

A Study on the Internet Buzzword “Huoren Gan” and Its English Translation

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The booming development of artificial intelligence (AI) has brought about a large number of standardized, highly polished and formulaic online contents in recent years. Against such a digital background, the Chinese internet buzzword “huoren gan (活人感)” has gained remarkable popularity among domestic online communities. This paper attempts to emphasize genuine human temperament, tolerable personal flaws and sincere emotional expression, which effectively counteracts the cold, mechanical and homogenized aesthetic prevalent in AI-generated works and artificially packaged online personal settings. As a typical high-context internet neologism rich in implicit cultural and emotional connotations, the term is prone to semantic attenuation and cultural misunderstanding if translated literally. Based on Edward T. Hall’s classic high- and low-context cultural theory and the translation explicitation strategy, this paper analyzes the origin and multi-layered semantics of “huoren gan.” It also re-examines the limitations of existing mainstream English translations and proposes context-aware differentiated translation solutions. Meanwhile, it concludes practical translation principles applicable to Chinese internet buzzwords, aiming to facilitate effective cross-cultural communication and improve the overseas dissemination of Chinese online culture.

Keywords: huoren gan, internet buzzword, explicitation, contextual translation, intercultural communication

Introduction

With the continuous iteration of digital technology and generative artificial intelligence (AI), online content production has gradually moved from manual creation to standardized mass production. Social media platforms are currently flooded with perfectly polished personal images, unified aesthetic styles and rigid scripted content. Gradually, internet users have grown weary of overly refined and inauthentic online presentations, and begun to pursue real, unpolished and emotionally vivid life expressions. It is under this collective public sentiment that the concept of “huoren gan (活人感)” has emerged and spread rapidly across major online platforms.

Eventually selected as one of the 2025 Annual Top Ten Internet Buzzwords by netizens, the term has stepped out of niche online discussions and become a mainstream cultural keyword. Nevertheless, in current cross-cultural communication practices, most English translations of “huoren gan” remain at the superficial literal level. Such translations fail to convey the term’s unique cultural background and implicit resistance to technological alienation and performative social interaction. Therefore, it is necessary to adopt targeted translation strategies to reconstruct its hidden connotations. This paper attempts to explore feasible English translation approaches for

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“huoren gan” from a contextual perspective, and provides practical references for the translation of similar Chinese internet buzzwords.

Theoretical Framework

High- and Low-Context Cultural Theory

In his foundational work *The Silent Language*, Edward T. Hall (2018) put forward the high- and low-context cultural classification theory, which has been widely applied in intercultural communication research. According to Hall's theory, high-context communication relies heavily on situational context, interpersonal relationships and shared cultural cognition. Most information is implied in the communication scenario rather than explicitly expressed by language itself. In contrast, low-context cultural communication focuses more on explicit linguistic information, with core meanings directly conveyed through verbal expressions, requiring less reliance on contextual reasoning.

Chinese culture is universally recognized as a typical high-context culture, a feature prominently reflected in Chinese internet buzzwords. Most online catchwords carry implicit social sentiments and cultural implications that cannot be fully interpreted merely through literal meaning. English-speaking countries, by comparison, belong to low-context cultural systems that value clarity, accuracy, and logical straightforwardness. Such cultural differences inevitably create obstacles in translation. Mechanical literal translation often leads to semantic ambiguity and cultural misreading, making adaptive translation strategies indispensable.

Translation Explication Strategy

Explication is a crucial translation strategy proposed and summarized by translation scholars to solve semantic gaps in cross-linguistic conversion. In translation practice, many source text meanings are implicitly embedded in cultural backgrounds and contextual atmospheres rather than explicitly stated. Explication requires translators to actively sort out these hidden semantics, emotional tones, and cultural assumptions, and present them clearly in target language expressions.

