

# The Loss of Emotional Meaning in Translation from the Perspective of Cultural Differences

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## Abstract

Since ancient times, cultural exchange has not been restricted by region or environment, and a lot of classic literature at home and abroad has been translated into many versions and spread widely around the world. However, due to the differences of language and culture, the cultural artistic conception expressed in the original works is extremely difficult to spread through translation. It would be a great loss for the cultural community and the author of the original work if the cultural feelings and meanings are not conveyed to readers all over the world. This paper will discuss the loss of emotional meaning in translation under the cultural differences between China and the west.

## Keywords

Cultural Difference; Translation; Emotional Meaning.

## 1. Introduction

Translation is not only a language conversion, but also a deeper level of mutual understanding between two completely different cultures. When translating cultural works in non-native languages, the translator must be familiar with the culture of the region. Only with a sufficient understanding of language, emotion, customs and religion, can translators accurately translate the original works and avoid losing the emotional meaning of it.

Generally speaking, culture is a social phenomenon, which is the product of people's long-term creation. At the same time, it is a historical phenomenon and the accumulation of social history. Specifically, culture refers to the history of a country or nation. Emotion is a person's psychological feeling in a particular situation. The communication between people with different cultural backgrounds is called cross-cultural communication. However, in order to communicate, people must clearly understand the commonness and differences between different cultures, and the main focus of cross-cultural communication is cultural differences. American Sam watts believes that the degree of influence of cultural factors on intercultural communication is determined by the degree of cultural differences. In cross-cultural communication, cultural differences often lead to the inability of cross-cultural communicators to correctly understand each other's emotional expressions under the inherent cultural background, resulting in misunderstandings and hurting others' emotions.

## 2. The Relationship Between Cross-Cultural Awareness and Translation

Cross-cultural awareness is the translator's recognition that translation is information exchange across languages and cultures. And cultural differences, like language differences, may become barriers to communication. Therefore, the translators should overcome the obstacles caused by cultural differences in order to ensure the smooth realization of information exchange. At the same time, the translator should not only be proficient in the target language, but also understand and study the cultures behind the language, and know how to deal with cultural differences and barriers under the guidance of the correct translation view. Translators lacking cultural awareness may only focus on literal translation and ignore the

cultural issues behind it, or misinterpret the information with the cultural experience taught in their mother tongue, which will lead to wrong translation. With cross-cultural awareness, translators can grasp the scale of translation and not be affected by cultural differences. In the absence of specific communicative tasks, it can still play a guiding role in the translator's learning and thinking.

As a carrier of cross-cultural awareness, translators like a bridge in information transmission. Therefore, cross-cultural awareness can ensure that interpreters can translate smoothly and communicate better in the transient process of bilingual translation. More importantly, they can improve cross-cultural communication.

### 3. The Influence of Cultural Differences on Translation

Due to the regional differences, the cultural backgrounds of China and the West differ greatly, which is embodied in the differences of skin color, language, living habits, literature and so on. In terms of language, there are great differences in vocabulary, language order and grammar between China and the West when they express the same meaning. Therefore, literal translation of a work should not be adopted in translation, otherwise the meaning expressed will inevitably be very different, resulting in cultural jokes. It is more likely that the traditional culture of the other side will be misunderstood due to cultural differences, thus causing obstacles to the communication between the two sides, which is not conducive to the active development of cultural exchanges between the two sides.

The specific cultural differences between China and the West is explained in detail from the following aspects:

#### 3.1. Geographical Difference

Britain and China are located in different regions. With different natural conditions and geographical environments, they have formed their own unique cultures. These cultural differences will be reflected in the language and, to a certain extent, have an impact on English-Chinese translation.

China belongs to the semi-closed river continental type, resulting in the difference between China and other countries. Most western countries have open Marine geography. So Europeans adapted to life on the move. In daily life, British people like to talk about the weather when they meet, "Beautiful day, isn't it?" Chinese people like to ask "Have you eaten yet?"

China is located in the East, so the west wind is generally cold, while the east wind is relatively warm, so it has the saying that "东风送暖" which means "the east wind sends warmth". However, for English-speaking countries such as Britain, the west is adjacent to the Atlantic Ocean, and the west wind is warm from the sea, while the East is the European continent, and the wind is cold. Therefore, the west wind in Britain contains this special cultural content, which is completely opposite to China.

#### 3.2. Religious Belief

Religious difference is the most significant one among ethnic differences. Religion is a kind of national belief for thousands of years. The main religions in China are Buddhism and Taoism, while the west mainly believes in Christianity and regards Jesus As god.

In China, the documented history of translation can be traced back to the Eastern Han Dynasty, nearly two thousand years ago. At that time, Buddhism began to be introduced into China, so there was a need to translate Buddhist scriptures. Many translators emerged from the Eastern Han dynasty to the Tang and Song dynasties. Therefore, many idioms have come into being, such as "借花献佛"(present Buddha with borrowed flowers) and "临时抱佛脚"(seek the temporary remedy to tackle the present emergency). In western countries, people believe in

Christianity, and related idioms such as "Crosses are ladders to heaven", "No coming to Heaven with dry eyes". Due to the differences between these religions, the translation tends to be biased towards religious beliefs.

Different religious beliefs and historical allusions in the eastern and Western cultures are imbued in their respective language expressions. Only by deeply understanding the differences between the eastern and Western cultures and understanding the cultural connotation in the language can the translator avoid errors and make translation really play a role in cultural exchange.

