Comparative study on WHO Western Pacific Region and World Federation of Chinese Medicine Societies international standard terminologies on traditional medicine; Syndrome Differentiation of Heart Diseases

Zhao-guo Li
1. College of Foreign Languages, Shanghai Normal University, Shanghai 200234, China
2. Secretariat of Translation Specialty Committee, World Federation of Chinese Medicine Societies, Shanghai 200234, China

Keywords: linguistics; terminology; translation; English; terms; traditional Chinese medicine; syndrome differentiation, heart disease

In traditional Chinese medicine (TCM), the so-called 脏腑 refers to all the internal organs in the human body, which are composed of two distinct parts respectively called 脏, usually translated as zang-organs or zang-viscera, and 腑, often rendered as fu-organs or fu-viscera. The 脏 is also known as 五脏 in Chinese because it includes five major internal organs, namely heart, liver, spleen, lung, and kidney. The 腑 is also known as 六腑 in Chinese because it includes six major internal organs, namely large intestine, small intestine, bladder, gallbladder, uterus and Sanjiao (also commonly known as triple energizer).

The so-called 脏腑辨证 is translated as visceral pattern identification/syndrome differentiation in WHO International Standard Terminologies on Traditional Medicine in the Western Pacific Region (abbreviated as WPPO Standard). In International Standard Chinese-English Basic Nomenclature of Chinese Medicine compiled by World Federation of Chinese Medicine Societies (abbreviated as WFCMS Standard), the translation is almost the same, the only difference lies in the position of identification and syndrome. Such a translation is basically the same as the current international practice in translating this concept. Though 脏腑 is often translated as zangfu-organs or zangfu-viscera, it is also frequently rendered as viscera if it is used as a collective term to refer to the internal organs as a whole.

DOI: 10.3736/jcim20110217
http://www.jcimjournal.com


Received November 28, 2010; accepted November 30, 2010; published online 15.11.2011.


基金项目：国家社会科学基金资助项目（No. 08BYY009）；国家中医药管理局资助项目（No. ZYS20090010-2）；国家质量监督检验检疫总局资助项目（No. 200901263）

Correspondence: Zhao-guo Li, MD, Professor; E-mail: zhooushi@163.com; Blog: zhooushi, blog, 163.com

Related Articles


zheng, or visceral syndrome/pattern differentiation/identification, is a method used to explore pathogenesis, decide the location and nature of pathological changes as well as study the conditions of pathogenic factors and healthy qi according to the analysis of the physiological functions and pathological changes of the viscera. In the theory and practice of TCM, there is quite a number of terms related to visceral syndrome/pattern differentiation/identification. In WPRO Standard\(^1\), 130 terms related to such an approach are included. While in WFCMS Standard\(^2\), about 200 terms are provided.

This article tries to make a comparative study on how to translate and standardize the terms and concepts related to the heart, one of the five zang-organs, according to the studies made in the book entitled International Standardization of English Translation of Traditional Chinese Medicine: Study of Theory, Summarization of Practice and Exploration of Methods\(^3\).

Heart disease pattern differentiation/syndrome differentiation: visceral pattern identification/syndrome differentiation dealing with diseases of the heart.

To translate 心病辨证 as heart diseases pattern identification/syndrome differentiation is certainly semantically acceptable and looks quite similar to the Chinese term in structure. However, morphologically speaking, to change it into “pattern identification/syndrome differentiation of heart diseases” may sound more reasonable.

心病辨证: 心气不足证; 心气虚证 heart qi deficiency pattern/syndrome; a pattern/syndrome marked by palpitations, shortness of breath, listlessness, spontaneous sweating, pallor, pale tongue, and weak or irregular pulse.

In Chinese, 心气虚证, 心气不足证 and 心气虚证 are three terms that are similar to each other in meaning. However in translation, it is better to translate them separately for the convenience of international communication. Though they sound and look quite similar to each other, they are independent terms and should not be taken simply as synonyms. Even if they are synonyms, they still need to be translated differently for the vividness and richness of language expressions. In fact, these three terms still bear certain semantic and pathological difference if careful analysis is made about them. For the sake of accuracy, these three terms can be translated respectively as “heart qi deficiency pattern/syndrome”, “heart qi insufficiency pattern/syndrome” and “heart qi consumption pattern/syndrome”.

