A comparative analysis of English and Chinese vocabulary from the perspective of culture

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Abstract: language is the carrier of culture, which is of great significance to the expression of meaning and cultural inheritance. In the cross-cultural context, vocabulary carries and transmits the corresponding cultural information. The most basic and active component of the language system is vocabulary. By analyzing and comparing the similarities and differences in the cultural meaning of English and Chinese vocabulary, we can more accurately grasp the differences between English and Chinese, and improve the accuracy of cross-cultural communication ability and Chinese-English bilingual translation activities.

Key words: cross cultural context; English and Chinese vocabulary; Comparison; C-E translation

With the development of the world economy, the world globalization has entered a new stage. The exchanges between countries have gone beyond a single economic category, and the cultural exchanges have become increasingly profound. At the same time, language communication has become increasingly frequent. Language carries the cultural connotations contained in different countries' politics, economy and customs. The 31st UNESCO General Conference pointed out that cultural diversity is the common heritage of mankind. Stuart Hall, a British scholar, once pointed out: "nowadays, language is a privileged medium, through which we 'understand' things, produce and communicate meaning. We can share meaning only by entering language together. Therefore, language is extremely important for meaning and culture, and it is always regarded as the main carrier of various cultural values and meanings." Language carries culture, is the carrier of culture, and transmits rich cultural information. Therefore, maintaining the diversity of languages is the basis of maintaining the diversity of world cultures. Linguist Hudson believes that many features of language are cultural features. Language interprets and reflects culture in the process of development and communication. In the language system, the most basic and active element is vocabulary. The study of the cultural connotations of English and Chinese words plays an important role in cultural analysis and translation studies.

1. Cross cultural perspective in English Chinese Translation

American linguist E.T. Hall put forward the concept of "Intercultural Communication" in his book "The Silent Language". The so-called "cross-cultural communication" refers to the use of the same language by communicators with differences in language and cultural background. The cultural background differences here mainly refer to the cultural differences between China and European and American countries, which often lead to cultural conflicts in the process of communication. Culture is the invisible environment of human social life. All countries and peoples are affected by their culture, including language culture, thinking mode and behavior mode. According to American linguist and translator Eugene A. According to Nida's theory, translation is an activity related to two different languages and cultures. The essence of translation is intercultural communication.

2. Reasons for differences between English and Chinese vocabulary

Ji Xianlin, a master of Chinese language, once said that "language is the external expression of people's thinking form". Among the seven major systems of world languages, English belongs to the Indo-European language family, while Chinese belongs to the Sino-Tibetan language family. The two languages have experienced various absorption and evolution in their long history, and the meaning of vocabulary has also produced huge differences. The reasons for the differences between Chinese and English vocabulary are mainly reflected in the differences in the way of thinking. First of all, since the Song Dynasty, Confucianism has prevailed in almost all academic and ideological fields. Ancient Chinese philosophers who advocated integrated thinking regarded the subjective world and the objective material world as a whole, thus forming an integrated thinking mode, which was manifested as a comprehensive thinking mode. The western philosophy theory has gone through the development of ancient Greece, the Middle Ages and modern times, and the influence of cultural trends such as the enlightenment and the Renaissance. Western philosophy advocates individual thinking, that is, to grasp the object from the individual, and to realize and understand things through logical analysis. The cognition and understanding of things produced in the overall thinking and individual thinking are different, so the use of words also has different tendencies. Since the 15th century, the western modern natural science has developed vigorously, and the way of thinking tends to be accurate. English prefers conceptual words, that is, specific and delicate, while Chinese prefers conceptual words, that is, general, vague and vague, describing things for their similarity, rather than accuracy. There are many ambiguity phenomena, which need human understanding and context to understand correctly.

Secondly, in the traditional thinking of English-speaking nations, the natural object and human subject are equally important, and the object consciousness appears in their way of expression, so English is more commonly used to express things in terms of object, and things are presented in an objective tone. The Chinese language is dominated by "everything is ready for me", attaches importance to subjective thinking, and describes objective things from the starting point of self. For example:

Your name just covers me.

I can't remember your name.

3. Semantic relations between English and Chinese words

In terms of translation theory, the linguist Saussure put forward the concepts of signified and signifier. He pointed out that words are not symbolic symbols, but an abstract symbol, which is composed of "signifier" and "signified". In a language system, the signifier and signified of a sign are one-to-one correspondence. In different language systems, the correspondence between these concepts cannot be simply equated. The meaning of words includes many levels. Leech divides the meaning of words into conceptual meaning, associative meaning, social meaning, associative meaning, reflected meaning, collocative meaning and thematic meaning. Wang Dechun divides Chinese meaning into lexical meaning, rhetorical meaning and grammatical meaning. Mu Xin (1985) the logical meaning, rhetorical meaning and grammatical meaning of Chinese are equivalent to the rational meaning, associative meaning and thematic meaning of English respectively. The semantic differences between English and Chinese words can be distinguished and understood by comparing the conceptual meaning and connotative meaning of words. The so-called conceptual meaning is the most basic meaning of vocabulary. It plays a central role in the elements of language communication and is generally stable. Connotative meaning is the extension and supplement of the conceptual meaning of vocabulary, which is closely related to different cultural contexts. Under different cultural backgrounds, vocabulary contains specific cultural connotations. Generally speaking, the connotative meaning of vocabulary is unstable and changes with the cultural environment of language users. When language users in different cultural backgrounds understand the meaning of words, they will have different cultural meanings. The conceptual meaning and connotative meaning of words have both similarities and differences. By analyzing the semantic differences between English and Chinese, grasping the similarities and differences between the conceptual meaning and connotative meaning of words, understanding the cultural characteristics of specific languages in different cultures, and improving the awareness of cross-cultural communication, we can better complete the translation of English and Chinese.

