

Exploring the Function of English Translation in Cross-Cultural Communication

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Abstract. With increasingly frequent political, economic, and cultural exchanges among countries and the rapid development of science and technology worldwide, the importance of translation is self-evident. To ensure accurate translation, translators must further study, understand, and master both Chinese and Western languages in the context of cross-cultural communication. Cross-cultural communication refers to the interactions between people from different cultural backgrounds, including those between nations, groups, and individuals. It involves the interesting process of converting between Chinese and English due to differences in these languages. Cross-cultural exchanges are characterized by the geographic, historical, and cultural differences between the East and the West, which often lead to challenges in communication. Translation, as a bridge, serves as an important means to promote cultural exchange and has made outstanding contributions to the dissemination and development of global culture. This paper focuses on analyzing the functions of English translation and the factors affecting it from a cross-cultural perspective. It proposes effective strategies for improving translation, which have significant implications for promoting cross-cultural communication.

Keywords: Cross-cultural communication, English translation, Translation function.

1. Factors Affecting English Translation in Cross-Cultural Communication

1.1. Influence of Chinese and Western Cultures

Culture, as a spiritual treasure carrying the unique identity of a nation, is constantly evolving. It is a symbol of recognition and the crystallization of human wisdom, embodied in various aspects such as language, customs, and activities (see Figure 1). Translation, as a bridge connecting different languages and cultures, inherently involves the deep interpretation and integration of language and culture. Throughout human evolution, cultural exchanges have emerged from the clash of ideas. On a macro level, culture is a form of ideology that differs in content and communication methods[1-3]. During cross-cultural English translation, given the vast differences between Chinese and Western cultures, it is crucial for translators to effectively understand, adapt to, and grasp these cultural nuances in advance. Only by having a thorough understanding of cultural differences can translators capture the essence of the original text. Additionally, vocabulary derives its cultural connotation and meaning from its unique cultural context. Therefore, translators must fully comprehend cultural differences and recognize the profound impact these differences have on English-Chinese translation. Translation is closely tied to culture; it should facilitate a constructive clash, exchange, and integration between Chinese and Western cultures, rather than serve as a mere conversion between languages.

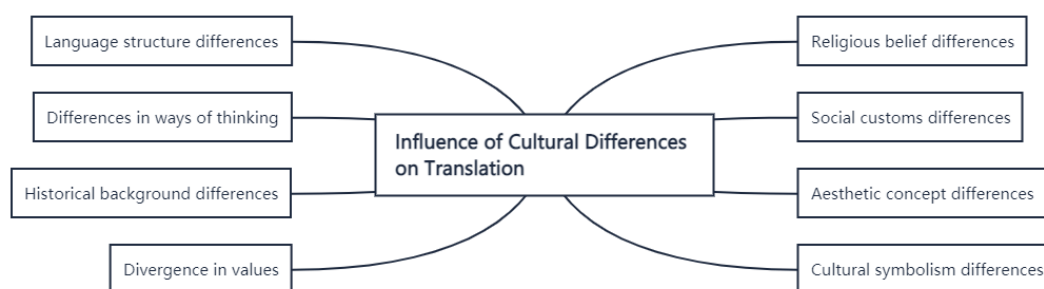


Figure 1. Influence of Cultural Differences on Translation.

1.2. Influence of Language Expression

Language is a mirror of social culture, reflecting its profound development and shaping people's ideas, thinking, and imagination. Deeply influenced by Confucianism, Chinese people tend to be gentle and reserved, with indirect and implicit expressions being a notable feature of traditional Chinese culture, which is centered on Confucianism, Buddhism, and Taoism. In contrast, Western culture emphasizes individuality, views people as superior to nature, and favors a more open, direct style of communication, focusing on the main points [4-5]. Therefore, in cross-cultural exchanges between Chinese and Western languages, language expression is inherently rooted in cultural foundations. The accuracy of English translation largely depends on the translator's understanding of these cultural cognitive differences. Given the cultural disparities, politeness conventions are often overlooked in language expression during cross-cultural English translation. Translators can only ensure accuracy by acknowledging and addressing the cognitive differences between Chinese and Western cultures.

1.3. Influence of Lifestyle Habits

In cross-cultural English translation, to improve readability and accuracy, translators must understand the lifestyle differences shaped by geographical factors between China and Western countries. This in-depth understanding is crucial for successful translation. For instance, greetings vary significantly between the East and the West due to differences in daily habits. Though the communicative function of greetings may be similar, translating them literally may lead to misunderstandings. In China, people often greet each other by asking about meals or activities, which demonstrates familiarity and care. However, in Western culture, such questions may be viewed as an invasion of privacy. Moreover, in Chinese interactions, honorifics are used frequently, reflecting the traditional value of respecting elders and caring for the young. By contrast, Western culture promotes equality, and people are accustomed to addressing each other by name. Thus, to ensure accuracy in cross-cultural translation, translators must fully understand these lifestyle differences to avoid misunderstandings and conflicts.

