

Original Paper

A Study on C-E Translation of Culture-Loaded Words in the
Chinese Film *Chang'an* from the Perspective of
Transknowletology

Jingwen Du & Huiqin Tu

School of Foreign Languages, Hubei University of Technology, Wuhan, China

Received: July 18, 2024

Accepted: August 22, 2024

Online Published: August 28, 2024

doi:10.22158/jecs.v8n3p91

URL: <http://dx.doi.org/10.22158/jecs.v8n3p91>

Abstract

With the continuous intercultural communication between China and Western countries, the film subtitle translation has become more important than ever before. From the perspective of transknowletology, this paper explores the culture-loaded words in the English subtitles of the film Chang'an through four categories: ecological culture-loaded words, material culture-loaded words, social culture-loaded words, and linguistic culture-loaded words, and analyzes how translators can more accurately convey the knowledge and values of these words. Through the deep analysis of the film subtitle translation, it concludes that the knowledge-transfer can facilitate translator better translate the culture-loaded words, enhance translation quality, aid in the dissemination of local knowledge to the world, and promote the global spread of Chinese traditional culture.

Keywords

Transknowletology, Chang'an, culture-loaded words

1. Introduction

With the development of globalization, intercultural communication between countries is becoming increasingly closer. Nowadays, film has become more important in the dissemination of culture across different nations as a new and efficient medium. The subtitles of films with rich cultural connotations and profound knowledge can not only help audiences quickly understand the storyline, but also help them to appreciate the underlying cultural knowledge. The film *Chang'an* mainly tells the story of the military governor Gao Shi recalling his life with Li Bai after the An Lushan Rebellion. This film has garnered wide attention since its release. Besides its excellent animation effect and engaging plot, the movie contains a wealth of culture-loaded words that embody the historical culture and ethnic customs,

collectively showing the beauty and prosperity of Chinese traditional culture. Therefore, the translation of these culture-loaded words is also an important aspect of cultural dissemination. The release of *Chang'an* breaks people's previous impressions about the dissemination of Chinese traditional culture. The English subtitles of the film were crafted by famous sinologist Linda Jaivin. She is familiar with the Chinese traditional culture and endeavors to spread it through film subtitles. The excellent subtitle translation enables foreign audiences to better appreciate the film plot and contributes to the film's box office performance abroad. Transknowletology was first proposed by Yang Feng (2021), arguing that "translation is a cultural activity and social practice that involves the processing, reconstruction, and retransmission of knowledge across languages." It differs from previous translation theories because it places greater emphasis on the manifestation of knowledge in the process of translation practice. Yang Feng (2022) regards the core content of transknowletology as knowledge, which breaks away from the previous phenomenon of overly elaborating on culture in traditional practices and begins to focus on the ontology of translation. Transknowletology considers all knowledge is local, and translation is an important way for local knowledge to reach the world and highlight its universality. As a new medium platform, film can better bring local knowledge to the world through subtitle translation. In Qin Jianghua's (2022) view, translation is not only a form of knowledge transfer but also a process of knowledge-making. Yang Feng believes that "language carries the intertwined knowledge of culture; knowledge is the result of translation practices that emerge from the mutual positioning, interpretation, and influence among different languages." Culture-loaded words are the product of the interweaving of language and culture, born in specific cultural contexts and containing a wealth of cultural knowledge and information. Therefore, the translation of culture-loaded words in subtitles is also a form of knowledge translation transfer. It reflects how the translator conveys the local knowledge behind these culture-loaded words to the world through the practice of translation based on their own knowledge. However, few scholars analyze culture-loaded words in the film subtitles from the perspective of transknowletology. This paper will study the culture-loaded words in the subtitles of the film *Chang'an* from the perspective of transknowletology, aiming to enrich the domestic research in transknowletology and subtitle translation of the culture-loaded words.

