

Popular Words Translation Studies and Teaching Chinese as a Second Language

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Abstract: As a product of the new era of the Internet, buzzwords are a linguistic and socio-cultural psychological phenomenon. Moreover, as more and more foreigners begin to learn Chinese, buzzwords are increasingly becoming the object of their interest and learning. Therefore, more and more Chinese buzzwords are being translated for learning. However, as a part of learning and teaching Chinese as a second language, the translation results of popular phrases have also caused certain impacts. Based on relevant literature and corpus analysis, the article explores how different translation strategies of popular phrases have different degrees of influence on second language acquisition and teaching Chinese as a second language in terms of language learning and cross-cultural communication and how the results of popular phrases translated by using either alienation or naturalization translation strategies are unable to show the linguistic and cultural meanings of the source language at the same time, whereas the strategy of using both of them or annotating them can take care of both of them and assist the second language learning. The strategy of using both or annotating them can better take care of both of them and assist second language learners to learn Chinese popular languages better. At the same time, relevant suggestions are put forward from screening and grading teaching of popular phrases and how to utilize translation results to assist learning, such as screening popular phrases, grading teaching or splitting morphemes for interpretation and other teaching strategies.

Keywords: Chinese popular words, Translation, Cross-cultural communication, Teaching Chinese as a second language

1. Introduction

The term "buzzword" is a distinctive creation of the contemporary network-driven era, embodying the spirit of our times. This concept exhibits a profound connection with individuals' daily experiences, functioning not only as a linguistic construct but also as a manifestation of social and cultural psychological dynamics. With the growing development of "Chinese language fever", more and more foreigners are learning Chinese and gradually integrating into Chinese society and life. During the network era, Chinese buzzwords have also become one of their learning objects and channels for understanding Chinese culture. As a part of learning Chinese as a second language, it is inevitable for L2 learners to study buzzwords with the assistance of the medium (mainly English) to learn, so buzzwords are translated into large numbers. However, in the translation process, in addition to

linguistic differences, the cross-cultural background is often easily ignored, thus affecting their understanding and utilization.

Research on the translation of Chinese buzzwords and their application in teaching Chinese as a second language has received increasing attention from the academic community. However, most of the studies focus on the classification of Chinese buzzwords, their translation strategies and their teaching strategies, and few studies link the translation strategies of Chinese buzzwords and their results to second language acquisition or teaching Chinese as a second language. In accordance with the original intent, this paper will initially organize and consolidate pertinent research within the existing literature. It will investigate the influence of translated Chinese popular language texts on second language acquisition and the teaching of Chinese as a second language. This investigation will be grounded in the theoretical framework of translation strategies and cross-cultural perspectives. Simultaneously, this paper will propose pedagogical recommendations derived from the research findings and the extant literature. These recommendations aim to enhance the utilization of Chinese popular language in the context of second language acquisition and teaching Chinese as a second language.

2. Research Method

2.1. Corpus analysis

Based on the classification and translation methods of popular phrases in the literature, it is necessary to analyze and evaluate the existing corpus of popular phrases in online media and the English translation texts of popular phrases for second-language learners (L2 learner) and discuss the possible impact of the translation results on second language learners' learning.

This paper will study the English translations of popular phrases for L2 learners, such as "Learning Chinese Popular Words with Pictures" and "Learning Dictionary of New Chinese Words for Foreigners". From these books, the translations and interpretations of some frequently used phrases and the possible errors in their interpretations will be analyzed. Table 1 is a list of 20 buzzwords selected from the two books and their translations.

Table 1: Chinese-English translations of twenty randomly selected buzzwords

Chinese	English Translation
标题党	Writers of eye-catching titles
菜鸟	Rookie, green hand
蹭饭	Have a meal for free or at a reduced price
潮	Ride the waves; fashionable
出轨	Derail; have sexual indiscretions; engage in an extramarital affair
非主流	Non-mainstream; eccentric
富二代	People born in rich families and expecting to inherit wealth from their parents
感冒	Take a liking to
嘻哈	Hip hop
宅	Stay at home
八卦	Unofficial news and hearsay (hang around and gossip)
打酱油	To buy soy sauce (a term which means the speaker is not involved in a certain matter)
粉丝	Fans (the transliteration of fans)

Table 1: (continued).

给力	Give power (awesome, cool, brilliant or supportive)
忽悠	Hu You (A term from northern China dialect meaning "to mislead, deceive")
火	Fire (extremely popular)
萌	Moe (Japanese) (A word from Japanese anime meaning cute, lovely, Can both be an adjective and a verb)
控	Controlled by "X" (A person with an interest in something bordering on addiction, eg. Horoscope Kong, Microblog Kong, Snack Kong, Collection Kong)
山寨	Mountain Village (cheap or pirated copy of something)
淡定	Dan Ding ("keep a peaceful mind" describing the ability to remain calm in situations of excitement or when faced with temptations)

In addition to textual analysis, reference will also be made to translations and interpretations of related buzzwords in online media to provide a more complete and diversified case for analysis.

