



Translation of Chinese Internet Catchword from the Perspective of Eco-Translatology

GUAN Xiaowei^{[a].*}

^[a]Ph.D., lecturer. School of Foreign Languages, Dalian University of Technology, Dalian, China.

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*Corresponding author.

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Abstract

Internet catchwords are characterized by flexibility, vividness and conciseness. In addition to their basic semantic features, most of the Internet catchwords often contain deeper cultural meanings and purposes of communication. Eco-translatology is a new translation theory developed on “translation theory of adaptation and selection”, which focuses on the integrity of translational ecosystem and adheres to the “theory of translator-centeredness”. This paper attempts to explore the translation of Internet catchwords from the linguistic, cultural and communicative dimensions of eco-translatology to promote the development of English translation of Chinese Internet catchwords, promoting and accelerating the spread of Chinese Internet catchwords and Internet culture.

Key words: Eco-translatology; Internet catchword; Linguistic; Cultural; Communicative

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INTRODUCTION

With the advancement of the process of economic globalization and political pluralism, exchanges among

different countries are increasingly frequent, of which cultural exchanges occupy an important position. Cultural exchange is not only a bridge connecting Chinese and foreign countries, but also the inherent requirement for promoting cultural globalization and diversity. With the popularity of network and the increasing number of Internet users in China, an emerging culture—network culture is on the rise. In addition to traditional newspapers, radio, television, Internet is becoming the most popular new platform for information exchange and dissemination. As a part of the network language and network culture, the emergence and development of network language obtains much attention, which spread rapidly with the power of Internet. How to translate the Chinese network catchwords—a window in Chinese culture—under specific cultural context is a major challenge for the translator.

Internet catchwords mostly originate from social hot events, inseparable from current affairs. Due to the popularity of the network, the large number of Internet users and fast network dissemination speed, once network catchwords are generated, recognized and accepted, its dissemination speed and coverage will be unstoppable. As a new and unique language form, Internet catchwords, which are innovative with various language forms and humor styles, are easy to be accepted and spread by the people. Recently, the domestic research on network catchwords mainly focused on linguistic features, cultural analysis, dissemination mechanisms, pragmatic meaning and impact on traditional values of network catchwords (Yu, 2001; Liu, 2002; Zhang, 2010). The study on the translation of Chinese network catchwords is relatively rare and fragmented (Xing, 2013; Zhang, 2013).

This paper offers an account of the translation of Chinese Internet catchwords from the perspective of eco-translatology. In section 1, we give a brief introduction to the theories of eco-translatology. Section 2 presents the three dimensional transformation of eco-translatology. In

section 3, we discuss the translation of Chinese Internet catchwords by three dimensional transformation approach.

1. ECO-TRANSLATOLOGY

Eco-translatology is a kind of translation study from ecological perspective, which uses translation adaptation and selection theory as its theoretical foundation. It explains the translation process, translation methods and translation standards from the perspective of ecology. With the “adaptation/ selection” theory of Darwin’s theory of biological evolution as a guide, eco-translatology explores the adaptation and selection of the translator in ecological environment. The core concept of this theory is “translator-centered”, which means that the translator should take the role of the transformation of the two languages and cultures in the translation process to make the ongoing adaptation and selection (Hu, 2008; Hu, 2010; Hu, 2011, pp.96-109). The translator should adapt to the translation environment of the original texts, and make selection of the translation from the perspective of translational eco-environment. Translational eco-environment refers to the world combined the original text, source language and target language, including language, communication, culture, society, authors, readers, etc. The translation process is an alternate cycle between translator’s adaptation and selection. The translation principles are multi-dimensional selective adaptation and adaptive selection. The translation approaches are “three-dimensional transformation (the dimensions of language, culture and communication)”.

2. THREE-DIMENSIONAL TRANSFORMATION OF ECO-TRANSLATOLOGY

Eco-translatology summarizes translation approach into three dimensional transformation, that is, the adaptive selection and transformation on the dimensions of language, culture and communication on the principle of “multi-dimensional adaptation and adaptive selection” (Hu, 2011, pp.5-9).

The “linguistic dimensional adaptive selection and transformation” refers to the adaptive selection and transformation of language forms in the different aspects and at different levels in the translation process.

The “cultural dimension adaptive selection and transformation” refers to translator’s concern about the transfer and interpretation of bilingual cultural connotation in the translation process. It concerns the difference between the source language and the target language cultures on their nature and content, to avoid distortion of the original texts from the perspective of target language culture. When transforming the source

language, translators should concern the whole cultural system adapting to the language.

The “communicative dimensional adaptive selection and transformation” refers to the adaptive selection and transformation concerning bilingual communicative intention in the translation process. It demands translators to focus on communicative level and to concern whether the original communicative intention is reflected in the translation, in addition to the transformation of language information and the transfer of cultural notion.

3. TRANSLATING INTERNET CATCHWORD BY THREE-DIMENSIONAL TRANSFORMATION

The translation of Internet catchwords is not just a simple transformation of language symbols, but should involve various aspects including different societies, communication, languages and cultures, as well as the relationship between translators and authors, translators and readers. All of these factors constitute the eco-environment of the translation of Internet catchwords. Therefore, translators must fully consider these relevant factors, giving priority to the overall environment to make the most appropriate selection ultimately. Combined with eco-translatology theory, the translation of Internet catchwords will be discussed in detail from the perspective of linguistic dimension, cultural dimension and communicative dimension.

