

# A Study on German Translation Strategies of Culture-Loaded Words in Documentary *Hexi Corridor* (Expert) by Adaptation Theory

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This paper deals with the translation strategies of Chinese Culture-Loaded Words from the perspective of adaptation theory. It is based on the translation text of the sixth episode “Silk Road” and the seventh episode “Dunhuang” of the documentary *Hexi Corridor*. Many words with Chinese cultural connotations appear in the subtitles of this documentary. This paper will be divided into four parts. The first part and the second part deal with the basic theories, i.e., definition of Chinese Culture-Loaded Words and of adaptation theory. The original text is analysed in the third part. This part deals with the background and specifics of the language of the documentary film *Hexi Corridor*. The fourth part deals with the difficulties encountered by the author in translation practice and the corresponding solutions adopted by the author. The translation difficulties are solved by five translation methods, namely transliteration, loan translation, substitution, interpretation, and adaptation.

**Keywords:** Chinese Culture-Loaded Words, adaptation theory, documentary film *Hexi Corridor*, translation strategies and methods

## Introduction

Documentary film is a television art form that artistically reproduces real people and things and uses real stories to stimulate people’s thinking. Through documentaries, people can understand many events and phenomena clearly and intuitively. Among them, historical and humanistic documentaries are a good way to learn about history. With the rapid development of all aspects of China and the implementation of the “Silk Road” initiative, the world is paying more and more attention to China, and there is no lack of the rich, magnificent, and profound history and culture in China. Therefore, the translation of subtitles for historical and humanistic documentaries can help international friends understand Chinese history and culture more intuitively and play an increasingly important role in spreading Chinese culture to the outside world. In this paper, the subtitles of the sixth episode “Silk Road” and the seventh episode “Dunhuang” of the historical and humanistic documentary *Hexi Corridor* are firstly translated into German, and then this translation report is completed on this basis.

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The whole paper is divided into four parts. Firstly, in first and second part, the definitions of Chinese Culture-Loaded Words and adaptation theory are narrated. Then, the background of the documentary and the characteristics of the language of the documentary are analysed in third part. Finally, the translation difficulties in translation practice and the corresponding solutions are described.

Lastly, the meanings of this report and the translation gains of the author are summarised. The aim of this paper is that this report contributes to a better understanding of Chinese history and culture for international friends and can provide a reference for the future translation of documentary subtitles.

### **Definition of Chinese Culture-Loaded Words**

For the definition of Culture-Loaded Words, many translation researchers already have understanding and cognition. Reiss, the German translation theorist, thinks that Culture-Loaded Word is the corresponding expression of things, customs, and habits generally known only in the country of the source language (Reiss, 1971). Similar views on the definition of Culture-Loaded Words are held by Koller, a translation theorist and linguist in German. He believes that Culture-Loaded Words refer to the specific expressions of countries in the fields of politics, system, geography, and social culture. When the expressions are translated into another language, it results in a “zero-correspondence” with missing words (Koller, 2004). Furthermore, the famous American translation theorist Newmark also has his own understanding of the Culture-Loaded Words. Newmark (2001) compared the Culture-Loaded Words with the general words and thinks that most Culture-Loaded Words contain specific cultural information. People who accept another culture often find it unfamiliar and difficult to understand, so such words are often manifestations of cultural differences and cultural gaps, as well as the difficulty of translation. Aixelá (1996), the Spanish translation theorist, has also defined it.

The author combines the views of several translation researchers and also has his own views on the Chinese Culture-Loaded Words. The Chinese Culture-Loaded Words contain special cultural information that exists only in China. And it is difficult to find a fully corresponding expression in another culture. The Chinese culture word is not unknown to Chinese people, but it is difficult to understand for people who have never come into contact with Chinese culture, or have little contact with Chinese culture. At the same time, it is difficult for translators to translate the cultural connotation of these words with one or two words or even a sentence.

### **Definition of Adaptation Theory**

Adaptation theory is a linguistic theory founded by Jef Verschueren, a well-known Belgian linguist and Secretary General of IPRA. Adaptation was originally a concept of the theory of biological evolution. Then it was introduced as a perspective in pragmatic research and adaptation theory emerged. The first book, *Understanding Pragmatics*, was published in 1995 by Jef Verschueren’s editor-in-chief and marked the foundation of the theory (Xie & Chen, 2007). According to him, the use of language is a constant, intentional, or unintentional process of language selection, which is influenced by internal or external factors (Verschueren, 1999).

Once, a language user uses language, he or she must constantly make choices based on the three properties of language (variability, negotiability, and adaptability) (Verschueren, 1999). These three properties are interlinked and inseparable. With the combination of these three properties of natural language, Verschueren (1999) believed that language adaptation in human communication includes four aspects: contextual correlates of adaptability, structural objects of adaptability, dynamics of adaptability, and salience of the adaptation processes. These four aspects constitute the main analytical dimensions of adaptation theory.