2.2. Theoretical Framework

2.2.1. Domesticating translation and foreignizing translation

Buzzwords are characterized by timeliness, innovation, simplicity and humor. And scholars classify them from different perspectives [1]. For example, Sun Yiqian categorizes buzzwords into newly created words, foreign words, old words with new meanings and mass media buzzwords from the perspective of the source of buzzwords, while Cui Huiru categorizes buzzwords into old words with new meanings, newly created Internet words, hybrids, harmonies and others from the perspective of the form of the buzzwords, and Wang Xiaohua categorizes buzzwords from the perspective of the source of the buzzwords in terms of both "linguistics" and "sociology" [2,3]. Wang also categorizes buzzwords from the perspective of origins, such as "brand new concepts", "simplified word formation", "compound word formation", and "old words with new meanings", while Li Tong categorizes popular words into "paraphrased" and "created" [4]. Niu Jingjing categorizes buzzwords into "exotic", "abbreviated", "dialectal", "foreign", "compound", and "old" [5]. Also, Li Tong categorizes buzzwords into "foreign", "compound", and "new" based on modality theory, "dialectal", "playful", "parody" and "metaphorical" [4].

In the light of the translation strategies of Chinese popular languages in the literature, based on the characteristics of popular languages such as epochal, social, and uniqueness, and with the standard of "Xin (faithfulness)" and "Da (expressiveness)", most of the scholars' translation strategies are based on "direct translation", "free translation" and also "transliteration", "interpretation" and "annotation", etc. [2]. For example, Sun Aiping advocates the translation strategy from a cross-cultural perspective [6]. Liu Youquan et al. summarizes that the main translation methods of popular languages are "transliteration", "free translation", "direct translation and annotation method", and "interpretation", based on the consideration of the differences in expression and cultural differences [7]. Niu Jingjing puts forward the strategy of popular language translation from the aspects of "analyzing the etymological background" and "grasping the polysemous nature of the discourse" so as to make the translation of popular language better combine the "expressed meaning" and "unspoken meaning" [5].

Based on the aforementioned popular language translation techniques, the author classifies "free translation" and other translation methods that adapt to the idiomatic expressions and cultural context of the target language as "domesticating strategies." These strategies are designed to enhance the effectiveness of popular language translation. This design aims to facilitate the comprehension and

acceptance of translations in the target language while removing cultural barriers. On the other hand, methods such as "direct translation" and "transliteration" are categorized as "foreignizing strategies." These methods are classified as such because they better reflect the formal and cultural aspects of the source language, preserving its linguistic and cultural nuances and allowing readers from diverse backgrounds to closely engage with and experience the source language. However, it is essential to note that these two translation strategies do not align directly with the previously mentioned translation techniques, as they also extend to the cultural dimension [8].

In light of the profound cultural implications inherent in widely spoken languages and their potent societal and contemporary attributes, a comprehensive examination of the ramifications of translating popular languages and its influence on the educational requirements of second language (L2) learners necessitates the incorporation of both linguistic and cultural facets.

2.2.2. Cross-cultural Perspective

As translation transcends linguistic and cultural boundaries, the significance of adopting a cross-cultural perspective cannot be underestimated. The concept of "cross-cultural communication," as articulated by renowned American anthropologist Hall in his work, "The Silent Language," alludes to the phenomenon wherein individuals from divergent nations, despite their contrasting cultural backgrounds, surmount these cultural barriers to partake in cultural exchanges. In the process, they manifest the distinct attributes of their respective cultures. Nevertheless, disparities in cultural backgrounds inherently reflect the values of specific social groups, thereby inevitably giving rise to psychological distance [9]. Varied cultures exhibit varying degrees of reliance on context, resulting in substantial differences in modes of expression and implicit conveyance of information. Particularly, Chinese, as an exemplar of a high-context culture, necessitates the transformation of its prevailing discourse when translated into low-context cultures, such as English. This transformation aims to render the implicit and intended meanings overt to readers, thereby mitigating cultural disparities, obstructions to comprehension, and potential misinterpretations [10].

3. Analysis

3.1. Study on the Translation of Popular Words

A glance at Table 2 shows that among the popular words for L2 learners, there are roughly several categories of newly created words, old words with new meanings, loan words and dialect words.

