

Research on English Network Catchphrase Translation Strategy Under Intercultural Communication--Take the Oxford Words of Years as Examples

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ABSTRACT

This paper aims to discuss the application of naturalization and alienation strategy in the English translation of network catchphrase under the background of cross-cultural communication. A detailed analysis of the translation process of the 2024 Oxford word of the year, "brain rot", combined with specific cases shows the implementation of these two translation strategies and their role in promoting cross-cultural communication. In addition, the article addresses the translation practices of other network buzzwords, provides a reference for research in related fields, and highlights the importance of maintaining the flexibility of translation strategies in a rapidly changing network environment.

KEYWORDS

Jia Zhangke; Film aesthetics; Characteristics of implication; Style changes

1 Introduction

With the acceleration of globalization and the rapid development of Internet technology, Internet buzzwords have emerged as significant carriers of contemporary ideas, trends, and cultures, spreading swiftly across various language communities. These buzzwords often encapsulate the zeitgeist of a particular moment, reflecting societal attitudes, emotions, and collective experiences. Their timeliness and specific cultural contexts create a unique challenge during the translation process, as the essence of the original term may not easily find equivalent expressions in another language.

The emotional richness and social significance embedded within these Internet buzzwords elevate them beyond mere words; they become vital communication tools that convey nuanced meanings and sentiments. However, this distinctive nature also poses risks when such terms are introduced into different linguistic environments. The original connotations may be misinterpreted, diluted, or lost altogether, leading to potential misunderstandings or cultural disconnects.

This study aims to explore effective methods for delivering Chinese Internet buzzwords to English-speaking audiences, focusing particularly on two translation strategies: naturalization and alienation. Naturalization involves adapting the buzzwords to fit the cultural and linguistic norms of the target language, making them more accessible and relatable for English readers. On the other hand, alienation preserves the original flavor and context of the buzzwords, highlighting their unique cultural significance and inviting readers to engage more deeply with the source culture.

By adopting these strategies, the goal is to promote cultural exchanges between China and other countries, enriching the understanding of contemporary Chinese culture through its Internet lexicon. This interplay between translation and cultural communication not only enhances mutual understanding but also fosters a greater appreciation for the complexities of language and the richness of cultural diversity in our increasingly interconnected world. Ultimately, this study seeks to bridge linguistic gaps and illuminate the profound connection between language and culture in the digital age.

2 Theoretical basis

2.1 Naturalization and alienation translation strategies

In translation theory, the concepts of naturalization (or domestication) and alienation (or foreignization) represent two fundamental strategies that shape the way texts are rendered from one language to another. The conceptual dichotomy of domestication and foreignization was first introduced by the German philosopher and theologian Friedrich Schleiermacher. In his landmark lecture "On the Different Methods of Translating," delivered in 1813, he proposed two approaches to translation: moving the author towards the reader and moving the reader towards the author. The American translation theorist Lawrence Venuti later formalized and popularized these concepts in his influential 1995 work, *The Translator's Invisibility: A History of Translation*, naming them "domestication" and "foreignization." Venuti significantly expanded upon this concept, making it a central theme in the cultural school of translation studies.

Naturalization involves tailoring the translation to fit the expectations and conventions of the target language audience. This means that translators may adapt idioms, cultural references, and stylistic choices to align with what is familiar and conventional in the target language. For example, if a text references a traditional meal from the source culture, a translator employing naturalization might choose to replace it with a more universally recognized dish that

resonates with the target audience. This approach fosters accessibility and comprehension, particularly for general readers who may not have the background knowledge required to understand the original text fully. However, while this method enhances readability and integration into the target culture, it also carries the risk of oversimplifying or entirely losing the unique flavors and deeper meanings embedded in the source material. Thus, careful consideration must be taken to strike a balance between clarity and fidelity to the original work. On the other hand, the alienation strategy stands in stark contrast to naturalization by preserving the distinctive features of the source language and culture. This approach involves maintaining foreign elements that might seem strange or unfamiliar to the target audience. For instance, a translator might keep an original phrase or cultural reference intact, thereby providing readers with a glimpse into the source culture's nuances and intricacies. This method can enhance the richness of the translated text and offer opportunities for cultural exchange and education. Readers who are open to exploring different traditions and practices often find this approach rewarding, as it can introduce them to new concepts and foster greater appreciation for cultural diversity. However, it is essential to recognize that alienation can also present challenges, as the preservation of foreign elements may lead to confusion or misinterpretation for readers who are less familiar with the source culture. In fields such as literature, art, or specialized academic texts, where nuance and cultural context play a crucial role, alienation can serve as a powerful tool to invite reflection and discussion. Ultimately, the choice between naturalization and alienation hinges on the specific context, purpose, and intended audience of the translation, as each strategy carries its own set of implications and effects on the reader's experience.

