

Exploring the Practice of English External Propaganda Translation from the Perspective of Cross-cultural Communication

Ying Huang*

Liaoning University of International Business and Economics, Dalian 116052, Liaoning, China

**Author to whom correspondence should be addressed.*

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Abstract: This article focuses on the practice of English external propaganda translation from the perspective of cross-cultural communication. Firstly, it briefly summarizes the connotations and characteristics of cross-cultural communication and English external propaganda translation. Secondly, it comprehensively explores and analyzes the current status of English external propaganda translation practice from the perspective of cross-cultural communication. Combining relevant cases, it briefly introduces the achievements of English external propaganda translation practice, and systematically analyzes the challenges faced by China's English external propaganda translation practice from the perspective of cross-cultural communication. Finally, based on the above exploration, it introduces the strategic choices for English external propaganda translation from the perspectives of cultural adaptation and cultural compensation. It is hoped that through this research, we can improve the effectiveness of cross-cultural communication in English external propaganda translation and provide some assistance in building a three-dimensional, authentic, and comprehensive government image.

Keywords: Cross-cultural communication; English; External propaganda translation; Current status of practice; Strategic choices

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1. Introduction

The core value of English external propaganda translation from the perspective of cross-cultural communication lies in its ability to effectively broaden people's horizons and enhance cognition and understanding among people with different cultural backgrounds. This understanding helps to enhance individuals' cultural sensitivity and cross-cultural communication skills, enabling more appropriate ways and strategies to be adopted for efficient and smooth communication activities between different countries and peoples. As a result, with the help of English external propaganda translation, it not only helps to reduce misunderstandings and conflicts caused by cultural differences between Chinese and Western nations, but also benefits the construction of a more harmonious, diverse, and friendly cultural ecology globally ^[1]. However, despite the significant

achievements made in China's English external propaganda translation work through the joint efforts of various parties, there are still many challenges faced in specific translation practices due to various practical factors. These challenges directly lead to frequent problems in English external propaganda translation practice, which not only severely restrict the effectiveness of English external propaganda translation itself, but also hinder the effective dissemination and understanding of various types of information globally in China.

2. Relevant overview

2.1. Cross-cultural communication

Cross-cultural communication refers to the exchange and dissemination of information between individuals, groups, organizations, and countries with different cultural backgrounds. As an important branch of communication studies, cross-cultural communication focuses on cultural differences, emphasizing that in cultural communication, language is only an explicit communication barrier, and the deeper challenges of cultural communication mainly come from non-verbal factors, including values, social norms, historical memory, cognitive models, belief systems, etc. These factors, hidden behind language, can profoundly affect people's attitudes, reactions, and understanding when facing information. Therefore, the core issue of cross-cultural communication is to explore how to achieve effective communication between different individuals, groups, and organizations by studying the impact of cultural differences on information encoding, decoding, transmission, and reception.

2.2. English publicity translation

English publicity translation refers to a translation activity that accurately and effectively conveys various information originating from China (including politics, economy, culture, technology, society, etc.) to international audiences through media, books, conferences, and other forms of media, by utilizing English language translation tools. This aims to spread traditional Chinese culture, shape a good image of China, and promote international exchanges and cooperation^[2]. English publicity translation has three characteristics:

Firstly, it has a significant cross-cultural attribute. In the translation process, it is necessary to focus on handling the cultural differences between the source language and the target language to avoid obstacles and misinterpretations in information transmission caused by cultural barriers.

Secondly, it has strong political sensitivity. English publicity translation has specific audiences and purposes, and its translation quality affects the overall perception and evaluation of China by the international community. Therefore, in the translation process, it is necessary to strictly grasp the political direction and policy intention of the translation content, achieve a high degree of agreement with the original text in the translation content, and carefully handle various sensitive vocabulary and key expressions.

Finally, it has an audience-oriented characteristic. Based on the conversion between Chinese and English languages, translators need to optimize and adjust the translation to a certain extent according to the information receiving habits, knowledge structure, and cultural background of the target audience, making the translation more persuasive, attractive, readable, and more in line with the language expression habits of the target audience^[3].

3. Current situation of English external communication translation practice from the perspective of cross-cultural communication

3.1. Achievements made

In recent years, under the dual influence of China's increasingly open policy and the continuous improvement

of its international status, significant developments have been achieved in English external communication translation in China from the perspective of cross-cultural communication.

