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Analysis of English Translation of Folk Culture Texts in Northern Shaanxi

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Abstract: With the implementation of the cultural Go Out policy, in order to promote the protection and development of national historical and cultural cities, folk culture in northern Shaanxi has gradually come into the public's view. However, there are still significant problems in the English translation of northern Shaanxi folk culture foreign propaganda. Based on the author's on-site research, this article points out the errors in the publicity of folk culture in northern Shaanxi, and takes cultural consciousness as the core, starting from two aspects of "seeking common ground" and "reserving differences". From the view of "seeking common ground", it is necessary to appropriately compile the original text and delete from the original text, and respect for different cultures. From the view of "reserving differences", translation methods such as transliteration and annotation are used to respect the original culture and improve the quality of translation, outlining exquisite images of northern Shaanxi's folk culture and effectively spreading the folk culture.

Keywords: Folk culture in northern Shaanxi; Cultural consciousness; English translation; translation strategy

1. Introduction

The characteristics of folk culture are the fundamental foundation of a nation. Northern Shaanxi, specifically referring to the Yan'an and Yulin regions of Shaanxi province. Here, the unique geographical location and cultural exchange of various ethnic groups have given birth to the colorful and lively folk culture of northern Shaanxi. Telling Chinese stories well and guiding world readers to appreciate the beauty of Chinese culture are important tasks for foreign language learners.^[5] In recent years, the development of folk culture in northern Shaanxi has been widely developed, but through visiting the folk museums in northern Shaanxi, the author found that there were many errors in the English introduction of folk culture, which posed obstacles to cultural publicity, and had impact on the image of northern Shaanxi and even China. Therefore, this article points out the errors in the English introduction of folk culture in northern Shaanxi and proposes translation strategies.

2. Cultural Consciousness

Mr. Fei Xiaotong, a famous sociologist in China, proposed cultural consciousness at the end of the 20th century, He believes that cultural consciousness refers to "people living in a certain culture have a self-awareness of their culture, understanding its origin, formation process, characteristics, and development trend, without any meaning of cultural return."^[1]

Cultural consciousness cannot be separated from translation. As a translator, on the one hand, it^[6] is necessary to have a deep understanding of traditional Chinese culture, its connotation, characteristics, and essence. On the other hand, it is also necessary to delve into foreign cultures, observe and study their characteristics, and view Chinese culture from the perspective of others. So translators should achieve cultural self-awareness, translate culture in the most appropriate way without damaging Chinese culture to spread Chinese culture and promote cultural exchange between China and foreign countries.^[3]

3. Error type

The difference in thinking between Chinese and English can easily lead to Chinglish. Translators blindly translate literal and hard without changing their thinking causing obscure translation, so that it is difficult for foreign tourists to understand. Meanwhile, due to different cultural backgrounds, especially folk culture that involves complex historical and cultural information, if the implicit cultural information is not translated, it will cause confusion for foreign readers and make it difficult to spread culture.

Eg 1: ST:....., 具有古老、多元、原生的特征, 这些特征是农耕文明与游牧文明相辅相成的基础上衍生积淀下来的一种社会形态。

TT: They have the ancient, diverse and native characteristics, which are a kind of social formation derived on the basis of mutually reinforcing farming civilization and nomadic civilization.

The translation is a typical Chinglish, which is translated word by word and does not conform to the expression habits of the target language. Our goal is to promote the folk culture of northern Shaanxi and demonstrate cultural confidence. Translators should express our culture and fully recognize and affirm our own cultural value.

Eg 2: ST: 陕北“生不逢地”的特殊地理，南北攻伐不断，东西交流常态。

TT: “People are living for eating”. The special geography of northern Shaanxi made it as the center of north-south war and east-west exchanges.

“生不逢地” refers to the poor geographical conditions and harsh living environment in northern Shaanxi. The translation “people are living for eating” means people make a living by eating. It inconsistent with the original meaning. Secondly, the terms “南北东西” here indicate northern Shaanxi has historically been a border region, invaded by nomadic tribes from the north. So, the war has been ongoing. And the geographical location of northern Shaanxi is unique. It has been a “knot area” where agricultural civilization and nomadic civilization blend since ancient times. Therefore, without explanation for them when translating, readers can’t understand their true meaning, especially “north-south war”.

