A Study of China English and Chinese Culture from the Perspective of the Turning of Literary Translation

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Abstract

Just like economic development, English has the trend of globalization and the characteristic of localization. As a variety of "World Englishes", China English makes Chinese unique culture, language, things, ideas and tradition enter the international community through transliteration, loan translation and semantic regeneration and at the same time it also absorbs many expressions with Chinese culture connotation and Chinese language characteristics. The paper mainly expounds translating Chinese culture and classics in China English from the turn of perspectives on translatology in the 21st century and put forward the author's own opinions based on the questionnaire on China English and data analysis.

1. The Appearance and Development of World Englishes

"English is no longer the possession of the British, or even the British and the Americans, but an international language which increasing numbers of people adopt for at least some of their purposes, without thereby denying … the value of their own languages." [1] (1)

With the development of economy, culture, science and technology, language interference and interactions among different countries, races, religions and cultural background, have increased. It is imperative for all the "residents" of the "global village" to improve their cross-cultural communication skills in order to eliminate "cultural shock" and "cultural conflict". Thus, it is significant to carry out a deep research into the World Englishes. As to the question whether there is a single world standard for English, Tom McArthur's "The Circle of World English" [2] (19) explains every clearly. In the following diagram, the hub is an entity called "World Standard English", which lies within a band of regional varieties, such as the standard and other forms of African English, American English, Canadian English, and Irish English. Beyond these, but linked to them by means of eight outward-extending spokes that serve to mark off eight regions of the world, is a crowded fringe of sub-varieties, lesser national varieties, and creoles, such as Aboriginal English, Black English Vernacular, Gullah, Jamaican Nation Language, Krio, Singapore English and Ulster Scots.

China English, as it is advocated in this paper, is an EIL variety which conforms to the international standards of understandability as well as conveying Chinese culture. The definition as "linguistic Englishness + cultural Chineseness" is proposed to call for linguistic conformity and cultural diversity in this nonnative variety of English. A detailed description of what China English should be like is given in respect of vocabulary, syntax and discourse. In international communication, English in China is used to describe the things peculiar to China, and disseminate China's affairs to the world outside. The phenomenon of "China English" proposed by Ge Chuangui in 1980, revealing the combination of "Linguistic Englishness" and "Cultural Chineseness", arouses many debates among scholars, covering many problems, including definition, English variety, manifestation, and distinction with "Chinese English" (Chinglish).

As the international usage of China English is considered, what is the intelligibility and acceptability of China English among the international English speakers? What are some factors affecting the intelligibility and acceptability of China English? Regarding the questions mentioned above, this research is an empirical one based on the theoretical probation. Theoretically, China English is a natural phenomenon during language nativization. It does not include the phonological level

China English refers to lexical manifestations of English nativization in China. It should be an appropriate usage of English in China, different from "Chinglish" and other deviations of English usage. Practically, China English is an objective language phenomenon.
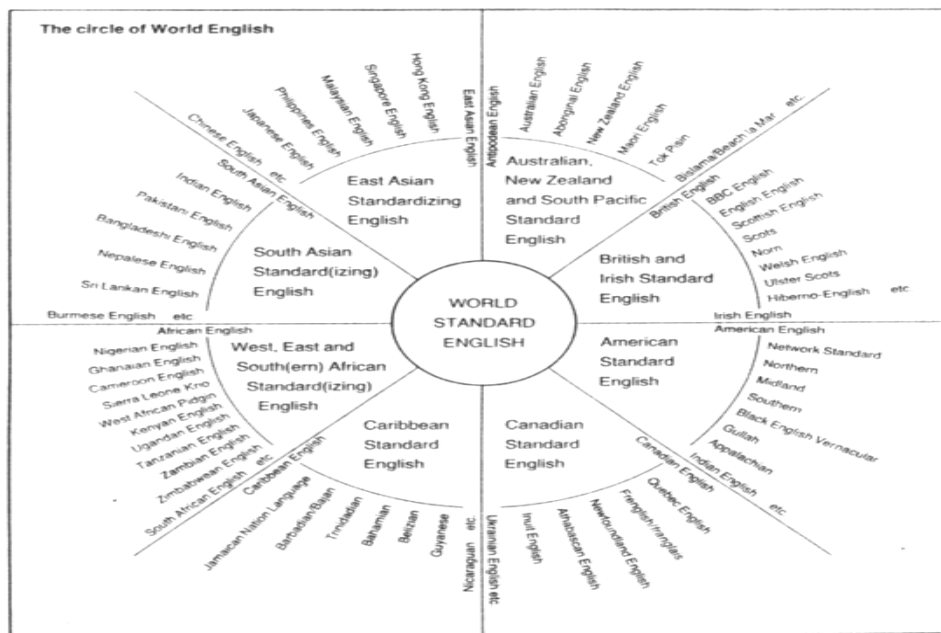
"China English" is used to describe and record the changes of English taking place in China. It is at the core of the international Standard English, introducing Chinese unique culture, things, ideas and traditions, etc. into the international community by means of transliteration, loan translation and semantic regeneration and at the same time fusing many expressions with Chinese characteristics, such as characteristic vocabulary, syntax, cognitive way and ways to organize the discourse. China English is not immune from Chinese influence, especially the influence of Chinese culture; on the other hand, it is not all exposed to Chinese influence -- it has to protect the English language from the interference of some Chinese linguistic features. Acceptability is the general attitude that the receivers have toward China English. Therefore, to make China English an acceptable standard variety in international communication, the key point is to avoid linguistic interference of the Chinese language. What is of practical value in the situation is to explore to what extent China English can be shaped by Chinese culture and to what extent it should protect itself from the influence of Chinese syntax.

