

# A Study of the French Translation Strategy of High-frequency Culture-loaded Terms in *The Analects of Confucius* Based on Corpus

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## ABSTRACT

Culture-loaded terms are words, phrases and idioms that signify something specific to a certain culture. *The Analects of Confucius*, a masterpiece of Confucianism, contains a large number of Chinese culture-loaded terms in its condensed language. This paper uses corpus software to statistically analyze the high-frequency culture-loaded terms in *The Analects of Confucius*, and to compare and explore the translation of the high-frequency culture-loaded terms in the three translations based on a bilingual parallel corpus of *The Analects of Confucius* in Chinese and French. The results of the study show that the three French translations have chosen the strategy of translating culture-loaded terms with domestication as the main focus and foreignization as a supplement, which has reduced the reading difficulty of the French version of the ancient Chinese text. However, for some representative cultural words, such as "ren" and "wen", some translators have adopted the strategy of foreignization and transliteration, supplemented by annotation or explanation, in order to preserve, supplement and introduce Chinese cultural information.

**Keywords:** *The Analects of Confucius*, Translation strategy, Culture-loaded terms, Corpus.

## 1. INTRODUCTION

The history of the French translation of *The Analects of Confucius* is over three hundred years old, and the translators were mainly early missionaries and later Sinologists. The French translation of *The Analects of Confucius* has contributed significantly to the spread of traditional Chinese culture in the French-speaking world and is an important part of the foreign translation of Chinese texts. High-frequency culture-loaded terms refer to cultural words that are used with high frequency in a text. *The Analects of Confucius* is rich in cultural words unique to traditional Chinese thought, and the interpretation and translation of these words is key to the effective dissemination of Chinese culture to the world. Compared to the study of the English translation of *The Analects of Confucius*, the study of the French translation of *The Analects of Confucius* started later, but the results have gradually become richer, mainly including: (1) the study of the translation and dissemination of *The Analects of Confucius* in

France; (2) the study of the subjectivity of the translators of the French translation; (3) the study of the French translation of the key word "ren" in *The Analects of Confucius*. In general, the existing studies on the French translation of *The Analects of Confucius* focus on the transmission history, the subjectivity of translators, and the translation analysis of "ren", but there are no studies on the translation of high-frequency culture-loaded terms, and no corpus-based translation studies. Therefore, this paper will use corpus software to count the high-frequency culture-loaded words of *The Analects of Confucius*. At the same time, it will compare, analyze and study the Chinese-French translations of high-frequency cultural load terms, and refine the translation strategies.

## 2. RESEARCH DESIGN

There are numerous French translations of *The Analects of Confucius*, and the author will select three translations published respectively by French sinologists Anne Cheng (1981), Pierre Ryckmans

(1987) and Chinese scholar Dong Qiang (2009) based on the period of publication, the academic background of the translators and the acceptance of the translations. After identifying the selected French texts, the author used the method of printed manuscript + scanner + ORC software to complete the input of the corpus, converting the paper documents into electronic documents that could be read and edited by the computer. After completing the input of the corpus, the paper version was checked word by word and sentence by sentence, and the collected corpus was cleaned and de-noised by EmEditor software, and the corpus information is shown in "Table 1". Subsequently, the corpus was divided, annotated and processed using software such as Treetagger, and the bilingual Chinese and French texts were aligned using ABBYY Aligner, and then a one-to-three Chinese and French parallel corpus was built with the help of Cuc\_Paraconc.

Table 1. Information of the parallel corpus of *The Analects of Confucius*

| Corpus                       | Number of characters |
|------------------------------|----------------------|
| The original text            | 22028                |
| Anne Cheng's translation     | 117898               |
| Pierre Ryckmans' translation | 116978               |
| Dong Qiang's translation     | 133197               |

Based on the above corpus, Wordsmith software was used to extract feature data of the three translations, including the number of type, the number of token, the average word length and sentence length. A higher type/token ratio indicates a larger and richer vocabulary used by the translator, while the average word length can be analyzed to determine the degree of written language in the translation. By comparing and analyzing these data, the stylistic characteristics of the three translations are outlined.

Table 2. Table of Textual Features of *The Analects of Confucius*

| Translation<br>Parameters | Anne Cheng | Pierre Ryckmans | Dong Qiang |
|---------------------------|------------|-----------------|------------|
| Number of characters      | 290492     | 289190          | 329792     |
| Type                      | 3921       | 3824            | 3467       |
| Token                     | 26744      | 25812           | 29063      |
| Type/token                | 14.66      | 14.81           | 11.93      |
| STTR                      | 40.21      | 37.97           | 35.87      |
| Average word length       | 4.04       | 4.14            | 4.18       |
| Average sentence length   | 18.07      | 16.65           | 19.08      |

With the help of tools such as Antconc, the frequency of words in the original text of *The Analects of Confucius* was counted and analyzed, and the results were manually filtered to eliminate non-cultural word and create a list of high-frequency culture-loaded terms. Then CUC\_Paraconc is used to retrieve the corresponding translations of high-frequency culture-loaded terms, and the translators' translation strategies and methods will be marked manually, such as domestication, foreignization, direct translation, transliteration, etc. Finally, a list of Chinese and French comparisons of high-frequency culture-loaded terms in the three translations was generated for analyzing the different strategies used by translators.

