



Research on Audience Response to the Translation of Chinese-specific Expressions

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Abstract. The Chinese-specific expression is an important carrier for spreading China's voice. Research on the English translation of Chinese-specific expressions helps to enhance the international community's understanding of China. Drawing on a newly published book Xi Jinping Zongshuji Jiaoyu Zhongyao Lunshu Jiangyi and its English version Understanding Xi Jinping's Educational Philosophy as research materials, this research extract the rich Chinese-specific expression, explore the specific translation methods in the dissemination of Chinese culture in the new era. This study conducts a questionnaire survey to investigate the audience response to the English translations of Chinese-specific expressions in order to examine the effectiveness of those expressions.

An analysis of 1043 selected Chinese-specific expressions and their translations shows that there are mainly 10 translation methods involved. According to statistical data, this study found that the translation methods with the highest selection rate are paraphrasing and variation translation. The questionnaire survey has found that the English-speaking audience is relatively satisfied with the translation examples. The translation method with the highest degree of understanding and acceptance is paraphrasing, followed by omission and literal translation; and the opposite is variation translation. In the context of an increasing demand for Chinese-English translation, this study provides useful reference for translators to efficiently complete translation tasks and contributes to enhancing the effectiveness of China's international communication.

Keywords: Chinese-specific expressions; educational philosophy; translation methods; audience response

1 Introduction

In the past two decades, there has been an increasing demand for English translations of texts rich in Chinese-specific expressions since China has become the second largest economy in the world. "Chinese-specific expressions" refer to words, phrases rich in cultural connotations unique to China, originating from the country's distinctive social and cultural background. These expressions, serving as an important medium for foreign countries to understand China, are not easy to be translated owing to their

political, cultural, and temporal characteristics. Given the difficulty and importance of this translation purpose, the translation studies of Chinese-specific expressions have been a hot topic today.

Since translation has become an important form of international communication, audience response should be one of the evaluation criteria for translation effectiveness. Most scholars discuss the translation of Chinese-specific expressions mainly from the aspect of the language features, translation methods, translation strategies, or translation techniques, paying inadequate attention to the audiences' reaction.

Audience response is a perspective of translation research from the standpoint of communication. With the introduction of audience response into translation studies, there has been an increase in the scholarship concerning the feedback from the audience, which contributes to better reception of translation on the part of audience.

This paper analyzes translation methods of Chinese-specific expressions and examines the audiences' response through these methods to assess the translation effect.

2 Literature Review

Since the late 20th century, the field of translation studies has incorporated some theories and concepts from communication studies. American scholar Harold Lasswell established the research direction and field of communication studies in the 1940s and proposed the influential "Five elements of the communication process" theory, which includes the communicator, message, medium, audience, and feedback^[1]. Translation communication is a special form of communication. The existence of language conversion during the communication process is the fundamental difference between translation communication and general communication.

The audience is the receiver of the message in the communication process and provides feedback in the form of acceptance, disregard, or rejection of the received message. In the context of translation, the audience refers to the readers who receive the translated text. Audience feedback is the most direct reflection of communication effectiveness and serves as an important basis for decision-making in subsequent translation and communication activities.

Audience research is one of the important topics in the field of international communication. There are three main research methods used in communication effectiveness studies: content analysis, sample surveys, and experiments^[2]. Sample surveys are mainly used to obtain audience feedback and collect relevant data on their exposure, cognition, attitudes, and behavioral changes.

In international communication audience research, in addition to studying the ontological characteristics of the audience from cultural environment, ideology, religious beliefs, and educational backgrounds, researchers often consider the effects of communication content on the audience as an important research subject. Primary data on audience feedback regarding communication cases can be obtained through means such as questionnaire surveys, interviews, and field investigations.

In the process of international communication, the elements that determine the effectiveness of international communication include the message content, translation

methods, medium, and the target audience. Analyzing and receiving feedback from the audience are important guarantees for enhancing international communication capabilities. Therefore, this approach requires understanding the needs and preferences of different audiences in different countries, regions, and demographic groups, adopting different translation methods to achieve accurate communication [3].

Moreover, the evaluation of audience influence focuses on cognitive, attitudinal, and identity-based aspects. The key word for assessing the influence of the audience is “efficacy”, which examines whether the communication activities have brought about change, increased mutual understanding, and achieved emotional resonance among the parties involved [4].