On the one hand, the coverage of English external communication translation has been continuously expanding, and the number of translations has increased significantly. According to the “2025 China Translation Industry Development Report” recently released by the Translators Association of China, with the successful holding of the China International Import Expo, the deepening promotion of the “Belt and Road” initiative, and the regular holding of various international forums and conferences in China, the demand for English external communication translation involving various fields such as politics, economy, culture, science and technology, and society has shown explosive growth. Apart from officially released policy documents, national condition reports, and various external communication materials published by local governments, enterprises and institutions, and social organizations, English external communication translation has also expanded to a wider range of daily communication levels such as English road signs in cities, public signage, English tour guides in scenic spots, and English introductions of products on e-commerce platforms. This fully demonstrates the important role played by English external communication translation in China’s opening up and development. On the other hand, the professional level of English external communication translation has been significantly improved. Attracted by the good development trend of the English external communication translation industry, more and more translation departments and professional translation institutions in universities have participated in the English external communication translation industry. With their professional and strong faculty, rich industry experience, and strict control over the quality of external communication translation, they provide strong intellectual support and talent guarantee for various difficult and professional external communication translation activities.

3.2. Challenges faced

On one hand, the quality of translations varies widely, making it difficult to meet the requirements of cross-cultural communication. Currently, due to the continuously expanding demand for English translation services in external communications, the number of professionals in the English translation industry in China has shown a trend of increasing year by year. By the end of 2024, the scale of professionals in the English translation industry in China had reached 6.808 million (data source: “2025 China Translation Industry Development Report”). While the surge in the number of professionals can certainly provide strong support for the development of the industry, it also easily leads to quality issues in external communications translations due to the varying levels of proficiency among these professionals. Although most of the professionals in external communications translation have studied English and obtained professional English proficiency certificates (such as CET-4 and CET-6), their lack of systematic training in English external communications translation, coupled with their limited experience living in English-speaking countries, makes them somewhat deficient in terms of English language thinking habits, English language expression, and understanding of the historical and cultural backgrounds of English-speaking countries. This lays the groundwork for frequent occurrences of issues such as overly literal translations, inappropriate vocabulary choices, stiff sentence structures, and even mixtures of Chinese and English or English pinyin in English external communications translations. For example, the Hangzhou government discovered some “bizarre translations” during inspections of foreign language signs in its region, including translations of “消防专用” as “Special Fire,” “小心水池” as “Careful Pool,” and “金蒜炆腰片” as “Fried Waist Slices with Golden Garlic.” To quickly correct these translation errors and achieve standard and normative writing of English external communications translations, the Hangzhou government

specifically developed the “Guidelines for Foreign Language Translation and Writing in Public Service Areas in Hangzhou (Trial)” and “Standards for Foreign Language Translation and Writing in Public Service Areas.” The existence of these issues seriously affects the credibility and authority of translations. If this problem is not quickly addressed and these “bizarre translations” are allowed to appear in scientific, cultural, and even political and economic documents, it will have a very unfavorable impact on China on the international stage, greatly reducing the effectiveness of cross-cultural communication through translations.

On the other hand, the translation of English publicity faces cognitive gaps and understanding barriers caused by cultural differences. As an important embodiment of a nation’s cultural uniqueness, cultural symbols are not just simple words, graphics, symbols, and sounds, but also carry the unique values, historical memories, and ways of thinking of the nation. The huge differences between China and the West in terms of historical memory, values, cognitive models, and social norms naturally create a cognitive gap between Chinese and Western groups, exacerbating the difficulty of cross-cultural communication of these cultural symbols ^[4]. It is easy to cause misunderstandings and information loss in the process of cross-cultural communication due to improper English translation, which not only seriously hinders the interpretation of various information about China by Western countries but also increases the understanding barriers between China and the West. Specifically, the problems faced by English publicity translation caused by cultural differences are mainly reflected in the following aspects: meaning loss and distortion, resistance caused by conflicts of values, expression barriers caused by differences in cognitive models, and communication misunderstandings caused by social norms and taboos.

Taking China’s highly representative color culture-red as an example, red symbolizes joy and auspiciousness in the Chinese cultural system. Red couplets during the Spring Festival, red flags symbolizing victory, and red veils representing joy all carry people’s aspirations for a happy and beautiful life. However, in Western culture, “red” is often associated with negative meanings, such as anger and danger, such as in “That’s a red flag for me” and “red alert.” If the translator simply translates “red” as “red” without exploring the cultural differences between China and the West in depth during the publicity translation involving Chinese culture, such as “red education,” “Red Classics,” and “Red Resources,” it will inevitably cause cognitive and understanding confusion for Western readers, and may even trigger certain negative political associations, misinterpreting “red education” and “Red Classics” as some politically colored positive ideas, rather than historical and cultural artistic masterpieces with epochal significance in the context of Chinese culture.