心血虚证; 血不足证; 血虚证 heart blood deficiency pattern/syndrome: a pattern/syndrome resulting from deficiency of blood to nourish the heart spirit, manifested by palpitations, dizziness, dream-disturbed sleep, forgetfulness, pale or sallow complexion, pale lips and tongue, and fine pulse.

The analysis about the translation of 心血虚证, 心气不足证 and 心气虚证 made above is certainly applicable to the translation of 心血虚证, 血不足证 and 血虚证 which, though look and sound similar to each other in meaning, still bear certain semantic and pathological difference. According to the structure and meaning of these three terms, they can be respectively translated as “heart blood deficiency pattern/syndrome”, “heart blood insufficiency pattern/syndrome” and “heart blood consumption pattern/syndrome”. Besides, in the definitions of the two groups of terms analyzed above, the phrase “pale tongue” may refer to the Chinese term 舌淡 which means that the tongue appears light-colored, not so serious as pale.

心血两虚证 pattern/syndrome of dual deficiency of heart qi and blood; a pattern/syndrome arising when deficiency of both qi and blood deprives the heart and spirit of nourishment, usually manifested by palpitations, shortness of breath, listlessness, fatigue, dizziness, forgetfulness, dream-disturbed sleep, pale complexion and tongue, and fine weak pulse.

The so-called 心血两虚 means deficiency of both qi and blood in the heart. The Chinese character 两 in this term is often translated as both or dual. When translated as “both”, this term is usually rendered as “deficiency of both heart qi and blood”; when translated as “dual”, it is often rendered as “dual deficiency of heart qi and blood”. Both ways of translation are quite popularly used in the current translation practice. In the definition, the phrase “fine weak pulse” may be the translation of the Chinese expression 脉细弱 in which the Chinese character 也 literally means “thin”. That is why 脉 is also frequently translated as “thin pulse” or “thready pulse”.

心虚胆怯证 pattern/syndrome of heart deficiency with timidity; a pattern/syndrome marked by palpitations, insomnia, timidity and susceptibility to fright, dizziness, a feeling of pressure in the chest, pale tongue, weak pulse or rapid stirred pulse.
The so-called 心虚胆怯证 is a syndrome or pattern caused by insufficiency of heart blood and deficiency of heart qi with the manifestations of timidity and susceptibility to fright. To translate it as “pattern/syndrome of heart deficiency with timidity” is certainly understandable and acceptable. In the West, this term is also translated as “heart vacuity and gallbladder timidity” by some translators, which not only sounds awkward, but also differs from the original term in meaning. The Chinese character 虚 means weakness of an organ or something in function, not “vacuity”. The Chinese phrase 胆怯 simply means timidity, not “gallbladder timidity”. Though the Chinese character 胆 in the Chinese phrase 胆怯 literally means “gallbladder”, it cannot be decoded alone literally and has to be understood with the other element involved in this phrase.

心阳虚脱证; 心阴不足证; 心阳亏虚证 heart yin deficiency pattern/syndrome; a pattern/syndrome resulting from deficiency of yin fluid to nourish the heart spirit, manifested by mental irritability, palpitation, insomnia, low fever, night sweating, malar flush, thirst and rapid fine pulse

The analysis about the translation of 心气虚证, 心气不足证 and 心气亏虚证 made above is also applicable to the translation of 心阳虚脱证, 心阴不足证 and 心阳亏虚证 which, though look and sound similar to each other in meaning, still bear certain semantic and pathological difference. According to the structure and meaning of these three terms, they can be respectively translated as “heart yin deficiency pattern/syndrome”, “heart yin insufficiency pattern/syndrome” and “heart yin consumption pattern/syndrome”. In this definition, the phrase “malar flush” may be the translation of the Chinese term 颜红 which is also frequently translated as “flushed cheeks”.

心阳虚脱证; 心阴不足证; 心阳亏虚证 heart yang deficiency pattern/syndrome; a pattern/syndrome resulting from deficiency of yang qi to warm and activate the heart, usually manifested by palpitation, dyspnea, a feeling of pressure in the chest, aversion to cold with cold limbs, bright pale complexion, dark lips and tongue with white coating, weak or irregular pulse

The analysis about the translation of 心气虚证, 心气不足证 and 心气亏虚证 made above is also applicable to the translation of 心阳虚脱证, 心阴不足证 and 心阳亏虚证 which, though look and sound similar to each other in meaning, still bear certain semantic and pathological difference.