2. Translation Techniques in Cross-Cultural Contexts

2.1. Accurate Translation of Fixed Collocations

Mastering English collocations and selecting accurate Chinese equivalents is key to improving translation accuracy. Comparing English and Chinese vocabulary reveals that English has fewer words than Chinese, implying a greater prevalence of polysemous words in English. While this flexibility makes English expression convenient, it complicates translation. Translators must have a rich vocabulary and analyze the specific context to determine the appropriate meaning of polysemous words, ensuring that the translation fits the context. Translators should not focus solely on the literal meaning but consider the context in which collocations appear to convey the most suitable meaning. For instance, in translating fixed collocations like 'break the ice,' translators must accurately convey

the idiomatic meaning rather than a literal translation. For example, 'break the ice' could be translated as '打破僵局' in Chinese to reflect the intended meaning of easing tension in a social situation, rather than a literal reference to breaking actual ice. For example, when translating the phrase 'come up with an idea' in a business meeting context, it might be translated as '提出一个想法' in Chinese. However, in a casual brainstorming session, 'come up with a funny story' might be translated as '编一个有趣的故事.' For example, the phrase 'come up with' could mean 'to think of' or 'to suggest,' and choosing the correct interpretation depends on the context, such as in a brainstorming session versus a formal proposal.

2.2. Appropriate Application of Addition and Omission

The use of addition is particularly common in English translation. Due to differences between English and Chinese in content and logical expression, translators often face challenges when expressing a sentence logically in Chinese. It may be straightforward in Chinese, but translating it into English may lead to serious logical errors or incoherent statements [6-7]. To address this, translators must add words or omit redundant phrases to ensure clarity and coherence. For instance, adding context-specific information is crucial to maintain translation quality. For example, when translating a Chinese expression like '入乡随俗' (literally 'enter a village and follow the customs'), adding an explanation such as 'adapt to local customs' helps convey the intended meaning more accurately to English readers. For example, when translating 'He has been to several countries,' adding specific details such as '他去过几个国家，比如日本、法国和德国' can make the translation more informative and culturally relevant. For example, when translating a Chinese phrase that implies additional details, adding context-specific words like 'clarify' or 'explain further' can help convey the intended meaning more accurately in English.

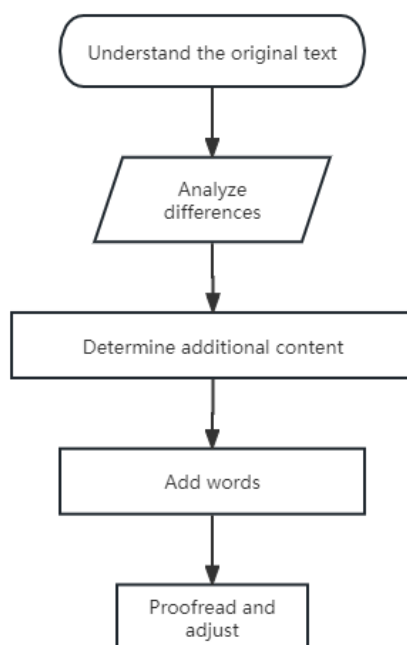


Figure 2. Steps in Applying Addition in English Translation.

2.3. Integrating Chinese and Western Cultures

In cross-cultural English translation, translators must thoroughly understand cultural differences between China and the West, avoiding a simplistic alignment with Western logic while ignoring Chinese culture. A successful translation integrates both cultures to find precise equivalents in the target language. When handling proper nouns, translators sometimes need to creatively combine both cultures. For example, the famous Tianjin dish "Goubuli Baozi" cannot be translated literally as "Dog

ignore," as it would not resonate with Western consumers. Instead, it is creatively translated as "Go believe," maintaining the phonetic characteristics while being easier for Western audiences to understand, thus achieving cultural integration.

3. Functions of English Translation in Cross-Cultural Contexts

3.1. Medium of Cultural Dissemination

English translation plays an important role as a medium and bridge in the progress of human civilization and global cultural exchange. Culture is not innate but rather the result of continuous learning and inheritance by humanity. When one culture is understood and accepted by another, they can integrate harmoniously, and translation serves as a bridge to promote this integration. For example, the great German poet Goethe read Chinese literature, including "The Two Fair Cousins," through English and German translations, sparking his interest in Chinese literature. In an era of limited transportation, few Westerners could visit China to understand its culture firsthand [8]. Thus, English translation became the primary medium for cultural exchange. Similarly, Lin Shu's systematic translations of Western authors and works provided valuable references and learning models, fostering the growth of numerous Chinese writers and artists. Translation not only involves language conversion but also cultural transmission and integration, driving the advancement of human civilization.

