

The Reconstruction of International Discourse Reflected in the English Translation of “Loong”

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Abstract: Translation can be seen beyond the replacement of linguistic symbols in the context of cross-cultural communication; it is also a struggle over cultural discourse power. It is well-known that the concept of the Loong in the culture of China has been associated with the notion of the dragon in English, which has quite negative implications. This could be seen to a great extent as an unbalanced representation of Chinese culture in the discourse system of the West. In this context, this paper will compare the cultural connotations of the two concepts, explore the source and effects of this mistranslation, and discuss some other important aspects of discourse power, in the international communication context. It also suggests ways to address the current condition through increasing cultural self-awareness and innovating cultural communication, and provides some reference value to international communication of Chinese culture.

Keywords: International Communication; Discourse Power; English Translation of “Loong”

1. Introduction

1.1 Research Background

In the context of globalization, intercultural interactions have become more common, but the imbalance in cultural exchange is still a significant issue. Using their powerful economic muscle and media control, Western states have become the leading players in the global mass opinion and created the West-centrism narrative. Being a traditional great civilization, it is necessary that China should develop its own cultural discourse power during the globalization of the Chinese culture. Otherwise, the fundamental cultural images of China will be misinterpreted or inaccurately translated. The

Loong itself has a spiritual symbol and is a cultural icon of the Chinese nation, but the English translation process has serious challenges. The meanings associated with the Chinese Loong and the western dragon are very different, however, these two signs have been artificially equated over the past few hundred years, which has become one of the ways in which the West can demonize China. So whether viewed from the perspective of cultural development itself or from the needs of national development, striving to enhance the international discourse power of China is an important and urgent issue; it also represents a concrete manifestation of a nation's communication capability [1].

1.2 Research Significance

The theory of discourse power by Michel Foucault, the French philosopher, states that discourse is power. Discourse can be used as a means of sharing information and controlling the power, and serves as the demonstration of power [2]. The concept of international communication discourse power is the ability of a country to influence the way it is perceived as well as how it sees the whole world through the prism of global public opinion, and basically, it is based on the right to encode and decode cultural signs. Translation, considered a form of intercultural communication, has always been influenced by the power dynamics, as stated in the Field Theory of Pierre Bourdieu.

This paper examines the connection between translation exercises and discourse power based on the English interpretation of the Loong as an example, with two levels of importance. Theoretically, this paper is an effort to broaden the area of research on cross-cultural communication by going beyond the technical aspects of discussion on translation and placing the issue of translation in the context of the international communication discourse power. In practice, the analysis of different conflicts of

interest that are present in the English version of the Loong can make recommendations about how best to implement the external output of Chinese cultural symbols in order to enhance the discourse power of China.

1.3 Research Methods

The present thesis will be both a literature-based research and a case study. It outlines central positions of discourse power theory and cross-cultural translation theory as an underlying basis of further discussion. By referring to particular examples such as the development of English versions of the Loong, the presence of differing translational versions in news papers and the variety of translation decisions across cultures this paper demonstrates how discourse power influences translative behavior. This is done on the basis of which it determines the reasons behind mistranslation, and suggests appropriate countermeasures.

2. Core Logic of International Communication Discourse Power and the Game Attribute of Translation

2.1 Constituent Dimensions of International Communication Discourse Power

The external use of language can be viewed as a battle in the international discourse power [3]. The concept of international communication discourse power includes three basic elements which are discourse subjects (communicators), discourse contents (cultural symbols and values) and discourse channels (means of communication). In the Western-centered international communication world, the imbalance between discourse subjects causes inequality in the way discourse content is encoded. Western translators carry out the task of re-encoding non-Western cultural symbols by using their own cultural ideas and creating a kind of knowledge hegemony. Translating is an intermediary that enables intercultural exchange but, at the same time, is an object of power in the process not a neutral information disseminator.

2.2 The Game Essence of Translation: Contest over the Right of Encoding and Interpretation

The conflict behind a translation is cultural equivalence versus power asymmetry. As Zhang Meifang notes, translation is an exchange of

ideas and cultures, which can be seen as a communication across separate civilizations [4]. Nevertheless, because of the extreme differences in strength, such exchange frequently takes the form of one-way cultural transmission and passivity on the part of the receiver. The translation debate about the English term used to describe the Chinese Loong is an example of this. Western missionaries translated China's Loong as a dragon based on their cultural framework. China did not have enough international presence at that time, hence had to take it over a long period of time before losing the ability to read its culture. Consequently, the English versions "should be used to represent the current tendency of the Anglophone world to recognize Eastern cultures and values, as well as the requirements of non-English-speaking countries to be allowed to engage in equal dialogue and have equal discourse authority with the West. These are some voices and expressions of Chinese people in the international arena" [5].

