/article/view/10767>
DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.3968/10767>

INTRODUCTION

Chinese political terms are the carrier of the distinctive Chinese culture, which express characteristics of the times. The translation of Chinese political terms plays an important role in cross-cultural communication. The study of the translation of Chinese political terms mainly focuses on three types of text: the reports of the Party and the government, the public speeches of Chinese leaders and the publicity text. The translation methods of Chinese political terms are studied from the perspectives of Culture Translation theory, communication mode, cross-cultural communication and so on. Few studies focus on the translation of Chinese political terms in Mo Yan’s novel *Frog* from the perspective of cultural identity of translator. This paper discusses some particular Chinese political terms from the Chinese *Frog* and Howard Goldblatt’s English translation version to analyze the translation methods adopted by the translator from the perspective of cultural identity of translator and hope to provide a new perspective for the translation of Chinese political terms.

1. CHINESE POLITICAL TERMS AND FROG

Chinese political terms refer to the specific political concept formed by the Party and the government in the political activities of the country’s internal affairs and diplomacy (Huang, 2017, p.119). Chinese political terms reflect the principles and policies of different stages of social development in China. The quality of translation is related to the effect of external communication and the construction of China’s national image. With the development of opening-up and reform in the modern time, the translation of Chinese political terms plays a more important role in cross-cultural communication.

Mo Yan is the first Chinese writer to win the Nobel Prize in Literature. His works are popular with western

readers and the translation plays a key role. His work *Frog* has a large number of Chinese political terms with Chinese characteristics during the Cultural Revolution and Family Planning period. Mo Yan uses a lot of political terms that express China's unique cultural connotations and characteristics of the times, which is different from Chinese political terms in other political texts and making the translation more difficult. To make foreign readers better understand the background of the novel and Chinese culture, it is very important to accurately and properly translate Chinese political terms, which is also the key to the translation quality of the novel. Howard Goldblatt has flexibly adopted a variety of methods in the process of translating Chinese political terms which are worth of studying.

2. CULTURAL IDENTITY OF TRANSLATOR

Cultural identity is the identity of belonging to a group. It is related to nationality, ethnicity, religion and social class that has its own distinct culture (Ennaji, 2005, pp.19-23). In the first half of the twentieth century, cultural identity of the translator was noticed by the translation and intercultural studies. The translator's cultural identity plays a key role in the translation and dissemination of Chinese culture (Xu, 2018, pp.85-89). The translation methods used by the translator are influenced by his cultural identity.

Lefevere (2006, p.19) argues that the first task of translator is to make the target language reader understand the original text. The translator not only translates the semantic information of the original text, but also conveys the deep meaning of it. Cross-cultural literary translation requires translators to fully understand the source culture and the target culture so as to convey the deep cultural information to the readers. They should find out the similarities and differences between the source culture and the target culture, take into account the translation purposes, contexts, audiences and other factors, and choose appropriate translation methods (Wang, 2018, pp.266-270).

Howard Goldblatt is a literary translator of numerous works of contemporary Chinese fiction. He has translated more than 60 works by more than 30 Chinese writers, and is the translator who has translated most Chinese novels into English in history. He translated works of Mo Yan, including six of Mo Yan's novels and collections of stories. His translation version is considered one of the best versions. Howard Goldblatt is an American translator who loves Chinese and understands Chinese culture. He is proficient in English and Chinese (Dong, 2008). He appreciated Mo Yan, the author of the *Frog*, and had a good communication with him in the process of translation. In the process of translation, Howard

Goldblatt is faithful to the original text and has made creative rewriting. He believes that translation should be faithful to the linguistic features of the original text and maintain the exotic features of Chinese culture. At the same time, creative rewriting and inadequate translation of the original work are effective. Howard Goldblatt is a foreign translator and his translation of Chinese political terms is different from those Chinese translators who are responsible for the translation of official political documents. His cultural identity influences the choice of translation methods in the process of translation.

3. TRANSLATION METHODS OF CHINESE POLITICAL TERMS

Most of Chinese political terms in *Frog* can be divided into the following categories: political abbreviations such as“文革”、“公社”、“走资派”; political slogans, such as“一个不少，两个正好，三个多了”，“马克思主义的道理，千头万绪，归根结底，就是一句话，造反有理——造反有理”; political identity words, such as“县委书记”，“县公安局反特科科长”，“县卫生局保卫科科长”and so on. Translation of Chinese political terms in Mo Yan's novel *Frog* can be a new perspective for the study of Chinese political terms.

