

Visual Translation of Traditional Chinese Costume Culture

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Abstract

The interpretation and dissemination of Chinese traditional costume culture to foreign countries has been carried out mainly through interlingual translation, based on the conversion of linguistic symbols. However, the text-based translation strategy is limited by its original limitations, resulting in the target audience in a heterogeneous culture not being able to interpret the cultural connotations behind traditional Chinese costumes accurately. That's why a large number of cultural elements originated in traditional costumes in the original language being diluted in communication, which is named as the phenomenon of culture dilution. Confronted with this phenomenon, the diverse visual symbol system has, to a certain extent, compensated for the lexical gap in language translation and provided a space for interpreting the unique cultural elements in traditional Chinese costume culture, becoming an essential means of promoting traditional costume culture.

Keywords

Traditional Chinese Costume Culture; Visual Translation; Culture Dilution; Lexical Gap.

1. Introduction

With the continuous development of information network technology and electronic communication media, visual culture has gradually evolved into the dominant form in contemporary social life and culture. Obviously, translation activities cannot avoid the influence of visual culture as well. As a visual medium of communication, images can cross the language barrier between different nationalities and fill the gap in the vocabulary of traditional costumes in the process of Chinese-English translation to a certain extent. Image is a kind of reality of visual representation, it transmits cultural information in its own unique way and brings diverse visual experience to the audience. That's the effective measure to reduce the adverse effects of cultural dilution and a potent channel for the dissemination of the unique cultural elements of Chinese traditional costumes. Therefore, it is no doubt that translators should make full use of the advantages of visual translation to promote the foreign dissemination of Chinese traditional costume culture.

2. Overview of Visual Translation

Visual translation is a part of inter-symbolic translation. And the purpose of Translating images and constructing the structure of the language in one text is aiming at conveying the elements contained in the cultural context of a country, and the reproduction and communication medium used are mainly language and various images containing symbolic meanings. In other words, visual translation refers to the translation of visual text in the context of visual culture, or the translating process fully considering the influence of visual culture.

According to the current research, visual translation, as part of visual culture, is a product of the combination of inter-symbolic translation and inter-linguistic translation.[1] At present, scholars mainly divide the research on visual translation into two main categories: one refers

to the research on the translation of linguistic symbols and the other refers to the research on the translation of non-linguistic symbols. Visual translation of linguistic symbols is based on kind of compensation methods, which further expands the influence of the native language and culture by compensating for the senses as well as the vision of the target audience; while visual translation of non-linguistic symbols is mainly achieved through systematic, accurate and adaptable processing of visual symbols.

In terms of research direction, the current study of visual translation has some similarities with the visual modality translation in multi-modal translation research, both of which consider the overall effect that can be presented by two or more modalities in a more comprehensive manner. From the aspect of conceptual definition, visual translation is mainly about creating a visual spectacle through the reorganization, encoding and interaction of multiple visual symbol systems such as text, graphics or images, and visual images, to achieve the effective transmission of some values, thus realizing the communicative behavior between different cultural systems, enhancing the sense of belonging to the national culture and further expanding the influence of the national culture. Unlike the one-way nature and linear sequence rules of words, visual translation as a visual narrative method can make the dissemination of ideas and thoughts more subtle and distinct. [2]

With the advent of the 5G era, the use of images has become wider. Compared with linguistic symbols, images can transcend national, ethnic and cultural barriers, being a much easier way of cultural communication, conducing to promoting the integration of Chinese and foreign culture. However, according to current research conditions on visual translation strategies, it has not yet formed a completely systematic theoretical system which needs to be further explored.

3. Lexical Gap in Chinese-English Translation of Traditional Costume

As China's international influence continues to grow, the rich and colourful traditional Chinese culture continues to make its way out of the country and into the public. As part of this, traditional Chinese costume culture has attracted the interest of both domestic and international audiences. However, due to the differences between the cultural backgrounds and living environments of various ethnic groups, it is difficult for translators to find exact equivalents in the target language in the process of interpreting traditional costume culture abroad, thus a lexical gap began to appear. The social work and life of people have given rise to their own unique language and culture, which in turn provides the conditions for the communication of their culture to the outside world.

What's more, the reason why some of the costume vocabulary in Chinese cannot find corresponding entries in English is that these traditional costumes, as part of traditional Chinese culture, are unique to the Chinese people and are not shared by the costume culture in the English-speaking world. The current Chinese-English costume vocabulary is divided into three main categories: headdress costume, body costume and foot costume. Looking at the vocabulary of the first category alone, there are already 49 vacancies in English. [3] Take the expression "hairpin" in the first category as an example, as a country of etiquette, according to its etiquette, a woman needs to hold the ceremony of maturing at the age of fifteen and wear a hairpin to show that she is ready for marriage, but this ceremony does not exist in the English-speaking world. Besides that, the vacancy of parts or accessories on the costume is, according to this article, related to the change of dynasties and the people's search for novelty and elegance. Therefore, the translator cannot find the exact expression "hairpin" in the English language, but the translator can make full use of the visual translation tool of visual systems to fill the comprehension difficulties caused by this lexical gap to the target audience and convey the cultural connotations behind this word to some extends.

