

# A Cultural Analysis of Swear Words Translation in English

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## Abstract

**The Swear word is an important part of western culture. Owing to its own taboo, for a long time, research and analysis on the culture of swear words are rare. In consideration of this, this article starts with the research on the production of swear words and the underlying culture and then discusses the strategy in translation of swear words and the cultural impact brought about by it. It is hoped that through the analysis of swear words translation and culture, readers' appreciation of the swear words culture can be advanced and the ability to communicate across cultures improved.**

## Keywords

**Swear Words; Swear Words Translation; Translation Strategy; Cross-cultural Communication.**

## 1. Introduction

The so-called swear words are to insult others with vulgar or malicious language. However, "it is an inevitable sociolinguistic phenomenon, and a way to vent dissatisfaction that exists in any language." [4] In the daily communication corpus of western society, such as film and TV series dialogue, the use of swear words is very common; but the research on swear words translation is still a new field. Until quite recently, swear words were a subject largely ignored by those who investigate the nature of language. [2] Recently, Netflix launched *History of Swear Words Season 1*. It has aroused people's interest in the most familiar strangers in English, swear words. These are also an important part of the culture of English-speaking countries. Swear words play an important role in American hip-hop music. The "Iceberg Theory" of Cross-cultural communication believes that in the cultural glacier model, a small part of the culture on the water is called "prominent culture" by scholars. We know that swear words are externally expressed culture, and what is the purpose that swears words do not merely curse words? Just like in China, swear words are not completely derogatory, and they are not just used to curse. In some cases, swear words are used to help us express uncontrollable emotions. Therefore, I want to use this article to briefly talk about the culture of "swear words" in English and its translation studies.

## 2. Discussion on the Production ,Classification of English Swear Words and the Underlying Culture

### 2.1. From a Macro Perspective

#### 2.1.1. Related to Religion

Most Westerners believe in Christianity or Catholicism, and religion is an important part of daily life. Swear words involving religious content in English are extremely common. There's also the third of "The Ten Commandments" of the Bible 'is You shall not take The Name of The Lord your God in vain; for The Lord will not hold him guiltless who takes His Name in vain.' Especially Jews are afraid to say God to avoid being condemned by God.

Therefore, swear words are a taboo of blasphemy from the beginning. Like god damn it, go to hell.

### 2.1.2. Relevant to Body Organs and Sexual Behavior

The body organs mentioned here generally refer to human sexual organs, which are also a relatively private part of each of us, so it is very taboo to use these swear words in public. Such as male reproductive organs: penis, dick, cock, balls, prick, etc., female reproductive organs: cunt, tits, etc., and some of the derivatives of these words, such as ass licker/kisser flattering, cocksucker bastard.

The word related to sexual behavior is famously the f word. Fuck you is the best example. And its derivative words or combinations also have the same lethality, such as fucker, fucking, etc. I will introduce them in detail later. Another common word is screw, such as screw you.

### 2.1.3. Related to Excrement

The characteristics of excrement are dirty and unsightly, so the "carrier" used to make swear words can't be more appropriate. Shit is common, and the tone is lighter. When women wanna say this meaning, they will say shoot. including "crap" also has a similar meaning. Of course, excrement is definitely not limited to humans, animal excrement is also used to scold people, such as bullshit, piss, etc.