According to the structure and meaning of these three terms, they can be respectively translated as “heart yang deficiency pattern/syndrome”, “heart yang insufficiency pattern/syndrome” and “heart yang consumption pattern/syndrome”. In the definition, the phrase “bright pale complexion” may be the translation of the Chinese term 红 which is used to describe the complexion of a patient with facial puffiness. This Chinese term is hard to be reasonably translated into English. In the current translation practice, it is frequently rendered as “bright white complexion”. However, compared with the original Chinese term, the English translation, either “bright pale complexion” or “bright white complexion”, often sounds too superficial to be equivalent to the original term in meaning.

心阳虚脱证 heart yang collapse pattern/syndrome; a pattern/syndrome marked by sudden profuse sweating and cold skin, reversal cold of limbs, feeble breathing, palpitations, clouding or loss of consciousness, pale complexion and hardly perceptible pulse

To translate the Chinese term 心阳虚脱证 as “heart yang collapse pattern/syndrome” is quite common in the current translation field. However, the Chinese phrase 虚脱 in this term indicates that it is the further progress of deficiency that leads to the collapse of heart yang. That is to say, in this syndrome or pattern deficiency is the cause and collapse is the result. In this definition, the phrase “reversal cold of limbs” may be the translation of the Chinese term 冷 by which the Chinese character 冷, which originally refers to loss of consciousness or faint, simply means extreme. The phrase 冷 in this term is used to describe extreme coldness of limbs. Thus to translate the Chinese phrase 冷 as “reversal cold” still needs careful consideration. The phrase “clouding or loss of consciousness” may be the translation of the Chinese term 神志模糊 which means mental confusion or mental derangement. To translate 神志模糊 as “clouding (of consciousness)” sounds a little unclear. The phrase “hardly perceptible pulse” is probably the translation of the Chinese term 脉微欲绝, sounding quite equivalent to the original Chinese term both in structure and in meaning.

心火上炎证 pattern/syndrome of heart fire flaming upward; a pattern/syndrome of up-flaring fire from the heart, marked by oral ulceration, mental irritability, insomnia, and a red tip of the
tongue

In WFCMS Standard[2], the Chinese term 心火亢盛 is translated as “syndrome/pattern of upflaming heart fire” (a hyphen is needed between “up” and “flaming”), appearing a little different in structure from that in WPRO Standard[1], though the meaning is almost the same. In the definition, 心火亢盛 is rendered as “up-flaring fire from the heart”, seeming to be the explanation of this term.

心火亢盛 intense heart fire pattern/syndrome; a pattern/syndrome of exuberant fire disturbing the heart spirit, marked by fever, thirst, vexation, insomnia, and in severe cases, manic agitation, and delirious speech, reddened tongue tip and yellow coating, and rapid slippery pulse

In WFCMS Standard[2], the term 心火亢盛 is not included. However, it has included another term 心火亢盛, quite similar to 心火亢盛, which is translated as “heart fire hyperactivity syndrome/pattern”. To translate the Chinese phrase 火邪 as “intense” seems inadequate because 火 means “intense” while 邪 means “exuberant” or “hyperactive”.

心火亢盛 pattern/syndrome of heat harassing the heart spirit; a pattern/syndrome caused by exuberant heat which disturbs the heart spirit, and marked by fever, thirst, vexation, insomnia, or even manic or delirious speech, flushed face, constipation, deep-colored urine, reddened tongue tip, yellow tongue coating and rapid slippery pulse

To translate 心火亢盛 as “pattern/syndrome of heat harassing the heart spirit” seems a little literal. However, careful analysis may indicate that such a practice sounds, comparatively speaking, quite equivalent to the original term not only in structure, but also, to a certain extent, in meaning. In the current translation field, there are different ways to translate the Chinese concept 心神, such as mind, vitality and mental activity, all of which may reveal part of the meaning of 心神, but not all of it. Comparatively speaking, to translate 心神 literally as “heart spirit” may be the better choice, for it not only bears the significance of back translation, but also conveys the basic meaning of 心神. In the past and present translation practice, several English verbs are used to translate the Chinese character 扰, such as disturb, stir and confuse. In WPRO Standard[2], the English word “harass” is usually used to translate 扰 in the related terms or expressions. If such a practice is followed as a rule, it is certain helpful for international standardization project.

