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A Review of Chinese and English Euphemism Contrastive and Translation Studies

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Abstract: There are a large number of euphemisms in both English and Chinese which plays an important role in communication. Due to the differences in politics, economy, history, religion, values and ways of thinking between China and the west, the translation of English and Chinese euphemisms is of great significance to cross-cultural communication. In recent years, the study on the comparison and translation of euphemisms between English and Chinese has attracted the attention of domestic scholars. This paper selects 28 Chinese papers on the comparison and translation of euphemisms between Chinese and English on CNKI, summarizes the general situation of the comparison and translation of euphemisms in China in the past 10 years, and summarizes the characteristics of the research. The purpose of this paper is to analyze the current situation of euphemism translation in China and find out the limitations of euphemism translation so as to promote the further development of euphemism translation.

Keywords: English-Chinese Contrast; English-Chinese Euphemism; Translation Studies.

1. Introduction

The contrastive study of English and Chinese euphemisms in our country rose in the 1990s, and the number of related literatures and works increased obviously after the new century. Based on what the author has learned and from the perspective of euphemism translation, the author has searched CNKI with "euphemism", "English-Chinese euphemism", "English-Chinese euphemism contrast", "English-Chinese euphemism translation" and "English-Chinese differences" as the theme, keywords and abstracts, and the time is limited to 2011-2021, to refer to and understand the research status of this field in China in the past ten years. This paper selects 28 papers as materials, reviews the research results in the past ten years, and analyzes and summarizes the comparison and translation research of English and Chinese euphemisms.

2. Contrast and Translation of English and Chinese Euphemisms

2.1. Definitions of Euphemism

Euphemism is a kind of appropriate expression that people hope to find in communication and exchange, which not only enables both parties to successfully complete the communication, but also makes both parties feel that the communication is pleasant. English euphemisms are divided into Euphemism (euphemism) and Innuendo (allusion). The word “Euphemism” comes from Greek and its definition refers to embarrassing or unpleasant things with mild, vague or oblique words. Innuendo means to imply bad or rude words indirectly, and is characterized by humorous and lively words that convey the purpose of speech indirectly. Chinese euphemism is also divided into two kinds: euphemism and taboo. Euphemism uses a roundabout or vaguely suggestive statement to set off what is to be said. Taboo, also known as taboo decoration, refers to the use of euphemism to avoid offending taboo or offensive words and phrases, mainly used in the speaker unwilling or inconvenient to directly say the situation. In short, the appearance of euphemisms is to make communication more effective.

2.2. Comparative Study of English and Chinese Euphemisms

English and Chinese euphemisms involve various topics and have rich cultural connotations. In the increasingly developed civilized society, people mostly use vague, beautifying and euphemistic ways to cover up the physiological phenomena of the human body, personal privacy and some sensitive social topics, try to avoid the stimulation and harm brought by blunt talk, and show personal respect and psychological care. Therefore, in the process of translation, it is necessary to have sufficient sensitivity to the source language and choose appropriate translation strategies and methods in order to present a good translation. Some scholars have conducted comparative studies on multiple topics and put forward corresponding translation strategies. Some scholars also focus on the comparative study of euphemisms of a certain phenomenon, and put forward translation methods for a specific category. According to the categories of euphemism, the analysis level of euphemism is divided into the following three categories.

2.2.1. Euphemism and its Translation at the Level of Physiological Phenomena

The Physiological euphemisms can be divided into three categories: death euphemisms, reproductive and sexual euphemisms, and urination euphemisms. Among them, the research on death euphemism is the most abundant, and the papers on the relationship between death euphemism and social culture account for a considerable proportion. Li Wenya [1] analyzes the unification of English and Chinese death euphemisms from the perspective of English and Chinese comparison, and on this basis puts forward the methods and skills of translating English and Chinese death euphemisms. Liu Zhenggang [2] compared the use of taboos in English and Chinese euphemisms and their corresponding translations from the perspective of their taboo avoidance functions. Based on the theory of linguistic adaptation, Zhang Na, Lu Qin and Wang Zhen [3] discussed the Chinese translation strategies of English physiological euphemism. Liu Jinbao [4] took euphemism in A Dream of Red Mansions

as his research object and made a comparative study on the translation of death euphemism in Yang's translation and Huo's translation of A Dream of Red Mansions. Similarly, Nie Dan [5] looked at the translation of death euphemisms in the English version of A Dream of Red Mansions from a cultural perspective.

In addition to discussing the similarities and differences between Chinese and English death euphemisms from different perspectives, most researchers summarize their common characteristics, analyze the differences, and propose corresponding translation strategies. Zhang Yansong [7] proposed the translation strategies of death in English and Chinese euphemisms from the perspective of the differences in cultural reflection between English and Chinese common euphemisms. Xiao Luling [8] discussed the similarities and differences between Chinese and English euphemisms from the aspects of their definition and application scope, and introduced the definition of pragmatic translation methods and translation strategies.

