



Comprehending Abilities of Translation Strategies for Conveying Semantic Features and Chinese Culture of Chinese Slangs

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Abstract

Translation, from a cultural perspective, is the exchange and communication between two distinct cultures, posing a challenge to the translator to possess not only fluency but also a deep understanding of the history and culture of both languages. This study examined the comprehension abilities for translation strategies of native Chinese English primary learners, and for conveying literal and semantic meanings of Chinese slangs in both source and target languages. A qualitative research design guided this study, with the help of a Chinese English comprehension test on Chinese slang designed, to judge learners' knowledge and understanding of the translation strategies and semantic and linguistic features of the Chinese slangs. The sample comprised 60 Chinese students from Shaoguan University, while the major data source was the Chinese English Dictionary of Modern Chinese Slang. The findings revealed learners' weak metaphorical competence hampering their translation skills, and the teachers' failure to effect long-term teaching and translation practices of Chinese slangs. It is recommended that teaching should be more focused on understanding the difference between the thinking model and language expression between Chinese and English. Training courses for translators should be organized to prioritize cultural proficiency and innovative translation techniques.

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Keywords: Chinese Slang, Translation Strategies, Semantic Features, Chinese Culture, Comprehending Abilities.

Introduction

Language is intricately connected to culture, which refers to a socially learned set of behaviours and beliefs. A linguistic culture, therefore, manifests a population's present-day lifestyle and the long-standing national, historical, and religious culture spanning centuries. A language encompasses several genres, proverbs, sayings, and oral traditions passed down by its speakers, which fundamentally distinguishes one language from another. Translation, from a cultural perspective, therefore, is the exchange and

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communication between two distinct cultures that shape human life. An artistic translator is required to possess fluency in a foreign language and a deep understanding of the language's history and culture. Additionally, they must know international cultural relations, psychology, and the histories and religions of various peoples. The translation process is complicated and requires linguistic expertise and an in-depth comprehension of the social and cultural intricacies involved. Translators must possess a thorough understanding of the language being translated, which is of vital importance during the translation process, due to the intricate connections that exist between language and culture. To do this, the translator must establish a strong rapport with the cultural context in which the source language originated and possess a deep understanding of the culture associated with the target language. This is especially true when translating Chinese slang, which is firmly ingrained in Chinese culture and frequently holds meanings that are challenging to explain in other languages. The semantic characteristics and cultural connotations of Chinese slang, which are frequently exclusive to the Chinese language and culture, present a problem for translators of Chinese slang.

An inherent difficulty arises when understanding Chinese slang due to its extensive semantic dimensions and deeply ingrained cultural subtleties. Efficient translation strategies are crucially required for properly communicating these components to non-native audiences. Translators, linguists, and scholars interested in cross-cultural communication and the intricacies of translating culturally significant phrases might acquire valuable insights by studying the functioning of these strategies (Yuan, 2020). A comprehensive understanding of translation approaches is also necessary for conveying Chinese slang's semantic qualities and cultural essence (Tsoi, 2022). Additionally, to succeed in this understanding, translation procedures for Chinese slang must effectively balance preserving the original meaning.

This study evaluates the comprehension abilities of native Chinese English primary learners for translation strategies in conveying literal and semantic meanings of Chinese slang in its source language and target language. This study first explored the intricate connection between language and culture to understand diverse strategies required for overcoming linguistic and cultural barriers and then explored what different translation methods are required to preserve Chinese slang's cultural essence and semantic integrity.

Literature Review

Traditionally, translation has been regarded as a means of exchanging information between distinct languages. Nevertheless, some translation theorists advocate for the notion that translation is primarily a linguistic process, while acknowledging that it fundamentally involves the transmission of meaning across different cultures or as a means of intercultural communication (Lefevers, 1992; Li & Ligang, 1999; Partridge et al., 1992; Robyns & Lefevere, 1994). Language also serves as a versatile instrument that individuals from diverse civilizations across the globe can utilize (Tursunovich, 2022). Communicating across multiple cultures and languages is characterized by substantial intricacy. Translation thus goes beyond a mere literal conversion of language; instead, it is a deliberate endeavor to achieve the most impactful outcome within a particular audience (Sang & Zhang, 2008). This applies to the Chinese English- Chinese translation as it involves a transfer of information and communication between the two cultures of China and England. Translators of this inter-cultural exchange must acknowledge the cultural differences, analyze the advantages and disadvantages of various translation methods, and choose the most suitable one for addressing these cultural variations (Bloomfield & Sapir, 1922; Collinson, Sapir, & de Saussure, 1924; Sapir, 1921).

