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Research on Translation of Folk Culture Lexis in Northern Anhui Province from the Perspective of Eco-translatology[1]

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Abstract

At present, in order to protect the cultural gene of Northern Anhui and promote dissemination of its folk culture, this paper, informed by the theory of Eco-Translatology, takes the folk culture of Northern Anhui as the research object and focuses on the English translation practice of folk culture lexis in this region. On the basis of collecting and sorting out the corpus of folk culture lexis in Northern Anhui, this paper divides the lexis into three categories: material folk custom, social folk custom and spiritual folk custom, aiming to analyze the difficulties and problems encountered in the process of English translation. The study also explores effective English translation strategies from the perspective of language, culture and communication, so as to improve the accuracy and acceptance of the English translation of folk culture lexis in Northern Anhui, and provide a theoretical basis and practical approach for its cross-cultural communication and transmission.

Keywords

Northern Anhui; Folk Culture Lexis; Eco-Translatology

1. Introduction

In the context of enhancing the influence of Chinese civilization and promoting Chinese culture to the world, folk culture, as the historical memory of the Chinese people for thousands of years, condenses the living conditions and collective wisdom of the Chinese people. Regarded as an important part of Chinese stories and a vital carrier of Chinese voice (Yu & Wen, 2024), it has irreplaceable value. And the unique natural and cultural landscape of Northern Anhui has nurtured a rich variety of folk traditions, which is not only the embodiment of local identity, but also an important cultural resource to promote regional sustainable development. Therefore, this has certain significance to conduct a systematic review of folk culture lexis in Northern Anhui and research on the difficulties and strategies of its English translation, so as to promote the international dissemination of folk culture in Northern Anhui and support the national strategy of "Chinese culture going global."

Literature review shows that domestic studies in folk culture translation mostly focuses on the translation strategies of folk culture lexis in literary works. For example, Dang Zhengsheng (2015) analyzed the translation principles of folk culture lexis such as "yasuiqian" (lucky money) in the English version of *Dream of the Red Chamber*. Li Weitang (2016) studied the translation strategies of Western Hunan folk culture in the English version of *Border Town*. Yu Cuihong (2023) explored the cognitive translation of Chinese Expressions Loaded with Folk Culture in *Life and Death Are Wearing Me Out* and its English translation. These studies primarily focus on specific literary works, with

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little attention paid to the translation of regional folk culture lexis. Existing regional studies mostly concentrated on ethnic minority areas, such as Wu Fei's (2014) research on the translation and transmission of Guizhou ethnic folk culture from the perspective of foreignization, and Xiong Wei and An Wenjing's (2019) studied on strategies for promoting Zhuang ethnic folk culture to the world. Searching on the CNKI with related keywords like "Northern Anhui folk culture lexis", the author, however, found no relevant data, which shows that study on English translation of Northern Anhui folk culture lexis is deficient now. This research on English translation strategies for its folk culture lexis, therefore, is of practical importance, since it can collect and the abundant folk cultural resources in Northern Anhui region, and spread it across the world.

The folk culture lexis in Northern Anhui carries meanings that do not travel easily across languages. In bilingual publicity materials and local museums, English translations of these terms are uneven—some are accurate, some are misleading, and some miss the point entirely. When a translation falls short, the cultural image it carries gets distorted, and the deeper meaning behind the term is lost on the reader. The translator's job, then, is not to move words from one language to another but to find ways of making the culture behind those words accessible to a new audience. This means paying attention to how the target culture receives and interprets what is being offered. Eco-translatology deals with this challenge directly. By treating translation as an act of adaptation and selection within a living cultural environment, it gives translators a practical framework for spreading these terms appropriately. With three-dimensional transformation perspective—linguistic, cultural, and communicative—translators can adapt and make selections to produce a target text, which functions in target language eco-environment in a way nearly equivalent to how the source text functions in its original context. In doing so, translation eco-balance can be achieved. Accordingly, this research, from the theoretical perspective of Eco-translatology, intended to explore how to carry out English translation of folk culture lexis in Northern Anhui, so as to provide a practical approach for dissemination of folk culture of Northern Anhui.

2. Theoretical Introduction

Eco-Translatology was initially proposed by Professor Hu Gengshen (2004) based on Darwin's theory of biological evolution, with its core concept being "translation as adaptation and selection". Hu (2013) defined translation as "a selective activity in which the translator adapts to the eco-translation environment and transplants the text." This theory emphasizes that during the translation process, the translator must adapt to the eco-translation environment (i.e., the world as represented by the source text, source language, and target language, encompassing elements such as language, communication, culture, society, and target readers etc.). Based on this environment, the translator makes "selections" in pursuit of the best for survival, thereby producing a translation with the highest "degree of integrated adaptation and selection" and achieving translation eco-balance. Translation eco-balance is the ultimate goal that the translators pursued.