2. The Translation and Dissemination of Culture-loaded Words in *Chang'an*

According to the scholar Liao Qiyi (2000), culture-loaded words refer to vocabulary that expresses things and concepts with unique meanings in the different countries. These words reflect the distinct ways of life that have been gradually accumulated by a specific nation throughout its long historical process, which makes them distinguish them from other nations. These words are the crystallization of the whole country's knowledge and wisdom, playing an irreplaceable role in the intercultural communication. China is such a country with millennia-long history and accumulated many culture-loaded words over time, showing its cultural characteristics and national spirit. Because of the culture-loaded words, the translators should have a deep understanding of them so they can accurately

disseminate cultural information and knowledge during the practice of translation.

The film *Chang'an* contains many culture-loaded words, especially the culture-loaded words in Tang poetry. Tang poetry represents the golden age of classical Chinese poetry, characterized by its rich themes and diverse styles. The flourishing of Tang poetry resulted from various factors, including economic prosperity and the enlightened thoughts and cultural atmosphere. At that time, poets inherited and carried forward the traditions of previous people and showed their enthusiasm to create poetry. The development of Tang poetry mainly went through four stages: Early Tang, High Tang, Mid Tang, and Late Tang. Most Tang poems are exquisite and have harmonious rhythms, reflecting the artistic characteristics of the era. The famous poet Li Bai is emblematic of the highest achievements of High Tang poetry. His poems are always diverse in content and themes, displaying the splendid landscape of the Tang Dynasty. Even today, these poems still have significant artistic appreciation value. The Tang poetry translations began to appear before the eighteenth century, and many scholars from home and abroad have shown their great interest. The film *Chang'an* is set against the backdrop of the High Tang era, which includes a wealth of Tang poetry works and many historical figures. Since its release on July 8, 2023, the film *Chang'an* has received widespread reputation for its unique artistic charm and profound cultural background. It has also won many awards, such as the Best Animated Feature Film Award at the 20th China Animation & Comic Competition Golden Dragon Award, the Best Animated Feature Film Award at the 36th Golden Rooster Awards and so on. All these awards highlight its outstanding contributions to intercultural communication and the excellent production. The film contains many poetry works and historical figures. Its rich cultural connotations have sparked a strong interest among audiences in traditional culture and history, particularly in Tang poetry. In the field of international film cultural dissemination, subtitles always play a crucial role to help audience to better understand the film and the cultural meaning behind it. In this film, the translation of culture-loaded words is particularly significant. The film *Chang'an* possesses considerable cultural dissemination values. It is essential for more people to recognize the value and research significance of culture-loaded words in subtitle translation.

3. The Analysis of Culture-loaded Words in *Chang'an* Based on Transknowletology

Culture-loaded words were first put forward by American linguist Eugene Nida. According to Nida (1945), culture-loaded words can be primarily divided into five major categories: ecological culture-loaded words, material culture-loaded words, social culture-loaded words, religious culture-loaded words, and linguistic culture-loaded words.

This article will analyze the culture-loaded words in the English subtitles of the film *Chang'an* from the transknowletology perspective, focusing on four aspects: ecological culture-loaded words, material culture-loaded words, social culture-loaded words, and linguistic culture-loaded words.

3.1 Ecological Culture-Loaded Words

Due to the different geographical environments, climatic conditions, and unique flora and fauna,

different countries have different ecosystems. The vocabulary developed within these environments is known as ecological culture-loaded words. Behind these words lies the significant disparity in ecological cultures among different countries, leading to many lexical inequalities. This requires translators to possess substantial cultural knowledge to translate the accurate versions and convey the original meaning.

