Comparative study on WHO Western Pacific Region and World Federation of Chinese Medicine Societies international standard terminologies on traditional medicine: Syndrome Differentiation of Combined Visceral 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, combined visceral disease

The internal organs in the human body physiologically promote and restrict each other. When one organ is in disorder, it will naturally affect other organs and eventually lead to dysfunction or disorders of them. If one disorder involves more than two organs, it is called combined visceral disease\(^{[1]}\).

In the WHO International Standard Terminologies on Traditional Medicine in the Western Pacific Region\(^{[2]}\) (abbreviated as the WPRO Standard), 20 terms are defined. While in the International Standard Chinese-English Basic Nomenclature of Chinese Medicine compiled by World Federation of Chinese Medicine Societies\(^{[3]}\) (abbreviated as the WFCMS Standard), 13 terms are included.

The following is a brief discussion about the English translation and international standardization of these terms 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\(^{[4]}\).

In traditional Chinese medicine (TCM), combined visceral pattern identification/syndrome differentiation: pattern identification/syndrome differentiation dealing with diseases in which two or more visceral organs are simultaneously involved.

In traditional Chinese medicine (TCM), 孽病 is often called 肾虚 which is sometimes translated as “accompanying symptoms” or “associated symptoms”.

---

**Open Access 开放获取**

DOI: 10.3736/jcim20110816
http://www.jcimjournal.com


投稿指南 投稿指南

Journal of Chinese Integrative Medicine (JCIM) or Zhong Xi Yi Jie He Xue Bao is an international, peer-reviewed, open access journal for the study of complementary and alternative medicine or integrative medicine from all regions of the world. JCIM is indexed in PubMed and Directory of Open Access Journals (DOAJ). JCIM is a member journal of CrossRef. Articles published in JCIM have maximum exposure to the international scholarly community.

Submit your manuscript here:
http://mc03.manuscriptcentral.com/jcim-en (for manuscripts written in English)
http://mc03.manuscriptcentral.com/jcim-en (for manuscripts written in Chinese)

- No submission and page charges for manuscripts written in English
- Quick decision and rapid publication

Send your postal address by e-mail to jcim@163.com, we will send you a complimentary print issue upon receipt.

ISSN 1672-1977. Published by JCIM Press, Shanghai, China.
and signs”. Comparatively speaking, translating it as “combined disease” or “combined syndrome” sounds more reasonable and concise. In the WFCMS Standard[3], this term is translated as “syndrome differentiation/pattern identification of combined zang-fu diseases”, appearing somewhat wordy.

心肾不交 heart-kidney non-interaction pattern/syndrome: a pattern/syndrome attributed to deficiency of yin fluid of the heart and the kidney with relative preponderance of yang, marked by restlessness, insomnia, palpitation, dizziness, tinnitus, aching of the lower back and knees, seminal emission, vexing heat in the chest, palms and soles, night sweating, reddened tongue, scanty coating and rapid fine pulse.

In the current translation practice, the Chinese term 心肾不交 is often liberally translated as “disharmony between the heart and kidney” or “imbalance between the heart and kidney”. To translate it as “heart-kidney non-interaction” is obvious a sort of literal translation, appearing concise, but sounding alien. In the definition, the expression “preponderance of yang” may be the translation of the Chinese term 阳偏亢 which is often translated as “hyperactivity of yang” or 阳偏盛 which is usually rendered as “exuberance of yang” or “predominance of yang”. The expression “vexing heat in the chest, palms and soles” may be an explanatory translation of the Chinese term 心烦热 which is sometimes literally translated as “vexing heat in the five centers”.

心肾阳虚证 heart-kidney yang deficiency pattern/syndrome: a pattern/syndrome arising when insufficient yang qi fails to warm and activate both the heart and the kidney, marked by palpitations, aversion to cold, lack of warmth in the extremities, inhibited urination, edema of the legs, aching and cold of lumbus and knees, white slimy tongue coating and weak sunken pulse

In the definition of this term, the expression “lack of warmth in the extremities” may be the translation of the Chinese term 四肢不温 or 肢凉 which is often simply translated as “cold limbs” or “cold extremities”. The expression “inhibited urination” may be the translation of the Chinese term 小便不利 which is quite often translated as “dysuria”, sounding concise, but appearing too modern because “dysuria” is a term used in Western medicine. Comparatively speaking, “inhibited urination” is better than “dysuria” in maintaining the original feature and meaning of 小便不利 in TCM.

