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A Study on Culturally-Loaded Linguistic Landscape Translation from the Perspective of Bassnett's Cultural Translation Theory

巴斯奈特文化翻译理论视角下语言景观文化 功能翻译研究

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Abstract: As one of the symbols of an international city, bilingual linguistic landscape not only provides convenience for foreigners in China, but also serves as a window for the dissemination of Chinese culture. Therefore, the English translation of the culturally-loaded linguistic landscape should be appropriate and accurate, and effectively display Chinese culture. Guided by the translation principles advocated by Bassnett's cultural translation theory, the paper analyzes Chinese-English translation of linguistic landscape under three conditions of cultural similarity, cultural difference and cultural loss, and proposes corresponding translation strategies to realize cultural function equivalence.

Keywords: culturally-loaded linguistic landscape, cultural function equivalence, cultural translation theory

摘要: 作为国际化城市的标志之一，语言景观的英译不仅为在中国的外国友人提供便捷，同时也是传播中国文化的窗口，因此，语言景

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观的英语翻译要恰当精确，并且有效展现所蕴含的中国文化。从巴斯奈特的文化翻译理论视角出发，本文研究了语言景观的中英翻译中文化功能对等的问题，认为语言景观中英翻译要以读者的接受为出发点，充分发挥译者的能动性，实现译文和原文的文化功能对等。针对文化相似，文化差异和文化缺失的三种情况，文章提出了对应的翻译策略和建议。

关键词：文化负载语言景观，文化功能对等，文化翻译理论

1. Introduction

Linguistic landscape performs information and symbolic functions (Landry & Bourish, 1997). The English versions of linguistic landscape in China is the most direct and important way to help foreigners in China to obtain information on transportation, catering, tourism, culture and other aspects of life. The bilingual linguistic landscape in China plays the role of “name card” and manifests the international image of China. The standardizing of the bilingual linguistic landscape is a way for China to be internationalized and propagate Chinese culture. In 2013, the <Guideline for the use of English in public areas> was released in China. As the first national standard for the standardization of translation and writing of linguistic landscape in China, the guideline stipulates the principles, methods and requirements for English translation in 13 service areas, including transportation, tourism, culture, education, medical care, and catering (Wang & Zhang, 2016). However, the guideline is only a translation specification for general linguistic landscape, and cannot solve the problems in the translation on historical and cultural connotations or local characteristics of linguistic landscape in China.

In addition to information function, bilingual linguistic landscape also performs the function of cultural dissemination, serving as an important window to transmit Chinese culture to the world. As one of the most important propaganda windows to foreign visitors in China, the English version of linguistic landscape is of great importance for them to understand Chinese culture, history and civilization.

In this sense, the proper and accurate English version of linguistic landscape not only carries informational function, but also helps to boost Chinese international image and spread Chinese culture. Realizing cultural function equivalence should be given due attention in the translation of linguistic landscape, otherwise, the English version is likely to cause cross-cultural misunderstanding. The research on Chinese-to-English public signs show that foreigners are more resistant to cultural translation errors and have lower tolerance than language translation errors (Wang & Zhan, 2019). Therefore, it is of great importance to show Chinese culture appropriately and positively in the translation of the linguistic landscape.

Susan Bassnett, the founder of cultural translation theory, believes that translation is the communication between cultures. She is the first to suggest that translation studies should take the “cultural turn”. She argues that translation should take culture as the translation unit, and translation is to meet the needs of readers’ culture, and translation equivalent is the cultural function equivalence between the source language and the target language (Bassnett & Lefevere, 1990). Bassnett believes translation studies’ intention is “an attempt to demonstrate that translation studies is indeed a discipline in its own right: not merely a minor branch of comparative literary study, nor yet a specific area of linguistics, but a vastly complex field with a lot of far-reaching ramifications” (Bassnett, 2000, p.12). Bassnett’s cultural translation theory provides translation studies with a new approach by regarding culture as the translation unit. The translation should be evaluated with “culture-bound”, that is, a translation is supposed to be capable of satisfying the needs of culture and society in the target language and of serving the target readers.