### 3.3. Folk Customs

In terms of folk customs, there are also many differences between China and the west, which also has a certain impact on translation. For example, the dragon is a totem image worshiped by the ancient Han people, symbolizing auspiciousness, dignity, power and progress. We call ourselves descendants of the dragon, which means a great and outstanding nation. The dragon is a metaphor for the emperor, and the Phoenix is a metaphor for the queen. In Chinese, the words about dragon and Phoenix are mostly commendatory, such as "卧虎藏龙, 龙飞凤舞, 生龙活虎, 龙凤呈祥", etc. But in English, dragon has a bad meaning. This is because it is recorded in the Bible that Satan, the devil who opposes God, is called the great dragon. Dragon is regarded as a symbol of evil in the West. In modern English, dragon is used to refer to "ferocious people" or "severe people". For example, she is a bit of dragon around this place. Phoenix is regarded as the king of birds in China, and also compared to outstanding people, such as "山窝里飞出了金凤凰". In Western legends, Phoenix is a kind of bird that burns itself to ashes after living in the desert for 500 or 600 years, from which a new phoenix is born. Therefore, in English, Phoenix means regeneration, resurrection and rebirth.

The differences between Chinese and Western folk customs are also reflected in different understanding of color. The basic color in Chinese and Western culture is red, which is also the most eye-catching color among various colors. Red has been worshiped in China since ancient times, mainly from the worship of the ancients to the sun. As early as in ancient times, when their ancestors held various sacrificial ceremonies, they had a kind of primitive and instinctive worship for the sun, and the auspicious and festive meaning represented by red arose spontaneously. At the same time, red represents smooth and success. For example, business prosperity is called "红火", etc. In western minds, it symbolizes cruelty, violence and danger. For example, "red revenge", "red ink". Moreover, white is a symbol of purity in the West, while it represents death in China.

### 3.4. Cultural Vacancy

The so-called "cultural vacancy" means that some terms (or cultural concepts) are owned by one country and one nation, and not shared by other countries and nations. For example, China's concepts of "唱红脸, 老油条, 铁饭碗, 大字报" are unique cultural heritages of China. Westerners who do not understand China's national conditions must not understand them. Similarly, there are some unique expressions in English that are not shared by us, such as "as poor as church mouse, a green eye, a skeleton in the cupboard", etc.

### 3.5. Dietary Habit

As the bread is the most important food in the West and China, we should pay attention to the different dietary habit in the translation of the English word "bread", such as: bread and water (粗茶淡饭), bread and cheese (家常便饭), bread and butter (谋生之道). In the above translation, we put "bread" into "饭". In addition, in some idioms, the difference is often obvious, such as: "He was a bold man that first ate an oyster". But in Chinese, the brave one is called "第一个吃螃蟹的人" (the first one who eats crabs). In English there is saying: "One can't make

an omelet without breaking eggs". Fried eggs are common breakfast products in Britain and the United States, but the corresponding sentence in Chinese should be "巧妇难为无米之炊", because "米" is the staple food in China.

#### 4. The Loss of Emotional Meaning in Translation

The different cultural backgrounds often result in limitations and errors in the translation. The emotional meaning of original text is often misled by information from different cultural backgrounds. If the translation of western cultural works is only carried out from the perspective of Chinese culture, the final meaning and emotion presented by the original works will lose their accuracy due to misleading information. Therefore, in the process of translation, a profound understanding of the specific meaning of each sentence is the focus of translation work. For example, the phrase "handwriting on the wall" often appears in western cultural works. Literally translated, it means "writing on the wall" in Chinese. But after reading the western culture, we find that the true meaning of this sentence is "the coming serious disaster." It involves a famous western allusion, that is, the banquet of the king of Babylon. For people from other countries learning Chinese, there is a very classic story. Chinese people say "convenient" has many meanings, but for a foreigner who has just started to learn Chinese, there will often be some misunderstandings because of this word, which leads to jokes.

"Achilles' Heel," a phrase inspired by Roman and Christian cultures, is derived from Achilles' Heel, and "black sheep" means "a person lacking in morality". These words are combined with local culture and emotion. If they are literally translated, they will inevitably cause a lot of misunderstandings so that Chinese readers can not understand the real connotation and emotional meaning of the original sentence. However, it is more difficult for interpreters to translating Classical Chinese.

As the time goes on, many Chinese and Western cultures have spread around the world and are well accepted by other countries. Although the cultural exchanges between China and the West have increased in recent years, some traditional folk customs are difficult to change. What we can do is to do as the Romans do and respect each other. The difference between eastern and western beauty is the concrete embodiment of the difference in local people's thoughts and life. The collision between the implicit eastern beauty and the enthusiastic Western beauty reflects the result of cultural exchange. Therefore, art has no borders, and the exchange between regional differences can better show more artistic styles. Therefore, the emotional loss of these cultural differences in translation will be less and less.

#### 5. Conclusion

In the process of translation, the translator must have a deep understanding of the local culture of the two language areas. Only by truly understanding the cultural connotation of the two places can the translators transform the the original text into the cultural form that can be accepted by the readers of the local culture. However, because of regional cultural differences, many translations lead to the loss of part of the connotation of the original works, especially the cultural significance.

All in all, cultural differences have an important influence on the loss of emotional meaning in translation. Undoubtedly, translation needs the support of culture. Translation is not only to translate the language, but to go deep into the culture, deeply experience the emotion that the author wants to express, and finally realize a kind of cultural translation. In addition, translators who want to clearly express the meaning of the original text need not only a solid foundation of language and culture, but also have a profound understanding of the language and culture.

Language translation is a transmission of culture, and it promotes the communication between cultures.

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