4. Translation Strategies for Folk Culture Texts in Northern Shaanxi from the Perspective of Cultural Consciousness

The folk culture of northern Shaanxi is the cultural accumulation of the people in northern Shaanxi for thousands of years, carrying the wisdom and labor of the people. The introduction of these folk culture and customs mainly focuses on conveying information, with strong narrative; Secondly, in terms of language expression, there are four character words and long sentences to provide detailed introduction to the origin and background of the folk culture. Furthermore, there are many professional terms, which are mostly unique to China’s language and culture. From the perspective of cultural consciousness, the translation of folk culture needs to achieve a cultural balance between the original text and the translated text. Translators should adjust and choose the content of the original text appropriately, so that the folk culture expressed in the original text can be integrated into the translated text; At the same time, it is necessary to maintain the translation readers’ desire to^[7] explore the original culture, and optimize and integrate translation resources with the principle of “seeking common ground” while “reserving differences” to form cultural consciousness.

4.1 Seeking common ground

Seeking common ground requires translators to stand from the perspective of the target audience while preserving the cultural connotations of China. During the translation process, appropriate compilation is carried out by deleting, modifying, and transforming the original sentence paragraphs, making it easier for western readers to understand.

Eg 3: ST: 《摇三摆》是流传于陕北及河套一带的民歌，在流传过程中也形成了多种曲调。

TT: A Girl Walking Gracefully was widely spread in the Northern Shaanxi and the Inner Mongolia Hetao Area. In the process of spreading, many kinds of tunes have also been formed.

To achieve cultural consciousness in external publicity, the translated text should be integrated with the target readers as much as possible. It should be noted that western audiences cannot appreciate and accept some cultural expressions like Chinese readers.^[6]《摇三摆》 is the title of the song, and Chai Gen is the founder of this folk song in northern Shaanxi. There is a story about its creative process: once, Chai Gen drove a donkey to a market in Inner Mongolia and saw that the girls there were very beautiful, especially the way they swayed when walking. So he was moved by the scenery and hummed the song. The translation is “A Girl Walking Gracefully”. Based on the content of the song, the translator translates it freely instead of using literal or transliteration rigidly. It has taken into account the target audience, allowing them to have the same reading experience as Chinese readers to understand the meaning of this song.

4.2 Reserving differences

The folk customs of northern Shaanxi with rich cultural connotations are a unique heritage of Chinese culture. The text introduced to it involves distinctive words and sentences. Due to the huge differences between Chinese and Western cultures, it is difficult to find completely corresponding concepts. Therefore, reserving differences requires translators to preserve the characteristics of the source language culture in the translation process,^[2] and enable targeted readers to better perceive the connotation of Chinese folk culture.

Eg 4: ST: 三转一响

TT: Three turns and one ring

Watches, bicycles, sewing machines, and radios were known as the “三转一响”. They were the four major items that many households in northern Shaanxi longed for before and after the reform and opening up. If it is translated literally, for readers who do not have the cultural background, they do not understand what the “three turns and one ring” specifically refers to. Therefore, the translation should be explained

by adding annotations, like “three turns and one ring (watches, bicycles, sewing machines, and radios).”

5. Conclusion

Based on cultural consciousness, this article analyzes the promotional materials of folk culture in northern Shaanxi from the perspectives of “seeking common ground” and “reserving differences”, pointing out the existing errors and the English translation strategies adopted. “Seeking common ground” should take into account the level of understanding of other ethnic cultures and languages by foreign readers, so that the translation can be more similar to the thinking and cognition of foreign readers, and they can have a deeper and comprehensive understanding of the folk culture of northern Shaanxi.^[4] Therefore, appropriate deletions, compilations, etc. should be made during the translation process. “Reserving differences” takes into account the need to respect the original text and the uniqueness of Shaanxi’s folk culture that differs from other cultures when transmitting information. Strategies such as transliteration and annotation are adopted to retain the original information, convey the most authentic Shaanxi’s folk culture to foreign readers, and help them further understand China’s culture, promoting Shaanxi’s folk culture to the world.

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