Example 1

The Original Text: 黄鹤

The Translated text: yellow crane

In the film, the scene where Li Bai ascends the Yellow Crane Tower to compose poetry is a significant highlight. When he sees Cui Hao's poem in the tavern, he is deeply moved. The term “黄鹤” (Yellow Crane) in the poem is crucially important. It does not refer to a real bird, but rather to the legendary crane ridden by immortals in traditional Chinese mythology. The Yellow Crane Tower derives its name from these ancient Chinese folk tales. For foreign audiences who are unfamiliar with this traditional culture, the symbolism of “黄鹤” may lead to misunderstandings. To address this, the translator cleverly chose the similar animal “crane” and added “yellow,” allowing viewers to grasp its meaning more accurately. This translation practice not only demonstrates the function of translation as a linguistic processing tool but also highlights the transformation of local knowledge into a globally recognized knowledge.

Example 2

The Original Text: 千树万树梨花开

The Translated text: snow blooms on trees like pear blossoms

The line from the film originates from the work of frontier poet Cen Can, rich in cultural knowledge and natural imagery. It depicts a scene after snowfall, where thousands of snowflakes on the trees resemble blooming pear flowers. Here, the pear blossoms are not real flowers, but rather an association triggered by the poet's observation of the snowy landscape at the border. The snow covering the trees appears pure and flawless, evoking a sense of flourishing pear blossoms, which profoundly expresses the solitude and grandeur of the border.

In the translation process, the translator needs to deeply understand the context of the original text to accurately convey its artistic conception and emotions. Therefore, the translator has rendered this line as “snow blooms on trees like pear blossoms.” This translation clearly expresses the core meaning of the original poem and effectively conveys the poet's feelings in a specific environment. Yang Chaojun and Yan Ping (2023) believe that the translator successfully achieves a knowledge transfer by analyzing the source language knowledge, then reconstructing it, ultimately resulting in an ontology of translation studies. By analyzing and reconstructing the source knowledge, the translated text retains the original poem's beauty and enables the audience to feel the emotions and aesthetics conveyed by the beautiful poetry.

3.2 Material Culture-Loaded Words

Material culture-loaded words refer to vocabulary associated with the material civilization created by humans, including clothing, food, housing, and transportation. These words often carry special meanings in the specific cultural contexts. In the film *Chang'an*, there are also many material culture-loaded words that contain a lot of information and knowledge. Therefore, the translator must try to preserve the meaning of original text and ensure that the translated text accurately conveys the material culture knowledge as well.

Example 3

The Original Text: 锦绣

The Translated text: splendid talent

The word “锦绣” consists of two characters: “锦,” which refers to colorful and luxurious silk fabrics, and “绣,” which denotes the art of embroidering patterns onto fabric with needle and thread. “锦绣” is often used to describe things that are exquisite. It not only depicts material beauty but is also used to express talents and skills of individuals. In the film, Li Bai says “锦绣,” when they decide to part with each other, hoping Gao Shi can fully utilize his talents and be recognized. In order to translate it, the translator chose not to use a simple literal translation but a more free translation to convey its meaning as “splendid talent.” According to Pang Xiucheng’s (2022) perspective, transknowletology no longer placed on factors such as identity, gender, ethnicity, and power. Instead, it advocates for a scientific approach to analyze the behavior of translators in the pursuit of knowledge. Transknowletology serves knowledge as the foundation and essence of translation activities. To convey the original intention of the plot and show the cultural knowledge behind it, the translator skillfully used the fluidity of knowledge, making appropriate choices based on the different contexts, thereby avoiding a mechanical translation and creating a more natural and smooth expression. This approach aids the audience in better understanding the emotions and themes conveyed by the film and allows them to appreciate the profound friendship between Li Bai and Gao Shi, as well as the respect for talent.

