Foreignization in the translation of traditional Chinese medicine terminologies and its cognitive theoretical basis

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The international standardization of traditional Chinese medicine (TCM) terminologies has been developed for decades at home and abroad with significant achievements both in theory and practice. Theoretically, based on the language features of TCM and TCM development abroad, Professor Li Zhaozuo[1] proposed five principles, which are naturalness, briefness, nationality, prescription and back translatability. Aside from this, Professor Fang Tingyu[2] put forward that “correspondence” and “simplicity” are keys to the standardization of TCM translation. However, there are still some controversies in practice. Some scholars value the foreignization strategy which not only retains the original terminology structure in the process of translation, but also transmits the cultural connotations of TCM terminologies completely and reflects the simplicity of the target language. However, others argue that “foreignization” translation is not in accord with the language used by the native speaker and reduces the readability. However, conceptual blending theory (CBT) indicates that foreignization is a practical and effective way for Chinese-English translation of TCM terminologies.

1 Chinese-English translation of TCM terminologies

TCM terminology is characterized by simplicity and derivation[3]. However, in the long-term development of TCM terminology translation, many of the translations are lengthy and complex. The reasons are as follows: (1) Due to lexical gaps in the TCM terminology translation process, translators usually add to the amount of words in order to keep systematic completeness of TCM terminologies; (2) Chinese, as one of the parataxis languages often lacks conjunctions, such as causality relationship which is invisible generally. However, English is the opposite, in which conjunctions are indispensable. To ensure that the readers can understand TCM concepts clearly, some translators therefore tend to clarify the implied relationships deliberately[4]. For example, 风寒咳嗽 is translated into “cough due to wind and cold”. It seems that there are no inconsistencies, but it will be prolix once included in a sentence. Therefore, retaining the cultural information and also maintaining the brevity in the process of translation are keys to the standardization of TCM terminology translation.

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2 Foreignization-oriented strategy

Foreignization-oriented strategy can achieve fidelity or transmigration of translation and bring special exotic nuances to the translation. Based on the foreignization-oriented strategy, the translators have to make an overall use of literal translation (金实不鸣, excess metal failing to sound), literal translation plus free translation (寒 渗, cold diarrhea) and literal translation plus transliteration (补阳, tonify yang), which can embody the correspondence and simplicity of TCM terminology. Therefore, the foreignization-oriented strategy can be a preferred method for the translation of TCM terminology.

Foreignization translation follows the content and form of the source language closely. Some scholars think that the target texts translated in these ways usually fail to achieve cognitive equivalence with their counterparts on the level of conceptual structure and will increase the difficulty of understanding TCM concepts. However, meaning is not limited in the conceptual container, but a complex combination in which two or more spaces are combined by projection and connection[5], whereby the equivalents obtained in this way could achieve cognitive equivalence with their counterparts.

3 The cognitive theoretical basis of foreignization

Objectivity is pursued as a goal of translation and translators generally read the meaning from the original text and then reconstruct it into the target text. However, this method does not consider the subject’s mental contribution. Cognitive linguistics argues that the translation process accommodates the subject’s cognitive involvement. Actually, meaning is not objectively given, but constructed, even for expressions pertaining to objective reality[6]. Accompanied by the integration of form and meaning, meaning and meaning as well as form and form in the mental space[7], a new mental space is gradually established.

3.1 Introduction of the CBT Gilles Fauconnier and Mark Turner[8, 9] first proposed a model called conceptual integration networks, and then later put forward CBT. The most basic modes of CBT consist of four primary spaces (two input spaces, a generic space and a blended space), and each connected to the other by cross-space mapping. As the theory of meaning construction, CBT can not only explain the meaning of the language, but also the cognitive processes involved in the production of meaning[10].

3.2 The blending of nominal phrase On the basis of foreignization-oriented strategy, the translation may be unreasonable collocation or irregular collocation. Some scholars believe that irregular collocation reduces readability. But in practical application, deliberately breaking down the collocation restrictions can produce many rhetoric functions and achieve more accurate comprehension. Figure 1 takes the example of “风水” to show the blending of nominal phrase in translation.

![Figure 1 Conceptual blending of nominal phrase](image-url)
In Figure 1, wind edema is as the English translation of “风肿”、“风” here metaphorically stands for the “风邪” (pathogenic wind). Cognitive linguists claim that the conceptual metaphor is composed of two domains, a clearly structured source domain and a misty or abstract target domain. The metaphor involves a similarity relationship between the source domain (the source of the literal meaning of the metaphorical expression) and the target domain (the domain of the experience actually described by the metaphor).[11]

In Figure 1, the source domain (wind) and the target domain (pathogenic wind) share a series of common traits or characteristics such as moving fast, swift change, moving on the surface and also cool or chilly. Furthermore, “wind” is not only a natural phenomenon, but also associated with a number of concepts such as the nature of pathogenic wind and its characteristics in causing diseases. Furthermore, we can find how the spaces of wind and edema cooperate and generate a blended space. Accompanied by edema space activated by wind space, the two parts can eventually accommodate each other and semantically participate in the construction of a blended semantics[22]. That is to say, in the case of “风肿”, the blending of the two spaces is actualized by the active zone firstly, and then in the translation wind and edema, finally reflecting the essence of the original Chinese “风肿”.

3.3 The blending of verbal phrase

Adopting the strategy of foreignization, the translation of TCM terminologies may be unreasonable or perplexing, not only for the nominal phrases, but also for the verbal phrases, for example, 燥溼 (dry dampness), 交通心腎 (coordinate the heart and the kidney), 疏风泄热 (disperse wind and discharge heat), 環脾化溼 (enliven the spleen and resolve dampness).

Also there is some debate that all these unreasonable translations reduce the readability and these are not semantically equivalent with the original terms. Actually it is not so if we know the relationship between the inner meaning and the surface expression. To answer this question, Talmy[16] argues that any meaning intended by language user has a corresponding expression in language, whatever a circuitous road is taken from the meaning to the expression or vice versa. That is to say, the symbolic link between form and meaning is internal to a construction. It is the unreasonable translation that actualizes the meaning construction of their counterpart in the human mind. Figure 2 takes the example of “理气” as the exemplary phrase.

![Conceptual blending of verbal phrase](image)

In Figure 2, the exact corresponding equivalent for “理气” is absent in English. In this case, people will take advantage of the existent categories to categorize this new term. Generally speaking, “regulate” is applied with “conduct” or “temperature” or “speed” which appear in the space of “regulate”. In the two spaces of “regulate” and “qi”, “qi” has a temporary relationship with “regulate” by mapping the linkages of those regular collocation words (conduct, temperature, speed). Finally, we can get the meaning of “regulate qi” which is a general term for treating disorders in the flow of qi, including stagnant flow and counterflow.

4 Conclusion

TCM is one of the most valuable possessions of the Chinese people. Due to its particular medical system and seemingly mysterious therapeutic effects, it has attracted worldwide attention. Accordingly, TCM terminology translation has become increasingly essential. Guided by the foreignization strategy, the translation not only transmits the cultural connotations of TCM terminologies faithfully but also offers simplicity. Furthermore, CBT demonstrates the rationality of the foreignization strategy, not only transferring the meaning, but also helping
the reader build the cognitive categorical system of TCM. Therefore, foreignization is a practical and effective way for Chinese-English translation of TCM terminologies.

REFERENCES


中医术语的异化翻译及其认知依据

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