Table 2: Collections of 20 popular words

Categories	Popular words	Translation methods
newly created words	富二代 People born into rich families and expecting to inherit wealth from their parents	interpretation
	标题党 Writers of eye-catching titles	free translation
old words with new meaning	山寨 Mountain village (cheap or pirated copy of something)	direct translationannotation
	菜鸟 Rookie,green hand	free translation
	蹭饭 Have a meal for free or at a reduced price	interpretation

Table 2: (continued).

old words with new meaning (continued)	潮 Ride the waves; fashionable	free translation
	火 Fire (extremely popular)	direct translation and annotation
	出轨 Derail; have sexual indiscretions; engage in an extramarital affair	direct translation and interpretation
	非主流 Non-mainstream;eccentric	Direct translation and free translation
	淡定 Dan Ding ("keep a peaceful mind" describing the ability to remain calm in situations of excitement or when faced with temptations)	Transliteration,free translation and annotation
	粉丝 Fans (the transliteration of fans)	free translation and annotation
	打酱油 To buy soy sauce (a term which means the speaker is not involved in a certain matter)	direct translation and annotation
	感冒 Take a liking to	free translation
dialect words	给力 Give power (awesome, cool, brilliant or supportive)	direct translation and annotation
	忽悠 Hu You (A term from northern China dialect meaning "to mislead, deceive")	Transliteration and annotation
	八卦 Unofficial news and hearsay (hang around and gossip)	free translation and annotation
loan words	控 Controlled by "X" (A person with an interest in something bordering on addiction, eg. Horoscope Kong, Microblog Kong, Snack Kong, Collection Kong)	direct translation and annotation
	萌 Moe (Japanese) (A word from Japanese anime meaning cute, lovely, Can both be an adjective and a verb)	Transliteration and annotation
	宅 Stay at home	free translation
	嘻哈 Hip hop	transliteration

Most of these translation methods are interpretations or annotations based on translations, direct translations and free translations. They facilitate L2 learners to further understand the hidden meanings behind the buzzwords while intuitively understanding the literal meanings of Chinese buzzwords, thus reducing confusion and misunderstanding. Nonetheless, some translations still appear somewhat strained and may readily mislead learners. For instance, the literal rendition of the colloquial term "火" as "fire" or "控" and its direct translation of "controlled" diverge significantly from the intended meaning of the colloquial expression. Consequently, the precision of translating colloquial terms and the associated strategies necessitates further consideration during the translation process.

Among these categories, the group of buzzwords referred to as "old words with new meaning" dominates the landscape. Translating such buzzwords requires diligent attention not only to the challenges of cross-cultural communication but also to the original significance of these buzzwords and their expanded interpretations and contextual applications subsequent to their rise as buzzwords. This meticulous approach is vital for minimizing or circumventing usage inaccuracies.

3.2. The effect of translation outcomes in second language acquisition

Examining the translations mentioned above, in terms of translation strategies, the "foreignizing" approach is predominantly employed for popular phrases that pose challenges in finding closely matching equivalents in the target language, as exemplified by the transliterations "大白Dabai" and "忽悠Huyou." Conversely, those expressions that can be readily conveyed with similar meanings are rendered using the "domesticating" method, thereby facilitating quicker comprehension for second language learners. Terms such as "八卦gossip" and "潮fashionable" fall under this category. For the benefit of second language learners seeking to comprehend and master these buzzwords, certain expressions adopting the foreignizing translation strategy are supplemented with explanatory notes. These annotations serve the dual purpose of allowing learners to observe the linguistic form of the source language while grasping the intended meaning.

However, both the translation of popular languages and the process of second language acquisition of popular languages essentially involve cross-cultural communication (Zhou Mi, 2022). When learning Chinese popular expressions, L2 learners are influenced by their cultural backgrounds. The translation of these expressions aids them in unravelling the "explicit meaning." However, the "implicit meaning" remains concealed beneath the linguistic symbols, encompassing social, situational, historical, and political connotations. This hidden layer represents a fundamental aspect of Chinese popular language culture, and comprehending it may still present limitations, necessitating further cultural adaptation.

In light of the translation outcomes and the associated challenges, L2 learners may encounter difficulties during the process of acquiring popular languages due to varying translation strategies.

3.2.1. Adoption of foreignizing strategies for transliteration or direct translation

The translation strategy and its resulting translations, although they facilitate learners' intuitive grasp of the original phonetic and textual characteristics of Chinese buzzwords, leave substantial doubts regarding their actual and implied meanings. These obstacles loom large in terms of comprehension. For novice learners, such translations offer limited utility, potentially leading to misinterpretations, as exemplified by direct translations like "火" for "fire," necessitating further investigation by either instructors or learners themselves, which poses a more formidable challenge. In contrast, advanced learners find these translations do not overtly convey the meanings of buzzwords, but instead, they serve to pique students' curiosity, fostering in-depth exploration, discussions, and collaborative learning with peers and educators.