Above all, Chinese traditional costumes carry the long-standing ritual culture of our country. Throughout history, it is easy to see that the early Chinese social order needed to be maintained by the ritual system, and on the contrary, the ritual culture also had a significant impact on the dress vocabulary. By comparing the Chinese-English vocabulary in traditional costume, it is found that most of the vocabulary derived from the ritual culture shows a complete gap, so it is difficult for translators to find an accurate way to convey the cultural elements of such traditional dress cultural symbols when they are presented to the outside world. To some degrees, the translation and dissemination of it help people around the world to understand the advanced civilization of ancient China and enhance the international influence of our culture. Therefore, with the continuous development of information technology, translators should establish a full media awareness and make use of modern technological achievements to promote the construction of a modern three-dimensional communication matrix for cultural symbols, so as to promote the concept of Chinese traditional costumes into a unique spiritual and cultural system through dynamic layers of accumulation. [4]

4. Visual Translation of Traditional Chinese Costume

As one of the carriers embodying the cultural connotation and spirit of the Chinese nation, traditional Chinese costume has a specific historical value in current foreign communication. It is conducive to the construction of a community consciousness identity based on ethnicity and world. In addition, the comprehensive, three-dimensional and authentic presentation of the ideology behind traditional costume culture is also of great significance for the enhancement of China's cultural soft power. With the strong momentum of visual culture, Chinese traditional costume culture can further expand its audience and break through the traditional interlingual translation model, which is centred on textual translation, and expand the translation field to a broader visual part.

Current technological developments provide a suitable context for the use of interlingual translations, whether in online games or in costume dramas, which promote traditional costumes to a certain extent. In order to further communicate the cultural elements that have aroused the interest of foreign audiences, translation activities should keep pace with the times, not be bound by semantic channels of communication and try to avoid the phenomenon of 'cultural discounting'. At present, subtitling of films is seen as one of the more common forms of visual translation, but in the strictest sense it does not rely exclusively on the audience's vision, but to a large extent on the audience's sense of hearing, which requires a high level of appreciation. In contrast, paper books or e-books with images, such as comics or illustrated books, are a great alternative for audiences who do not have easy access to all kinds of sound.

Translators can promote the spread of Chinese traditional costumes to the outside world by translating certain types of traditional costumes in an illustrated manner. The Hu costume, for example, was born during the Spring and Autumn Period and the Warring States Period, mainly as a result of King Wu Ling of Zhao's reform of the Hu costume to fight against the invasion of nomadic groups from the north, and was mainly characterised by the girding of the Guo Luo belt to facilitate riding and shooting. If only words were used to describe the characteristics of this costume, people would have to make up their own minds, which is not intuitive and three-dimensional enough; however, by using a combination of images and textual symbols, the target audience can gain a more intuitive feeling and activate their aesthetic and subjective re-creation, thus promoting the communication of the Hu costume to the outside world. For example, the current *Chinese Tibetan Costume* album is a comprehensive display of the ethnic characteristics of Tibetan costume and conveys Tibetan culture.

At present, the communication of traditional Chinese costume to the outside still mainly relies on textual exposition, and the number of visual translation texts of costume is still small. By

exploring the diverse visual symbolic systems derived from traditional costume texts, the translators hope to help target language audiences overcome the obstacles they encounter in interpreting the cultural connotations of the original language, which will not only enable smoother cultural communication between different ethnic groups, but also facilitate the integration of different ethnic groups.

5. Conclusion

The cross-cultural communication strategy in the Internet era relies heavily on visual methods, that's why translators should grasp the essence of Internet cultural communication and utilize this new approach of empathy connection to further enhance the application rate of visual translation, thereby promoting cultural exchange and dissemination extensively. So from one perspective, the promotion of Chinese traditional costumes through visual translation channels is of strategic importance for the further dissemination of our cultural elements and the enhancement of our cultural soft power. In all ages, translators have been tasked with the mission of conveying the emotions of original texts. The visualization of cultural elements in traditional costumes transforms the translation of traditional costumes from a uni-modal text to a multi-modal text, and through the interpretation of images as a hyper-textual narrative mode, enhances the shaping, appealing and infectious power of cultural elements in costumes in the country's foreign translation.

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