心火亢盛 pattern/syndrome of transmission of heart heat to the small intestine; a pattern/syndrome that arises when heart fire is exuberant and spreads to the small intestine, and that is characterized by fever, thirst, vexation, oral sores with painful ulceration, rough painful voidings of reddish urine or even hematuria, reddened tongue tip and yellow coating, and rapid pulse

To translate 心火亢盛 as “pattern/syndrome of transmission of heart heat to the small intestine” is certainly understandable, but sounds a little awkward because there are two “of” in this single term. If changed into “pattern/syndrome of heat transmission to the small intestine”, it may be much better in structure. In the definition, the phrase “rough painful voidings of reddish urine” may be the translation of the Chinese expression “小便短赤涩痛” which means unsmooth or inhibited and painful urination with scanty brown urine. In this Chinese expression, 短 means unsmooth or inhibited urination, not “rough”. The expression “reddened tongue tip and yellow coating” may be the translation of the Chinese term 舌红苔黄 which may be better translated as “reddened tongue with yellow coating”.

心血瘀阻 heart blood stasis (obstruction) pattern/syndrome; a pattern/syndrome arising when the blood flow in the heart vessels is impeded, marked by palpitations and stabbing pain in the precordial region

The Chinese term 心血瘀阻 refers to the syndrome or pattern caused by stasis and impediment in the heart vessels. Just as the definition puts it, this syndrome or pattern “arising when the blood flow in the heart vessels is impeded” because of stasis. In fact the Chinese phrase 瘀阻 in 心血瘀阻 refers to both stasis and impediment. For this reason, the term may be better translated as “heart blood stasis and impediment pattern/syndrome”.

心血瘀阻 heart vessel obstruction pattern/syndrome; a pattern/syndrome arising when the heart vessels are impeded, marked by paroxysms of palpitations with fearful throbbing, pain and a feeling of pressure in the heart and chest referring to the shoulder or upper arm

In the term 心血瘀阻, the Chinese character 阻 means block or obstruction, and is easy to understand and translate. However, the character 瘀 is not so easy to understand. This Chinese character
usually means two things. One is a sort of diseases caused by obstruction of pathogenic factors in the limbs, meridians and viscera; the other is a sort of diseases characterized by pain, numbness and inflexibility of limbs due to invasion of pathogenic wind, cold and dampness into the meridians running along the limbs. When 病 and 阻 are used together as a phrase, it indicates the block or obstruction of vessels or meridians due to invasion of pathogenic wind, cold or dampness. If 病阻 is translated as “obstruction” or “block”, it actually has just expressed the meaning of 阻, but abandoned the meaning of 病. Unfortunately in the current translation practice, such a translation is used more and more frequently.

痰蒙心神 pattern/syndrome of phlegm clouding the heart spirit; a pattern/syndrome marked by impairment of consciousness, psychotic depression, or even coma, accompanied with phlegmatic sound in the throat.

The Chinese character 蒙在 the term 痰蒙心神 is also frequently translated as “confuse”. For instance, in the current translation practice, some translators translate “痰蒙心神” as “mental confusion by phlegm” or “phlegm confusing mind”.

Comparatively speaking, to translate 蒙 as “clouding” sounds more vivid while to translate it as “confusion” sounds more specific.

痰火扰心证; 痰火扰神证 pattern/syndrome of phlegm-fire harassing the heart; a pattern/syndrome caused by phlegm-fire which harases the heart spirit, marked by restlessness, insomnia or even raving madness, reddened tongue tip, yellow dense and slimy tongue coating, and rapid slippery pulse.

The so-called 痰火扰心证 and 痰火扰神证 are two Chinese terms that sound similar to each other in meaning and structure, but still bear certain pathological difference if careful analysis is made. In terms of terminology translation, it is better to translate them separately rather than the same for the sake of distinction. In Chinese, it is true that 心 (heart) and 神 (spirit) are closely related to each other, however, they are still two different concepts and thus need to be translated differently. If 痰火扰心证 is translated as “pattern/syndrome of phlegm-fire harassing the heart”, then 痰火扰神证 can be translated as “pattern/syndrome of phlegm-fire harassing the spirit”. In the definition, the phrase “raving madness” may be the translation of the Chinese term 狂狂 which is sometimes rendered as “restlessness and mania”.

Comparatively speaking, “raving madness” sounds much better than “restlessness and mania”.

水气凌心证 pattern/syndrome of water qi intimidating the heart; a pattern/syndrome arising when deficiency of yang qi of the heart and the kidney results in water flooding, marked by palpitations and shortness of breath associated with general edema, especially in the legs, short voidings of scanty clear urine, associated with listlessness, lassitude, cold extremities, pale or dark gloomy complexion, pale plump tongue with white slippery coating and sunken weak pulse.