Bassnett’s cultural translation theory provides strong theoretical guidance for the realization of cultural function equivalence in translation of culturally-loaded linguistic landscape. In light of the theory, the translator should fully understand the content and cultural connotation of the original Chinese version, and creatively and faithfully reproduce the equivalent cultural function in English version. This paper studies on how to realize cultural function equivalence

in translation of culturally-loaded linguistic landscape from the perspective of Bassnett's cultural translation theory.

2. Literature Review

The term linguistic landscape was popularized by Landry and Bourhis who defined it as “language of public road signs, advertising billboards, street names, place names, commercial shop signs, and public signs on government buildings which combines to form the linguistic landscape of a given territory, region, or urban agglomeration” (Landry & Bourhis, 1997, p.23). Another popular definition of linguistic landscape was put forward by Jaworski and Thurlow, from the angle of social semiotics, they defined it as “the interplay between language, visual discourse, the spatial practices and dimensions of culture, especially the textual mediation or discursive construction of place and the use of space as a semiotic resource in his own right” (Jaworski & Thurlow, 2010, p.38). So it is safe to make the conclusion that any signs or written texts appeared in a public place can be viewed as a part of linguistic landscape.

According to Landry and Bourhis, linguistic landscape holds two basic functions: informational function and symbolic function. The information function of linguistic landscape is to offer people information of a given place, while the symbolic function of linguistic landscape involves power, status, and identity issues of a certain language group, which can exert impact on people's linguistic behavior (Landry & Bourhis, 1997). On top of that, Hicks proposes that there is a mythological or folkloric function to the linguistic landscape of special importance to societies that have kept their native religion. He adds that this function refers that places in the landscape are named in such a way as to provide a focal point for various traditional stories, sagas and myths that are part of the in-group's traditional culture (Hicks, 2002). Therefore, besides informational function, symbolic function, the linguistic landscape bears the function of cultural inheriting and disseminating.

Since the introduction of the concept of linguistic landscape in China, the research areas mainly focus on city cases, place nomination, outdoor slogans, public signs, and plaque translation (Wang, 2021). Among them, the research on translation of public signs take the majority. In the database of National Digital Library of China, more than two thousands of essays about the translation of public signs have been published from 1980 to 2022. Statistical analysis of more than 500 academic papers on public sign translation published in the past ten years shows that a great number of systematic and academic research has been done by Chinese scholars, covering various aspects of public signs based on rich theories, among which functional translation theory, intercultural communication theory, intertextuality theory, communicative translation theory, and ecological translation theory are the most widely used (Wang, 2017). However, most research focus on realizing the informational function of linguistic landscapes in translation, while the research on how to achieve cultural function equivalence in the translation of linguistic landscapes has not been given due attention. There aren't many papers on cultural function in the translation of linguistic landscapes on CNKI. One is by Liu Yanfang, who discussed Chinese and Western cultural differences in public signs from the perspective of Nida's "functional equivalence" theory, and concluded that English translation should focus on cultural functional equivalence rather than static equivalence at lexical level (Liu, 2008). Wang Qian and Zhan Yu (2019) conducted research on the 120 American native speakers' acceptance of the 20 English versions of Chinese public signs, found that cultural function deviations between the source and target texts can lead to mistranslation of cultural functions. This can be avoided by fully using the translator's initiative (Wang & Zhan, 2019).

In China, Bassnett's cultural translation theory has been widely accepted and applied in the study of translation research, especially in the translation of Chinese literature works. However, the research on translating linguistic landscapes based on Bassnett's cultural translation theory is rare. On CNKI only one paper can be found, which is entitled English translation of public signs in Guilin tourist

attractions from the perspective of Susan Bassnett's cultural translation (Cheng & Li, 2012). So more effort need to be made in this research area. By taking culture as the translation unit, Bassnett's cultural translation theory can provide a new approach for the Chinese-English translation of the culturally-loaded linguistic landscape.