Translation is essentially about the translator's constant and dynamic adaptation to the original and the translated text. As there are inevitable differences between the language and culture of the target language and the language and culture of the source language, when the translator is involved in the process of translation as a cross-cultural transmission of meaning, on the one hand, he or she has to conform to the context and cultural communication background of the source language when decoding, drawing on the linguistic factors of the source language, including grammatical rules, linguistic conventions, and textual features, in order to understand the author's intention and the connotation of the source text accurately. At the same time, when the translator re-encodes the text in the target language, he or she must also conform to the language and context of the target language in order to choose the most appropriate way to express the meaning of the source text as he or she understands it, and if necessary, he or she must also make adjustments to the linguistic expressions and make appropriate additions to the linguistic and cultural information about the source language that the target language lacks, so that the readers of the translated text can decode the meaning of the translated text in a reasonable and correct manner. It can be said that the whole translation process is a process of constant adaptation and selection of language, context, and culture by the translator, which is in line with the connotation of the adaptation theory (Wang & Teng, 2013). For the translation of Chinese Culture-Loaded Words, how the translator can dynamically conform to the linguistic structure, cultural context, and author's intention of the original text, as well as the expression habits of the target language, the cultural cognitive context of the readers of the translated text and the translation purpose, so that the cultural connotation and expression effect of the Culture-Loaded Words of the source language can be successfully reproduced in the translated text, is the focus of this paper.

### **Analysis of the Original Text**

The source text of this practice report comes from the sixth and seventh episodes of the documentary film *Hexi Corridor* made by CCTV in 2015. This documentary is jointly produced by the Gansu Provincial Party Committee Publicity Department and CCTV-10. The documentary takes the Hexi Corridor, an important corridor in western China and the main artery of the Silk Road, as the subject of narration, presenting the history and cultural changes of the Hexi Corridor and the Western part of China connected by it, as well as the unique role and important influence played by the Hexi Corridor in the course of Chinese history, from the political, military, economic, cultural, and religious perspectives, over a period of about 2,000 years from the Han Dynasty to the present day.

The language of these two episodes has rich cultural characteristics of ancient China and other ancient nations. As a result, there are many culturally charged words and Chinese cultural elements in the source text, e.g., Grand Canal of Sui and Tang Dynasties, Sui Emperor Yangdi, *Xi Yu Tu Ji*, courier station, Sogdian, the rebellion of An Lushan, Hu Xuan dance dancing woman. How man translates these words with their Chinese cultural connotations into German is the difficult part of this translation exercise.

### **Application of the Translation Methods**

The chapter is about the corresponding solutions to the difficulties encountered by the author in translation practice with five translation methods. Due to the difficulty of Chinese Culture-Loaded Words, the translation method has always been the focus of attention and discussion in the academic circle. The author used Kohler's five translation methods for the phenomenon of "zero-correspondence" to solve the difficulties in translation

practice. The five methods are transliteration, loan translation, substitution, interpretation, and adaptation (Wang & Hou, 2017).

### Transliteration

In most cases, the translator only needs to use the “Transliteration” method to translate the names of people, books, nations, and places, etc., as the readers of the target text can often learn from the context that the translated words represent the names of people, books, nations, etc. The method of “Transliteration” is a simple and intuitive literal translation strategy that can retain the characteristics of the original language. However, the prerequisite for transliteration is that it does not interfere with the reader’s access to information.

Example 1:

ST: 此时，一个来自帝都的高级官员西出长安，翻越秦岭，渡过黄河，踏上河西走廊，仔细巡视着武威，张掖等地。

TT: Zu dieser Zeit ging ein hochrangiger Beamter aus der Hauptstadt Chang’an (Hauptstadt der Sui-Dynastie) nach Westen, überquerte den Qinling, überquerte den Gelben Fluss, betrat den Hexi-Korridor und inspizierte Wuwei, Zhangye (Zwei Städte im Hexi-Korridor) und andere Orte sorgfältig.

Analysis: “秦岭”, “武威”, “张掖” are the names of places. In this example, the translator only has to translate “秦岭”, “武威”, and “张掖” into “Qinling”, “Wuwei”, and “Zhangye”. This does not create ambiguity. The advantage of this approach is that it does not create ambiguity for the reader.

### Loan Translation

Loan translation means that words in one language can be translated with existing words in another language.

Example 2:

ST: 各国商人因此裹足不前，原本应该繁华如织的丝路贸易也变得阻塞不通。

TT: Infolgedessen zögern die Händler von den verschiedenen Ländern aus den westlichen Regionen. Der Seidenstraßenhandel, der ist ursprünglich blühend und gedeihend sein sollte, ist ebenfalls blockiert.

Analysis: The phrase “繁华如织” was intended to convey the prosperity of the Silk Road trade. This can also be expressed only by the word “blühend”. There is no need to translate “like weaving”. The word “blühend” is very common in German, so we can translate it as “blühend”. The expressions “繁华如织” and “blühend” have the same meaning on the cognitive level of the reader of the original and the reader of the translation.

