

A Study of Translation Strategies of Animal Idioms Concerning “Dog” From a Cross-Cultural Perspective

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There are rich idioms in both Chinese and English cultures. Under different cultural backgrounds, the word “dog” has contained different cultural connotations. Translating animal idioms about dogs requires flexible use of translation strategies. In addition, it is also necessary to pay attention to the problems that may be encountered in translation in order to obtain appropriate and accurate translations and to promote cross-cultural communication.

Keywords: dog, idioms, translation

Introduction

Language and culture are complementary. By assisting and inspiring each other, language and culture are closely related. These two languages, English and Chinese, have been gradually changing over time. During the long period of language evolution, various idioms formed, which are viewed as the essence of the language (Wu, 2006). There are rich connotations in these idioms, which usually include phrases, proverbs, slang, proverbs, aphorisms, and so on. Idioms reflect the culture, customs, and beliefs of a nation in a comprehensive manner. People can find out the social customs and social formation of the nation through the language system. There are too many idioms about animals in English and Chinese cultures. Dogs, which are very familiar to human beings, appear very frequently in various idioms to express the same or different meanings. As China and the West are under the different cultural background, one should utilize translation techniques skillfully and accurately to deliver the cultural connotations of the source language to the readers when it comes to translating animal idioms related to “dog”.

Literature Review

Language and culture influence each other. In order to realize cultural communication, translation work is of significance. The idioms, especially for animal idioms, contain rich cultural connotations. Both internationally and domestically, most of researches studying the translation of animal idioms are from linguistic and cultural perspectives. In the following paragraphs, the author mainly reviews the research before on the translation of animal idioms.

Among the foreign studies, Novakovic (2019) particularly studied the idiom of “cat”. He studied the idiom of cat in English and Serbian lexical dictionaries and found that the analysis of existing bilingual dictionaries would reveal the problems that translators sometimes face in the process of translating those difficult idioms.

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Nguyen (2020) studied the translation of English animal idioms from a cognitive linguistic perspective. Two hundred and twenty-one animal idioms were collected from the *Oxford Learner's Dictionary of English* and categorized into vertebrate and invertebrate. Nguyen found that the mapping system of the conceptual metaphor “human is an animal” helps to reveal human characteristics vividly from the mathematical, behavioral, and affective traits of animals.

In domestic studies, Guo Hua and Zhu Zhe (2011) analyzed idiomatic translation from the perspective of association theory. Association theory emphasizes the exchange of communicative information, which provides the best theoretical guidance for the cross-cultural translation of English-Chinese animal idioms.

Zhu Linyi (2012) believed that “dynamic equivalence” translation theory put forward by Eugene Nida is of great significance to the translation of English-Chinese animal idioms. A deep understanding of the cultural significance of these idioms is of great help to the translation of English-Chinese animal idioms faithfully and accurately. Translators should take into account the cultural and linguistic characteristics, the acceptability of target readers, and the harmonious unity of the functions of the source language and the target language. Zhu Linyi believes that the strategy of using dynamic equivalence is to enable the target reader to receive the same information as the source reader in the same way.

Lu Yan (2016) considered that there are a large number of idioms about animals in both English and Chinese, but sometimes they are not one-to-one correspondence. Therefore, the mutual translation of English-Chinese idioms should follow certain principles and the translators need to master certain translation strategies. This paper tries to analyze English-Chinese animal idioms from the perspective of modality theory and find out the corresponding translation strategies.

The above literature review has reviewed the domestic and international studies on animal idioms translation. Some studies have been conducted on the translation of animal idioms in view of linguistics. Other studies are about the cultural translation of animal idioms. There are few studies that specialize in the translation of dog-related idioms. Only Novakovic has studied the translation of dog-related idioms from English to Serbian. In the time of globalization, it is necessary to study the translation of dog idioms from a cross-cultural perspective in order to promote cultural exchange.

Regional and Historical Differences About the Connotations of “Dog”

Regional Differences

Eastern civilization is represented by the Chinese civilization, which originated in the Yellow River basin and was centered on agricultural culture. In such an agricultural society, dogs, like the cows and horses, belonged to the domestic animals, each of which had its own role to play. People treated dogs and cattle, horses, chickens, ducks, and other domestic animals in an equal way.

Many Western countries developed based on fishing, hunting, and animal husbandry, so the dog was perceived as a significant tool for production. It helped people catch and hunt for food. Among the hundreds of dog breeds selected and bred by mankind, a large number of hunting dogs and sheepdogs are from Western countries. Even the President of the United States keeps hounds in the White House.