Furthermore, English translation has helped introduce Western cultural elements, such as philosophical thoughts, literature, and scientific advancements, into China, significantly influencing Chinese cultural and intellectual developments. The translation of major works, such as Shakespeare's plays and Newton's "Principia Mathematica," enabled Chinese scholars and the general public to learn about Western achievements. This cultural dissemination contributed to the modernization of China, particularly during the late Qing Dynasty and the Republic of China period, allowing Chinese society to integrate new ideas and embrace global progress.

3.2. Information Transmission

Information transmission is a key function of English translation. Language is both a reflection of culture and a medium for conveying information. Translation transcends linguistic boundaries, ensuring accurate communication of information between cultures. The Western understanding of China began with Chen Kaijun's translation of "The Travels of Marco Polo," which caused a sensation in Europe and introduced the Western world to the Liao Dynasty, leading to the use of "Cathay" to refer to China. This translation conveyed historical information and fostered Western curiosity about China, facilitating intercultural exchange and understanding.

In addition, English translation has been instrumental in sharing scientific discoveries and technological innovations. For example, the translation of Chinese traditional medicine texts into English has facilitated the global spread of knowledge about acupuncture and herbal remedies. Similarly, translations of Western medical and scientific texts into Chinese have played a crucial role in the development of modern medicine and technology in China. This bidirectional flow of information has enabled different cultures to benefit from each other's advancements, fostering a spirit of cooperation and shared progress.

3.3. Communicative Function

With the deepening of political multipolarity, economic globalization, and cultural diversity, communication and exchange among countries have become increasingly frequent and necessary. Translation, as a bridge for international exchange, plays a vital role in facilitating understanding of Western political systems, economic models, and cultural values, providing valuable references for China's modernization. In this context, the communicative function of English translation is fully utilized, promoting mutual understanding and respect among different cultures and advancing global knowledge sharing.

4. Strategies for Enhancing the Quality of English Translation in Cross-Cultural Communication

4.1. Enhancing Translators' Cultural Literacy

In cross-cultural communication, accurate information transmission and cultural integration require high-quality translation, and the translator's cultural literacy directly impacts the depth of translation. Therefore, translators should not only master language skills but also thoroughly understand the cultural similarities and differences between China and the West, encompassing historical background, social customs, values, and religious beliefs [9]. Only by accurately distinguishing between the essences of the two cultures can translators convey the intended meaning and cultural connotations of the source text while avoiding misunderstandings and conflicts. Furthermore, translators should adopt an open and inclusive attitude and treat different cultures equally, facilitating cultural integration during translation.

4.2. Strengthening Training in Translation Techniques

Systematic training can help translators master practical methods and strategies, such as context analysis, semantic conversion, and handling cultural imagery, to accurately understand and translate the source text. In a cross-cultural context, professional translation skills training can be conducted regularly (see Table 1). This enhances not only language skills but also cross-cultural communication abilities. Translators should also improve their sensitivity to language and culture by reading extensively, practicing regularly, and analyzing cases to develop a nuanced understanding of the source text's context and cultural background. Understanding and respecting cultural differences enables better transmission of culture in translation.

Table 1. Methods for Strengthening Training in Translation Techniques.

Mode of training	Specific content
Online Courses	Provide translation skills training courses through the network platform, including video explanation, online testing and interactive Q&A
Offline lectures	Invite translation experts or scholars to give face-to-face lectures to share translation experience and skills
Simulation translation project	Design simulation translation projects, so that translators can learn and master translation skills in practice
Case Study	Typical translation cases are selected for analysis and explanation to help translators understand the difficulties and error-prone points in translation

4.3. Introducing Advanced Translation Technologies

With the development of technology in China, various advanced translation tools have emerged. The proper use of these tools can help translators improve the quality of English translation. In the context of cross-cultural communication, traditional translation methods have significant limitations, such as time consumption and difficulties in ensuring accuracy and fluency [10-11]. Introducing advanced technologies alongside traditional methods can significantly improve translation efficiency and reduce the translator's burden. Technology can quickly process large volumes of text and analyze language precisely using intelligent algorithms to ensure accuracy. However, the original context and cultural connotations must be preserved to maintain the natural flow of the translation. Combining technology with the translator's expertise promotes translation quality.

5. Conclusion

As English is the global lingua franca, translation plays a key role as a medium for international cultural exchange and the development of political multipolarity and economic globalization. Translators must adopt a cross-cultural perspective, integrating Chinese and Western cultures during

translation to ensure that the target text aligns with the original text while being accessible to the target audience. Additionally, it is important to note the polysemous nature of fixed English collocations and use addition or omission techniques appropriately to improve translation accuracy, ensuring it is better understood by the target audience and fostering cross-cultural communication.

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