### 3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

#### 3.1 Characteristics of the Translations

Wordsmith 8.0 has been used to analyze the translation characteristics of the three translations, and this statistic only counts the body of the translation, excluding the subtexts such as preface and notes. In corpus translatology, the Type/Token Ratio (TTR) reflects the lexical richness of a text; the higher the TTR, the higher the lexical richness, and vice versa, the lower the lexical richness used by the translator. When the text is long, the Standardized Type/Token Ratio (STTR) is usually used to measure lexical richness. STTR refers to the calculation of the type/token ratio per 1000 words of corpus text, and then averaging the results to make the statistics more accurate. Wordsmith 8.0, which had its default language set to French, analyzed three translations and produced the following results.

The data ("Table 2") shows that the STTR of Anne Cheng's translation is 40.21, which is higher than that of another French translator, Pierre Ryckmans (37.97) and the Chinese translator, Dong Qiang (35.87), indicating that Anne Cheng's translation is richer and more varied in word usage, while Dong Qiang's translation is less difficult to read. Among the three translations, the total number of tokens in Dong Qiang's translation is higher than that in Anne Cheng's translation and Pierre Ryckmans' translation, indicating that his translation has more interpretation of the source language, or more use of paraphrasing.

The average word lengths of Anne Cheng, Pierre Ryckmans and Dong Qiang are 4.04, 4.14

and 4.18 respectively, indicating that the three translations are generally similar in terms of word difficulty, choosing mostly simple words that are more commonly used, and using mostly free translations to explain the ancient Chinese expressions of *The Analects of Confucius*, which generally reflect the colloquial character of *The Analects of Confucius* as a subject of discourse. In order to better compare the word usage characteristics of the three translations, Wordsmith 8.0 was used to count the frequency of the occurrence of words of different lengths, see "Figure 1".

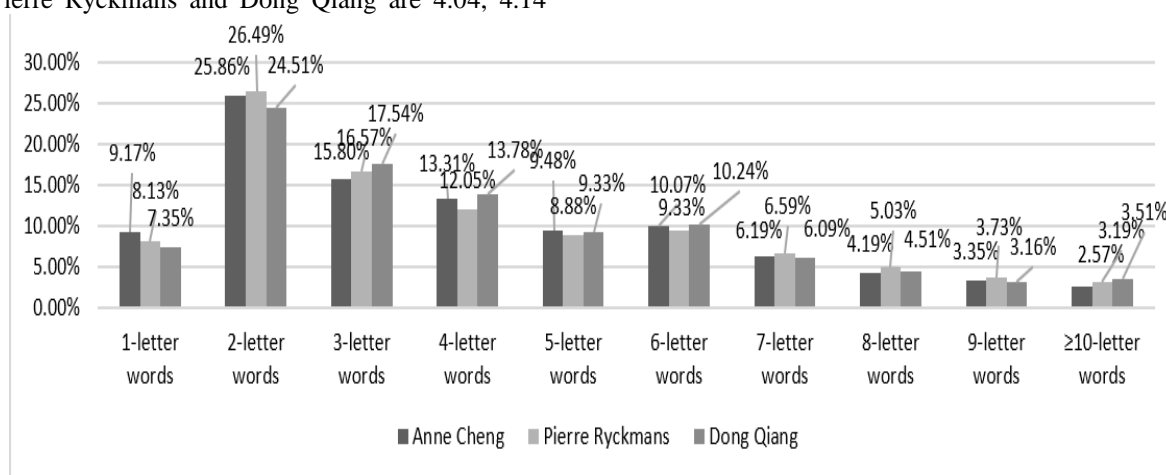


Figure 1 Percentage of word length in translations.

In the three translations, words with two to four letters account for the largest proportion of the text, 54.97%, 55.11% and 55.83% respectively, indicating that the three translations are highly readable for the average reader.

Finally, the average sentence length of the three translations shows that the average sentence length of both French translators is lower than that of the Chinese translator Dong Qiang's translation, with Pierre Ryckmans' translation having the shortest average sentence length and its translation being more comprehensible, while the sentence length of the Chinese translator Dong Qiang's translation may be influenced by the sentence length of the original text, using more long sentences in the translation.