3. Divergent Cultural Connotations of the Loong and the Dragon, and the Origins of the Mistranslation

3.1 Fundamental Opposition in Cultural Connotations

Loong is a culturally rich symbol in China that has positive meanings attached to it. Since the stone-carved Loong found at the Chahai Site, Fuxin, Liaoning (over 8000 years ago) until it became the symbol of royal power in the feudal dynasties; since the pioneering spirit in the expression "dragons soar and tigers leap", to the auspicious meaning of "dragon and phoenix bring prosperity", Loong has been used as an auspicious spiritual symbol signifying unity and aspiration between the Chinese people. Most of the Chinese terms involving the word long have positive implications. The favorable impression of the Loong is also enhanced by cultural activities like dragon dances and dragon boat races.

On the contrary, the cultural significance of the Western dragon is extremely negative. Based on the "Seraphim" (large serpent) in Judaism, the concept of the dragon was transformed in Christian culture to become a symbol of evil and the embodiment of Satan, an enormous, ferocious beast breathing fire and looking horrific [6]. The English word, dragon, also has insulting connotations as it means a shrew or

drug addict, which all suggest a sense of viciousness and brutality.

3.2 Historical Origins of Mistranslation: Cultural Encoding Dominated by Power

The dissonance between the Loong and the dragon has not been accidental, but rather a consequence of a Western discourse hegemony. The 16th century saw the compilation of the Portuguese-Chinese Dictionary by Michele Ruggieri and Matteo Ricci and the first correlation of the two symbols. The 19th century saw the translation of the word long into dragon by British missionary Robert Morrison in his Chinese and English Dictionary. Further, in translating the Book of Revelation, he translated the Bible term Dragon (the great serpent) into giant long, thus intertwining these two cultural icons inseparably [7].

The massive distribution of this incorrect translation went hand in hand with Western colonialism and the worldwide propagation of English. The cultural encoding of the West was made a de facto standard due to its economic and military dominance. Influenced by such a norm, Chinese scholars working on dictionaries unintentionally passed on the bad translation. Basically, it is a way of cultural dominance practised by the West in terms of knowledge production, imposing its perception of the Loong to counteract the indigenous awareness of Chinese people about their culture.

4. Practical Impacts of Mistranslation: Dilemmas of Cultural Communication Stemming from Deficient Discourse Power

4.1 Distorted Cultural Image and the Construction of China's Stigmatization

The adverse implications of the dragon are used as an opportunity by Western interests to vilify China in the modern world. Western journalists often use the term dragon to mean China when writing in the news. Based on this imagery of ferocity and malevolence, such reporting indirectly encourages the development of a perception among Western audiences that the rise of China poses a threat. It is much more than just a translational problem; it is a misconception due to the imbalance of power. The West is in a superior position in discursive communication and it enforces its cultural values on the Chinese Loong, which does not allow positive image of the Loong to be

comprehended across the world.

4.2 Erosion of Cultural Confidence and Diminished Communication Effectiveness

The prolonged use of the term dragon as a translation also undermines the cultural self-confidence of the Chinese people to some level. During the last 200 years, the mentality of the Chinese culture was influenced by the dominant Western culture that made China feel less self-assured and more inferior. China failed to have the guts to speak up on behalf of itself in cross-cultural communication. Others try to eliminate the favorable connotation and symbolic significance of the Loong in Chinese culture, so as to appeal to Western spectators. This is reflected in the practice of translation as tolerance and acceptance of the faulty translation, which significantly impacts the quality of cultural communication. If the foremost cultural emblem of a country is misunderstood, then its essence cannot be understood by foreigners.

