

Translation Strategies of Culture-Specific Items and Cultural Identity: A Case Study on William A. Lyell's Translation of "Diary of a Madman"

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Abstract: Since the cultural turn in translation studies was proposed, researchers have focused on the cultural elements in the translation. How to construct cultural identity needs to be taken into consideration. Meanwhile, culture-specific items (hereafter, CSIs) are one of the most difficult issues for translators, especially in literary translation. Researchers have put forward different translation strategies to solve the problems of CSIs and explored the use of those strategies in specific textual materials. This work probed the strategies employed in the translation of CSIs in William A. Lyell's English version of "Diary of a Madman" based on Aixelá's model and their effect on the construction of Chinese cultural identity. The results demonstrated that the most frequent strategy was linguistic (non-cultural) translation, followed by absolute universalization. In addition, conservation methods were more helpful in constructing cultural identity than substitution approaches.

Keywords: Culture-specific items, Translation strategies, Literary translation.

1. Introduction

Last century, translation was viewed as a merely linguistic issue. However, Susan Bassnett and André Lefevere proposed the cultural turn in translation studies in 1990, urging that translation studies should move to a broader historical and cultural perspective. Since then, more researchers have regarded translation as an activity that involves cultural elements.

Cultural identity is an important focus in translation from cultural perspectives. It is regarded as the tradition and beliefs shared by a group of people [1]. Venuti argued that translation has great potential for the construction of foreign cultures [2]. Translators try to show the culture of the source language in their translations, particularly in literary translation. It requires cross-cultural competence and familiarity with cultural frames of both languages.

One difficulty confronting translators is to find the equivalent of source texts in target languages. Many words in different languages can hardly be fully equivalent [3]. This might be caused by cultural differences in terms of ideology, beliefs, and values [4]. For those expressions peculiar to a specific culture, researchers coined terms to name them such as cultural items [5], culture-specific items [6], and extralinguistic culture-bound references [7].

To solve the translation problems of culture-specific items, some researchers have proposed different strategies. Venuti introduced domestication and foreignization [8]. Pedersen suggested seven categories on the basis of their SL-oriented or TL-oriented nature [7]. Aixelá divided his eleven strategies into two major groups: conservation (repetition, orthographic adaptation, linguistic (non-cultural) translation, extratextual gloss, intratextual gloss) and substitution (synonymy, limited universalization, absolute universalization, naturalization, deletion, autonomous creation) [6].

As for translation strategies of CSIs, researches based on

textual materials have been conducted. Applying Venuti's model, Farahani and Mokhtari explored translation strategies of CSIs in English version of "Blind Owl" [9]. Akef and Vakili used Aixelá's theory to compare the strategies employed by two translators in their English translations of CSIs in Savushun [10].

The present study intended to identify the translation strategies of CSIs used by William A. Lyell in his English translation of "Diary of a Madman" by Lu Xun and analyze the construction of cultural identity in this text. Specifically, this study was designed to investigate: 1. What strategies were most frequent among the procedures used in Lyell's translation? 2. Did those strategies succeed in presenting the meaning of CSIs? 3. How did they construct Chinese cultural identity?

2. Methodology

This research was a case study with its aim to analyze Lyell's English translation of "Diary of a Madman" based on Aixelá's theory. Both quantitative and qualitative methods were adopted.

The chosen source text was Lu Xun's short story "Diary of a Madman" [11]. Written in April 1918, it is of far-reaching significance in the history of modern Chinese literature. Lyell translated this work to make more people know about this outstanding Chinese author [12]. After the analysis of the original text, 57 CSIs were selected and the strategies used in their translations in the target text were categorized and calculated according to Aixelá's classification.

3. Results

The results are presented below in Table 1. The table shows the frequency and percentage of translation strategies employed in the text.

Table 1. The frequency and percentage of translation strategies in the text.

Translation Strategies		Frequency	Percentage
Conservation	Orthographic Adaptation	6	8%
	Extratextual Gloss	12	16%
	Intratextual Gloss	4	5%
	Linguistic (Non-Cultural) Translation	22	29%
	Total	44	58%
Substitution	Absolute Universalization	19	25%
	Synonym	2	2.5%
	Deletion	5	6.5%
	Naturalization	6	8%
	Total	32	42%
Total		76	100%

According to the data, a total of eight strategies were applied by the translator. As for the two major groups, conservative methods (58%) were used more frequently than substitutive methods (42%). Linguistic (non-cultural) translation and absolute universalization were the most used strategies with 29% and 25% respectively, while synonym and intratextual gloss were the least frequent ones, accounting for 2.5% and 5% respectively.

4. Discussion

The results demonstrated that in the translation of 57 CSIs, Lyell tended to adopt conservation strategies, among which linguistic (non-cultural) translation was used most. The effect of strategies would be discussed below in order of frequency.