3 Audience Response Research

3.1 Materials

This study takes a newly published book Xi Jinping Zongshuji Jiaoyu Zhongyao Lunshu Jiangyi and its English version *Understanding Xi Jinping's Educational Philosophy* (hereinafter referred to as *Understanding*) as primary research materials. Published in March 2020, these texts comprise a collection of Xi Jinping's statements on education, encapsulating the concept of “Building Strong Moral Character” and showcasing China's notable educational accomplishments and experience. The narrative style adopted in these works aims to engage readers and reflect Xi's straightforward and approachable language style. Notably, these materials embody a harmonious blend of rigor and practicality along-side vividness and liveliness.

To enhance the global dissemination of new ideas and perspectives regarding China's educational development, the Ministry of Education of China assembled a panel of experts from Beijing Foreign Studies University to produce an English version. Published jointly by Foreign Language Teaching and Research Press and Higher Education Press in October 2022, the English edition aims to provide English-speaking readers with comprehensive insights into the context, significance, and main content of China's educational reform and development in the new era, as well as the ways to achieve it.

Given the extensive use of Chinese-specific terminology in this book, the quality of its translation significantly impacts the international community's accurate comprehension of China's ideologies and directives, thus playing a pivotal role in disseminating China's perspectives on the global stage.

3.2 Method

This study is conducted to evaluate the effectiveness of the translated version by extract bilingual expressions, questionnaire survey and data analysis. The questionnaire was designed to examine the reader response to the translation of Chinese-specific expressions and evaluate how the readers understand China through those methods.

Firstly, with *Understanding* and its Chinese version as the object of study, we extract the Chinese-specific expressions from the source text, compare the source text

and target text by selecting the counterpart in the English translation. There is a grouped data analysis of the English translations of these expressions and a generalization of different translation methods.

Secondly, a questionnaire-based survey was used to test the degree to which target language audiences understand the translated expressions selected from each group so that we may examine the effectiveness of the corresponding translation method in translation communication.

3.3 Questionnaire

Audience response was investigated through a questionnaire survey based on certain selected translation examples. This study has sorted out and extracted a total of 1043 Chinese-specific expressions, presenting examples of various translation methods within a ratio not exceeding 5%.

The selection of translation examples was screened according to specific principles to improve the validity of the questionnaire. The principles for selecting translation examples primarily include: 1) the frequent occurrence of Chinese expressions in the translation, 2) the Chinese expressions effectively reflecting the core ideas and educational ideology of the translation, and 3) the examples representing different translation methods in accordance with specified numerical ratios.

The questionnaire includes structured and open-ended questions. A total of 18 questions were divided into three parts. The background information of the audience and their attitudes towards the translation examples were investigated through multiple-choice questions while their overall impression of the translation methods was investigated by open-ended questions. The model of scale construction designed by Rensis Likert's (1932) is one of the two most popular approaches to the thoughts and views of respondents. Likert's model proves not only more efficient in terms of time and resource expenditure, but also more effective in developing scales with high reliability^[5]. The Likert scale was used in this study to examine the readers' understanding and acceptance of the translation examples by summated ratings, from low to high.

3.4 Participants

The English version *Understanding* used in this study is an importance text on current Chinese education. The survey respondents were carefully selected to be engaged in education-related industries, or foreigners who are studying Chinese with English as their first native language. Guangdong Province encompasses cities in the Bay Area that are developing rapidly in the context of China's national strategy, and it is the frontier of China's reform and opening up, which makes the spread of education concepts faster and cultural exchanges more frequent. Therefore, the study targeted at Guangdong Province, the data is easy to collect, and the result can be more typical and possess greater reference value.

The teaching staff of universities in Guangdong Province were engaged to assist in soliciting respondents to complete the questionnaire, ensuring the authenticity of participants to the greatest extent possible. The questionnaire was distributed to native

English-speaking foreign teachers from 15 universities in Guangdong Province, including the University of Macao and Jinan University, as well as 4 training institutions, including Giraffe American Language.

4 Analysis

4.1 Categorizes the Translation Methods

In the translation practice, Vinay & Darbelnet classify translation methods into two categories: direct translation and oblique translation^[6], Xiong Bing defines translation strategies as the collection of principles and adopted solutions based on specific translation purposes, and agreed that translation strategies can be divided into two categories: foreignization and domestication strategies^[7]. In recent years, China scholar Huang Zhonglian's summarizes a large number of translation methods, and believes translation methods can be divided into two categories: literal translation and free translation^[8].