The Chinese slang, being an indispensable part of Chinese culture, is colloquially flavored. Each slang phrase in Chinese culture conveys multiple levels of meaning, ranging from literal meanings to more profound, context-driven implications tightly woven into the fabric of the culture. The interpretations of these meanings can vary from literal to more profound. Translating these phrases accurately necessitates a comprehensive method beyond mere linguistic skill. This strategy requires a deep understanding of the cultural background and the ability to handle the intricate nuances of meaning inherent in slang vocabulary. The Chinese-English Dictionary of Modern Chinese Slang, compiled by Li & Ligang (1999), is a primary source text to analyze the Chinese slang.

There is no dearth of studies on translation of the Chinese slang, which include studies on research design, interpretation of the Chinese culture reflected by the semantic meanings of Chinese slangs, and translation strategies such as domestication and foreignization (Venuti, 2017).

The comprehension of translation approaches is necessary for conveying Chinese slang's semantic qualities and cultural essence. Translators encounter significant difficulties with Chinese slang, as it has cultural subtleties and historical allusions. To succeed, translation procedures for Chinese slang must effectively balance preserving the original meaning while ensuring the translated phrase is comprehensible and meaningful to the target audience. This task not only involves a direct translation but also requires adapting cultural references and idiomatic expressions to preserve the intended meaning of the original term. Translators must consider the cultural significance of slang and find alternative terminology or creative

methods to communicate the same idea in the target language effectively. In Chinese slang, this intricate task exemplifies the dynamic interaction between language and culture, emphasizing the imperative of cultural proficiency in translation and underscoring the significance of cultural literacy.

As an element of colloquial spoken language, Chinese slang is vividly flavored with local color. The form of Chinese slang does not stick to one pattern, and the content of Chinese slang relates to everything involved in human life, which makes it catchy, easy to communicate, and full of interest. Since the integration of cultural diversity between China and the world is ever closer, the translation of Chinese culture plays a significant role in building the discourse system with Chinese characteristics, promoting Chinese culture to move further into the world and driving world civilization harmony in diversity. As an indispensable part of Chinese culture, translating Chinese slang is crucial to demonstrating distinct cultural charm. So far, because of the universality of Chinese slang, all-around progress has not been made in developing Chinese slang translation. To help foreign readers experience the extensive and profound beauty of Chinese slang, the cognitive equivalence of both side readers needs to be achieved. This study evaluates the comprehension abilities of native Chinese English primary learners for translation strategies in conveying literal and semantic meanings of Chinese slang in its source language and target language.

The rich semantic qualities of the Chinese slang include metaphor, allusion, and humor, due to which the Chinese slang is easily identifiable. However, because these characteristics have their origins in historical, social, and cultural circumstances specific to China, the semantic richness of Chinese slang is a substantial difficulty for translators, who are tasked with discovering ways to transmit these meanings in the language they translate accurately (Xiao, 2023). For example, the slang term "吃瓜群众" (chī guā qún zhòng) translates to "melon-eating crowd." This slang is used metaphorically to refer to individuals who only observe a scene without actively participating. Not only does the translation of this term involve language equivalence, but it also necessitates an awareness of its cultural connotation (Xiao, 2023). The translator's cultural competency is crucial in achieving a harmonious blend of domestication and foreignization strategies. This equilibrium guarantees that the translated piece is easily understandable to the target audience while also maintaining its cultural authenticity (Venuti, 2017).