心肺气虚证 heart-lung qi deficiency pattern/syndrome: a pattern/syndrome marked by palpitations, a feeling of pressure in the chest, cough, dyspnea and shortness of breath aggravated on exertion, thin expectoration, dizziness, listlessness and lack of strength, feeble voice, spontaneous sweating, pale tongue and weak pulse.

In the definition of this term, the expression “a feeling of pressure in the chest” may be the translation of the Chinese term 胸闷 which is often concisely translated as “chest distress” or “chest oppression”. The expression “shortness of breath aggravated on exertion” may be the translation of the Chinese term 动则气喘 which means panting on exertion. The expression “listlessness and lack of strength” may be the translation of the Chinese term 神疲乏力 which means mental fatigue with physical lassitude. That is why it is sometimes simply translated as “fatigue” or “lassitude”. The expression “pale tongue” may be the translation of the Chinese term 舌淡 which means light-colored tongue.

Related Articles 推荐阅读


心脾两虚证 pattern/syndrome of dual deficiency of the heart and spleen: a pattern/syndrome marked by palpitation, amnesia, insomnia or dream-disturbed sleep, loss of appetite, abdominal distention, loose bowels, lassitude, sallow face, pale tender-soft tongue and fine weak pulse.

According to TCM, 心脾两虚证 is caused by deficiency of yang qi and blood in the heart and the spleen. In the definition of this term, the expression “dream-disturbed sleep” may be the translation of the Chinese term 多梦 which is often simply translated as “dreaminess”. However, comparatively speaking, “dream-disturbed sleep” sounds more expressive though it looks a little bit wordy. The expression “loss of appetite” may be the translation of the Chinese term 消食 which is usually translated as “anorexia” or “no appetite”. The expression “loose bowels” may be the translation of the Chinese term 便溏 which is often translated as “sloppy stool” or “loose stool”.

心肝血虚证 heart-liver blood deficiency pattern/syndrome: a pattern/syndrome marked by palpitations, forgetfulness, insomnia, dream-disturbed sleep, dizziness, blurred vision, pale complexion, numbness of the limbs, lusterless nails, scanty volume of pale menstrual flow or even amenorrhea in women, pale tongue and fine pulse.

According to TCM, 心肝血虚证 is caused by blood deficiency that leads to the failure of the heart and the liver to be nourished. In the definition of this term, “forgetfulness” may refer to 健忘 in TCM, which is sometimes translated as “amnesia”. The expression “scanty volume of pale menstrual flow” may refer to the Chinese term 经少 which is often concisely translated as “scanty menstruation”. Clinical manifestations still include vague pain in hypochondria and light-colored complexion.

肺肾气虚证 lung-kidney qi deficiency pattern/syndrome: a pattern/syndrome marked by dyspnea with prolonged exhalation, spontaneous sweating, lack of strength, aching lumbus and limp legs, and cough with thin sputum.

According to TCM, 肺肾气虚证 is caused by deficiency of qi in the lung and the kidney that leads to the failure of the kidney to receive qi. In the definition of this term, the expression “dyspnea with prolonged exhalation” may refer to the Chinese term 呼多吸少 which literally means to exhale more but inhale less. The expression “lack of strength” may refer to the Chinese term 乏力 which simply means fatigue or weakness. Clinical manifestations still include weak cough aggravated with exertion, low voice, urination with cough, light-colored purplish tongue and weak pulse.

肺肾阴虚证 lung-kidney yin deficiency pattern/syndrome: a pattern/syndrome attributed to deficiency of yin fluid of the lung and the kidney with harassment of endogenous heat, marked by cough with scanty expectoration, dryness of the mouth and throat or hoarseness of voice, aching lumbus and limb legs, bone-steaming tidal fever, flushed cheeks, night sweating, nocturnal emission in men and menstrual irregularities in women, reddened tongue with scanty coating and rapid fine pulse.