The challenges, such as the absence of such words and the loss of cultural imagery, appeared in translating Northern Anhui's folk culture lexis, are, in essence, issues of adaptation and selection. With distinct ideological systems, Chinese and Western cultures have given rise to unique folk traditions. In the process of translation, folk culture is transplanted from its original cultural eco-environment and must adapt to the target eco-translation environment so as to be understood and accepted by target-language readers. Hu Gengshen (2013) proposed that translators working within eco-translatology should adapt and select across three dimensions: linguistic, cultural, and communicative. This study draws on that framework to examine how folk culture lexis from Northern Anhui can be rendered into English. Translating these terms is not a matter of choosing the right English word and transplant it. The source text carries cultural meanings that target readers may not immediately grasp, and the translator must find expressions that read naturally in English while still bearing what the original intended to communicate. A translation that sounds fluent but erases the cultural reference has not done its job; neither has one that preserves every detail but leaves the reader confused. Getting it right means satisfying all three concerns — linguistic, cultural, and communicative — at the same time.

Eco-translatology also draws on Western scholar's attention. In *Translation and Globalization*, Michael Cronin (2003) proposed the idea of "Translation Ecology" for the first time, pointing out that translation does not happen in isolation—it is shaped by the forces of globalization. When cultures meet through translation, the work of bridging differences becomes especially complex if what is being translated carries deep folk traditions. Folk culture lexis may look stable on the page, but the readers who encounter them come from very different backgrounds and bring different expectations. Translators, then, need to take into account target readers and make active choices about how to make

these terms understandable across languages.

Using Eco-translatology's three-dimensional transformation, this research examines examples of Northern Anhui's folk culture lexis and discusses translation strategies for these terms.

3. Case Analysis

Folk culture lexis carries the essence of local traditions in linguistic form. It consists of specific words, phrases, and idioms that reflect a community's material life, social practices, and spiritual values. According to the classification proposed by Mai Hongyu and Guan Rongzhen (2012), folk culture lexis can be divided into three categories: 1) Material folk culture lexis: including terms related to food, clothing, housing, production; 2) Social folk culture lexis: encompassing vocabulary associated with family, interpersonal communication, rituals, customs, festivals; 3) Spiritual folk culture lexis: such as those reflecting religious beliefs, myths, ballads, proverbs, rituals, and superstitions (Zhao, 2022). Based on above classification, the folk culture lexis collected from Northern Anhui will be categorized and analyzed through the three-dimensional perspective—linguistic, cultural, and communicative—to examine the adaptive choices made by translators during the translation process, with the aim of exploring effective translation strategies for Northern Anhui's folk culture lexis.

3.1 Translation of Material Folk Culture Lexis in Northern Anhui

The material folk culture lexis in Northern Anhui carries clear regional features. The names of local snacks and specialties, for example, often point to how the food is made or what it is used for. Translating these terms means going beyond word-for-word substitution. Translators need to account for how both languages work and adapt their choices to fit the context of both the source and target texts. Done well, this lets the translation take root in the target language and be understood by its readers.

Example 1: 格拉条 (Gelatiao) is a traditional noodle from Fuyang, Northern Anhui. The name comes from Fuyang local dialect word "格拉", which means to mix or stir. This dish starts with a firm dough pressed through a machine into thick, chewy noodles, which are then tossed with some ingredients like sesame paste, bean sprouts, chopped celery, etc. Simply translating it as "thick noodles" misses what makes the dish distinct — the dialect origin, the distinctive preparation, even the key ingredients. Transliteration alone, on the other hand, leaves target readers with a meaningless string of sounds. Faced with this dilemma, the translator has to weigh the source cultural context and the preference of English-speaking readers for descriptive definitions. The translator here uses transliteration with annotation: *Gelatiao: pressed wheat noodles with sesame sauce and spices, a specialty of Fuyang*. This way, readers learn what the noodles are made of and how they are prepared — details that help them understand the dish in their own cultural terms. Thus, the cultural gap is narrowed without omitting the term's local flavor.