Historical Differences

In the history, the status of dogs was relatively low and they played a relatively small social role. There was a settled society with fixed ranks and classes in feudal society. Even the sacrificial offerings also embodied the

strict hierarchical division in this society. During the sacrificial ritual, the son of heaven could kill cattle, sheep, and pigs, the vassal state could kill sheep and pigs, the scholar-officials could only kill pigs, and the common people could only kill dogs in addition to killing chickens. This shows that in ancient times, the status of dogs was very low, basically only in the position of a substitute. During the Shang and Zhou Dynasties, the dog-eating trend emerged in Northern China, and gradually came to a climax during the Warring States, Qin and Han Dynasties, when the whole society, both the upper rulers and the lower commoners, liked to eat dog meat. It can also be seen from the Chinese people's attitude towards dogs and the status of dogs in ancient times that “dog” in specific cultures means negative or bad. Most of the people who were compared to dogs are people of very bad character and disposition. Lots of words with “dog” in Chinese are used to be compared to the kind of people despised, spurned, shameless, and despicable, such as “走狗” (running dogs), “丧家犬” (homeless dogs), “落水狗” (drowning dogs), and “狗头军师” (villainous adviser) (Huang, 2003). However, Westerners once slandered Easterners as “barbarians” because of their habits of dog-eating, which is clearly a wrong view. What kind of meat to eat, such as livestock or poultry, is determined by different ethnic customs and personal preferences? Such prejudices and misunderstandings should be eliminated (Wang, 2021, p. 233).

Strategies for Translating the Idiom of “Dog”

Literal Translation

Literal translation is a commonly used method of translating idioms. Using this method can preserve the metaphorical image, national characteristics, and language style of the original idioms in the translation without causing incorrect associations (Hu, 2013).

Example 1: An old dog will learn no new tricks./You can't teach an old dog new tricks. This is an English proverb, which means that as one gets older, one cannot learn new things. Elderly people are no longer like a clean blank sheet of paper. What they learned during the young period is ingrained in their mind and it is difficult for others to change their thoughts. Elderly people have accumulated rich personal experiences over the past decades, but their learning abilities have fallen far behind those of young people. It can be translated as “老狗学不会新把戏” in Chinese.

Example 2: Barking dogs seldom bite. This idiom means that a dog that barks loudly at people tends not to hurt them. In Chinese, it refers to “会叫的狗不咬人”. It can also mean that people who make threatening noises, or who are used to yelling loudly at other people, should not be taken too seriously. The translation of this idiom is easy to understand, so it is reasonable to adopt this method of literal translation.

Example 3: Be aware of a silent dog and still water. We can translate this idiom into Chinese: “提防不吠的狗，小心静止的水”. It means that even dogs that do not bark may bite; the seemingly calm water may make boats capsize, indicating that there is often great danger hidden beneath the surface of safety.

Example 4: A dog's mouth emits no ivory. It is in Chinese: “狗嘴里吐不出象牙”. The meaning of this idiom is very straightforward, which means that we cannot find precious ivory in dog's mouth, which also means that it is difficult for a bad person to say anything good. So, the author believes that a literal translation of this idiom is more appropriate.

Free Translation

Free translation refers to the translation method that the translation is faithful to the content of the original text but is not bound by the structural form and rhetorical techniques of the original text. It is translated according

to the general idea of the original text, not word by word or sentence by sentence. Free translation can better reflect the language characteristics of the target language.

Example 1: A living dog is better than a dead lion. This sentence is recorded in Chapters 9 of the Bible, Old Testament, Ecclesiastes. It can be translated to “好死不如赖活着” in Chinese. Those who are alive at least have the hope of life, but once they are dead, their names are not remembered by anyone. Their love, their hate, and their jealousy, have long since disappeared. They will never have a part in anything done under the sun. Instead of translating it into “死狮不如活狗” in Chinese, the translator thinks it is better to translate it into the familiar phrase “好死不如赖活着” in Chinese.

Example 2: In the dog’s house. This is an idiom from the United States, which does not literally mean “in the doghouse” but describes a person who has suffered from something bad, annoyed people, and been left out, or is in trouble and in disgrace. So, the final translation in Chinese is “受辱，失宠”.

Example 3: The dog returns to his vomit. The literal meaning of this sentence is that the dog goes back to eat what it spit out before, but the author thinks that as the word-for-word translation using the direct translation method can be understood to some extent, translation in this way sounds not like the authentic Chinese, so the translator thinks that the translation is: “重回旧日罪恶” would be better.

Borrowing Method

In Chinese and English, there are some idioms that can correspond to each other, which are basically the same in content and form, and also the same in meaning and rhetorical meaning. Although the literal meanings of these idioms in these two cultures cannot be completely equal, the metaphorical meanings they imply are almost the same. We can borrow the idioms inherent in the other culture for translation so that the readers will have less difficulty in reading or understanding the familiar words, and it will be easier for them to comprehend the meaning of the original text. So, when translating this type of idioms, we can sometimes borrow idioms with the same meaning from Chinese or English.