1.2. The questionnaire on China English and data analysis

The author made a questionnaire (as follows) on thirty words taken from China English to American high school students when she was a Confucius Institute at Alfred University in the USA. After a data analysis and a deep discussion with them, the author reached a conclusion that except two political words, one economic word and one cultural word, they are familiar with most of China English, especially, as regards wushu and gongfu. This manifests that more and more foreigners like to know Chinese culture and China's development and more and more vocabulary of China English will enter international community.

Table 1. The Investigation Table of the Questionnaire on American High School Students' Understanding of Vocabulary about Chinese C Culture

category	Words	Don't know	Have heard	Just know	Being familiar with	Frequently use	total
politics	一国两制one country, two systems	5 16.7%	9 30%	6 20%	5 16.7%	4 13.3%	30 100%
	三个代表 three represents	20 66.7%	3 10%	2 6.7%	5 16.7%	0 0%	30 100%
	小康社会 a well-off society	15 50%	6 20%	4 13.3%	2 6.7%	3 10%	30 100%
	西部大开发 Go-West Campaign	8 26.7%	10 33.3%	2 6.7%	3 10%	7 23.3%	30 100%
economy	市场经济 market economy	0 0%	5 16.7%	6 20%	10 33.3%	9 31%	30 100%
	软着陆 soft landing	2 6.7%	4 13.3%	7 23.3%	11 36.7%	6 20%	30 100%
	乡镇企业 township enterprises	1 3.3%	10 33.3%	15 50%	2 6.7%	2 6.7%	30 100%
	菜篮子工程vegetable basket project	20 66.7%	5 16.7%	3 10%	2 6.7%	0 0%	30 100%
History and culture	道Dao	4 13.3%	4 13.3%	12 40%	8 26.7%	2 6.7%	30 100%
	中国工笔画 Chinese gongbi paintings	6 20%	14 46.7%	2 6.7%	5 16.7%	3 10%	30 100%
	门神menshen (traditional Chinese door-god)	24 80%	4 13.3%	2 6.7%	0 0%	0 0%	30 100%
	红楼梦 *A Dream of Red Mansions*	6 20%	12 40%	9 30%	2 6.7%	1 3.3%	30 100%
Folk customs	汤圆 tangyuan	2 6.7%	11 36.7%	10 33.3%	2 6.7%	5 16.7%	30 100%
	饺子 jiaozi	0 0%	0 0%	11 36.7%	9 30%	10 33.3%	30 100%
	旗袍 qipao	5 16.7%	14 46.7%	3 10%	7 23.3%	1 3.3%	30 100%
	中秋节Mid-Autumn Day	2 6.7%	10 33.3%	4 13.3%	3 10%	11 36.7%	30 100%
Folk culture	武术wushu	0 0%	4 13.3%	5 16.7%	15 50%	6 20%	30 100%
	太极拳taijiquan	2 6.7%	1 3.3%	6 20%	14 46.7%	7 23.3%	30 100%
	秧歌Yangge	10 33.3%	5 16.7%	6 20%	7 23.3%	2 6.7%	30 100%
	琵琶pipa	9 30%	10 33.3%	7 23.3%	2 6.7%	2 6.7%	30 100%