According to *Methods and Approaches in Translation Studies*^[9], based on Xiong Bing and Huang Zhonglian's exposition of translation strategies and methods, this study categorizes the translation methods of 1043 Chinese-specific expressions concerned and analyzes them through the data tool Excel. 10 translation methods as applied in the handling of Chinese-specific expressions in this study.

There are 304 Chinese-specific expressions involving the method of paraphrasing, accounting for 28.8%. It is the most frequently used English translation method for Chinese-specific expressions. And the second one is variation translation, as represented by 284 expressions accounting for 26.9%. These two translation methods account for more than half of all special expressions. It is found that 168 expressions are involved in the method of literal translation, accounting for 15.9% in all the expressions. Omission method is found in 98 expressions, ellipsis in 74.

Addition and combination were found in less number of the expressions -- 60 for 5.7% and 35 for 3.4% respectively. The translation method borrowing is used with 10 expressions, while annotation and transliteration are found in five and four respectively. It is worth noting that some special expressions adopt two or more translation methods, accounting for 1.3%.

The analysis above shows that only 15.9% of the translations of special expressions basically involve the method of direct translation, while 84% use indirect translation methods.

4.2 General Account of the Survey

The questionnaire was distributed electronically through the Questionnaire Star online platform from July to December in 2023. It has received 45 responses, 4 of which were excluded as the respondents were not foreigners whose native language was English. The shortest time taken to complete the questionnaire was 252 seconds, the longest was 3685 seconds, with an average time of 1177 seconds, or nearly 20 minutes.

4.3 Degree of Acceptance of the Translation

A point of interest is that the survey data shows a high level of overall satisfaction of the respondents with the translation methods of these Chinese-specific expressions. As can be seen from Table-1, 24.14% are most satisfied with a score of 5, 41.38% with a score of 4, making a total of 65.5%. 24.14% gave a score of 3, which represents an intermediate level of satisfaction, while only 6.9% and 3.45% gave scores of 2 and 1, respectively.

Table 1. Respondents’ degree of satisfaction with translation methods

Score	Degree of satisfaction	Percentage
1-5	Strongly Agree	%
	-	
1	Strongly Disagree	3.45%
	Strongly Disagree	
	Disagree	
	Neutral	
	Agree	
5	Strongly Agree	24.14%

Source: Data from this study

The survey shows that there are differences in the understanding and acceptance of the English translation for the Chinese-specific expressions by those methods. Respondents are questioned to rate from score 1 to 5 for their understanding and acceptance of expression examples by each translation method, with the higher the degree, the high the score. Table-2 shows the total percentage of the selection for scores of 5 and 4. It is found that the translation method with the highest degree of understanding and acceptance is paraphrasing, accounting for 75%, followed by omission and ellipsis with 69%, literal translation with 67%, and the other methods, including transliteration, annotation, and addition, just reach 60%. Combination and borrowing are 58% and 57% respectively, and variation translation with a relatively lower degree of satisfaction, just exceeding 50%.

Table 2. The understanding and acceptance of the English translation for the Chinese-specific expressions by the translation methods

Translation strategies	Degree of understanding and acceptance	Percentage
Paraphrasing translation, Omission and ellipsis translation, ...	Complete understanding and full acceptance	%
	-	
	No Understanding and Rejection	
Paraphrasing translation	Complete understanding and full acceptance	75%
Omission and ellipsis translation	High understanding and strong acceptance	69%
Literal translation	Moderate Understanding and Moderate Acceptance	67%
Transliteration, annotation, and addition translation	Partial understanding and partial acceptance	60%

Combination translation	low understanding and weak acceptance	58%
Borrowing translation	Limited understanding and minimal acceptance	57%
Variation translation	No Understanding and Rejection	50%

Source: Data from this study

4.4 Enhance Interest in Reading

More importantly, the survey results indicate that respondents believe that these translations have enhanced their interest in reading this book, with 13.79% giving a score of 5, 37.93% a score of 4, 20.69% a score of 3, 20.69% a score of 2, and only 6.9% a score of 1, as shown in Table-3.