2.2 Application of intercultural communication theory

In intercultural communication, understanding and respecting the cultural backgrounds and social habits of the target audience is crucial for effective translation. This entails that a translator's role transcends mere linguistic conversion; it requires a deep comprehension of the nuances embedded within the original text and the socio-cultural context in which it will be received. Translators must strive not only for accuracy but also for relevance, ensuring that the message resonates with the audience in a way that feels authentic and relatable. This necessitates a keen awareness of potential cultural misunderstandings that could arise; certain phrases or idioms may hold unique significance within one culture while being completely alien or inappropriate in another. To navigate these complexities, translators can adopt a flexible approach that incorporates both naturalization—adapting content to fit the target culture—and alienation—maintaining elements of the original text that emphasize its cultural uniqueness. The ultimate goal is to create a translation that serves as a bridge between distinct cultural landscapes, fostering mutual understanding and appreciation. Success in translation is thus not just about language proficiency but also about cultivating a rich tapestry of human connections that honors both the source material and its intended audience.

In practice, the principles of cross-cultural communication theory manifest in various ways that influence the translator's work. First and foremost, the translator must cultivate a thorough understanding of both the source and target cultures. This deep dive includes exploring the historical contexts, traditions, societal values, and even the everyday customs that characterize each culture. Without such cultural sensitivity, translations may inadvertently convey messages that are ambiguous or, worse, offensive, leading to misinterpretations and diminished trust between cultures. Moreover, translators must recognize that communication styles can vary significantly across cultures. For instance, a straightforward, direct approach that is effective in Western cultures may not resonate the same way in cultures that value indirectness and subtlety. Translators must be adept at adjusting tone, style, and even the emotional undertones of the text. A perfect example is the challenge of translating Chinese buzzwords, which often carry humor or irony; a direct translation may strip away these layers, necessitating a creative approach to capture the intended emotional effect. Lastly, as digital communication evolves rapidly, the translator must stay attuned to contemporary trends and Internet slang. An ability to adapt and update one's knowledge base not only improves translation accuracy but also ensures relevance in a fast-paced world, equipping translators to tackle emerging challenges and provide translations that resonate with modern audiences. This commitment to ongoing learning and adaptability ultimately enriches the translation process and enhances intercultural dialogue.

3 Case analysis: the oxford word of the year is "brain rot"

3.1 Etymology and meaning evolution

The term "brain rot" first emerged in the literary landscape of 1854, prominently featured in Henry David Thoreau's influential work, "Walden." Thoreau used this phrase as a critique of the societal tendency to trivialize complex, nuanced ideas in favor of simplistic, digestible notions. His reflections highlighted a growing concern about how societal values could shape intellectual discourse, emphasizing the importance of engaging with profound thoughts rather than succumbing to the allure of mediocrity. Fast forward to 2024, and "brain rot" gained renewed attention when it was designated as the Oxford Word of the Year. This contemporary usage expands its meaning to encompass the deterioration of cognitive abilities resulting from the excessive consumption of low-quality or superficial online content. The term

serves as a lens through which we can examine the pervasive influence of digital media in contemporary society, acting not only as a critique of online culture but also as a symbolic representation of our changing information consumption patterns, revealing the potential consequences of our engagement with the virtual world.

As "brain rot" emerges as a significant social phenomenon, it has sparked widespread discourse and introspection. Transitioning from its original metaphorical roots in literature to a pertinent commentary on the digital age, the term has encapsulated the shifting landscape of human thought and the profound impact of technological advancements. In an era characterized by rapid information exchange and constant connectivity, individuals encounter an overwhelming flood of data and fragmented information daily. This incessant bombardment of stimuli, particularly from low-quality sources, can lead to detrimental effects, including heightened distraction, diminished focus, and a decline in critical thinking skills. By encapsulating these concerns, "brain rot" vividly articulates the struggles individuals face in navigating the complexities of the information age. It serves as a cautionary symbol of the need for mindfulness in our consumption of digital content and highlights the pressing necessity for individuals to cultivate discernment and engage meaningfully with the information that surrounds them. The ongoing dialogue surrounding "brain rot" emphasizes the importance of fostering a culture that values thoughtful engagement and critical analysis over the superficial consumption of information.

3.2 Application of the naturalization strategy

For the naturalized translation of the term "brain rot," a thoughtful paraphrase method can be employed. This involves using interpretation to enhance the English reader's grasp of this emerging concept. To illustrate, one might elaborate, "'Brain rot' refers to the perceived decline in mental acuity that arises from excessive consumption of trivial or unchallenging online content." This phrasing successfully retains the essence of the original term while making it accessible to non-native speakers who may not be familiar with the slang. Additionally, incorporating familiar English expressions, such as "mental fog," can further elucidate this phenomenon, making it easier for readers to visualize and comprehend the concept. This dual approach not only aids in understanding but also adds a layer of relatability, allowing readers to connect the term "brain rot" with their own experiences of feeling overwhelmed or mentally sluggish due to information overload.

