

# A Study on the English Translation Strategies of Culture-Loaded Words in *Raise the Red Lantern* from the Perspective of Manipulation Theory

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## ABSTRACT

In the context of globalisation promoting cultural intermingling, the accurate translation of Culture-loaded words is particularly important. They carry the deep connotation of a particular culture. Although domestic and foreign scholars have made fruitful achievements in the translation and research of culturally loaded words, they still face the challenges of conveying deeper meanings and new word translation strategies. Based on the theory of manipulation, this paper makes use of the English translation of culturally loaded words in the film "Raise the Red Lantern" to analyse the examples. It explores the influence of patronage, poetics, and ideology on translation strategies, with a view to reducing cultural misunderstandings and providing a reference for the study of English translation strategies of culturally loaded words.

## KEYWORDS

Raise the Red Lantern; Manipulation Theory; Culture-loaded words; translation strategies

## 1 Introduction

With the process of globalisation, the increase in cross-cultural communication has made the translation of cultural-loaded terms a key area of translation studies. The accurate translation of these words is extremely important to cross-cultural understanding. The study of English translation strategies under the perspective of manipulation theory is therefore particularly crucial, which helps to refine effective translation methods, provide reference for the translation of film and television works, improve translation quality and promote cultural communication.

In the field of translation research, the translation strategy of cultural-loaded words has been the focus of scholars. Scholars at home and abroad have explored it from different research perspectives. Such as Eco-Translation studies, linguistics of national conditions, the perspective of register theory and so on. A series of research results have been obtained through in-depth discussion of culture-loaded words. These researches have solved many problems encountered in translation practice and provided theoretical guidance and practical reference for translators.

However, previous studies have not yet adequately addressed the question of how to deal with the influence of factors such as ideology, poetics and patronage on translation strategies.

The goal of this study is to provide a reference for reducing cultural misunderstandings and barriers, enhancing the accuracy and effectiveness of translating cultural-loaded words through an in-depth analysis of the English translation of cultural-loaded words in "Raise the Red Lantern". This paper will first outline the basic concepts and core ideas of manipulation theory, then analyse the choice of translation strategies for culture-loaded words in "Raise the Red Lantern" and how they are influenced by manipulation theory, and finally summarise the research findings.

## 2 Literature review

The film "Raise the Red Lantern" is a classic work adapted by director Zhang Yimou in 1991 from Su Tong's novel "Raise the Red Lantern", which has attracted extensive attention and discussion in domestic and international academic circles for its unique visual style, profound thematic exploration, and insightful dissection of feudal society. Domestic literature has analysed the film in depth mainly from the aspects of visual art, female image and cultural meaning; while foreign literature has interpreted the film more from the perspectives of cross-cultural perspective, feminist criticism, and visual art and narrative techniques. These studies not only enrich our understanding of the film, but also provide valuable references and experience for future academic research.

Culture-loaded words are crucial in cross-cultural communication, carrying specific cultural connotations and reflecting their deep-rooted characteristics. In recent years, with the development of globalisation, their translation and research have become the focus of academic circles.

According to the search of CNKI, 44 relevant papers were published in domestic core journals from 2014 to 2024, showing that domestic scholars pay more attention to the English translation of culture-loaded words, and the relevant

research has become a hotspot.

Domestic scholars have made in-depth studies from different perspectives and achieved many results. From the research perspective, Sun Lin and Han Caihong explore how to achieve the unity of selection and adaptation from the perspective of ecological translation; Fan Yanni and Tian Sisheng compare the English translation of *The Treatise on Typhoid Fever* from the perspective of linguistic national conditions, and summarize the principles and methods of translating culture-loaded words in the Chinese medicine category; Jing Fang and Duan Cheng analyse the role of the three elements of the linguistic field in translation equivalence from the perspective of domain theory. In terms of research methodology, Huang Xin and Yan Xiaoying (2018) conduct a comparative study on the classification of culture-loaded words in the *Sakya Aphorisms* to provide theoretical support for the translation of national canonical texts; Wang Hai and Wang Haichao (2017) use a corpus to analyse the translation strategy of missionaries on Lingnan culture-loaded words; and Wang Yinquan (2006) argues the rationality and necessity of the phonetic translation of *Fuwa* through case study.

Internationally, the study of culture-loaded words started early and the theory and practice are relatively mature; Nida (1964) firstly put forward the concept of 'culture-loaded words' as an important issue in cross-cultural translation. Foreign scholars focus on in-depth research from multiple dimensions, such as Mona Baker (1992) in 'In Other Words: A Coursebook on Translation' to clarify the concept of culture-loaded words, pointing out that it is difficult to accurately convey connotations due to cultural differences; Newmark (1988) subdivided them into five categories: Ecological Culture, Material Culture, Social Culture, Religious Culture, Linguistic Culture words, which facilitates the analysis and treatment of strategies. In terms of translation strategies, Nida, Eugene, Albert Ejbrill's (1964) Functional Equivalence Theory emphasises functional equivalence rather than literal correspondence to provide a guide for translation; Peter Newmark (1988) proposes communicative and semantic translation strategies, which need to be chosen according to the type of text and the needs of the reader. Susan Bassnett's Cultural Translation Theory (1980) emphasises the cultural turn. It advocates that the translation unit shifts from discourse to culture, focusing on cultural information transfer and intercultural communication effectiveness.