Table 3. Degree of agreement of enhanced interest in reading Understanding

Score	Degree of agreement	Percentage
1-5	Strongly Agree - Strongly Disagree	%
1	Strongly Disagree	6.90%
2	Disagree	20.69%
3	Neutral	20.69%
4	Agree	37.93%
5	Strongly Agree	13.79%

Source: Data from this study

5 Conclusion

With the latest background of the international situation, the increasing demand for English translations of Chinese policies and Chinese positions has made the English translation of Chinese-specific expressions the focus of research in the field of translation studies. Chinese-specific expressions embody China’s thoughts and views, represents China’s voice, and are an important carrier for foreign countries to understand China. Chinese-specific expressions are characterized by culture and epoch, and are constantly updated with changes in the social environment. Therefore, the English translation of Chinese-specific expressions have new manifestations in the new era.

The choice of translation methods is determined by the purpose of translation and the translator’s understanding of the source text. Among these two influencing factors, the translation of Chinese-specific expressions has a significant change in translation purpose due to the shift in China’s status in the global economy and development. This is mainly reflected in the fact that more countries and people nowadays are eager to learn about China in order to gain experience in development or in order to gain strength in competition. The key focus of translation purposes is that the target reader can understand the translated text and acquire information through it. When it comes to purpose of translation in the new era, more consideration is given to the audience’s response. This study selects texts that embodies China’s educational

thoughts and viewpoints to explore what translation methods, and the degree of understanding and acceptance of the translated texts by the audience in connection with these translation methods.

5.1 Major Findings

Translation Methods of the Chinese-specific Expressions .

Using the comparison method, the author selects the counterpart in the English translation to compare the source text and target text. Based on Xiong Bing and Huang Zhonglian's exposition of translation strategies and methods, combined with the analysis of translation examples, the author discovered 10 translation methods as applied in the handling of Chinese-specific expressions in this study.

Moreover, this study has proposed a definition of Chinese-specific expressions in the new era and made a bilingual list of Chinese-specific expressions for educational specialized texts through repeated examination of literature review and sample extraction process. On these bases, ten methods for the translation of Chinese-specific expressions are discovered, providing references for the translation of educational texts.

Audience Response to the Translations.

This study conducted a questionnaire survey to investigate the understanding and acceptance of the target language audience towards the translated text. In the process of questionnaire design, the author extensively researched and consulted with foreign friends to ensure its scientific validity in assessing translation effects. The survey and analysis of the audience's response provide references for selecting appropriate translation methods in texts with special translation purposes. It also found that audiences generally had a high understanding and acceptance of translations applied the translation methods. It also revealed that paraphrasing emerged as the translation method with the highest level of understanding and acceptance among the translation examples. Following closely were omission, ellipsis, and literal translation, with transliteration, annotation, addition, combination, and borrowing, exhibiting slightly lower levels of understanding and acceptance. Variation translation was identified as the translation method with the lowest degree of understanding and acceptance among the examples analyzed.

Analysis of the responses to the open-ended questions in the questionnaire revealed that readers' comprehension and acceptance of the translation examples may be influenced by their native language culture and language habits. While some respondents understood and accepted the translations, they also noted that certain expressions sounded unusual, suggesting a preference for idiomatic expressions commonly used in the target language.

5.2 Limitations and Suggestions

Although this study analyzes the English translation of Chinese-specific expressions in educational contexts and presents some fresh findings which provides reference to

the translation of the similar type of text with a clear translation purpose, there are still some limitations to be dealt with in further research.

The accuracy of extracting specific expressions could be further improved. The extraction of Chinese-specific expressions relies mainly on the author's understanding of the definition of Chinese-specific expressions, and a limited number of published books and journals, which may be inadequate and still contain some deviation in understanding.

The accuracy of categorizing translation methods as represented in the bilingual list could be further improved. The determination of English translation methods for Chinese-specific expressions is mainly based on the author's knowledge of translation theory and her level of translation practice. Thus, there may still be cognitive deviations and situations of low translation proficiency, as well as the possibility of inappropriate determination of translation methods for individual expressions.

The number of translation case studies could be further increased. Due to time limit and the length constraint of the paper, this study selected translation cases for analysis based on certain principles and presented some findings based on the analysis. In future research, the number of translation examples can be increased and more findings will be revealed.

The number of respondents could be further increased. The text selected for this study is concerned with education. In order to facilitate the questionnaire survey, the target audiences were set as individuals engaged in education-related industries in Guangdong Province, which means the findings of the study may not be applicable to audiences without an educational background. Future studies could be conducted in a way to reach respondents beyond the present geographical or industry scope.

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