3.1 The conceptual meaning corresponds to the connotative meaning

The language production of different countries and nations has roughly the same physiological and psychological mechanism. In the process of gradual change and development, there are still similarities between different societies and cultures. There is also such a similarity in the meaning of words between English and Chinese. The conceptual meaning and connotative meaning of words are almost the same, which will not cause ambiguity. This kind of vocabulary has a characteristic, that is, the vast majority of words are single meaning. For example: air, oxygen, kidney, table, artificial intelligence, etc. There are also some polysemy words that express the same or similar conceptual and connotative meanings in both English and Chinese cultures. For example, "Rose" has the conceptual meaning of "Rose" in both English and Chinese, while it is the symbol of "love" in both cultural connotations.

3.2 Conceptual meaning and connotative meaning are not completely corresponding

In English and Chinese languages and cultures, the incomplete correspondence between the conceptual meaning and connotative meaning of words is manifested in the phenomenon of polysemy and the connotative differences of the same meaning. There are two main differences: the conceptual meaning is the same, but the connotative meaning is very different. For example, dog and dog both express an animal in both English and Chinese, while in western culture, the connotative meaning of dog often contains commendatory meaning. As the Chinese often say: luck changes, it can be expressed by every dog has its day, while the word "dog" in Chinese often contains derogatory meaning, Friends of evil, crowing like a cock and stealing like a dog, snarl and snap at Lv Dongbin, etc. Individualism is regarded in the United States as a quality of individual independence and independence from others, but it has a derogatory meaning in Chinese.; The conceptual meaning is different, but the connotative meaning is the same or similar. For example, in western culture, lion is a symbol of bravery and ferocity, while in Chinese culture, the tiger is the king of all animals. Therefore, translate "a lion in the way" into "a tiger in the way" in Chinese, and "as majestic as a lion" into "a tiger in the way".

In both English and Chinese language systems, most of the lexical semantics belong to partial correspondence.

First of all, Chinese lexical semantics includes English lexical semantics. For example, the word "car" in Chinese includes cars, buses, trucks, taxis, etc., but in English, these words are respectively represented by motorcar, bus, truck, taxi. Another example is "borrow" in Chinese, including "borrow" and "lend" in English vocabulary.

Secondly, English lexical semantics includes Chinese lexical semantics. Such as sister in English, including sister and sister in Chinese vocabulary; Marriage means "marry" and "marry" in Chinese; Both cousins and cousins in Chinese can be represented by "cousin" in English vocabulary.

In addition, some words with specific cultural connotations in English and Chinese are often expressed in the sense of inequality. It shows that the conceptual meaning or literal meaning is similar or similar, but the connotative meaning is very different, and even difficult to understand without the language background. In ancient Chinese history and culture, plants are often endowed with many associative meanings. For example, in Wang Wei's Acacia, "red bean" is endowed with the meaning of "Acacia". The meaning of "bright moon" often expresses the feeling of "homesickness". It is also like the four gentlemen in flowers, "plum, orchid, bamboo and chrysanthemum", which express different spiritual characters. Words from ancient Greek mythology and the Bible, such as Pandora's box, refer to "the source of disaster"; Sphinx (sphinx) is extended to people or things that make people unable to guess and confused; Noah's Ark refers to people's shelter.

3.3 Conceptual meaning and connotative meaning do not correspond at all

Because countries and nations are different in history, economy, cultural traditions and other aspects, each nation has produced some unique thing names in its long development, but in another language and culture, the corresponding vocabulary can not be found, which

is manifested as semantic vacancy in another language and culture. Usually, such words have a strong national imprint. Such as "Feng Shui", "Yin and Yang", "heaven and earth", "Kang", "steamed stuffed bun" and so on, these vocabulary concepts do not exist in English. In translation, we need to fill this gap and express the meaning; Similarly, there are many words in English that cannot be found in Chinese. For example, sofa, coffee, Nazi, hippie, vitamin, etc. Although there are corresponding transliteration of Chinese characters to express them, they are only a kind of loan, not corresponding to each other.

4. Summary

English and Chinese language vocabulary is the crystallization of wisdom formed by people's long-term life experience in their respective historical and cultural backgrounds. Under the specific cultural background, the meaning of vocabulary is also different. Language vocabulary is the reflection of culture, and the meaning of language expression is constrained and influenced by culture. In the context of cultural diversity in the world, English Chinese translation is also a cultural transformation. Through the analysis and comparison of the similarities and differences of lexical meaning, we can better improve the translator's cultural literacy and sensitivity to cultural differences.

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