In short, the research on culturally loaded vocabulary by scholars at home and abroad has been going on continuously and deeply. It provides an important theoretical basis and practical guidance for translation practice in cross-cultural communication. To sum up, scholars at home and abroad have made fruitful achievements in the translation and research of culture-loaded words. Although there are some achievements in the research of culture-loaded words at home and abroad, there are still some shortcomings. On the one hand, for some complex and culturally rich culture-loaded words, it may be difficult for the existing translation strategies to fully convey their deeper meanings; on the other hand, the society is developing rapidly and the culture is changing constantly. On the other hand, society is developing rapidly and culture is changing. New culture-loaded words are emerging constantly, and their translation methods and strategies need more research to be explored.

### 3 Manipulation Theory

#### 3.1 Patronage

Patronage refers to those individuals, groups or organisations that can facilitate or hinder the creation, dissemination and reception of literary works.

#### 3.2 Poetics

Poetics refers to a set of rules, conventions, and standards for the creation and evaluation of literature that influence the production and reception of literary works. According to Lefevere, Poetics consists of three aspects: literary traditions, literary techniques and evaluation criteria.

#### 3.3 Ideology

Ideology is a set of beliefs, values and perceptions about the world and society, which is usually unconscious but influences people's thoughts and behaviours to a great extent. In Lefevere's theory of manipulation, the role of ideology includes: shaping people's understanding of reality, which influences the translator's interpretation of the original text and the choice of translation strategies; helping to maintain or change power structures in a society; and establishing norms and taboos in a culture within which the translator has to work in order to make the translated work acceptable in the target culture.

## 4 English Translation Strategies of Culture-loaded Words in "Raise the Red Lantern" and the Influence of Manipulation Theory on Them

Culture-loaded words carry rich cultural connotations and historical backgrounds, as an important part of film language and a unique identification of a specific culture. Eugene Nida (1993) proposed five categories of culture-loaded words: ecological, material, social, religious and linguistic. This paper will follow this categorisation criterion and explore the role of manipulation theory on the choice of one's translation strategy by analysing representative example sentences of culture-loaded words in "Raise the Red Lantern".

### 4.1 Material culture-loaded words

Material culture-loaded words relate to the material goods of a culture, such as food, clothing, transport, and means of production. These words reflect the material standard of living and technological development of the culture.

Source Text: 这屋子里干嘛挂这么多红灯笼?

Target Text: Why are there so many red lanterns?

From the Patronage's point of view, international distributors and other Patronages chose "red lantern" as a concise and clear translation for the film's wide dissemination in the Western market because it allows Western audiences to quickly understand this key cultural element, reduces the cost of understanding due to cultural differences, and meets the needs of commercial promotion. Analysed from the Poetics level, "red lantern" retains the core imagery of the original word, which is in line with the English language habits and expression norms, and meets the aesthetic requirements for simplicity and directness in English culture, ensuring the translation's poetic fluency and acceptability. In terms of Ideology, this direct translation strategy presents Chinese cultural elements in a relatively mild way, avoiding the ideological conflicts that may be triggered by complex cultural interpretations, so that the Western audience can come into contact with the concept of the "Red Lantern" in a familiar linguistic form, so that they can independently comprehend the symbolic meaning of the red lantern in the film, and then understand the meaning of the feudal family conveyed by the film. The concept of "Red Lantern" is familiar to Western audiences so that they can understand its symbolism in the film, and then understand the ideology of the feudal family, which will help the film's acceptance in the international market.

### 4.2 Social culture-loaded words

culture-bound terms refer to words that reflect the structure, institutions, customs, etc. of a society. These words reveal the organisation, social relations and way of life of that society.

Source Text: 太太, 四太太向你请安来啦

Target Text: First Mistress, the Fourth Mistress is here to visit.