In WFCMS Standard[2], the term 水气凌心 is translated as “water pathogen attacking heart”. In the current translation practice, the Chinese character 凌 in this term is often rendered as “attack” or “invade”, making it hard to be differentiated with the Chinese concepts of 攻 (attack), 侵 (invade) or 袭 (intrude). In WPRO Standard[1], 凌 is rendered as “intimidate”. Such a translation may still need further consideration, but it at least has revealed some difference between攻和凌. In the definition, the phrase “water flooding” is probably the translation of the Chinese term 水泛 which means extravasation of fluid or wanton flow of water. To translate it as “water flooding” seems to make some sense, though sounds somewhat exaggerating. The phrase “short voidings of scanty clear urine” sounds difficult to understand and seems to have nothing to do with this specific syndrome or pattern. According to TCM theory, the syndrome or pattern of water qi intimidating the heart is caused by deficiency of yang qi in the heart and kidney that leads to water flooding, usually characterized by aversion to cold, cold limbs, edema of limbs (more severe in lower limbs), palpitations, asthma, inability to lie flat, cough, expectoration of clear whitish sputum, pale enlarged tongue with white and greasy coating and weak pulse.

瘀阻脑络证 pattern/syndrome of (blood) stasis obstructing the brain collateral; a pattern/syndrome arising when a brain collateral is obstructed by static blood, marked by dizziness, headache with fixed location, or forgetfulness, insomnia, or loss of consciousness, dull lusterless complexion, purple tongue or tongue with purple spots, and fine choppy pulse.

In WFCMS Standard[2], 瘀阻脑络证 is translated as “syndrome/pattern of static blood obstructing brain collateral”, quite similar to that in WPRO
Standard\(^{[1]}\), only with some difference in rendering 气. The Chinese character 气 in this term certainly means 血 which is rendered as “(blood) stasis” in WPRO Standard\(^{[1]}\) but as “static blood” in WFCMS Standard\(^{[2]}\). However, in the definition in WPRO Standard\(^{[1]}\), 血 is also rendered as “static blood”.

气闭中风证 pattern/syndrome of qi block with syncope; a pattern/syndrome arising when emotional stimuli cause obstruction of qi movement involving the heart spirit, marked by fainting, aphasia or loss of consciousness, trismus, convulsions and string-like or hidden pulse

The so-called 气闭中风证 refers to a syndrome or pattern caused by emotional stimulation that blocks spirit and qi with the clinical manifestations described in the definition mentioned above. To translate it as “pattern/syndrome of qi block with syncope” has basically revealed the meaning of this term, though not well balanced in structure.

气闭心包证 pattern/syndrome of fluid retention in the pericardium; a pattern/syndrome caused by fluid retention in the pericardium impeding the flow of qi and blood, marked by a forceful heart beat, fullness and a feeling of pressure in the chest, dyspnea with inability to lie flat, purplish tongue with white slippery coating, and sunken or hidden pulse

The Chinese term 气闭心包证 refers to a syndrome or pattern caused by retention of fluid in the pericardium that obstructs the flow of qi and blood with the clinical manifestations described in the definition mentioned above. According to the diagnostics of TCM, the condition of tongue in this syndrome or pattern is “light-colored purplish tongue with white greasy coating”, not just “purplish tongue with white slippery coating”. Besides, the pulse condition is not only “sunken or hidden”, but also weak.

小肠气滞证 small intestinal qi stagnation pattern/syndrome; a pattern/syndrome caused by qi stagnation in the small intestine, marked by abdominal pain with borborygmi

The Chinese term 小肠气滞 means stagnation of qi in the small intestine, not the stagnation of intestinal qi itself. For this reason, the reasonable translation of 小肠气滞 may be “qi stagnation in the small intestine” rather than “small intestinal qi stagnation”, just as described in the definition mentioned above.

REFERENCES

1 World Health Organization Western Pacific Region. WHO international standard terminologies on traditional medicine in the Western Pacific Region. 2007.

WHO 西太区与世界中医药学会联合会中医名词术语国际标准比较研究：心病辨证

李照国
1. 上海师范大学外国语学院，上海 200234
2. 世界中医药学会联合会翻译专业委员会秘书处，上海 200234

关键词：语言学；科学术语；翻译；英语；中医名词；心病辨证