3. Cultural Translation Theory

English scholar Susan Bassnett is the founder of cultural translation theory. In 1980, Bassnett first summarized her cultural translation theory in her book *Translation studies*. She believes that "translation studies is not merely a minor branch of comparative literary study, not yet a specific area of linguistics, but a vastly complex field with many ramifications", and translation process "involves a whole set of extra-linguistic criteria also" (Bassnett, 1980, p.13).

In 1990, Bassnett further explored her cultural translation theory and put forward the concept of "cultural turn" in the book *Translation, History and Culture*, marking the shift from purely linguistic perspective to cultural angle. The cultural turn has made the translation studies reevaluate the translation standards, emphasized cultural context constrains in translation process and attached importance to cultural function equivalence between source text and target text. She proposes that "Translation is not just the transfer of texts from one language into another, it is now rightly seen as a process of negotiation between texts and between cultures" (Bassnett & Lefevere, 1990, p.4).

In 2002, in the third edition of *Translation Studies*, Bassnett added that the loss and acquisition of cultural information during translation is unavoidable due to the lack of linguistic homogeneity. She explains that translation is a process of decoding and re-decoding in terms of culture, but forcing the source culture into the target culture is very dangerous. Translators should show respect to both target culture and target readers (Peng, 2018).

In general, four aspects of Bassnett's cultural translation theory can be adopted to realize the cultural function equivalence in the translation of culturally-loaded linguistic landscapes. First, translation should take culture as the translation unit, not always linger on the discourse level. Just as Bassnett expounds "We are no longer stuck to the word, or even the text, because we have realized the importance of context in matters of translation", and "Translations are never produced in a vacuum, and that they are also never received in a vacuum" (Bassnett & Lefevere, 1990, p.122). Second, translation is not a simple process of decoding and re-coding, but an activity of communication. Traditionally, translation is treated as a static transformation from the source language to target language. Bassnett challenges the tradition and believes that translation is a dynamic process aiming at achieving cultural function equivalence. She proposes that "The study of translation is the study of cultural interaction" (Bassnett & Lefevere, 1998, p.ix). Third, translation should not be restricted as the description of source language text, but viewed as the functional equivalence in the target language culture. Unlike Nida's concept of equivalence which puts emphasis on transferring the information contained in the source text, Bassnett's concept of equivalence aims at the transformation and acceptance of cultural function equivalence. Last, translation will have different principles and norms in different times in order to meet different needs. In order to meet the needs, Bassnett suggests that translators should make full use of their subjective initiative and adopt translation strategies in a flexible and creative manner. To answer how to achieve the functional equivalence in the translation, Bassnett illustrates in her monograph that the translator has to substantially adapt the source language to the target language (Bassnett, 2000).

The fundamental principle of Bassnett's cultural translation theory lies in that translation process is deeply rooted in culture to which languages belongs, and the translation equivalence is the cultural equivalence between source language and target language. Translation, in a word, is to satisfy the needs of different cultures and the needs of different groups in a certain culture (Bassnett &

Lefevere, 1990). Cultural translation theory encourages translators to take culture as a translation unit, emphasizes the leading position of the translator, proposes the new “culture-bound” translation evaluation (Bassnett, 2000), therefore it provides a new approach to translation studies.

4. Translation Strategies

According to Bassnett, translation is an activity of cross-cultural communication and “translation is a cultural functional equivalence of ST and TT” (Bassnett & Lefevere, 1990, p.3). To achieve the cultural functional equivalence, translators must retain the cultural information of the source text and transplant it into the target language. In translation of culturally-loaded linguistic landscape, a translator must consider the target readers, take the realization of cultural function equivalence as top priority, and choose proper translation strategies to achieve the cultural functional equivalence. In light of Bassnett’s cultural translation theory, this paper explores the translation strategies to realize the cultural function equivalence in the translation of culturally-loaded linguistic landscape under three circumstances.