Example 4

The original text: 行囊

The translated text: saddlebags

The word “行囊” in ancient times referred to the luggage carried during journeys, the character “行” means to travel, and “囊” signifies a bag. This word is a typical material culture-loaded word which has a long history and encompasses profound material cultural meanings. In the film, the acquaintance between Li Bai and Gao Shi is the starting point of their friendship journey, and Li Bai mentions the word “行囊”. As a traditional culture-loaded word, “行囊” plays an important role in the dissemination of knowledge. The translator described it as “saddlebags” because of the cultural difference. “saddlebags” are bags that hang on a saddle, specifically designed for carrying items while riding in the Western countries. Through this translation, the translator not only conveys the cultural knowledge behind the term but also enables the audience to better understand the context and rich implications of

the ancient Chinese travel journey.

3.3 Social Culture-Loaded Words

Qin Yurui (2024) states that social culture-loaded words are often used to describe and explain social and cultural phenomena, reflecting changes in people's ideologies, behaviors, and values. They encompass political systems, customs and traditions, names and titles, historical allusions, and more, often carrying distinct ethnic characteristics. In the film *Chang'an*, there are many such idioms that reflect the historical and cultural context.

Example 5

The original text: 行卷

The translated text: passing the scroll

In the Tang Dynasty, “行卷” was an important custom in the Imperial Civil Examination System. Many candidates compiled their poetic and literary works into scrolls and presented them to high-ranking officials or social elites in hopes of seeking their recommendations or praise, thereby increasing their chances in the examination. In the film, Li Bai, as the son of a merchant, finds it difficult to achieve desirable results in the rigidly stratified examination system. So he hopes to realize his dream of success through the practice of “行卷”. As a typical social culture-loaded word, “行卷” has no direct equivalent in Western culture. The translator cleverly translates “行卷” as “passing the scroll.” The word “scroll” effectively conveys the meaning, while “passing” vividly reflects the act of transmission and communication. This translated text preserves the cultural information of the original text and presents a vivid image to the audience. In this way, the translator successfully bridges the knowledge gap between Chinese and Western cultures, allowing the audience to appreciate the historical and cultural phenomenon.

Example 6

The original text: 直破漠北，封狼居胥

The translated text: flying the banner beyond the great desert

The idiom “直破漠北，封狼居胥” originates from the Han Dynasty and carries significant historical connotations. It refers to the Western Han general Huo Qubing, who was commanded to lead an expedition to the northern desert and build an altar on Mount Langju to celebrate his victories. This idiom symbolizes one of the highest honors for the martial heroes in the ancient China. In the film, Gao Shi says this phrase to express his father's expectations for him. He comes from a traditional warrior family. Gao Shi hopes to fight for his country, achieve great military accomplishments, and become a formidable general. In this instance, the translator used a free translation approach, using “flying the banner beyond the great desert.” This expression implies planting one's flag after a victory in the northern desert, symbolizing triumph in battle. Through this translation practice, the translator reinterprets the traditional cultural allusion and adds a poignant visual element to the film. In the process of conveying local knowledge to a global audience, the translator also infuses a touch of artistic charm.

3.4 Linguistic Culture-Loaded Words

The development of languages among various ethnic groups occurs within their unique historical contexts, therefore resulting in distinct characteristics. There are significant differences between Chinese and Western cultures, especially in phonetics, morphology, syntax, and vocabulary. The film *Chang'an* also features a considerable number of linguistic culture-loaded words, primarily focusing on specific idioms and vocabulary that reflect its cultural uniqueness.

Example 7

The original text: 海纳百川

The translated text: embraces all kinds

The idiom “海纳百川” is commonly used to describe a person with a broad mind who can embrace different thoughts and perspectives. It originates from Chinese traditional culture and philosophical thought, vividly depicting the vastness and inclusiveness of the people like sea that accommodates countless rivers. This idiom vividly reflects the underlying social culture and knowledge system. In the film, the translator has translated it as “embraces all kinds.” It can effectively reduce ambiguity and misunderstandings in the process of cultural exchange for the foreign audience. At the same time, it demonstrates the values and spirit inherent in the culture, illustrating how local knowledge can be disseminated global knowledge through translation. This translation practice is not merely a linguistic transformation but also conveys the cultural significance, highlighting the important role of the translator in fostering intercultural communication from the perspective of transknowletology.