These scholars have some similarities in the study and translation of euphemism at the level of physiological phenomena, especially death euphemism, which can be summarized as follows. First, there are many similarities between English and Chinese euphemisms for "physiological phenomena". However, we should pay special attention to the differences between them. English death euphemisms express the good wishes of the living to the dead, while Chinese have different euphemisms for the dead of different ages and genders. For example, English "join the angles" and "go to see one's Maker", Chinese “夭折”“英年早逝”“香消玉殒”“寿终正寝”etc. Second, most researchers studying on the translation strategies of death euphemism advocate the literal translation and free translation. Xiao Luling [8] takes the translation method of using translation as the theoretical support and points out that different strategies are adopted according to different contexts and social pragmatic values. She believes that the literal translation strategy should be adopted as far as possible under the condition that the original meaning can be accurately expressed and the language rules are not violated. For example, go west equals 归西天. When the translator is limited by the difference of foreign culture, the literal meaning of the original text is abandoned and the translation strategy of free translation is adopted such as 有个长短 means if anything were to happen to the dear child. On the basis of advocating literal translation and free translation, Li Wenyan [1] proposed a method of adaptation: When the special linguistic and cultural characteristics of euphemism are difficult to be reflected in the translation, the translator adopts a method of adaptation to translate, abandoning the characteristics of the original euphemism and translating with ordinary target language, which can also be noted. As Ping 'er said in Dream of Red Mansions: “将来还有三四位姑娘，还有两三个爷们，一个老太太——这几件大事未完呢！” Among them, “一位老太太” means the death of Jia Mu, the English translation was directly translated into the “Old Ancestress funeral”.

There are few literatures related to euphemism at the level of other physiological phenomena. Lin Shengqu [9] further studied and discussed the translation of euphemism from English to Chinese based on the translation strategies of medical euphemism from the perspective of equivalence theory, and proposed translation strategies of medical euphemism on the topics of "illness, old age, birth and death". Liu Zhicheng [10] looked at the comparison and translation of English and Chinese euphemisms from a cultural perspective, and studied the translation of English and Chinese euphemisms around the different euphemisms of "old", "sex" and "marriage and childbearing".

2.2.2. Euphemisms and Translations Related to Personal Privacy

Generally speaking, Westerners emphasize personal privacy more than Orientals. Different times, places, objects and occasions have different performances of privacy, such as British and American people, especially women's age, stature and marital status are all private. Hu Erjuan [11] studies the translation principles and strategies of English and Chinese euphemisms in terms of politeness and concealing functions on the basis of the linguistic competence of euphemisms, so as to faithfully convey the cultural connotations carried by different euphemisms to readers. Qian Jia [12] analyzes the development trend of English and Chinese euphemism from the perspective of cultural globalization, and points out that style euphemism reflecting individual equality and freedom has increased and become a new fashion in language communication. The recognition of The Times value of each occupation is different, so in order to reduce the fact brought by the occupation title, "humble" occupation should be euphemistically called, and the translation process should pay more attention to the language to avoid embarrassment and unhappiness in the communication process.

2.2.3. Social Euphemisms

Euphemism at the social level is mainly reflected in the study of euphemism from the perspective of collective and society. Luo Jianzhong, Wang Xiaoyan and Shi Yaju [13] take the comparison and translation of English and Chinese euphemisms in cultural causes as the starting point, and say that in social communication, if there is no corresponding euphemism form in the target language due to cultural differences, it is difficult to literal translation, free translation can be considered for translation. For example, in English, to oil somebody means to bribe someone. A literal translation of the word to oil somebody would cause misunderstanding, and the direct use of bribery would lose its social meaning, so it can be translated as burning incense or meaning something. Tan Jing [14] analyzed the differences between English and Chinese euphemisms in the aspects of language itself, cultural tradition and social environment, and analyzed the ways of dealing with euphemisms in cross-cultural communication. Li Hua [15] explored the choice of euphemism translation strategies from the perspective of the origin and function of euphemism as well as the inequality in cross-cultural communication, and proposed that literal translation should be the best way to deal with the negative meanings presented by euphemism at the political and economic levels, so as to achieve equivalence in the content and linguistic function of the translation. Meng Zhen and Lu Wei [16] also explored the metonymic mechanism and pragmatic function of English political euphemisms, and compared the translation of euphemisms in Trump's speeches with examples of the composition and linguistic application, pointing out that the realization of indirect and vague pragmatic effects of political euphemisms cannot be achieved without metonymy.

3. Conclusion

To sum up, the research and translation of Chinese and English euphemisms mainly focus on death euphemisms at

the physiological level, and there are too few studies on personal privacy and social aspects. Most researchers take the analysis of the similarities and differences of Chinese and English euphemisms as the starting point, and lack sufficient examples or empirical analysis. For translation studies, most scholars pay attention to the translation strategies of euphemisms, and the translation strategies and methods proposed are mainly literal translation and free translation, and there is a lack of research on other methods. Less research has been done on the ideology behind the translation of the two euphemisms. The phenomenon of research duplication is common, and the research problem is not deep enough.

Due to the differences in politics, economy, history, religion, values and ways of thinking between China and the west, the translation of English and Chinese euphemisms is of great significance to cross-cultural communication. The author believes that no matter what kind of theory or perspective is combined with the contrastive study and translation of English and Chinese euphemisms, it should keep pace with The Times, keep close to the development trend of The Times, and obtain real data to make the conclusion more reliable and convincing. At the same time, we should broaden our vision, not limit ourselves to a certain fixed level, and study problems with innovative vision.

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