5. Reconstructing Discourse Power: English Translation Strategies for the Loong and Pathways of International Communication

5.1 Core Principles: Upholding Cultural Consciousness and Discursive Autonomy

As a precondition of improving the power of international communication discourse, cultural awareness is needed. Dai Lian points out that it is being rooted in cultural heritage that can serve as a key to identity positioning in the face of globalization [8]. The English translation of the Loong must not be limited to the word dragon but rather it should adhere to the cultural equivalence principle: that is, the Loong should not be used to cater to western cultures or dissociate itself with the real world requirements of international exchange, thus bringing out the genuine Chinese voices.

The idea of translating the Chinese Loong into Loong is presented by some scholars, which can be considered as a fair proposal. The pronunciation is similar to the word long, the spelling has a picture-characteristic, and it is a neologism devoid of negative connotations associated with the word dragon. However, this translation does not have a united official endorsement. Currently, the term "Chinese Dragon" or "Long" or "Loong" is used in practice to translate, indicating first awakening among Chinese practitioners and some resistance

to the habitual thinking that has been formed over time.

5.2 Multi-dimensional Communication and Practical Paths for Power Contestation

5.2.1 Top-level Design of Cultural Communication at the Government Level

The government must take an active role in promoting and developing some actions. The appointment of the official standard translation as Loong will offer institutional backing of cross-cultural communication. As a case in point, Chinese baijiu has a rich history and cultural implication, but it had no single standard English name, which included such variants as Chinese spirits, Chinese distilled spirits, and Chinese liquor. In April 2020, China Alcoholic Drinks Association filed an application with the General Administration of Customs to establish a unified English name, Chinese Baijiu. Beginning on January 1, 2021, the new customs tariff schedule officially made use of the term Chinese Baijiu as the standard translation [9]. There is another example of South Korea which can be regarded as the world-known successful precedent. In 2005 the country altered the Chinese name of its capital city, Hancheng, to Seoul, which was aimed at the desire to gain the power of discourse in the intergovernmental dialogue with China. With time, this action has proved effective as the name “Seoul” was progressively accepted globally [10]. Taking advantage of the state power to autonomously interpret the cultural symbols, creating various communication channels across languages and platforms to overcome the barriers imposed by the Western media, and increasing the cultural confidence are critical elements of enhancing discourse power.

5.2.2 Constructing Diversified Translational Practice and Discursive Narratives among Academia and Media

Ran Yongping argues that the overall innovation in linguistic ontology research often serves as an important indicator of the academic standing of the field of linguistics; if such research achievements gain international recognition and acceptance within the linguistic community, it signifies significant influence and discourse power within that disciplinary domain [11]. Scholars need to conduct studies on cross-cultural translation to facilitate the acceptance of the term “Loong”, which they need to explain in their academic publications

and international forums. Being a central player in the sphere of international communication, media organizations must be more active in using the concept of Loong, as well as adding information about the introduction of dragon dances and dragon boat festivals to reflect the favorable attitude towards the Chinese Loong. Also, on the occasion of Spring Festival and other cultural exchange programs, English language materials and video clips can be used to spread the message that Loong represents good fortune and a sense of community, and the audience around the world will gradually have the chance to learn about the Chinese Loong.

5.2.3 Promoting Cross-cultural Exchange and Construction of Cultural Identity through Civil Society

Cultural communication cannot take place without the involvement of civil forces. Global audiences may experience the particular attraction of the Chinese Loong by attending Loong Culture Festivals and other similar events organized by overseas Chinese associations and cultural organizations, Chinese Loong art exhibitions etc. Moreover, people must use the word, Loong, and interpret it consciously in the course of external interaction. This will ensure a benign interaction between governments, scholars, media and civil society to attempt to achieve cultural discourse power.

6. Conclusion and Prospect

The discussion about English translations of the Loong exemplifies the struggle over the power in international communication discourse. Changing the term “dragon” into the term “Loong” is not merely the shift of words, but the shift of China in relation to the passive process of assimilating western cultural encoding to active construction of its own discourse system. The approach requires cultural assurance, enhanced communication ability and enhanced competence in promoting inter-civilization learning.

In addition to the increasing overall national power of China and the resurgence of cultural confidence, China has the ability and determination to transform its cultural symbols. Other independent translations like “Loong” are also worth promoting. The media outlets must actively present the Chinese Loong, and various forms of cultural exchange programs must be held to enhance mutual understanding and friendship between people around the world.

Through these alone will China be able to end the Western monopoly on discursive authority, let the world listen to the real voices of Chinese culture, and finally raise the level of China international communication discourse power.

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