Because of the special cultural identity of the translator, the translation methods of literal translation, amplification, omission, free translation are adopted by Howard Goldblatt to translate those Chinese political terms.

3.1 Literal Translation

Literal translation refers to word-for-word translation, which translates the original text from one language to another one word at a time. The translator uses this translation method to maintain the exotic features of Chinese culture and makes the translated text faithful to the original text. Although it makes the translated text difficult for readers to understand, it can produce “defamiliarization” effect and attract the attention of the target language readers.

Example 1:

批斗县委书记杨林的大会，因为参加人数太多，无地可容，时任公社革命委员会主任的肖上唇别出心裁地将会场安排在胶河北岸滞洪区内。(Mo, 2009)

So many people turned out for the rally to denounce *Party Secretary Yang Lin that the revolutionary committee head*, Xiao Shangchun, came up with the ingenious idea of moving the site to the retarding basin on the northern bank of the Jiao River. (Goldblatt, 2014)

Example 2:

他不吃煤因为他不饿，他不饿因为他爹是公社粮库保管员。(Mo, 2009)

He didn't eat it because he wasn't hungry, he said, and that was because his father was *the commune granary watchman*. (Goldblatt, 2014)

The phrases“县委书记”，“公社革命委员会主任” and “公社粮库保管员” are special political identity words in Chinese culture. These words come into being in the Cultural Revolution and Family Planning period, which are well known by Chinese readers. There are no equivalence political identities and political identity words in English. The translator uses literal translation to translate them into “Party Secretary”, “the revolutionary committee head” and “the commune granary watchman” to maintain the features of Chinese culture, which makes the translated text faithful to the original text. The readers can acquire knowledge of Chinese Cultural Revolution and Family Planning period and know more about Chinese culture.

3.2 Amplification

Amplification means additional translation, which adds more words in translated text to make complete sentences to convey the exact meaning of the original text. Some Chinese political terms are difficult for foreign readers. The translator adds more words in translation to make it more clear for foreign readers to understand.

Example 3:

他说党和人民的眼睛是亮的。绝不会冤枉一个好人，也绝不会放过一个坏人。(Mo, 2009)

The Party and the people are blessed with bright-seeing eyes, he told her. *Under no circumstance would they treat a good person unjustly or make allowances for a bad one.* (Goldblatt, 2014)

Example 4:

公社公安员老宁腰挂匣枪，前来助阵，村支书袁脸率领妇女主任、民兵连长、四个民兵，冲进王脚的家。(Mo, 2009)
Ning Lao (Waist) from commune security, pistol on his belt, led a group consisting of the Party secretary, the Women's League chairwoman, the militia commander and four of his men; they burst unannounced into Wang's yard. (Goldblatt, 2014)

In the original sentence of example 3, the subject of the sentence is omitted, which is common in Chinese. The grammatical structure of English is more rigorous that the subject of the sentence should not be omitted in this sentence. Without the subject, foreign readers will feel confused about the meaning of the sentence. The translator is proficient in Chinese and fully understands the exact meaning of the original sentence. He adds the subject “they” to make the completed sentences for readers to understand. “妇女主任” in example 4 is also difficult for readers to understand. There is no equivalent concept in English culture and the readers will confuse about the meaning if this word translated literally. The translator adds more information “the Women's League” to explain the meaning of this political identity word. The translated text conforms to the linguistic conventions of English and foreign readers can understand the sentences with few processing effort.

3.3 Omission

Omission means cutting down some unnecessary words in the translated text. Translator's choice is influenced by

his cultural identity, and he chooses inadequate translation of the original work which is effective. The translation method of omission is adopted. The omission of the unnecessary words will not change the meaning of the original text and the translated text can be clear enough for readers to understand.