Example 1: Cast a pearl before the swine. This idiom comes from the New Testament—Matthew 7: “Give not that which is holy unto the dogs, neither cast ye your pearls before swine, lest they trample them under their feet, and turn again and rend and turn again and rend you”. In later times, it has become an international idiom, often used to express the meaning of offering something valuable or beautiful to those who cannot appreciate it; giving something precious to those who cannot understand its value, etc., which contains contemptuous mockery. According to its literal meaning, this idiom is similar to the Chinese idiom “明珠暗投”, but the meaning is different with the Chinese idiom, and the latter is mostly used to describe people, so they basically cannot be corresponded to each other. Finally, the author thinks that it is more appropriate to translate “cast a pearl before the swine” into the Chinese idiom “对牛弹琴”.

Example 2: Give sb. a pig of his own sow. It means that dealing with a man as he deals with you. In Chinese, there is a corresponding idiom “以其人之道还治其人之身”, which conveys the meaning of this proverb very well.

Example 3: The scolded dog fears cold water. The original meaning is that a dog that has been scalded by boiling water will shiver when it sees cold water. That is to say, after being hurt by a thing, one will be afraid of seeing something similar to it again. Therefore, I think it is appropriate to borrow the Chinese proverb “一朝被蛇咬，十年怕井绳”.

Example 4: Give a dog a bad name and hang him. Similarly, the English idiom: A staff is quickly found to beat a dog with. In Chinese, “欲加之罪，何患无辞” means that if you want to harm someone, even if you are not at fault, you can still make up charges as a reason. Therefore, it is more appropriate to borrow this Chinese idiom as a translation.

Example 5: “挂羊头，卖狗肉。” Metaphorically, using a good name as a cover is actually doing bad things. It also generally refers to deceiving people with a good name. This idiom has a derogatory meaning and can be translated to English: “Cry up wine and sell wine”.

Issues to Pay Attention to When Translating Idioms Related to “Dog”

Generally speaking, the discussion from the above examples clearly shows that when translating idioms with cultural terms, the author believes that the free translation and the borrowing method are more appropriate. Translation not only conveys the culture of the source language, but also conveys the beauty in literal translation. In the process of translating Chinese-English idioms, the translator should pay great attention to the differences between two cultures, because it is hard to retain the exoticism completely. Through various translation strategies, translators should try their best to preserve special cultural meanings, expressive preferences, emotional color, specific language conventions, and values and aesthetics, so as to maximize the preservation of the source language culture. However, these translation strategies must not be at the expense of ignoring the accurate transmission of information. In some cases, if one translation strategy fails to satisfy the reader’s comprehension needs, the translator should use other methods to fill the gap. In some cases, a combination of different strategies is needed to better help target language readers understand the meaning of the source text.

When translating an animal idiom about “dog”, it is difficult to understand the true meaning of the phrase if we do not understand the culture behind it. Based on the understanding of the two cultures, the translation achieves the purpose of cross-cultural communication. It is very necessary to consider cultural factors when translating idioms of loaded cultures. Whether the cultural features of the source language idioms are preserved or not becomes an important criterion for evaluating the translation. By employing the strategy of alienation, the translator can impart the unique source language culture and expressions to the target language readers. Therefore, cultural exchanges between countries can be promoted in this way.

First of all, it is important to not take the words too literally when translating. The most difficult thing in translation is the cultural factors embedded in the text, not the language of the text. There are great differences between two cultures. Some idioms may be very easy to understand in one language and culture, but if translated into another language, readers may feel very strange, so some translations are often puzzling. The translator must not limit his thoughts when doing the translation of animal idioms about dogs, or else the translated content is likely to be puzzling. For example, be like a dog with two tails. This idiom means someone is very happy and we cannot see it as a dog with two tails. In addition, if we want to accurately understand idioms about dogs in these two languages and cultures, we have to clearly distinguish whether the idioms are positive, negative, or neutral. For example, a positive idiom is “hot dog” which means “great”; a neutral idiom is “doggy bag” that means a bag for leftovers; a negative idiom is “go to dog” that means something gets down.

Conclusions

In conclusion, both Chinese and English idioms are the crystallization of human material production and life, and they contain a lot of historical celebrity stories, which comprehensively show the influence of different

cultures on different languages. The idioms are very vivid and rich in philosophical meanings. The translation methods advocated by the author have certain limitations, so the translator needs to analyze the context for a better translation, easy for readers to understand.

Since English and Chinese belong to different language families, Chinese and English idioms are largely influenced by their cultures. The idioms in these two cultures have their own unique features, so when translating, it is somewhat difficult to find their idioms fully corresponding to each other. As a result, translators need to adopt different translation strategies. No matter what strategies are adopted, the purpose is always to naturally and accurately convey cultural information for better cross-cultural communication.

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