2. A Discussion of China English from the Turning of Literary Translation Perspective

2.1. Translating Cultural Differences

In the 21st century the multiculturalism produces various types of translation and non-unitary orientation of translation. In the preface "The culture of translation and a turn of translation in culture studies" to Perspectives: Studies in Translation, Wang Ning points out, "some Western scholars think that if there emerged 'cultural turn' in translation studies in the early of 1990s, in the present 'translation turn' in the culture studies should be appealed." From this aspect, translation actually becomes a kind of cultural popularization and cultural explanation, especially literary works. Literary translation has enabled audiences to appreciate excellent literary works written in foreign languages and cultural traditions. Good translations will bring cultural products from one cultural tradition to another thereby realizing a "traveling of literature" [3] (275) that enrich literary creation in the target culture. The un-translatability is part of the cultural incompatibility between the two languages involved in translation. Translation is born out of a need to understand what is different in a foreign cognitive environment and it is cultural alienation that leads to breakdowns in communication. A multicultural appreciation of human diversity is indeed important, yet we should also be sensitive to cultural differences. Therefore, we should not overestimate target-audience's familiarity with the unique source-language culture. Cultural appropriation is essential in facilitating assimilation which, in turn, bridges the communication gap between the source text and the target text.

2.2 China English Being the Way to Realize "Facsimile of Culture"

2.2.1. Semantic Translation in "Facsimile of Culture"

Translation confronts cultural differences by employing feasible and coherent strategies to accommodate the culture of the source text. Cultural awareness, identity, and subsequent appropriation are needed to help target-language readers infer associations and relationship in translation. How to realize "facsimile of culture" [4] in translation and how to make China English play a communicative role in cross-culture communication, we should master translation theory in macro and use translation techniques skillfully in micro. Facsimile of culture refers to "the basic criterion of translation, one which requires that the meaning, form and style of the source language be precisely expressed in the translation from the angle of culture".[ibid] In addition, China English explores the extent to which a facsimile of culture could be achieved in translation. Even the translated text is oriented towards "foreignization", it cannot be translated through the method of transliteration, literal translation, and hard translation simply.

The purpose of translating Chinese classical works is to introduce Chinese social life, culture tradition and ideas to foreign readers faithfully. The main purpose of translating them is to exchange ideas and culture. Approaches to cultural factors involved in translating Chinese classical works with strong Chinese cultural characteristics may be divided into two methods: SL (Source Language) culture-oriented or foeignization and TL (Target Language) culture-oriented or domestification and a good translation version should find a reasonable "meeting point" [64] (358) because the purpose of translating such classical literary work is not only to make foreigners know Chinese culture but also to make them appreciate and understand the novel under the condition of the readability. For example, in Chinese classical works, there are a large number of idioms that describe the beauty of ladies. In A Dream of Red Mansions, Cao Xueqin did not spare pen and ink in portraying the beauty of ladies vividly. In Chapter 7, there is an antithetical couplet, "春恨秋悲皆自惹，花容月貌为谁妍". Yang Xianyi and Gladys Yang translated it into "They brought on themselves spring grief and autumn anguish, wasted, their beauty fair as flowers and moon". "花容月貌"is well translated and the whole couplet seems to be very appropriate. Another example in Chapter 43, translating "翩若惊鸿，婉若游龙" into "had the grace of a startled swan or drifting dragon" not only maintains the original meaning of the SL but also realize natural coherence by using the figure of speech of alliteration twice. From these examples we can see that when translate things with Chinese cultural characteristics, it is the best to use semantic translation. Concretely speaking, as far as China English is concerned, it is "English linguistics + Chinese culture".

2.2.2. The "Adaptability in Cultural Context" in "Facsimile of Culture"

On the basis of the theory of adaptability in cultural context [5] (41) and translation criticism, China English discusses how to make the target language adapt to the cultural context of the source language and reach the extent of "maximal functional equivalence" posed by Eugene A. Nida and "communicative translation" posed by Newmark as far as possible during the process of the translation of Chinese literary works. Communicative translation attempts to produce on its readers an effect as close as possible to that obtained on the readers of the original. A maximal idea definition of functional equivalence could be stated as "The readers of a translated text should be able to understand and appreciate it in especially the same manner as the original readers did." [6] (118) The maximal definition implies a high degree of language-culture correspondence between the source and target languages and an usually effective translation so as to produce in receptors the capacity for a response very close to what the original readers experienced.