### 2.1.4. Prejudice & Discrimination

The first is that with the development of the social economy, the status of women has been improved, but the problem of gender inequality still exists. In society, the status of women seems to have been lower than that of men. Therefore, some swear words that involve women have become lingua franca in the world. That "bitch" including the "son of bitch" has become cursed, but not everyone knows that bitch means a female dog in the beginning. It is said that this may be derived from the old Scandinavian "bikkjuna". However, it was not until the 15th century that he began to be used to scorn women. In addition, the term "motherfucker" shows that the elders of each family have also become part of the dirty language. Finally, the word "whore", "slut" is a great insult to women. Then there is the issue of racial discrimination. Especially in a multi-ethnic immigration country like the United States, racial discrimination has always been a problem in the United States and will exist for a long time. This was first reflected in blacks, such as "nigger", "thick lip", "broad-nosed", etc.; Indians: "drunk Indian", "dumb Indian" (implying that Indians are alcoholics and fools), etc.; Jews: Yid (Jews); Japanese: "little yellow men"; New Zealanders: "kiwi"; Chinese: "chinks"; Italians: "dagos"; Poles: "pollacks"; for LGBT crowds: "pervert", "fag/faggot/fudge packer". The last is discrimination against animals. The status of animals is even lower. [3] Naturally, they will be used for swear words, such as "pig/swine", "ass/donkey", "beast", "chick", etc.

## 2.2. From a Micro Perspective

The five most common English swear words begin with F, S, Cu, Co, and A. In the following, letter abbreviations are used instead. F, S and A are the most familiar swear words. Let us understand the past and present of these five words together. From people's initial understanding of language, we can find the basis for language taboos. Regarding the origin of language, there have always been two views, which have formed two major schools, namely the Conventionalists and the Naturalists. The Habitual School believes that the symbols have been chosen arbitrarily for the message, and the two are not intrinsically connected, but are established by convention; while the Natural School believes that language originates from the imitation of natural sounds. The combination of sound and meaning is an inevitable connection. They believe that there is an intrinsic correspondence between sound and sense (an intrinsic correspondence between sound and sense). Nowadays, people generally agree with the view of the habitual school that the combination of sound and meaning is arbitrary.

### 2.2.1. "F" Word

Fuck is a famous English swear word which means "sexual intercourse." This word is generally considered extremely offensive. Common words related to fuck include, fuck you, what the fuck (WTF for short) happened. The etymology of Fuck has become divergent today, but since the 15th century, the word began to appear in ancient British documents. Of course, the spelling at that time was not the same as it is now. It was a little different. The difference between ancient Chinese and vernacular Chinese was the same. For example, in the second edition of the Oxford Dictionary in 1503, the word appeared in the form of "fuckiit", and more than 20 years later, an English poet wrote the word as it is today. If we push forward, we can still see this word-there is this word in ancient Norwegian and Swedish documents. Of course, the same spelling is very different. Therefore, to unify the communication system of the entire country, the official (royal language), local (dialect), and foreign languages (foreign fusion languages) are all screened and reviewed at this time. So why is F recognized by linguists?

Just now we mentioned that this term was also seen in the early ancient Nordic language documents, and the United Kingdom itself is a country with many cultures, including the Germans from the north (one of the branches of Anglo-Saxon). An important part of the British DNA. The ancient Nordic people can be regarded as one of the ancestors of Britain, so the language they use must be recorded. It just so happens that F is still a very noble word in ancient Germanic civilization because it means "mating". In the ancient Germanic life and customs (some people even say that one of the seven kingdoms of ancient England inherited this tradition), ordinary people must obtain the consent of the tribal leaders to have sex. After obtaining consent, they will hang out at the door of their homes. The license issued by the country-"Fornication Under Consent of the King".

Of course, there are many versions of its origin, which are no longer verified. The only thing we can know is that F long ago, although it also meant "mating", its status was very noble.

### 2.2.2. The "S" Word

Shit, excrement. It is a vulgar word in modern English, but not as vulgar as fuck. This word, which is understood by all intellectuals on the earth, is spelled "scitte" in Old English, which means purification, diarrhea. If we go back to other more civilizations, we can find It is proof of the Indo-European language family-Dutch "schijten" and German "scheissen". This primitive Indo-European word here conveys the meaning of separation from the body.