Moreover, translating Chinese slangs becomes more challenging due to their rich semantic features and deep cultural connotations. It is also difficult to convey these elements to non-Chinese audiences due to their intricacies, even if the translation is of high quality and effectively executed. Effective translation strategies consider both the literal and contextual meanings of slangs to preserve their intended impact. Innovative approaches, such as adaptive translation and cultural transposition, which aim to bridge the cultural gap by contextualizing Chinese slangs within the cultural framework of the target language (Liu & Li, 2019; Pesaro, 2022). These strategies highlight the importance of a nuanced approach that goes beyond mere linguistic translation, taking into account the cultural and societal implications embedded within Chinese slangs (Ma & Wang, 2018; Shei & Gao, 2017). Comprehension of these slangs in translation is enhanced when translators employ a deep understanding of both source and target cultures, allowing for a more faithful and impactful rendition of the original text (Pesaro, 2022; Tan, 2023).

Many Chinese slang convey cultural meanings firmly rooted in China's culture. Because of the differences in cultural backgrounds, it may be challenging to convey these ideas while speaking a language other than English. A good translation of Chinese slang necessitates a thorough comprehension of Chinese culture and the capacity to locate analogous terms in the target language that convey the same cultural relevance. For instance, the slang phrase "躺平" (tǎng píng) represents a passive attitude towards life and a rejection of cultural demands. Although it technically means "lying flat," it denotes a passive approach towards life. For translation, it is necessary to grasp the cultural phenomenon that this phrase reflects and locate an appropriate counterpart in the translated language (Xiong, 2023).

Several different translation strategies have been offered to translate Chinese slang. Each of these strategies has its advantages and disadvantages. The literal translation, the free translation, and the adaptive translation all fall under this category. The process of translating slang terms word for word from the source language into the target language is referred to as literal translation. This tactic is frequently utilized in situations in which the meaning of the slang term is unambiguous and uncomplicated. On the other hand, literal translation might be troublesome when the slang phrase includes cultural connotations that are difficult to comprehend in the language they are being translated into. Literal translation can lead to a loss of meaning and cultural importance, which makes it less successful in expressing the entire variety of Chinese slang (Araújo, Pereira, & Benevenuto, 2020; Teng & Crezee, 2022).

Instead of translating the precise words of the slang phrase, free translation entails conveying the meaning of the term being translated. Using this method, the translator makes possible more effective communication of the semantic characteristics and cultural connotations of the slang phrase. On the other hand, free translation may not always be able to convey the entire complexity of the slang phrase. It may occasionally result in the loss of the original linguistic form. Specifically, Yihong (2024) this indicates that free translation is particularly beneficial for translating Chinese slang with complex cultural meanings. It provides greater flexibility in identifying corresponding expressions in the target language (Yihong, 2024).

Changing a slang phrase to be appropriate for the target language's cultural context is called adaptive translation. It is common practice to employ this tactic when the slang phrase is not directly equivalent in the target language and where the term's meaning demands an inventive approach. Adaptive translation is the most efficient method for translating Chinese slang. This allows for preserving the original language's semantic characteristics and cultural connotations. On the other hand, the adaptive translation strategy necessitates a profound comprehension of both the source and target cultures, making it a problematic method for translators (Xiong, 2023).

Several case studies have investigated the efficiency of various translation procedures for Chinese slang. The translation of Chinese slang in English subtitles of Chinese films (Sun, 2022). According to the study's findings, adaptive translation was the most successful technique since it enabled the preservation of both the semantic characteristics and the cultural implications of the target language. On the other hand, the research also found that adaptive translation necessitated a significant amount of cultural awareness and inventiveness on the translator's side (Sun, 2022). The translation of Chinese slang in literary works was the subject of another study conducted by Liu (2019). The study found that free translation was the most widely employed technique. This was because it provided greater flexibility in communicating the meaning of slang terminology. However, the research additionally discovered that free translation frequently led to the loss of the original linguistic form and the cultural value of the original text (Liu, 2019).

Due to its complex semantic elements and cultural connotations, translating Chinese slang presents substantial difficulties. Several distinct translation systems, such as literal, free, and adaptive, represent different approaches to solving these issues. Literal translation can result in a loss of meaning; however, free translation provides greater flexibility, and adaptive translation is the most effective method for keeping both semantic elements and cultural implications. On the other hand, adaptive translation calls for significant cultural awareness and creative thinking. To express the semantic characteristics and cultural aspects of Chinese slang, future research must continue to investigate the comprehension capabilities of various translation methodologies in conveying the semantic and cultural features of Chinese slang and its application for teaching and learning Chinese slang.