2.2.2.1. Adaptability of Cultural Context in Translating Idiomatic Phrases

Idiomatic phrases are unique and fixed expressions formed in the process of a language being used. They include idioms, proverbs, enigmatic folk similes (two-part allegorical sayings, of which the first part, always stated, describes a riddle, while the second part, sometimes unstated, carries a message as the answer to the riddle) and allusions. Both the Chinese and the English language have a long history, so they both have a great number of idiomatic phrases. They are implicit, or humorous, or solemn, or elegant, giving people a kind of feeling of the appreciation of beauty for their conciseness and liveliness. They are important parts of the two languages and cultures. Because people's thoughts and emotion share much in common, some Chinese idioms and English idioms in linguistics are similar in linguistic forms and figurative image and can be translated correspondingly, e.g., "趁热打铁" to strike while the iron is hot.

However, Chinese and English idiomatic phrases carry different national cultural characteristics and cultural information due to different geography, history, religious belief, living customs, etc. Some Chinese and English idioms have the same meaning but they use different figurative images, e.g., "一箭双雕" to kill two birds with one stone, When we translate these idiomatic phrases with Chinese cultural characteristics, we can adopt the method of literal translation, or foreignization from the perspective of spreading Chinese culture. For example, if we translate "五十步笑百步" and "一箭双雕" into "The (soldier who retreated) 50 paces jeered at the one who (retreated) 100 paces", "One arrow, two hawks" by foreignization, foreigners have a feeling of feasting their eyes on Chinese culture.

2.2.2.2. Adaptability of Cultural Context in Culturally-Loaded Words in Tang Poems

Translation of poetry was, and still is, by some, believed as impossibility, for any unfaithful elements would have been taken as failure, be it content or form. The arguments include linguistic elements and cultural elements. Most importantly the myth of untranslatability looks upon poetry as beauty itself which is untouchable, for once it is touched it is destroyed. "Traduttore - traditore." (Translator = traitor.), says the well-known Italian phrase. As absolute faithfulness is impossible, treason in translation is unavoidable. The creative treason is the ultimate goal that China English should realize. "Poetry is what gets lost in translation," Robert Frost says. Zhu Guangqian [7] (113) says that the reason why poetry translation poses more difficulty than prose translation lies in that poetry stresses more on its musical quality while prose emphasizes more on meaning. Translating meaning is apparently easier than translating the musical quality (my translation).

But as translation of poetry has never been stagnant though sometimes vigorous and sometimes not, there is strong evidence in both translation history and today's practice that poetic translation, a literary form distinguished from fiction, drama, and prose, is translatable. Many translators in contemporary and modern China have made and are making outstanding contributions to the literary and poetic exchanges between China and the West through their diligent and painstaking work. Xu Yuanchong, for instance, has translated several books of Chinese ancient poems into English, the most important being the The 300 Tang Poems. Gu Zhengkun, by rendering into English The Collection of Mao Zedong's Poems, is another example to have introduced Chinese poetry to readers of English. Foreigners include Arthur Waley, Herbert Giles, Witter Bynner, W.J.B. Fletcher, James Legg, Amy Lowell, etc.

Translators from English into English are, needless to say, numerous, such as Bian Zhilin, Guo Moruo, Tu Ang, Huang Gaoxin, Jiang Feng, Cao Minglun, and Zhu Chunshen, to name but a few for the present purpose. Poetry, as a branch of literature, is aesthetic in essence. As translators, we believe that we have done our job well if we manage to deliver the message of the original and if our translated version plays the functions of the original. Even in the aesthetic sphere, we can also adapt and accommodate to re-create the power and the expressiveness of the original so that the original beauty is preserved at its best. Exact preservation and representation is but an idealistic bubble which immediately explodes in translation practice. Complete and thorough faithfulness is an impossibility and absolutely unnecessary since we after all are in different cultures and have different aesthetic conventions. Perfectly faithful rendering often fails to ignite the emotional flame in the target readers' heart as it does to the source readers.