In addition, in the early 20th century, the British would also write the word "shite", of course, the meaning is similar. It is said that Europeans like to keep pets, especially cats and dogs. In the beginning, everyone did not develop the habit of helping dogs pick up their poop. In a society with such a distinct class in the UK, it is in response to the phenomenon that the upper class uses the smell of shit to describe the lower class. And this "excrement separated from the body" is the simplest, rude and powerful. As a result, S, as a term for a curse, gradually became popular.

### 2.2.3. The "Cunt, Cock" Word

Cunt and cock are both crude expressions of human organs. In fact, in ancient times, they were not words that sound very harsh. They were basically characterized by society until the Middle Ages and even after the Enlightenment. But what can be said about these two words Cunt is not uncommon. Cunt is not uncommon in the Germanic language system. At the same time, there is a similar form in Latin. At that time, it was used to mean "shaded place", and cock is closer to today's meaning in very old English." male of the domestic fowl", male fowl, but not just the head of the chicken.

#### 2.2.4. The "Ass" Word

The word "ASS" has a very rich and unified source. It can be seen in Germanic, Celtic and even Latin. According to research, the earliest spelling is "ONOS", which is used to refer to a kind of "shorter than a horse but more powerful "Endurance" horse-like animals, after long-term research, it is basically confirmed that this animal is a "donkey." Donkeys have been a good transporter for long distances since ancient times, so it is not enough that they can appear in so many cross-regional cultural and language systems. It's weird.

### 3. Culture and Communication Impact Brought about by Swear Words

After reading these few etymological explanations, have you discovered that languages are not just used for the curse, their meaning verified. On some specific occasions and situations, when interacting with specific people, English swear words are not regarded as rude by the other party, but rather give the other party a sense of psychological relief and intimacy. Because English swear words also have different "discourse marking functions." [6]

#### 3.1. Emotional Expression

Emotional function is the most important and significant function of English swear words. When people speak swear words, the most important thing is to vent their emotions. The tone of English swear words is very short and powerful, and the intonation can be long or short, which can fully express the emotions of the speaker. This kind of swearing function is to emphasize that someone expresses emotions to something, such as: this cake is delicious. This cake is fucking delicious.

#### 3.2. Show Your Attitude

Halliday put forward three major functions of language: "conceptual function, interpersonal function, and textual function. "Among them, the interpersonal function refers to that in addition to conveying information, language also has the functions of expressing the speaker's attitude, identity, status, and motivation. Through this function, the speaker can participate in a certain situational context and express his attitude , And try to influence the attitude and behavior of others. Although English profanity is usually regarded as an offensive style, in a specific context, it can be used to express positive and negative attitudes to express the speaker's agreement or denial of a certain point of view. For example, the following scene: I just finished my hair cut, and I asked my classmates how my hair was cut. At this time, he replied: "It look like shit." If this happened before I knew the relevant culture, some people might even feel it. But after understanding the function behind swear words, I believe everyone can accept it. So, this kind of swear word that "looks like Baba" is just an exaggerated description of a state, and it does not mean to invade others.

#### 3.3. Reminder Function

As mentioned earlier, English swear words usually contain accents and crackling sounds, so when placed at the beginning of a sentence, it is conducive to the prominence of tone and intonation, and it is easy to attract readers' attention. The Reminder is another function of English swear words. People usually use English swear words to awaken the listener's subconsciousness. Just like oh, my god. Some people often talk about the mantra-like oh, my god. When you say holy shit, the one I will arouse the curiosity of people around you, pay attention to what happened to you, and attract their attention. force.

#### 3.4. Communicative Function

Due to the different levels of education, social status, and interpersonal relationships, languages are divided into formal and informal styles. Talking casually between friends; speaking with colleagues in terms of strong terminology; educated people usually use elegant style;

uneducated people usually use spoken language or slang. After English swear words become a catchphrase and become a habit, the swearing component fades and becomes an additional component of the language. At that time, the swear word is meaningless, there is no transmission of any information. It just plays a social role and reflects different interpersonal relationships. In English, passed away or deeply departed is often used instead of died, which is the same as ours in Chinese. It is the same to replace death with death. Some other common ones are: let someone go instead of fire someone, and people on the streets instead of homeless people.