In the definition of this term, the expression “endogenous heat” may refer to the Chinese term 内热 which means internal heat. In the current translation practice, the English word “endogenous” is frequently used to translate the Chinese character 内, especially in terms like 内湿 (internal dampness), 内燥 (internal dryness), 内火 (internal fire), and 内风 (internal wind). In these terms, the Chinese character 内 (internal) indicates that these pathogenic factors (dampness, dryness, fire or wind) are produced inside the body. In order to express such a sense of internal production, translators tend to use the English word “endogenous” to translate 内 in these terms. However, in the WPRO Standard[3], the Chinese character 内 in terms like 内风, 内湿, 内火, 内风 and 内热 is translated as “internal” instead of “endogenous”. Semantically and logically speaking, “endogenous” sounds much clearer than “internal” in expressing the underlined meaning of 内 in these terms. The expression “bone-steaming tidal fever” may refer to the Chinese term 肾蒸潮热 or 肾蒸发热 which is translated as “bone steaming fever” in the WFCMS Standard[3]. In the past 肾蒸 was often simply translated as “hectic fever”. For the sake of back translation, literal translation (bone steaming) is gradually adopted in the current translation practice.

肺肾阳虚证: 水寒射肺证 lung-kidney yang deficiency pattern/syndrome: a pattern/syndrome arising when debilitated kidney yang causes water flood harassing the lung, marked by aversion to cold with cold limbs, cough and dyspnea with expectoration of profuse white thin sputum, edema of legs, oliguria, pale enlarged tongue with whitish slippery coating and weak pulse.

In TCM, 肺肾阳虚证 and 水寒射肺证 are two separate terms. Though similar to each other in meaning, they still bear certain subtle semantic difference if careful analysis is made. For the sake of terminology translation, it is better to translate them separately rather than identically. In the WFCMS Standard[3], these two terms are rendered respectively as “spleen-kidney yang deficiency syndrome/pattern” and “syndrome/pattern of water-cold attacking lung”. Such a separate
translation is obviously reasonable and practical. In the definition of this term, the expression “water flood harassing the lung” may refer to the Chinese term 水泛扰肺 in which 水泛 is translated quite differently in the current translation practice. Even in the WPRO Standard[3], it varies in translation. For instance, in the WPRO Standard[2], 水泛 is translated as “water flood”, sounding quite literal. While in the WFCMS Standard[4], 水泛 is rendered as “water diffusion”, obviously a liberal translation. In some English-Chinese dictionaries of TCM, 水泛 is also translated as “edema”. Comparatively speaking, to render 水泛 as “water flood”, though sounding somewhat alien, is a temporarily practical trial.

脾肺气虚证; 脾肺两虚证 spleen-lung qi deficiency pattern/syndrome: a pattern/syndrome marked by anorexia, loose stools, abdominal distension, protracted cough with dyspnea and shortness of breath, expectoration of large amount of thin sputum, feebly voice, lazy to speak, pale lusterless complexion, pale tongue with white slippery coating and weak fine pulse

In TCM, 脾肺气虚证 and 脾肺两虚证 are two separate terms. Generally speaking, they are similar to each other in meaning. However, they are two separate terms and bear certain semantic difference, and thus need to be translated separately. If 脾肺气虚证 is translated as “spleen-lung qi deficiency pattern/syndrome”, 脾肺两虚证 may be reasonably rendered as “pattern/syndrome of dual deficiency of the spleen and lung”. In the WFCMS Standard[1], 脾肺气虚 and 脾肺两虚 are translated respectively as “spleen-lung qi deficiency” and “deficiency of both the lung and the spleen.” In the definition of these terms, the phrase “laziness to speak” may be the translation of the Chinese term 懶言 which means that the patient does not want to speak because of illness. Though the Chinese character 懶 literally means “lazy”, it simply means unwillingness in this term.

肝火犯肺证 pattern/syndrome of liver fire invading the lung: a pattern/syndrome marked by bitter taste in the mouth, dizziness and red eyes, irritability, irascibility, moving pain in the chest and hypochondriac region, cough with thick expectoration or even hemoptysis, red tongue and rapid tight string-like pulse

According to TCM, 肝火犯肺证 is caused by superabundant liver fire that moves upwards to invade the lung, making it hard for the lung to purify and descend normally. In the definition of this term, the phrase “moving pain” may refer to the Chinese term 游走性疼痛 which is also frequently translated as “migratory pain” or “wan-dering pain”. Clinical manifestations also include burning pain in the chest and hypochondria, dryness of the mouth and paroxysmal cough.