3.2.2. Adopting domesticating strategies, free translation or applying interpretation

The outcomes of such translations serve to maximize the literal and implicit connotations of popular idiomatic expressions. This proves beneficial for students, facilitating their comprehension of both the literal and the underlying implications, encompassing the trending events associated with these idioms. However, this approach relies to some extent on the English medium to aid students in grasping these idioms. Consequently, it may not adequately capture the cultural nuances of Chinese idioms due to the influence of cultural filters. This can result in deviations, with certain interpretations falling short of fully elucidating the genuine meanings of the Chinese idioms. For instance, the translation of "蹭饭" as "Have a meal for free or at a reduced price" by means of interpretation closely parallels the literal rendering as "rubbing rice." Consequently, the practice of free translation or interpretation tends to neglect the requirements of Chinese learners seeking to comprehend and master the Chinese language and only plays a subsidiary role in their acquisition of the cultural dimensions inherent to these idioms.

3.2.3. Both methods

Some of the popular language translations use annotations based on the basic translation methods, i.e., transliterations, direct translations or free translations, which take the preservation of the Chinese textual forms, the interpretation of the underlying meanings and related background events into account.

It is conducive to the learning of the language and textual forms of the popular languages by beginners and intermediate and advanced learners as well as the understanding of the underlying meanings [11].

3.3. Suggestions for teaching Chinese as a second language

Based on the translation results of Chinese popular phrases for second language learners mentioned above, the following suggestions are proposed for teaching Chinese as a second language:

Following the selection of popular phrases suitable for classroom teaching, they should be taught at varying proficiency levels [12]. For beginners, after presenting the phonetics and the original text of the popular Chinese phrases, translations can be employed judiciously [13]. It is advisable to use translation results in the form of annotations to aid in students' comprehension. When necessary, free translations or interpretations can be used for clarification. In the case of advanced learners, a more direct explanation in Chinese is encouraged. They should make connections with the buzzwords using the vocabulary they have already acquired. This approach facilitates the learning of buzzwords in a manner that integrates the new with the familiar, thus keeping in line with the students' Chinese language proficiency [14].

Utilizing translation appropriately to facilitate learning allows students to gain deeper insights into the cultural background and related events associated with the buzzwords [15]. This approach helps students adapt better to the culture and reduces their reliance on media language.

Teaching should be based on the combination of translation results with the original textual form of Chinese buzzwords. Translation results merely provide an interpretation of the meaning of buzzwords and often do not delve into the buzzword text itself. Therefore, in a Chinese as a second language classroom, teachers should pay more attention to breaking down the morphemes of buzzwords. They can then further explain the meaning of these buzzwords by incorporating their phonetics and characters, enabling students to develop a profound understanding. This understanding goes beyond the superficial meaning of the buzzwords and extends to the study of Chinese language and characters, allowing students to appreciate the beauty of the language and culture.

4. Conclusion

The various types of buzzwords can be broadly categorized into two main groups: newly coined words and established words imbued with new meanings. Additionally, there are instances of buzzwords originating from dialects and loanwords. These necessitate diverse translation strategies, including direct translation, free translation, transliteration, and interpretation, which may be based on either direct or free translation methods. Moreover, translations can be classified into domesticating and foreignizing strategies, taking into account the cultural context.

Certain translation outcomes may seem far-fetched and require further scrutiny. These translations often deviate significantly from the linguistic and cultural nuances intended by the buzzwords. For instance, the "foreignizing" strategies, like direct translation, maintain the original linguistic structure, aiding learners in grasping the essence of Chinese buzzwords. Nevertheless, they still demand additional explanations to bridge the cultural gaps and prevent comprehension obstacles. In contrast, the domesticating strategies, such as free translation, offer learners quicker understanding of the buzzword's meaning but sacrifice the authentic linguistic form and cultural connotations, resulting in potential misinterpretations.

This paper proposes pedagogical recommendations pertaining to buzzwords. After meticulously screening buzzwords based on their practicality and other relevant factors, a tiered teaching approach should be adopted, tailored to the students' proficiency levels. Additionally, the paper suggests that educators should not over-rely on translation results and instead emphasize deconstructing and elaborating on buzzwords themselves, fostering an understanding of the associated social trends and cultural underpinnings.

The research explores the influence of buzzword translation on L2 acquisition within the contexts of buzzword translation and L2 acquisition. It critically evaluates the translation methodologies and their associated challenges, thereby stimulating further investigations into buzzword translation and furnishing additional resources for L2 acquisition, particularly in the realm of language and culture instruction beyond the confines of textbooks.

However, it's important to acknowledge the limitations of this study. The availability of a limited corpus and a lack of comprehensive research on learners' acquisition of buzzwords and their comprehension of buzzword translations underscore the need for further investigation. The hope is to gather a more extensive data set, refine the establishment of relevant corpora, and conduct a more precise examination and analysis of the challenges and effects arising from mediated language learning among Chinese second language learners.

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