4.1 Translation of culturally-loaded linguistic landscapes in the context of cultural similarity

Similarities exist in the different languages and cultures in the world, which provide the objective foundation for the translation (Nida, 2001). That is, people from different cultural backgrounds can understand each other because of similarities in the life experiences and common understanding of same phenomena. The cultural consistency and similarity facilitate the cultural exchanges between China and the West, and enable the realization of cultural function equivalence in the translation. For example, whether in Western or Chinese culture, the animal “bee” symbolizes being busy, hard-working and selfless, and “donkey” indicates the connotation of being stubborn, dumb and lazy. We can find many equivalents in English and Chinese as the following examples: striking while the iron is hot (趁

热打铁), misfortunes never come singly (祸不单行), blood is thicker than water (血浓于水), as light as feather (轻如鸿毛), as you sow, so you will reap (种瓜得瓜), eat the fruit of ones own doings (自食其果), sea going dry and rocks melting (海枯石烂), love is as deep as the sea (情深似海), kill two birds with one stone (一石二鸟), think thrice before you take any action (三思而后行), to lure the tiger away from the mountain (调虎离山). These examples fully illustrate the consistency of understanding of certain things have been made among different cultural groups. In addition, many words in Chinese and English are reducible because some Chinese expressions have become fixed translations in English, and vice versa. Some Chinese unique words such as Confucius (孔子), fengshui (风水), kongfu (功夫), mahjong (麻将), taiji (太极), spring roll (春卷) have been borrowed by English, and many culturally-loaded English expressions like hysteria (歇斯底里), the last supper (最后的晚餐), Domino effect (多米诺效应), black humor (黑色幽默) have been accepted and used in Chinese. Thereby, under the circumstance of cultural similarity, literal translation can be adopted to convey the same cultural connotation to achieve cultural function equivalence.

Literal translation is to retain the meaning as well as the form of the source text in the translation, so the translation is faithful to the form while it conveys the meaning. In the process of English translation of culturally-loaded linguistic landscape, the translator must fully understand the interlinked cultural connotation between Chinese and English, keep the translation easy and smooth and try to seek culturally equivalent expressions in the target language. For example, 一国两制 (One country, two systems), 与时俱进 (Keep pace with the time), 绿水青山就是金山银山 (Clear waters and green mountains are as valuable as mountains of gold and silver), 丝绸之路 (the Silk Road), 一带一路 (One Belt and One Road), 峰会 (summit conference), 天河瀑布 (Milky Way Waterfall), 独秀峰 (Solitary Beauty Peak), 相依岩 (Dependent Rock), 听涛阁 (Waving Listening Pavilion), these examples illustrate the translatability between Chinese and English in a similar cultural context, with cultural similarities or coincidence, some source culture expressions can be translated literally.

4.2 Translation of culturally-loaded linguistic landscape in the context of cultural differences

Due to the cultural differences between China and the West, the cultural conflicts in translation are inevitable. When there are cultural conflicts between the source text and the target text, Bassnett advocates the translator to use the expressions familiar to the target readers. So in the context of cultural difference, domestication is the favored translation strategy under the guidance of Bassnett's cultural translation theory. Domestication is defined as "an ethnocentric reduction of the foreign text to target-language cultural values, bringing the readers at home" (Venuti, 1995, p.81). With domestication approach, the patterns and structures of source language are translated in accordance with the conventions of target language. So domestication is the translation strategy which conforms to the cultural habits of the target readers as much as possible to minimize the strangeness of source text for target readers.