The practical application of this naturalization strategy becomes even clearer when we consider specific contexts. For instance, if we are translating an article that addresses teenage addiction to mobile games, and the term "brain rot" appears, a direct substitution with terms like "mental fog" or "cognitive decline" could effectively convey the intended meaning without losing its impact. To enhance clarity, one could add a brief explanatory note: "This condition, often referred to as 'brain rot', is characterized by a noticeable decrease in one's ability to concentrate and think critically due to prolonged exposure to mind-numbing activities such as playing video games for extended periods." This additional context not only smooths the flow of the article but also ensures that readers fully grasp the implications of "brain rot." By presenting a clear and relatable understanding of the term, we can foster a better engagement with the subject matter, encouraging readers to reflect on the psychological effects of their digital consumption habits and fostering a deeper discussion surrounding the consequences of such behaviors.

3.3 Application of alienation strategy

On the other hand, if the strategy of alienation is chosen, utilizing the term "brain rot" directly—alongside brief notes or contextual hints—can be a powerful approach. For instance, in an article discussing the implications of social media, one might encounter a phrase like: "The rise of 'brain rot', a term used to describe the mental deterioration allegedly caused by overexposure to low-quality internet content..." This technique not only maintains the novelty and distinctiveness of contemporary Chinese buzzwords, but it also piques the reader's interest, igniting curiosity about the cultural nuances tied to the term. By presenting "brain rot" in this way, the reader is encouraged to delve deeper into its implications, particularly within the context of digital culture.

The advantage of employing an alienation strategy lies in its capacity to preserve the exotic atmosphere of the original text, allowing readers to experience the enchanting qualities of diverse cultures. When expressive words like "brain rot" are referenced directly, it not only enriches the essay's articulation but also opens the door for readers to engage with unfamiliar yet intriguing concepts. However, to facilitate understanding, it is crucial to provide proper interpretation of such terms. For example, in introducing the concept of "brain rot," one could include a brief historical background note: "Originally coined by American writer Henry David Thoreau in his seminal work 'Walden', the term 'brain rot' has evolved, gaining a new context in today's digital landscape, where it refers to the cognitive repercussions linked to excessive consumption of superficial information online." This approach allows for the preservation of the term's original characteristics while aiding readers in grasping its contemporary significance. Such thoughtful treatment ensures that readers not only appreciate the term's uniqueness but also connect with its broader implications in the context of modern society.

3.4 Comprehensive strategy

The most effective way to convey information across different audiences may be through the combined use of naturalization and alienation methods in translation. Naturalization involves adapting the text to resonate with the target audience, making it relatable and culturally appropriate. For example, the term "brain rot," which refers to cognitive decline from excessive exposure to superficial online content, can be introduced as follows: "The phenomenon known as 'brain rot'—wherein individuals experience cognitive decline due to prolonged engagement with superficial web content—has become a hot topic among netizens." This approach ensures clarity and engagement by framing the concept in familiar language.

Conversely, alienation methods help maintain the integrity and professionalism of the original text, especially in academic contexts. By preserving technical jargon and intricate ideas, these methods cater to informed readers seeking depth and credibility. For instance, a professional report on "brain rot" might delve into psychological studies, preserving the concept's complexity while providing valuable insights. Striking a balance between naturalization and alienation is key, with flexibility depending on context and audience. Media targeting the general public should adopt a more accessible, domesticated approach to encourage engagement, while academic publications may prioritize alienation to uphold rigor. Ultimately, a reader-centered strategy is essential, ensuring that translations remain faithful to the original while meeting the diverse needs of target audiences. By considering cultural nuances and audience expectations, translators can create meaningful exchanges of ideas that resonate across different contexts.

4 Conclusion

Through the translation case of the Oxford word of the year "brain rot" and the specific analysis of several Chinese Internet buzzwords, we can see that the translation strategies of naturalization and alienation play an important role in cross-cultural communication. The correct use of these two strategies can not only help us to better spread Chinese culture but also promote international mutual understanding and communication. Future research can continue to explore more types of Internet buzzwords and continuously optimize existing translation methods to contribute to the construction of a more harmonious and diverse world.

The translation of Internet buzzwords is not only a simple vocabulary replacement, but also an art, which requires the translator to have a keen cultural insight and rich language knowledge. By flexibly using the strategy of naturalization and alienation, translators can ensure the effective transmission of information while retaining the characteristics of the original text, so that more readers can enjoy the fun of cross-cultural communication. With the continuous advancement of globalization and the rapid development of technological means, Internet buzzwords will continue to play an important role in the global scope and become an important link connecting different cultures. Therefore, continuous learning and innovation will be an eternal theme for the professionals engaged in translation work.

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