### Substitution

When a word is translated from Chinese into German and no suitable word is found, one can look for similar expressions to replace it. This is substitution, i.e., choosing the closest equivalents. The words chosen are very similar in meaning to the original words, so they can be substituted for each other.

Example 3:

ST: 仓慈，淮南人，三国曹魏时期的敦煌太守。敦煌郡在河西走廊西段，自汉帝国以来，作为丝绸贸易集散地的敦煌运行到东汉末年已变得破败不堪。

TT: Cangci, gebürtig aus Huainan, war Bürgermeister von Dunhuang von der Periode der 3 Reiche. Der Landkreis Dunhuang befindet sich im westlichen Teil des Hexi-Korridors. Seit dem Han-Reich ist Dunhuang als Vertriebszentrum für Seidenhandel bis zum Ende der östlichen Han-Dynastie häufig geworden.

Analysis: Dunhuang County was established in the sixth year of Emperor Wu’s reign (111 BC), together with Jiuquan, Wuwei, and Zhangye, which had previously been established in the western part of the river, known as the Four Counties of Hexi. During the reign of Emperor Wu of the Han Dynasty, the country was divided into

13 Zhou, with Jun set up under the Zhou and Xian under the Jun. This is very similar to the way provinces, cities, and counties are set up in China today. So, man translates “敦煌郡” into “der Landkreis Dunhuang” and “敦煌太守” into “Bürgermeister von Dunhuang”.

### Interpretation

Because most Western readers lack knowledge of Chinese culture and the source text does not contain obvious such cultural information, it is often difficult for western readers to get the same information as for Chinese readers. In order to better convey the information that contains the Chinese cultural elements, translators sometimes need to add relevant background information to compensate for the knowledge gaps of the target readers. In most cases, translators have to use this translation strategy.

Example 4:

ST: 如果不幸被盘踞在河西走廊周围的突厥,吐谷浑等势力劫掠,盘剥,他们就有可能血本无归。

TT: Wenn sie leider von den Tujue und Tuyuhun (Tujue und Tuyuhun waren Stammesverbände im alten Nordwestchina, die überwiegend nomadisch lebten.), die im Hexi-Korridor genisten waren, ausgeraubt und ausgebeutet wurden, konnten sie ihr Geld verlieren.

Analysis: Tujue and Tuyuhun were predominantly nomadic tribal alliance states in northwestern China in ancient times. Western readers may find it difficult to understand this part if they do not understand this ethnic group. Therefore, it is necessary to explain this.

### Adaptation

Adaptation refers to the reorganization and adjustment of the content or form of the original text in order to achieve the intended purpose of the translation, taking into account different political, economic, and cultural backgrounds, language and discourse characteristics, and from the perspective of meeting the expectations of the readers of the translated text. It is a rational choice made by the translator based on the analysis of the original text and with the aim of realising the function of the translation, and is not an irresponsible adaptation or fabrication out of thin air.

Example 5:

ST: 公元639年,大唐王朝的富庶和开放使丝绸之路迎来了自汉以来的第二个鼎盛时期,敦煌也成为了史书中形容的“华戎所交一大都会”。

TT: Im Jahr 639n. Chr. brachte der Wohlstand und die Öffnung der Tang-Dynastie die Seidenstraße zu ihrer zweiten Blütezeit seit der Han-Dynastie. Dunhuang wurde auch die in Geschichtsbüchern beschriebene “eine große Metropole des chinesischen und ausländischen Austauschs” („eine große Metropole des chinesischen und ausländischen Austauschs“).

Analysis: The word “华戎所交一大都会” cannot be translated word for word into German. Before translating, we need to understand the meaning of this word. “华戎所交一大都会” means that the Tang Dynasty and the countries of the western regions communicate and merge in Dunhuang and then can express in German.

### Conclusions

Chinese culture going abroad is an important topic of the times. It is the responsibility of every translator to accurately introduce Chinese culture to the world and enable overseas readers to improve their understanding of Chinese culture. This paper takes the historical and humanities documentary film *Hexi Corridor*, Episode 6 “Silk

Road” as an example to discuss the translation techniques of Chinese Culture-Loaded Words in translation. This paper draws conclusions based on adaptation theory and five translation methods.

Overall, this paper explores five translation methods for translating Chinese Culture-Loaded Words in the perspective of the adaptation theory, which are transliteration, loan translation, substitution, interpretation, and adaptation. After empirical analysis, it is found that each method has a tendency to use scenarios. One should be flexible in choosing and adjusting to the specific situation. At the same time, in addition to knowledge of the language of the target language country and translation skills, one should also have a deep understanding of the national culture of the target country. In the translation process, the translator should be rigorous, patient, and meticulous to avoid ambiguities that cause cultural misinterpretation, in order to promote communication and understanding between Chinese and foreign nationalities, thus promoting the development and prosperity of world civilisation.

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