Example 2: 枕头馍 (Zhentoumo) is a large steamed bun from Fuyang in northern Anhui. The name of this local food goes back to the early Southern Song Dynasty. At that time, local people made wheat buns for soldiers fighting the Jin army. The buns were so big that soldiers can take it as a pillow during the march, hence the name. The shape and story behind the food are the unique feature of it. A direct translation like "Pillow Bun" in English would leave English readers wondering what the connection is between a pillow and something you eat. Furthermore, while Chinese readers with cultural background naturally understand the implied relationship between "枕头" and "馍" without conjunction, English, by contrast, requires this relationship to be stated more clearly. The translator therefore adopts "Pillow-shaped Steamed Bun", which keeps the visual image intact and preserves the cultural image, while accurately specifying that it is a steamed bun rather than bread. Cultural meaning and basic clarity are both kept in the process.

3.2 Translation of Social Folk Culture Lexis in Northern Anhui

Social folk culture lexis in Northern Anhui covers local ways of living, interpersonal relationships, and customs of local people. Hu Gengshen has argued that translators need to stay alert to cultural differences so that the target text does not distort the source through the lens of the translator's own culture. The linguistic shift involved should take into account the cultural system on both sides, allowing adaptive transformation between cultures.

Example 1: 花鼓灯 (Huagudeng), a folk performance tradition rooted in the Huai River Basin, brings together singing, dancing, percussion, comedy, and acrobatics into a single stage form. It was among the first entries on national intangible cultural heritage of China. Translating the name literally as "Flower-Drum-Lantern" would leave the target readers confused, since they have no real sense of what the performance actually involves. The cultural

dimension in eco-translatology calls for the source material to be "replanted" in the target culture. And in this case, the translator chooses literal translation with annotation: *Huagudeng performance (a traditional Anhui folk dance integrating vigorous drumming, singing, and acrobatics)*. Rather than explaining each character ("花", "鼓", "灯"), the translator uses descriptive language to clearly convey the characteristics of this performance to the target audience.

Example 2: 送粥米 (Songzhoumi) is a folk custom practiced when a baby is born. Relatives and friends bring the new mother nutritious foods — eggs, brown sugar, millet — along with baby clothing to celebrate the childbirth. The name itself highlights the staple foods being gifted, but the social purpose is celebration, not a literal delivery of porridge and rice. A word-for-word translation such as "Sending Congee and Rice" would miss the congratulatory meaning entirely and leave English readers wondering what purpose the behavior serves. In Western culture, the closest equivalent is the "Baby Shower", and borrowing that term as a reference point gives the reader something familiar to hold on to. The translator therefore renders it as *A post-birth celebration similar to a Baby Shower*, which shifts attention away from the specific food items and toward the ritual's social meaning — An adaptive selection is made. The analogy does not erase the cultural specifics, but it gives the target reader a way in.

3.3 Translation of Spiritual Folk Culture Lexis in Northern Anhui

The spiritual folk culture lexis of Northern Anhui largely originates from local beliefs and psychological aspirations. These terms carry the marks which are deeply tied to this particular place. Translating them is not simply about seeking equivalents. The source culture takes certain things for granted that the target culture may not know at all. At the same time, the translation has to actually communicate — not just transfer meaning, but let the reader feel something of what the original carries.

Example: 送灶 (Songzao) is a traditional ritual in northern Anhui. Generally, families send off the Kitchen God on the 23rd or 24th of the twelfth lunar month. The custom involves offering sticky sweets to Kitchen God. the idea is that the sweets will "stick to his mouth" so that when he reports the household to the Jade Emperor, he will speak well of them. A direct translation like "Seeing off the Kitchen God" gives the right image but does not explain cultural meaning much. A target reader encountering this phrase for the first time would not know what people actually do, why sweets matter, or what families hopes to gain. The translator therefore must prioritize communicative accessibility and uses transliteration with annotation: *Songzao, a ritual performed on the 23rd or 24th of the 12th lunar month where families offer sticky sweets to the Kitchen God to ensure he gives a favorable report to the Jade Emperor*. The phonetic form "Songzao" keeps the original name, while the annotation supplies the context what the reader needs to know. This transformation adapts to "eco-environment" of target language by letting the reader understand not just the name of the custom but what it means to people who follow it.

4. Conclusion

This study examines how eco-translatology can help translate Northern Anhui's folk culture terms into English. The framework treats translators not as one who simply substitute words by words, but as decision-makers who figure out how to carry meaning across cultural boundaries. Through case analysis, the study shows that translating these terms is not just about getting the English right. It requires understanding what these terms mean in their original context and how target readers might receive them. Translators use different approaches depending on the term — sometimes keeping the original sound with an explanation, sometimes finding a cultural equivalent, sometimes just making sure the reader gets the point. There is no one-size-fits-all method; the choice depends on what the term carries and what the reader needs to know. A next step would be to build a systematic database of Northern Anhui's folk culture terminology, which could help translators work more consistently and promote broader cultural exchange.

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