Example 5:

“文化大革命”中他当红卫兵头头那阵子，不知道糟蹋了多少姑娘。(Mo, 2009)

During the Cultural Revolution, as *head of a Red Guard faction*, he raped more women than you can count. (Goldblatt, 2014)

Example 6:

肖上唇当了公社革委会主任，他儿子肖下唇当了我们学校红卫兵大队长。(Mo, 2009)

His father was the head of the commune revolutionary committee, while Xiachun himself was *the leader of our school's Red Guard brigade.* (Goldblatt, 2014)

In the original sentence of example 5, “头头” in “红卫兵头头” is the colloquial overlapping words which means “the leader”. It is difficult for foreign readers to understand because there is no equivalence overlapping words in English. In the translated version the second “头” is omitted without influencing the original meaning of the sentence. The word “大队长” is a special political identity word in Chinese culture which refers to “the highest leader of the Red Guard brigade”. There is no equivalence in English. The omission of the word does not affect conveying the information in the original sentence. The cognitive context of foreign readers is considered by the translator and the method of omission is adopted. The translated text conforms to the acceptance psychology of foreign readers and better conveys the communicative intention of the original text. The unnecessary words are omitted and the translated text will be clearer for readers to understand.

3.4 Free Translation

Free translation means translator does not translate the original text from one language to another one word at a time. The cultural identity of translator helps him understand Chinese culture and he can fully understand the meaning of the original text. The translator can explain the exact meaning of the original text by creative rewriting.

Example 7:

姑姑右手扶腰，左手拇指、小指、无名指蜷曲，食指和中指并拢挺直，伸向前方，身着七十年代大流行的“的确良”军干服，衣袖高挽，身体胖大，白发苍苍，像一个“文革”后期的县社干部。(Mo, 2009)

With her right hand on her hip, she held her left hand out in front, the thumb and outer two fingers curled inward, her index and middle fingers pointing ahead; she was wearing a 1970s-vintage Dacron military uniform, sleeves rolled up. Overweight and greying, she had the look of a commune cadre from *the Cultural Revolution.* (Goldblatt, 2014)

Example 8:

新中国成立后的第一个计划生育高潮掀了起来。政府提出口号：一个不少，两个正好，三个多了。(Mo, 2009)

As the first family-planning policy in New China peaked, the government proposed: *One is good, two is just right, three is too many.* (Goldblatt, 2014)

The political abbreviation “文革” in example 7 means “文化大革命” in the complete form. In example 8, the political slogan “一个不少，两个正好，三个多了” means “having one child is good, having two children is suitable for the family’s economic condition, and three children is hard for a family to raise”. If the abbreviation and the slogan are translated literally, it will be beyond the cognitive environment of foreign readers. It is difficult for English readers who know little about Chinese political abbreviations and Chinese culture to understand. Because of the special cultural identity, the translator has knowledge of the Cultural Revolution and Family Planning period and he can accurately understand the meaning of the political abbreviation and slogan. The translator uses free translation to explain the exact meaning of the abbreviation and the slogan, which is easy to understand for foreign readers.

CONCLUSION

With the development of globalization, there is more cross-culture communication between countries. The translation of Chinese political terms plays an increasingly prominent role in cross-culture communication and it is worth of studying. There are a large number of Chinese political terms in Mo Yan’s novel *Frog*, which reflect Chinese culture during the Cultural Revolution and family planning period. The good translation of those Chinese political terms can make English readers better understand

the novel, better introduce Chinese culture to the foreign readers and promote cross-culture communication. The cultural identity of the translator Howard Goldblatt is playing a key role in the process of the translation. This paper analyzes the translation of the Chinese political terms by Howard Goldblatt in *Frog* from the perspective of cultural identity of the translator. The translation methods of literal translation, amplification, omission and free translation are used to convey the meaning of the original texts. Through reading, readers can fully understand the novel and learn more about Chinese culture.

REFERENCES

- Bassnet, S., & Lefevere, A. (1998). *Constructing cultures: Essays on literary translation*. Clevedon: Multilingual Matters.
- Dong, J. J. (2008). *Influence of translator’s cultural identity on Howard Goldblatt’s translation*. Central South University.
- Ennaji, M. (2005). Multilingualism, cultural identity, and education in Morocco. *Springer Science & Business Media*, 19-23.
- Goldblatt, H. (2014). *Frog*. Australia: Penguin Group.
- Huang, Q. (2017). Language characteristics and English translation strategies of Chinese political terms. *Journal of Chongqing University of Technology (Social Science)*, (3), 119-124.
- Mo, Y. (2009). *Frog*. Shanghai: Shanghai Literature and Art Press.
- Wang, Q. (2018). The Construction of translator’s identity in the communication of Chinese cultural translation. *Social Sciences Front*, (9), 266-270.
- Xu, D. (2018). The Influence of translator’s identity on the translation process: A case study of Cao Cao’s image in Romus’s translation. *Foreign Language Teaching*, (6), 85-89.