Usually, cultural conflict is caused by different views of value and different ways of thinking. For instance, China has vast territory and people often use "挥金如土" to show off their wealth, whereas, the United Kingdom is an island country surrounded by the sea, with limited arable land, thus "soil" is very precious to the British. If "挥金如土" is translated into "spend money like soil", it is impossible for the British to have similar connection with the Chinese, and the translation is likely to cause cross-cultural obstacles. But for the British, water is an inexhaustible resource, so they use "spend money like water" to show off wealth. In such case, domestication can be used to eliminate cultural conflicts and bring the translation in line with the mainstream values of the target readers. More cases in point are 鱼米之乡 (a land of milk and honey), 拦路虎 (a lion in the way), 害群之马 (the black sheep of family), 像热锅上的蚂蚁 (like a hen in a hot girdle), 力大如牛 (as strong as a horse), 山中无老虎, 猴子成霸王 (Among the blind, the one-eyed is the king), 画蛇添足 (to put a fifth wheel to the couch), 班门弄斧 (to teach grandmother to suck eggs), etc.

In the translation of culturally-loaded linguistic landscape, the translator should exert subjective initiative and make some adjustments to achieve cultural function equivalence on the basis of full understanding of the original text. Bassnett emphasizes the leading position of the translator by saying that “The translator cannot be the author of the SL text, but the author of the TL text has clear moral responsibility to the TL readers” (Bassnett, 2000, p.86).

For instance, as to the prevailing sign “老、幼、病、残、孕专座” on buses, the translation versions like “Reserved for the old, infirm, sick, disabled and pregnant” or “Offer your seat to the people in weak” are not well accepted by the English native speakers, because in western culture, “the weak”, “the old”, “the disabled” all bear a kind of discrimination. So the translator should consider the acceptability of the target readers and take domestication approach to realize cultural function equivalence. The translation versions of “Offer your seat to the people in need”, or “Courtesy Seats” can be well accepted and realize both informational function and cultural function.

Another example is “文明单位”, which is an honor awarded to the organization for it has set good example in the construction of material, political, spiritual and ecological development in China. Nevertheless, the word “civilized” in western culture is associated with the transition from barbarism to civilization, which is different from “文明” in this context. Hence the translation “Civilized Unit” can cause misunderstanding to the target readers by thinking that the organization is uncivilized before it receives the honor. With domestication approach, the translation version “Model Unit” can be understood easily and will not arouse cross-cultural misunderstanding from the target readers. Similarly, in the translation of core socialist values in China, one of the values “文明” is translated into “civility” instead of “civilization”.

To achieve cultural function equivalence, the key lies in the cognitive effect obtained by the target readers in their own culture. According to Bassnett, in the process of cultural function equivalence, the translator has greater initiative and the flexibility to rewrite or even break the literary form of the original text.

For instance, the English translation of a sign in a Macau Cathedral says “欢迎参观。在圣堂内，请勿喧哗，出入关门，谢谢合作。” is “Welcome. Thanking you for showing respect in the place of worship”. At the first sight, the English version seems incomplete, since it does not remind the visitors to keep quiet. Actually, the English version has fully realized the cultural function, because Westerners are very familiar with Catholicism, and they are also very familiar with church etiquette. The main function of the translation is to express the appreciation for their respect.

Chinese linguistic landscape tends to be descriptive and devious while English linguistic landscape turns out to be informative and topic-oriented. Flowery expressions such as idioms, poetry are often seen in Chinese linguistic landscape. To make the translation readable and remove the cultural barrier, translators have the initiative and flexibility to translate the original version. For instance, the signs for caring grass can be seen everywhere in China, and the source texts are poetic, such as “小草娇嫩，踏之何忍？”，“小草有生命，脚下请留情”，“小草青青，足下留情”，“小草含羞笑，请您走便道”，“一花一草皆生命，一枝一叶总关情”，“请君足下绕一绕，小草对您笑一笑”，just name a few. If the translator translates the original literally, it may confuse and disorient the target readers, thus the best one can be “Keep off the grass”, which can be understood by target readers easily and fulfill its function well.