Method

Research Design

A qualitative research design guided this study, with the help of a Chinese English comprehension test on Chinese slang was designed to evaluate the comprehension abilities of adult learners with both Chinese and English bilingual languages on the translation strategies and semantic and linguistic features of selected Chinese slang.

Sampling and Data Collection

The sample of the study comprised 60 Chinese students from Shaoguan University, who willingly participated in this research and responded to the questionnaire. The Chinese-English Dictionary of Modern Chinese Slang compiled by Li & Ligang (1999) was the primary source text for data collection for this study. This dictionary has also been authenticated as the primary resource for analyzing Chinese slang for the purpose of translation strategies such as domestication and foreignization (Rohsenow, 2002), highly recommended to compilers and interpreters of Chinese culture reflected in semantic meanings of Chinese slangs.

Research Instrument

A questionnaire comprising 54 multiple-choice questions was prepared to examine Chinese slangs extracted from the Chinese English Dictionary of Modern Chinese Slang. The questionnaire contained two sections: Chinese to English and English to Chinese. Each section included three parts of speech: nouns, verbs, and adjectives. The questions were designed to assess various purposes such as identifying translation methods or strategies, comparing semantic meanings between Chinese and English, and so on. There were 54 multiple-choice questions, and the responses were rated on a 5-point Likert scale.

Data Analysis

The descriptive and inferential statistics were measured to conduct the data analysis. Descriptive statistics included means, standard deviations, and frequency distributions, which introduced characteristics of the sample. A significance level of $p < 0.05$ was set for all the questionnaire items, ensuring that findings with a probability lower than 5% would be considered statistically significant. The Skewness and Kurtosis values indicated that the sample was normally distributed, and no further outlier detection or removal of questionnaire items was required.

Results and Discussion

Table 1 shows the descriptive statistics of the sample. There were 60 valid samples with no outliers. The data indicate a significant prevalence of the use of Slangs among the Chinese students.

Table 1: Descriptive Statistics.

Score of respondents (valid n=60)		
	Mean	68.3667
	Median	69.0000
	Mode	72.00
	Std. Deviation	8.39485
	Skewness	-.394
	Std. Error of Skewness	.309
	Kurtosis	.595
	Std. Error of Kurtosis	.608
	Minimum	44.00
	Maximum	89.00

To determine the scores of samples, the responses were divided into five categories: Number A represented “distinction (over 90)”; Number B represented “good (between 80 to 89)”; Number C represented “satisfy (between 70 to 79)”; Number D represented “pass (between 60 to 69)” and Number E represented “fail (under 59)”. Table 2 presents scores of these categories and reveals that no sample achieved distinction (over 90). A total of 81.6% of samples could reach the level of Pass and above, and 11 students failed the test.

Table 2: Scores of Categories.

	Category	Frequency	Percentage	Valid Percentage	Cumulative Percentage
Valid	A Distinction	0	0	0	0
	B Good (80 To 89)	4	6.7	6.7	6.7
	C Satisfy (70 To 79)	25	41.7	41.7	48.3
	D Pass (60 To 69)	20	33.3	33.3	81.7
	E Fail (Under 59)	11	18.3	18.3	100.0
Total		60	100.0	100.0	

The questionnaire comprised 54 questions. The accuracy level of 45 questions (83.3%) was above 50% and the remaining 9 questions (16.7%) had accuracy level below 50%. The top three highest and three lowest accuracy questions were analyzed as examples.

The top three highest accuracy questions included: Q. 1. The free translation of Chinese slang “柴火姐儿” in English is “country girl.” Which language elements are equivalent to “girl” in “柴火姐儿”? A. 柴火 (firewood) B. 柴 (wood) C. 火 (fire) D. 姐儿 (girl). The correct answer is ‘D’ and received 100% respondents’ accuracy. This question aimed to evaluate the cognitive equivalence between “姐儿” and “girl.” This is a familiar concept about the female gender and is easy to recognize in Chinese and English. Q.2. Those who refuse to move when their house is about to be torn down by the government for a new construction project” are called “钉子户.” What kind of attitude is reflected by “钉子”? A. 户——户口 (household for residence) B. 钉子——工具 (nail for tool) C. 钉子——坚守原地 (nail for stand ground) D. 家——原地 (house for original place). The correct answer is ‘C’ and it received 100% accuracy. The focus is on understanding the cultural meaning of “钉子户.” It is a metaphor to describe people who refuse to move their houses because their condition is common; they prefer to stay in one place. This Chinese slang is used daily in daily life. Moreover, the semantic and cultural meanings are internally consistent, making it easy to choose the correct answer. Q. 3. The Chinese slang “吃素的” in English is “easy to deal with.” What kind of translation method is adopted in this translation? A. 直译法 (literal translation) B. 注释法 (annotation) C. 意译法 (free translation) D. 音译法 (transliteration). The correct answer is ‘C’ and received 97.67% respondents’ accuracy. Only two respondents chose answer B, and the rest got the correct answer. The aim was to identify whether respondents could differentiate between different translation methods.