4.1. Linguistic (non-cultural) translation

Linguistic (non-cultural) translation is mainly used for proper nouns, idioms, and special linguistic expressions. Proper nouns refer to the name of places and people. The only place name in the story is Wolf Cub Village. Lyell maintained the image of wolves to indicate the fierceness of feudalism. Some people's names have Chinese linguistic features. For example, Venerable Old Zhao is used to call someone who is venerable and old, which performs better than Mr. Zhao to present exotic Chinese flavor to target readers.

Chinese idioms in the text are highly generalized expressions. Lyell attempted to apply this method to convey both surface and deep meanings of those idioms. For instance, qing mian liao ya literally means the frightening faces and long teeth of evil ghosts and is used to describe terrible facial expressions of people, so Lyell translated it as green faces and protruding fangs. Meanwhile, the chosen words green and fangs could be associated with horrible images, successfully presenting the idiom's connotative meaning.

As for special linguistic expressions, Lyell seemed to pay more attention to their literal meanings. In Chinese, chu men simply means going out, but Lyell put an unnecessary emphasis on the gate. His translation made my way out the front gate actually adds additional information that the source text does not intend to express.

4.2. Absolute Universalization

When Lyell found it difficult to maintain the form of CSIs, he would adopt common expressions to explain the items. For most Chinese idioms, the meaning is the top priority over the form. So, ming zhi gu fan is translated as goes ahead and does it even though he knows it's wrong and ren yi dao de as

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However, this strategy would also lead to the loss of some information. For example, niang lao zi means parents. niang is the ancient address of mothers, while lao zi is an oral form of fathers in dialects. The translation fathers and mothers does not show the linguistic and cultural features of the source language.

4.3. Extratextual Gloss

Extratextual gloss is a supplementary method to other strategies. In the target text, footnotes are mostly applied. Examples include official positions and Chinese allusions. Hou bu is translated as await a substantive official appointment with an definition of this official. Lyell also provided a brief introduction to the allusions such as exchange children and eat them and historical figures like Yi Ya and Xu Xilin. Extra explanations allow target readers to know more about the background information about China.

4.4. Naturalization

Naturalization to some extent reduces the exotic flavor of Chinese by replacing CSIs with items familiar to readers. For example, zhi xian, an official in ancient China, is translated as the western official magistrate. But magistrates deal with legal affairs, while zhi xian is in charge of economic, political, and other issues of a county. Therefore, this kind of substitution may lead to misunderstanding. A similar situation can also be seen in the replacement of Chinese food man tou with bread.

4.5. Orthographic Adaptation

Orthographic adaptation involves transcription and transliteration. Out of respect for Chinese forms, the spelling of Chinese Pinyin would usually be retained in Lyell's translation.

It is mainly adopted for translating people's names such as Pan Gu. A special example lies in hai yi na, the transliteration of the English word hyena. To maintain the features of pronunciation of Chinese characters, Lyell did not simply translate it back to hyena but kept its Pinyin *hai-yi-na* and added a footnote to explain it.

4.6. Deletion

Deletion is employed when CSIs are hard to explain. However, some detailed information that represents Chinese culture may be omitted together with those CSIs. In the translation of yi wan cai, the container bowl has not been translated because of the cultural difference that westerners seldom use bowls to hold food.

4.7. Intratextual Gloss

Intratextual gloss is to insert a gloss in the text to solve ambiguities. For example, man tou is replaced by bread, and Lyell added a modifier steamed, trying to inform readers how the food is made and make them realize the differences between man tou and bread. But it may also lead to misunderstanding, as readers will probably regard man tou as a kind of bread instead of a different dish made of steamed dough.

4.8. Synonym

When the same CSIs appear in the text more than once, synonyms will be used to avoid repetition. For example, niang lao zi is translated as fathers and mothers and dads and moms respectively. In the original text, there are only a few repeated CSIs, so this strategy is the least frequent one.

5. Conclusion

The purpose of this study was to analyze the strategies Lyell used in “Diary of a Madman” and the effect of those strategies on the construction of cultural identity. The findings showed that for the 57 items in the original text, Lyell adopted linguistic (non-cultural) translation, absolute universalization, extratextual gloss, naturalization, orthographic adaptation, deletion, intratextual gloss, and synonym. He applied more conservation methods than substitution approaches. The predominant strategy is linguistic (non-cultural) translation, accounting for 29%, followed by absolute universalization, constituting 25%.

The study also suggested that conservation is of great help in constructing Chinese cultural identity. Based on the analysis of cited examples, it is reasonable to argue that the four conservative strategies in varying degrees contribute to the reproduction of the characteristics of Chinese culture, though these procedures may cause misunderstanding because of the choices of the translator. In contrast, substitution methods are less useful and even hinder the construction of cultural identity. Readers might lose the opportunity to get in touch with the foreign culture.

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