Internet buzzwords feature conciseness, strong emotional coloring, and rich cultural load. When translating such high-context vocabulary, rigid literal translation often achieves formal equivalence but loses pragmatic meaning and cultural value. It is argued that appropriate application of explication can effectively bridge contextual differences between Chinese and English, restore complete semantic information, and realize authentic and effective cross-cultural transmission of internet buzzwords.

Semantic Core and Pragmatic Features of “Huoren Gan”

Different from vocabulary with single fixed meaning, “huoren gan” is a composite multi-dimensional internet buzzword with layered connotations. Its core semantics can be summarized in three major aspects, which lay a solid foundation for differentiated translation research.

First, the term represents unperformed authenticity. It emphasizes that individuals do not deliberately package or beautify their personal images. Instead of maintaining perfect, flawless online settings, people properly display real emotions, personal shortcomings and trivial life states.

Second, “huoren gan” highlights unique human attributes distinct from machine characteristics. It stresses the randomness, emotional fluctuation, and spontaneity of human creation, which form a sharp contrast with standardized, error-free and programmable AI-generated content.

Third, the word embodies the warm texture of ordinary daily life. It resists cold, over-refined artificial aesthetics and affirms the vitality and authenticity of real life scenarios.

Pragmatically, “huoren gan” is mostly used as a positive evaluation to praise authentic, down-to-earth and unpretentious people and original content. Interestingly, with the expansion of its application scope, the term has also derived an ironic pragmatic meaning in recent years. It can be used to criticize pseudo-authenticity, deliberately staged flaws and artificially created “human liveliness.” Such flexible pragmatic tones determine that a single fixed translation cannot adapt to all communication scenarios.

Defects of Existing English Renderings of “Huoren Gan”

With the increasing overseas influence of Chinese internet culture, many translators and foreign social media users have tried to translate “huoren gan.” However, most mainstream renderings have obvious deficiencies in semantic accuracy, pragmatic effect, and stylistic appropriateness, which hinder effective cross-cultural communication.

To start with, the literal translation *The Feeling of a Real Person* only retains the most superficial literal meaning. It completely ignores the term’s core cultural connotations of resisting AI mechanization and packaged online personas. Such under-translation makes it impossible for foreign readers to understand the cultural phenomenon behind the buzzword.

Besides, the single abstract noun “authenticity” oversimplifies the rich connotation of “huoren gan.” Although it covers the core meaning of “truthfulness,” it is overly academic and rigid. It lacks the colloquial property and emotional tension of internet vocabulary, thus being inappropriate for daily online evaluation and casual communication scenarios.

Furthermore, *The Expression Real Person Feeling* does not conform to native English collocation norms. The phrase sounds awkward and vague in meaning, resulting in extremely low acceptance among foreign users and basically no practical communication value.

On balance, current translations fail to balance semantics, pragmatics, and stylistic features. It is therefore necessary to adopt the explicitation strategy to develop targeted scenario-based translation schemes.

Contextualized English Translation Strategies for “Huoren Gan” Based on Explicitation

Considering the flexible semantics, diverse pragmatic tones and varied application scenarios of “huoren gan,” this paper adopts the explicitation strategy to propose classified English translation schemes. Such contextualized renderings can fully convey implicit cultural emotions and realize functional equivalence in cross-cultural communication.

Daily Complimentary Context: Unfiltered Authenticity

In daily informal scenarios, “huoren gan” is widely used to praise individuals with natural personalities and unpolished daily content without deliberate packaging. The translation unfiltered authenticity fits such contexts perfectly. The word “unfiltered” explicitly reflects the rejection of image retouching and artificial performance, while “authenticity” highlights the genuineness of personal temperament and life content. This expression is highly popular on English social platforms and conforms to the language habits of young overseas users.

Example 1: She refuses to shape a perfect online image and is full of unfiltered authenticity.