Example 8

The original text: 终南捷径

The translated text: shortcut to the court

In the film, Gao Shi describes Li Bai's in *Chang'an* city by using the idiom “终南捷径.” However, “终南” refers to a famous mountain range, the idiom “终南捷径” originates from the Tang dynasty and later came to symbolize the most direct path to gaining an official position, representing a convenient route to achieving one's goals. In this context, the translator opted for a free translation, translating it as “shortcut to the court.” Although this translation sacrifices some of the original meaning, it makes it easier for the audience to understand. From the perspective of transknowletology, the translator need not cling to the aesthetic form of the original text but should pursue the beauty of regeneration in the target language, the aesthetic standards of foreign cultures are the only criteria, and the translator can adapt accordingly. Pan Wenguo (2023) proposed three fundamental principles: “seeking truth for knowledge, establishing righteousness through goodness, and enlightening truth through beauty,” focusing on the translator's subjectivity, objectivity, actions, processes, and outcomes from the perspective of knowledge as a whole. Through the reconstruction and reprocessing of language, translators transform their rich local knowledge into universally applicable global knowledge. As a reconstructor of knowledge, the translator with profound understanding of the different cultural knowledge can more effectively express the connections between different languages, thereby

facilitating better acceptance by foreign audiences.

4. Conclusion

In today's world, the intercultural communication is becoming more and more important and film as a new platform also plays an indispensable role. The film *Chang'an* is an excellent animation production which contains rich Chinese traditional culture elements and ancient poetry. In the intercultural communication, film subtitle translation plays an important role. High-quality subtitle translation can help foreign audiences have a better understanding of the plot and convey the underlying cultural knowledge and information. Therefore, it can enhance the audience's appreciation of the film. This article analyzes four aspects of culture-loaded words in this film's subtitle translation from the transknowletology perspective, revealing the knowledge and cultural values in these words. Through the study and analysis of culture-loaded words in the subtitle translation of *Chang'an*, we can clearly know the knowledge has a significant impact on the intercultural communication. Not only can film subtitle translation convey cultural values but also carry abundant information. Therefore, to enhance the spread of local knowledge into global knowledge and achieve the effective intercultural communication, it is important to emphasize the accuracy and importance of knowledge in film subtitle translation. Through new platforms such as films, we can better disseminate the Chinese traditional culture to the world, enhance its global influence and promote the understanding between different cultures, achieving deeper intercultural integration.

References

- Liao, Q. Y. (2000). *Exploration of Contemporary Western Translation Theories* (p. 232). Nanjing: Yilin Press.
- Nida, E. A. (1945). Linguistics and Ethnology in Translation Problems. *Word*, 1(2), 194-208.
- Pan, W. G. (2023). New Breakthroughs in Translation Studies. *Technology Enhanced Foreign Language Education*, (01), 7-10+106.
- Pang, X. C. (2022). Transknowletology: Translator's Personal Knowledge and Knowing Model. *Contemporary Foreign Language Studies*, (01), 72-82.
- Qin, J. H. (2022). Translations as knowledge Production, management, and utilization: towards transknowletology. *Contemporary Foreign Language Studies*, (01), 60-71.
- Qin, Y. R. (2024). A Comparative Study on the English Translation of Culture-Loaded Words in The Peach Blossom Fan in the View of Cultural Translation Theory. *Journal of Heihe University*, 15(04), 139-142.
- Yang, C. J., & Yan, P. (2023). translation process in the light of transknowletology. *Foreign Studies*, 11(03), 82-88+97+109.
- Yang, F. (2021). Declaration of Knowledge Translation Studies. *Contemporary Foreign Language Studies*, (05), 2+27.

Yang, F. (2022). The definition and classification of translation in the context of transknowledgeology. *Contemporary Foreign Language Studies*, (01), 1-2.