4.3 Translation of culturally-loaded linguistic landscape in the context of cultural loss

There is great discrepancy between Chinese and English cultures, many Chinese culturally-loaded words such as 天干，地支，节气，八卦，对联，气功，皮影戏 do not have equivalent words in English. Facing cultural loss, Bassnett advocates that the target readers should try to adapt, understand and absorb foreign cultures. Through reading the translation text, the target readers acknowledge foreign customs, characteristics of foreign language and culture, so as to enrich local language and culture. In the context of cultural loss, the

combination of transliteration and annotation is an efficient translation method for the translation of culturally-loaded linguistic landscapes.

For example, “角楼” is a kind of auxiliary building commonly located at the corner of ancient Chinese buildings. The literal translation “Angle tower” cannot reflect its functionality, and is easily regarded by target readers as the name of a landscape. Therefore, with the strategy of annotation, “角楼” can be translated into “The watch tower” (Ren, 2007), with which, the target readers can easily understand its function and know about Chinese culture. Another classical example is the translation of “四书五经”, with the translation strategies of transliteration and annotation, the translation is “there were specialists on the five classics: the Yijing or Classic of Changes (for divination), the Shujing or Classic of Documents (or History), the Shijing or Classic of Songs (Odes, ancient folk poems), the Chunqiu or Spring and Autumn Annals (chronicles of Confucius’s own state of Lu in Shandong, with their commentaries), and the Liji or Record of Ceremonies and Proper Conduct” (Fairbank, 2006, pp.252-253).

According to Bassnett, the translator should try to view the original text from the perspective of target language readers. Only in this way can the translator find that many common cultural factors are strange or totally new to the target readers, therefore, the annotation is necessary in the context of cultural loss. For instance, the translation of “十千脚店” from 清明上河图 (Ascending the River at Qingming Festival) painted by Zhang Zeduan is “Shiqian Inn”. The name “Shiqian” comes from a poem by Cao Zhi. Without annotation of the poet and his poem, the translation itself makes no sense at all. While with the annotation (The title “Shi Qian” means ten thousand. It came from a poem of Cao Zhi, who was a famous poet during the Three Kingdom Period, that “I came back and feasted at Ping le, so happy to have vessels of liquor worth ten thousand yuan”. From the annotation, the readers can better understand the origin of the name and its background culture.

A large area of “cultural loss” is the difficulty faced by translators when translating culturally-loaded linguistic landscape from Chinese into English.

Based on Bassnett's cultural translation theory, to achieve the cultural function equivalence, the translator should try to make the target language readers understand and appreciate the original text correctly. Thereby, in the midst of cultural loss, the combination of transliteration and annotation can be an effective approach to achieve cultural function equivalence.

5. Conclusion

Guided by Bassnett's cultural translation theory, this paper studies on how to realize cultural function equivalence in the translation of culturally-loaded linguistic landscapes in China, hoping to provide some constructive and practical translation strategies. In light of Bassnett's cultural translation theory, this paper explores the translation strategies to realize the cultural function equivalence in the translation of culturally-loaded linguistic landscape under three circumstances. In the context of cultural similarity, the translator should explore the origin and function of source language, and try to seek culturally equivalent expressions in the target language; In the context of cultural differences, to achieve cultural function equivalence, domestication is the preferred translation method, with which the translator can have greater initiative and flexibly rewrite or even break the literary form of the original text; In the context of cultural loss, the translator can combine the translation methods of transliteration and annotation to realize cultural function equivalence.

As revealed through this study, to achieve cultural function equivalence in the translation of culturally-loaded linguistic landscape, what a translator should do is to fully comprehend the source language, and adopt different translation strategies creatively and flexibly under different conditions, so the translation can be reader-centered and culture-oriented to achieve cultural function equivalence.

The proper English translation of Chinese culturally-loaded linguistic landscape is helpful to build up China's international image as a culturally advanced country. However, realizing cultural function equivalence in the

translation of culturally-loaded linguistic landscape is by no means easy. Hope the translation strategies provided in this paper can be constructive to the translators to achieve cultural function equivalence in the translation of culturally-loaded linguistic landscapes in China.

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