Similarly, top three lowest accuracy questions included Q. 1. Chinese slang “土鳖” in English is “ignorant person; clodhopper; a country bumpkin,” which word explains the semantic meaning of “土”? A. country B. ignorant C. bumpkin D. innocent. The correct answer is ‘B’ and it received 18.33% accuracy. A total of 23 respondents chose A option, 25 chose C option, and 1 respondent chose D option, and only 11 respondents chose the correct answer. Most of the respondents did not figure out the semantic meaning of “土” in English. Q.2. The literal translation of Chinese slang “喝水” in English is “to drink water.” What is the semantic meaning of this slang in English? A. suffer losses (in business) B. drink plain water C. innocent D. thirst. The correct answer is ‘A’ and it received only 21.67% accuracy. Only 13 respondents

chose the correct answer, while 26 respondents chose answer B. 1 respondent chose answer C and 20 respondents chose answer D. This question aimed to understand the semantic meaning of slangs. Most samples did not figure out the literal translation's basic semantic meaning. The possible reason is that the semantic meaning of Chinese slang “喝水” is not frequently used in daily life, for it is business slang. Q.3. The free translation of Chinese slang “拍板” in English is “make the final decision.” The source language, the Chinese verb “拍 (slap),” is translated as the verb “make” in the target language, English. Is the meaning of the verb “拍 (slap)” and “make” equivalent to each other or different from each other? A. 同等 (equivalent) B. 细微差别 (nuanced) C. 有别 (different) D. 极大差异 (huge difference). The correct answer is ‘D’ and it received only 25% accuracy opted by 15 respondents. Among the unsuccessful attempts, 3 respondents chose the option A, 14 respondents chose B and 28 respondents chose the option C. This question was set to determine the different meanings of verbs between Chinese and English. The Chinese verb “拍 (slap)” and the English verb “make” are different actions. Many respondents knew they were different but did not recognize the essence.

Conclusion

In the process of answering the questionnaire, learners can realize that the Chinese and English languages do not correspond to each other in Chinese English slang translations. The lack of knowledge of the two objective realities and two language realities negatively impacts their understanding of the source language, Chinese, and thus, translations into English. The learners’ weak metaphorical competence further hampers their understanding and translation of metaphors. In long-term teaching and translation practices of Chinese slangs, teachers should enhance the sensitivity training in the difference between the thinking model and language expression between Chinese and English. They focus on accumulating knowledge of Chinese and English cultural backgrounds and cultivating a translation awareness to convey Chinese culture more acceptably by targeting English readers.

To accurately convey the semantic features and cultural nuances of Chinese slang, it is crucial for future research studies to explore the comprehension skills of different translation approaches. Additional empirical research is required to investigate the effectiveness of these approaches in many circumstances, such as translation of literary works, subtitling of films, and other kinds of artistic expressions. Furthermore, implementing training courses for translators that prioritize cultural proficiency and innovative translation techniques can enhance one's ability to translate Chinese slang effectively. The advancements in artificial intelligence and machine translation have created new opportunities to improve the translation of Chinese slang. Investigating how these technologies can be used to enhance understanding and communication of cultural subtleties in slang has the potential to result in significant improvements in translation quality. Moreover, the cooperation of linguists, cultural experts, and translators can enhance our understanding of Chinese slang by capturing its intricate nuances. This collaboration guarantees that the translated language accurately conveys the semantic aspects and cultural implications. This can be achieved by ensuring that the translation is efficient.

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