From the Patronage's point of view, in order to achieve wider dissemination and acceptance of the film in the international market, the choice of "visit" as a concise and easy-to-understand translation can help to reduce the difficulty of comprehension for the Western audience, which is in line with the film's commercial promotion needs. From the Poetics point of view, "请安" has specific ceremonial and cultural connotations in the context of Chinese feudalism, while "visit" has the meaning of visiting and looking around in English. In order to make the translation more concise and fluent in the English context and in line with the English expression habits, the translator chooses the naturalisation translation strategy, which only focuses on the core meaning of the action of "请安" in which a junior or a person of low status greets an elder or a person of high status. Although rich cultural details such as etiquette and norms in the original words are lost, the readability and naturalness of the lines after translation are ensured to a certain extent, and the rhythmic and concise beauty of the language is maintained. In terms of ideology, in order to avoid any cultural misunderstanding or disconnection that might be brought about by in-depth interpretation, and to enable the audience to understand more smoothly the life scenes and character relationships within the feudal family shown in the film, the naturalisation strategy was chosen as a more simplified way of conveying to the Western audience the Ideology message of hierarchical relationships within the feudal family. It uses the concept of "visit", which is familiar to Western audiences, to present the traditional Chinese act of "请安", which weakens the specific Ideology of Chinese feudal rites contained in "请安", so that Western audiences can generally understand the film's content. It weakens the specific ideological content of the Chinese feudal rites and allows the Western audience to understand the status differences between the characters in the film and the way they interact with each other.

### 4.3 Religious culture-loaded words

Religious culture-loaded words relate to the religious beliefs, traditions, religious systems of a culture. These terms

reflect the religious life and spiritual pursuits of the culture.

Source Text: 罪过, 罪过...

Target Text: Such sins, such sins...

From the Patronage perspective, the film's sponsors wanted the film to be widely recognised and understood in the international market. The translation of "such sins" is relatively easy to understand for Western audiences because "sin" has a clear meaning in Western culture and religion, which helps to reduce the barrier of understanding due to cultural differences, thus making the film easier to be accepted by international audiences and facilitating its dissemination and commercial promotion. This translation helps to reduce the barriers of understanding caused by cultural differences, thus making the film more acceptable to international audiences, and facilitating the dissemination and commercial promotion of the film. From the Poetics point of view, "sins" has rich connotations in Chinese culture, while "such sins" has a sense of gravity in English. To a certain extent, this kind of translation retains the negative evaluation and moral condemnation implied by the original word, which is in line with the linguistic conventions of English and the aesthetic requirements of poetic rhythm, so that the lines can still convey the uneasiness arising from the violation of morality or ethics, and maintain the expressive power of the language after translation. In terms of Ideology, this translation strategy conveys to the Western audience the complex psychology of the characters in the feudal family and the underlying notion of moral restraint. The translation of "such sins" enables Western audiences to understand the characters' perceptions of right and wrong behaviour through their familiar concepts of religious and moral judgement, and avoids the misunderstanding of "罪过", which is a term with strong Chinese cultural overtones. It better shows the ideology of the characters under feudalism, and enables the Western audience to understand the cultural connotation of the film more deeply.

#### 4.4 Linguistic culture-loaded words

Linguistic culture-loaded words refer to words with unique cultural connotations in a particular language environment. These words reflect the cultural characteristics and expression habits of the language.

Source Text: 太太要是有个三长两短

Target Text: If something serious happens to her

From the Patronage's point of view, the Patronage expects the film to be widely accepted and understood by the Western audience, so as to reduce the barrier of understanding caused by the cultural difference. The easy-to-understand expression "something serious" allows Western audiences to quickly understand the general emotional atmosphere and seriousness of the lines, which is conducive to better communication in the international market and meets the needs of commercial promotion. From the Poetics point of view, "三长两短" is an idiom with strong Chinese cultural colours, which originally refers to unexpected disasters or accidents. On the other hand, "something serious" is a broad but clear phrase in English, which can reflect the core meaning of the seriousness of something. This translation strategy sacrifices the unique cultural imagery of the original text to a certain extent, but ensures the fluency and readability of the translation in the English context, makes the translation fit with the English idiom of expression and Poetics traditions, and avoids the stagnation that may arise from the difficulty of interpreting complex cultural imagery. In terms of Ideology, this translation choice conveys the situational message of the film to the Western audience in a gentle and accessible way. It avoids any possible Ideology misunderstanding or confusion that might be caused by a detailed explanation of the complex cultural concept of "三长两短", and allows the audience to focus their attention on the plot development and emotional expression, which helps the Western audience to understand the emotions and ideas embedded in the film without being overly distracted by unfamiliar cultural elements.

## 5 Conclusion

This study takes the film "Raise the Red Lantern" as an example. The English translation strategies of culture-loaded words under the framework of manipulation theory are discussed in depth. Through the analysis, it is found that the choice and application of translation strategies for culture-loaded words in the film are influenced by a variety of manipulation factors such as Patronage, Poetics and Ideology.

The findings of this study are instructive for the study and practice of translation of culture-loaded words. In the process of translation, translators should fully consider various manipulative factors and flexibly apply translation strategies so as to achieve effective translation and cross-cultural communication of culture-loaded words. At the same time, future research can expand the object and scope of the study, explore in depth the translation strategies of culture-loaded words in different types of texts, and make greater contributions to the development of translation theory and practice.

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