3.1 Linguistic Dimension

Linguistic dimensional adaptive selection and transformation is carried out in different aspects and at different levels. In the process of translation, translators should first adapt to the eco-environment, and then make selection to the translation adapting to the eco-environment of translation. Therefore the translation of Internet catchwords must first make adaptive transformation on the language dimension.

The new Internet catchword “大妈 Dàmā”, which are widely spread online, usually refers to the middle-aged Chinese housewives. Between April and May 2013, gold prices fell in the global gold market, so Chinese “Dama” became the main force in the gold buying spree. However, by the end of last year the international price of gold reached the lowest, so their investments have changed into speculation and the opportunities have become misfortune. Therefore, this word is later used to refer to those passionate, energetic but impulsive and blind people who are good at calculating but are lack of the vision. However, apparently the translations “aunt” or “grandma” can not accurately express the special meaning of this Chinese word. Because of the cultural differences between China and foreign countries, we cannot found the exact

word in the English to match its meaning and culture exactly when expressing this kind of Chinese social phenomena in English. So foreigners often create a lot of Chinglish words by transliteration, such as “shanzhai”, “kongfu”, “toufu”, “fuwa”, etc. Some foreign media have also adopted the transliteration “Dama”, which is easy to understand and memorize for readers and is in line with people’s cognitive psychology. The transliteration “Dama” adapt to translation eco-environment of the source language, not only fully expressing the meaning of the original language, but also reflecting the cultural connotation of the word .

3.2 Cultural Dimension

The “cultural-dimension adaptive selection and transformation” requires the translator to focus on the transmission and interpretation of bilingual cultural connotation in the translation process. Any national language is rooted in and linked with its culture. Therefore, the translator must take the similarities and differences between cultures into consideration. The characteristics of Internet catchwords require translators to transform the expression of cultural features with brief language. So the translators need to fully consider the adaptive transformation on cultural dimension.

The word “土豪tūháo” in Chinese have been mentioned millions of times on China’s Weibo in recent years. In Chinese, the word “tu” means dirt or uncouth and the word “hao” means rich or splendor. Traditionally “tuhao” has been referred to rich people who always bully and tease common people depending on their fortune and power in China’s rural areas. But in recent years, in the comic and animation field this word has been used to describe those who spend money extravagantly and irrationally. These kinds of people are everywhere, who devour their money and swing their credit or debit cards in excess. They favor luxuries, but have bad taste, so they are often despised, mocked and criticized.

There are some translations of “tuhao” online, such as “country baron”, “newly rich”, “upstart”, “rural rich”, “provincial tycoon”, “vulgar tycoon”, etc. Some foreign media called “tuhao” the Beverly Hillbillies of China. The word “Beverly Hillbillies”, the name of a famous American situation comedy, is combined by “Beverly Hills” and “Hillbillies”. This comedy tells the story of a house of upstarts moving to Beverly Hills where rich and famous people live. This translation is vivid to the foreigners who have seen this comedy, but not to other foreigners who haven’t seen this comedy, because they will not understand the meaning of this translation. So this translation seems unpopular yet. Some suggested changing “Beverly Hillbillies” into “Beijing Hillbillies”. But “tuhao” does not just exist in Beijing, China. It is a popular phenomenon throughout the whole country, so this translation is not suitable yet.

The method combining transliteration with interpretation is a translation method with higher degree of adaptation. By using this method, the word could be translated as “tuhao (people who spend money extravagantly and irrationally). By the annotated translation with transliteration, the meaning and cultural implication is completely delivered to the readers. This translation adapts to the eco-environment of translation and realizes the transformation on cultural dimension.

After a recent BBC program on Chinese hot words, the word “tuhao” has roused the concern of “Oxford English Dictionary” editors, so this word is expected to be included into the dictionary.

3.3 Communicative Dimension

On communicative dimension, the information is useless if it hasn’t played a communicative role in translation. The translation should be readable and understandable to the readers, without any doubts and obscures. The communicative translation puts more emphasis on the communicative effect than the content, which enables the readers to understand the content without difficulty using simple and beautiful language.

In 2010, the Chinese word “给力gěilì” became one of the popular internet catchwords, having the meaning of cool, awesome, energetic and powerful. The netizens also coined new English word “gelivable”. This new Chinglish word is basically in line with the forming rules of English words, which is popular on the internet.

According to the theory of eco-translatology, for the need of communication, language units should be reorganized in translation to achieve the purpose of communication and exchange. Language on the network is a medium language, which role is dissemination and exchange. The English translation “gelivable” is mainly created for the convenient dissemination and exchange of the popular Chinese word in Britain and America. From the perspective of communicative dimension, the translation “gelivable” brings new vitality for Chinese language, which enables people to see the power of the internet and reaches the communicative purpose.

CONCLUSION

Internet catchwords, a kind of culture-loaded words, are characterized by flexibility, vividness and conciseness. Most of the Internet catchwords contain a deeper cultural implication and purpose of communication in addition to their basic semantic features. Therefore, in translating the Internet catchwords, the translators need to make a flexible use of the transformation on linguistic, cultural and communicative dimension, and make an adaption to the eco-environment of Internet catchwords to carry out the translation with a higher degree of adaptation, so as to be better accepted and understood by the people from foreign cultures.

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