肝气犯胃证; 胃气不和证 pattern/syndrome of liver qi invading the stomach: a pattern/syndrome marked by dizziness, hypochondriac pain, irritability, epigastric distension and pain, anorexia, belching, nausea, vomiting and string-like pulse, also known as the liver-stomach disharmony pattern/syndrome

In TCM, 肝气犯胃证 and 胃气不和证 are two separate terms which share some similarities, but still bear certain difference and need to be translated differently. If 肝气犯胃证 is translated as “pattern/syndrome of liver qi invading the stomach”, then 胃气不和证 can be rendered as “pattern/syndrome of liver-stomach disharmony”. In the WFCMS Standard[3], 肝气犯胃 and 胃气不和 are respectively translated as “liver qi invading stomach” and “liver-stomach disharmony”.

肝郁脾虚证; 肝郁不调证 pattern/syndrome of liver depression and spleen deficiency: a pattern/syndrome marked by hypochondriac and abdominal painful distension, depressed mood, frequent sighing, anorexia, uncomfortable loose bowels or alleviation of abdominal pain after defecation, borborygm with flatus and white slimy tongue coating, the same as the pattern/syndrome of liver stagnation and spleen deficiency, also known as the liver-spleen disharmony pattern/syndrome

In TCM, 肝郁脾虚证 and 肝郁不调证 are two separate terms, similar to each other in meaning. In order to maintain the original system of terminology of TCM in English, it is better to translate them separately. If 肝郁脾虚证 is translated as “pattern/syndrome of liver depression and spleen deficiency”, 肝郁不调证 may be reasonably rendered as “pattern/syndrome of liver-spleen disharmony”. In the WFCMS Standard[4], 肝郁脾虚证 is translated as “syndrome/pattern of liver depression and spleen deficiency”, but 肝郁不调证 is not included. According to TCM, 肝郁脾虚证 is caused by the failure of the liver and the spleen to function normally. Clinical manifestations include abdominal pain with defecation desire, and slow and wiry pulse. In the definition of these two terms, the expression “uncomfortable loose bowels” may refer to the Chinese term 大便不爽 which is also frequently translated as “unsmooth defecation”.

肝肾两虚证 liver-kidney yin deficiency pattern/ syndrome: a pattern/syndrome attributed to insufficienty of yin fluid of the liver and the kidney with harassment of endogenous heat, marked by dizziness, blurred vision, tinnitus, forgetfulness,
insomnia and dream-disturbed sleep, hypochondriac pain, aching lumbus and poor muscle tone in legs, flushed cheeks, heat sensation in the chest, palms and soles, night sweating, nocturnal emission in men and scant menstruation in women, reddened tongue with scanty coating, and rapid fine pulse.

In TCM, 肝肾阴虚证 is also called 肝肾虚火证 (syndrome/pattern of liver-kidney deficiency-fire). Discussion about the translation of the key terms used in the definition of this term is made in the analysis of 肝肾阴虚证 above.

脾肾阳虚证: 脾肾虚寒证 spleen-kidney yang deficiency pattern/syndrome: a pattern/syndrome attributed to insufficient yang qi of the spleen and the kidney with endogenous cold, marked by bright pale complexion, aversion to cold with cold limbs, coldness and pain in the lumbar and lower abdomen, chronic diarrhea, or edema with inhibited urination, pale enlarged tongue with white slippery coating, and slow, sunken and forceless pulse.

In TCM, 脾胃阳虚证 and 脾胃阴寒证 are two separate terms similar to each other in meaning. For the sake of terminology translation, it is advisable to translate them separately rather than identically. If 脾胃阳虚证 is translated as “spleen-kidney yang deficiency pattern/syndrome”, then 脾胃阴寒证 can be translated as “spleen-kidney deficiency cold pattern/syndrome”. In the definition of this term, the phrase “bright pale complexion” may be the translation of the Chinese term 脾胃虚寒 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.

REFERENCES

2. 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：脏腑兼病辨证

李振国
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；科学技术；翻译；英语；中医名词；脏腑兼病辨证