#### 4. Research on the Strategy of English Swear Words Translation

As mentioned earlier, swear words exist in any language or culture and cannot be avoided. But at the same time, we have also seen that there are very few studies on the translation of swear words, so correspondingly, there are even fewer studies on the English-Chinese translation of swear words. The author believes that there is another reason for this situation, that is, when translating literary works, previous translators may make some artificial deletions because of the social values and moral values of the time. Even if people want to do research, they will have to give up because of lack of information, so they don't understand the swearing culture at that time. However, with the continuous development of human society, the exchanges between countries and nations have become more extensive and in-depth. Not only are there economic and trade exchanges between countries and regions, but culture is also introduced to different nations as business activities proceed, especially global information. Of today. Due to the rapid development of the Internet, people who speak different languages can also obtain the first-hand information they need in the shortest time. In addition, people's minds are becoming more and more open and they are more and more able to accept new and foreign things. Translators of cultural transmitters cannot filter these swear words so "blatantly" at this time, because the channels for obtaining information are basically the same. Today's various video websites are a good example. Most of the subtitle translation team members are not professional translators, and a large number of foreign words have entered people's field of vision. These tell us that we can no longer avoid the problem of "swearing" translation. On the contrary, we should actively research, and there are few papers and monographs we can see now. In the face of what translation strategies these "translators" should adopt and why, we have the following analysis.

In fact, according to our traditional understanding, only abusive swearing, that is, abusive swearing, can be regarded as real "swearing". Language itself, especially those with impact, constitute a certain explanatory power and subversive power to the established social and cultural order. English swear words, which are rejected by the mainstream language, are discourse signals that carry various emotions. The listener can make a more comprehensive judgment on the disposition, mood, and psychological state of the speaker. Although foul language has a certain impact on social morality, especially speech morality, to a certain extent, English profanity reflects social reality and human nature, so it is not necessarily unreasonable. Its existence and the change of its meaning just reflect the law of development of language itself. English swear words as a discourse marker have no propositional meaning. The speaker uses it to modify and supplement his connotative meaning, release his own emotions, and properly use these languages can effectively promote communication.

As early as 1964, Eugene Nida first proposed dynamic equivalence theory from the perspective of linguistics in his published "Science of Translation", including four aspects: lexical equivalence, syntactic equivalence, text equivalence and problems equal. Nida believes that translation is to use the closest and most natural expression in the target language to reproduce the information of the source language. The so-called dynamic equivalence means that the response of the recipient of the translation to the translation is basically equivalent to the

response of the recipient of the original text to the original text. The final criterion for judging the quality of a translation is to consider whether the translation is faithful to the original text, whether it is easy to understand, and whether the form is appropriate to attract readers. He believes that the oral form of the language has priority over the written form, and the language form that is common, familiar and understandable by readers should be preferred to enable readers to better understand and accept the translation.

Nida believes that oral expression is better than written expression, and that expression in a language that readers can understand can better convey the meaning of the original, so that readers can obtain the same reading experience as the original reader by reading the translation.

The core idea of his theory is "functional equivalence". Simply put, functional equivalence means that the translation and the original text are equivalent in terms of language function, rather than corresponding in language form. To obtain functional equivalence, it is necessary to understand what is functional equivalence. Nida divided language functions into nine categories. The translation should be equivalent to the original in these functions. So, what is equal? Nida believes that the answer to this question cannot be limited to the text itself, not only the equivalence in the lexical meaning, but also the equivalence in semantics, style and style. He gave the reader's psychological response the power to judge equivalence. That is to say, although the object of peer reference is the text, it is the reader who decides whether to be peer. This is different from the viewpoint of most translation researchers before Nida. Traditionally, people always use objective texts as the basis for judging whether the translation is right or wrong. But Nida suddenly snatched the power from the text and handed it to the reader. [1] This change of hands immediately created a brand new situation, opening the horizons of translation researchers who were almost in desperation at the time.