4. Strategic choices for English publicity translation in the context of cross-cultural communication

4.1. Cultural compensation and alienation

Unlike cultural adaptation and planning, which seek “commonalities” in English publicity translation, cultural compensation and alienation focus more on “differences” between Chinese and Western cultures. This approach emphasizes respecting the objective facts of cultural differences between China and the West. While pursuing easy-to-understand translations, it is necessary to preserve the uniqueness associated with individual cultural elements. Through necessary cultural compensation, the target audience can be assisted in reading the translation, ultimately achieving understanding of these cultural elements with strong ethnic characteristics ^[5]. To this end, the following points can be addressed:

Firstly, preserve the unique language style and cultural characteristics of the source language, and provide appropriate explanatory translations and annotations. Especially when encountering the translation of culture-

loaded words that cannot be simply replaced and have strong Chinese characteristics, corresponding English explanations or footnotes can be added in parentheses based on literal translation to serve as supplementary information. For example, “Kung Fu Tea” can be translated literally and supplemented with an English explanation: “a traditional Chinese tea ceremony emphasizing meticulous preparation and appreciation.” This ensures that cultural information can be fully transmitted between the source and target audiences, allowing the target audience to achieve a reading effect of “knowing not only the how but also the why.”

Secondly, introduce cultural elements unique to the source language and apply “alienation” to the translation. The purpose of alienation is to appropriately break the reading habits of the target audience and stimulate their strong curiosity and desire to explore by preserving the characteristics of the source language. For instance, the Dragon Boat Festival can be translated as “Duanwu Festival” and the Chinese Valentine’s Day as “Qixi Festival,” accompanied by brief introductions. This enhances the “exotic charm” of these words and phrases, increasing readers’ interest in reading.

4.2. Cultural adaptation and planning

Cultural adaptation and planning strategies emphasize that when translators conduct English publicity translation, they need to actively adapt to the target language cultural environment by adjusting the source text expression, translating more aligned with the target audience’s way of thinking, communication habits, and cultural characteristics. This proactive “adaptation” requires translators to appropriately “encode” and “package” the translation based on fully respecting the core of the source culture. This approach aims to reduce the cultural gap between China and the West, improving the cross-cultural acceptability and dissemination of English publicity translations ^[6]. To achieve this, we can focus on the following points:

Firstly, transforming the cultural context. For instance, some promotional slogans and official titles with strong Chinese characteristics in the Chinese context need to be re-examined and reconsidered in the target cultural context during external publicity translation. According to the communication habits of the target audience, grand narratives with strong emotional overtones, represented by the “Chinese Dream” and “the Great Rejuvenation of the Chinese Nation,” can be transformed into more specific and perceivable descriptions such as “China is committed to pursuing sustainable development and improving the well-being of its people, striving for a prosperous future where everyone can thrive.” Through the use of universal concepts like “improving people’s well-being,” “sustainable development,” and “prosperous future” in the translation, Western readers can quickly understand China’s positive vision for pursuing a better future through reading and understanding the translation.

The second method is to replace cultural imagery. The English external communication translation in the context of cross-cultural communication often involves a large number of idioms, allusions, colloquialisms, and imagery. Considering that these vocabularies often carry profound cultural connotations, it may be difficult for the target audience to understand. Therefore, the method of replacing cultural imagery can be adopted for translation. For example, the aforementioned “red education” can be replaced with expressions that are more easily recognized by Western culture, such as “patriotic education” or “revolutionary education.” Another example is the difference in cultural cognition between the auspicious and powerful connotations of “dragon” in Chinese culture and the evil and monstrous imagery it represents in Western culture. When translating imagery involving “dragon,” such as “dragon and phoenix bringing auspicious signs” or “descendants of the dragon,” they can be replaced with more universally understood expressions like “inheritors of a glorious tradition” or “Harmonious Union of Auspicious Creatures.” This helps convey the positive connotations of harmony and

auspiciousness in the source language, ensuring that the translation avoids conflicts arising from differences between Chinese and Western cultures. As a result, the emotional tone and descriptive content of the translation are closer to the positive significance implied in the original text, making it easier for the target audience to accept.

5. Conclusion

In summary, although English translation for external communication has achieved remarkable results in the process of development from the perspective of cross-cultural communication, it also faces certain challenges and problems due to various practical factors. To achieve ideal communication effects, it is necessary to fully consider the cognitive characteristics of audiences in different countries, the communication purposes of external communication texts, and the cultural differences between China and the West. By adopting more refined and targeted translation strategies, the integrity of the translated content can be improved, and it can be more adaptable to cross-cultural communication. In future work, we need to continue to focus on English translation for external communication from the perspective of cross-cultural communication. Through continuous learning and practice, we will constantly explore new translation skills and intensify our research on the historical and cultural characteristics and language habits of different countries and nations. We strive to become experts in Chinese-English language translation and messengers of cross-cultural communication, so that China's voice can cross national cultural and geographical boundaries and be heard and respected by the world.

Disclosure statement

The author declares no conflict of interest.

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