Artistic Content Evaluation Context: Raw Human Texture

When evaluating unscripted documentaries, short videos and daily life records, “huoren gan” mainly emphasizes the real life atmosphere and spontaneous emotional warmth of non-mechanical creation. The

rendering raw human texture can well interpret such connotations. The adjective “raw” refers to “original and unprocessed creation states,” while “human texture” represents tangible human emotions and life temperature. This phrase is suitable for artistic evaluation and cultural commentary scenarios.

Example 2: This unscripted life record is filled with raw human texture and strikes a chord with audiences.

Ironic and Critical Context: Performed Realness

In some specific scenarios, the term carries obvious negative and ironic tones, aiming to criticize artificially fabricated authenticity and deliberately displayed imperfections. Under such circumstances, performed realness is the most appropriate translation. The word “performed” accurately reveals the staged and artificial nature of pseudo-human liveliness, while “realness” retains the colloquial feature of the original buzzword.

Example 3: His so-called “huoren gan” is merely performed realness packaged to win public favor.

Academic Formal Context: Genuine Human Vitality

For rigorous formal scenarios, such as academic research papers and cultural reviews, the translation needs to be standardized and professional. Genuine human vitality effectively summarizes the core connotation of real human emotion and spontaneous life power. It avoids overly colloquial expressions and meets the stylistic requirements of academic writing.

Example 4: The popularity of genuine human vitality reflects modern people’s pursuit of sincere communication in the digital era.

Informal Spoken Alternative: Real-Person Vibes

In casual daily conversations, real-person vibes can serve as a concise and vivid alternative. The oral word “vibes” successfully conveys the overall emotional atmosphere contained in “huoren gan.” It is easy to understand and spread, though it is not applicable to formal academic writing.

Translation Enlightenment for Chinese Internet Buzzwords

The contextualized translation practice of “huoren gan” can provide several practical implications for the English translation of Chinese high-context internet buzzwords.

First of all, translators should take the initiative to apply explication to break cross-cultural contextual barriers. Most Chinese internet buzzwords are rooted in local digital culture and contain a large amount of implicit information. Simply relying on literal translation will inevitably cause semantic loss. By explicating hidden cultural connotations and emotional attitudes, translators can help low-context English readers accurately understand the core meaning of Chinese online vocabulary.

Moreover, context-dependent differentiated translation should be prioritized. It is inappropriate to adopt a fixed translation standard for internet buzzwords with flexible semantics and variable pragmatic tones. According to different communication purposes including daily praise, artistic evaluation, ironic criticism, and academic discussion, targeted translation choices can better achieve functional equivalence.

In addition, a balance should be maintained between target language adaptation and cultural feature retention. While conforming to English expression norms, translators ought to avoid excessive domestication. Proper retention of unique Chinese cultural characteristics helps foreign audiences understand the real connotation of Chinese internet culture.

Finally, continuous attention should be paid to the dynamic semantic evolution of internet buzzwords. Online language updates rapidly with changing social contexts. Long-term observation of semantic changes can help

translators adjust translation strategies timely and maintain the accuracy and effectiveness of translation results.

Conclusion

As a typical cultural keyword in the digital age, the internet buzzword “huoren gan” reflects contemporary Chinese netizens’ resistance to mechanical AI content and performative online interaction, as well as their yearning for real, warm and authentic interpersonal communication. The translation of such high-context online vocabulary is never a simple lexical conversion, but a systematic process of cultural meaning reconstruction.

Guided by high-/low-context culture theory and translation explicitation strategy, this paper proposes differentiated renderings including unfiltered authenticity, raw human texture, performed realness and genuine human vitality for different application scenarios. These translations effectively make up for the defects of traditional single literal translation, realize the unity of semantic accuracy, pragmatic appropriateness and stylistic consistency, and provide valuable references for the translation of similar Chinese internet buzzwords.

In the context of global cultural exchange, internet buzzwords act as vivid carriers of local culture. Optimizing the translation quality of Chinese online neologisms is conducive to helping overseas audiences understand Chinese social mentality and cultural trends, and promoting the effective international communication of Chinese language and culture.

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