As A. Benjamin [8] (72) points out, "the task of the translator consists in finding that intended effect (Intention) upon the language into which he is translating which produces in it the echo of the original". It is interesting that Benjamin uses the word 'echo.' The task of the translator can only produce the echo of the original, not the originality of the original. The idea of the echo is that we hear our own voices sent back to us. The echo is never strictly identical with what has been voiced before. It also suggests something about the space, the topography, of the domain that creates the echo. The voice that comes back to us is similar to what we uttered but is also distorted by the response of what sends back our voice. Just as the ultimate function of art is aesthetic, so is the function of literature. The translated piece should have the aesthetic value first and foremost, as Mao Dun [9](217), a well-acknowledged writer and translator, says in a translation conference that the translated version should be similarly artistic. (The original Chinese reads 译作同样也应该是艺术品). Abiding by this principle, I render the two examples in Tang poems. In Chinese ancient poems, "breaking willows" is the symbol of missing someone. As token of enduring thought, willow branches were often presented to those who ere departing. For example, in the following poem, there are three different translations of "折柳".

<div align="center">

春夜洛城闻笛

李白

谁家玉笛暗飞声，散入春风满洛城。

此夜曲中闻《折柳》，何人不起故园情？

</div>

Hearing a Bamboo Flute on a Spring Night in the City of Luoyang [10] (18)

Li Bai

From whose house do the invisible notes of a jade flute come flying?
The spring wind scatters them. They fill the city of Luoyang.
To-night, as the phrase form, I hear "The Snapped Willow".
To whom do they not bring back the love of his old, early garden?

<div align="right">

` (Translated by Louell)

</div>

Hearing the Flute on a Spring Night in Luoyang [11] (32)
Furtive music from whose jade flute tonight
Steals forth upon spring winds to fill the town?
Recognizing the tune of Breaking Willow Boughs
Who could be untouched by thoughts of home?

<div align="right">

(Translated by Zhang Tingshen and Wei Bosi)

</div>

Hearing the Flute in Loyang One Spring Night [12] (42)
From whose house floats the muffled tone of a flute?
East wind brings to Loyang its singular strain.
The same night, one hears willow being snapped off.
From thoughts of home and garden can one refrain?

<div align="right">

(Translated by Xu Zhongjie)

</div>

By analyzing the above different translations, we can see translating "折柳" into "breaking willow boughs" is the best and it completely reproduces the culture of the SL and adapt to the cultural context of the SL . "Breaking" is much better than "snap" because there is a word "heartbreaking" in English, meaning "causing deep sorrow or terrible disappointment" while "snap" only means the movement of breaking off or the sound of breaking and has no sad connotation.

Another example is the translations of two famous sentences "滴不尽相思血泪抛红豆，看不完春柳春花满画楼"in "红豆词" in A Dream of Red Mansions.

> Like drops of blood fall endless tears of longing,
> By painted pavilion grow willows and flowers untold,

<div align="center">By Yang Hsien-yi [10] (129)</div>

> Still weeping tears of blood about our separation:
> Little red love-beans of my desolation.
> Still blooming flowers I see outside my window growing,

<div align="center">By D. Hawkes [ibid.]</div>

> Oh, Endless tears of love and longing come, these little red beans,
> Like drops of blood shed, showing our devotion and separation.
> And endless weeping willows wakening in the morn outside the window.

<div align="center">By Wang Hongyin</div>

There are two important culturally-loaded words, "抛红豆" and "春柳". The first translation has basically expresses the original meaning but its semantic meaning is not as deep and rich as the second one. The second one is more adaptable to English expressions but it omits "春柳". In the third translation, the adding of "devotion" strengthens the feeling of being lovesick and at the same time translating "春柳" into "weeping willows" and thus maintain Chinese culture's image. The omission of translating "春柳" or translating it into "growing willows" cannot let Western readers appreciate the implication of willows in Chinese culture.

Conclusion

In the long history of the development of its civilization, China, one of the four countries apart from India, Babylon and Egypt that boast an ancient civilization, has left to the world a rich legacy of ideas and traditions, which contributes greatly the human culture of the world today. With 5,000 years of history and 1.3 billion people strong, China has moved into the 21st century at a breathtaking pace. Nowadays, an opening and strong China joins hands and works together with people of other countries to build a harmonious world with lasting peace and common prosperity. China English, perfect combination of linguistic Englishness and cultural Chineseness, spreads splendid Chinese civilization and introduces China's development in all aspects to the international world. After a profound research on China English, the thesis demonstrates that China English deserves a place in World Englishes and is playing an increasingly important role in international and intra-national context. China English is a newly emerged thing and task, so my attempt in this study is only a beginning of a long-term study of China English. Therefore further study will be continued. I welcome criticism and suggestions by experts and professors.

Note:

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