The original English swear word expression involves cultural background, but due to the differences between Chinese and Western cultures, "the corresponding design culture swear word expression cannot be found in Chinese. "[8] We can use Nida's functional equivalence as the core to paraphrase the swear word to "convey the original connotation. "[5]

## 5. An Analysis of English Swearing Translation at the Discourse Level

Then I will explore the Case Analysis of English Swearing Translation in *The Catcher in the Rye* Introduction.

Let us recall that the protagonist is a 16-year-old high school student Holden Caulfield, one of the earliest anti-hero images in contemporary American literature. Holden was born in a wealthy middle-class family in New York. The teachers and his parents in the school forced him to study hard to get ahead so that he could buy a Cadillac in the future, but all day long at school, he talked about women, alcohol, and sex. He couldn't understand everything around him. , He didn't even bother to study hard, so he was always punished. When he was expelled for the fourth time, he dared not go home. So he wandered in the busiest New York City in the United States for a day or two nights, staying in small guest shops, visiting nightclubs, and making casual girlfriends. He spent time in the cinema boringly, called prostitutes in a muddle, and couldn't help but hug his vain girlfriend. Hug, at the same time, his heart is very depressed, trying to escape the hypocritical adult world to find and criticize the experience and feelings of purity and truth. This extremely mentally inconsistent contradiction eventually caused him to completely collapse and lie down in a mental hospital.

SL: "...I was standing way the hell up on top of Thomsen Hill,"

TL: "我他妈正高高地站在汤姆逊小山顶上, ....."[7]

SL: "They don't do any damn more molding at Pencey than they do at any other school."

TL“跟别的学校比起来，他们在潘西做的培育工作他妈的强不到哪儿去。”[7]

SL: “ Boy,I sat at that goddamn bar till around one o'clock or so,getting drunk as a bastard.”

TL:“乖乖，我就坐在那间破酒吧里，一直待到一点钟左右，醉的一塌糊涂。”[7]

Analyzing the above several examples, we find that the translator has translated almost all goddam, damn and hell as "fuck", achieving lexical equivalence and stylistic equivalence. Just like the meaning of "dynamic equivalence" explained by Nida, "dynamic equivalence" focuses on whether the influence of the target language reader is consistent with the influence of the source language on the source language reader. The translator's goal is to express completely, because Several swear words in the original text all have religious meanings, and none of them have a one-to-one correspondence with Chinese words. Therefore, Chinese words need to be supplemented to achieve vocabulary equivalence and stylistic equivalence so that readers can better understand English vocabulary.

SL:I said when somebody answered the goddam phone.

TL:“听到有人来接他妈的电话时，我就说”[7]

SL: I stayed in the damn phone booth for quite a while.

TL:“我在那个破电话间里呆了很久”[7]

In the original text, Holden expressed his dislike of the bar. In the translation, they were all translated as "broken", which made Nida's vocabulary equivalent, text equivalent, and stylistic equivalent. Just like the meaning of "dynamic equivalence" explained by Nida, "dynamic equivalence" focuses on whether the influence of the target language reader is consistent with the influence of the source language on the source language reader. The translator's goal is to express completely natural.

## 6. Conclusion

Language is a guide to social reality. Through the above discussion, we once again realize the widespread application of swear words in life. It is a part of culture that cannot be ignored. Starting with the research on the production of swear words and the underlying culture, and then discussing the application of Nida's functional equivalence theory to the analysis of the case analysis of swear words translation words and text levels, as well as the analysis of the cultural impact brought about, not only makes us have a good understanding of the swear word culture, and improved our Cross-cultural communication ability in dealing with swear words translation, these undoubtedly have a positive effect on a thorough and comprehensive understanding of a nation and country.

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