### 3.2 High-frequency Culture-loaded Terms from *The Analects of Confucius*

The source text of *The Analects of Confucius* is ancient Chinese, which has many differences from

modern Chinese, and therefore it is not possible to directly apply modern Chinese word separation and annotation software to the analysis of ancient Chinese. Therefore, the author used manual word separation and then used AntConc to count the word frequencies of *The Analects of Confucius*, and came up with the top 15 high-frequency culture-loaded terms (word frequency over 40 times) of *The Analects of Confucius*, as shown in "Table 3". From "Table 3", it can be seen that these words cover Confucius' moral concepts, educational principles, ethical thoughts and political ideas.

Table 3. High Frequency Culture-Loaded terms in *The Analects of Confucius*

| No. | Culture-Loaded terms | Frequency | No. | Culture-Loaded terms | Frequency |
|-----|----------------------|-----------|-----|----------------------|-----------|
| 1   | 言 yan                | 130       | 9   | 天 tian               | 49        |
| 2   | 知 zhi                | 118       | 10  | 乐 yue                | 48        |
| 3   | 仁 ren                | 110       | 11  | 邦 bang               | 48        |
| 4   | 君子 junzi             | 107       | 12  | 政 zheng              | 43        |
| 5   | 道 dao                | 89        | 13  | 善 shan               | 42        |
| 6   | 礼 li                 | 75        | 14  | 文 wen                | 42        |
| 7   | 学 xue                | 66        | 15  | 德 de                 | 40        |
| 8   | 公 gong               | 59        |     |                      |           |

### 3.3 Translation of High-frequency Culture-loaded Terms from *The Analects of Confucius*

Culture-loaded terms are words, phrases and idioms that signify something specific to a certain culture, and they reflect the unique ways of activity of a particular people that have gradually accumulated over the course of a long history (Liao Qiyi, 2000:232). The culture-loaded terms in *The Analects of Confucius* are an outward expression of traditional Chinese culture, and the translator's treatment of such words directly affects the accuracy with which Confucianism can be transmitted abroad. The analysis of the translations of the high-frequency culture-loaded terms in *The Analects of Confucius* shows that the three translators adopt a relatively consistent translation strategy, with domestication as the main focus and foreignization as a secondary one. Among the 15 high-frequency culture-loaded terms, 11 words were translated by the three translators using the strategy of domestication, including "zhi", "junzi", "li", "xue", "gong", "tian", "yue", "bang", "zheng", "shan" and "de". For example,

- 君子食无求饱，居无求安……

Anne Cheng: L'homme de bien mange sans se gaver, vit sans grand confort……

Pierre Ryckmans: Un homme de qualité qui mange avec modération, qui n'exige nul confort dans son logement……

Dong Qiang: L'Homme de Bien ne cherche jamais à s'assouvir par des repas gourmands, à s'installer trop confortablement dans la vie……

"Junzi" is the ideal personality in Confucius' mind. "Junzi" cares about being capable, but not about being well-known; "junzi" needs to be consistent in word and deed, and is ashamed of being inconsistent in word and deed. "Junzi" does

not pursue a comfortable life, but rather pursues good learning and diligence, and "junzi" is dignified, not frivolous, and respectful, not rude (Chen Lai, 2011, 140-141). "Junzi" has become the ideal representation of personality in traditional Chinese culture, a symbol that is unique to other cultures. Translators have been unable to find an equivalent for "junzi" in French, and have adopted a strategy of domestication, with Anne Cheng and Dong Qiang translating it as "homme de bien" and Pierre Ryckmans translating it as "homme de qualité". Whether it is "homme de bien" or "homme de qualité", these translations only reflect one aspect of the "junzi" and do not represent the whole picture. But the advantage of this is that it is less difficult for the reader to read.

Another example is the translation of the word "tian".

- 不然，获罪于天，无所祷也。

Anne Cheng: C'est faux. Quand on a offensé le Ciel, à quoi bon prier encore?

Pierre Ryckmans: Ce dicton n'a pas de sens. À qui offense le Ciel, rien ne sert de prier.

Dong Qiang: Non, ceci n'est pas vrai. Celui qui attire la colère du Ciel, même s'il fait des prières, ce sera trop tard.

"Tian" is one of the core elements of traditional Chinese culture, involving theology, philosophy and religion. It has three main meanings: the natural "tian" in the traditional sense, the sovereign "tian" that governs the fate of all things, and the righteous "tian" that symbolizes morality and normality. The "tian" in *The Analects of Confucius* is mostly the "tian" that has an independent personality and dominates the destiny of all things in heaven and earth (Zhang Zheng, Hu Wenxiao, 2015, 93). The word "tian" has the meaning of "Dieu (God)" and "Ciel (Heaven)", but is not limited to this. Moreover, both "god" and "heaven" belong to the

realm of Western theology and are not equivalent to the meaning of "tian" in Chinese culture. Therefore, some scholars have even suggested translating it as "Tian" (Zhang Zheng, Hu Wenxiao, 2015, 95). As can be seen from the examples, all three translators use "Ciel" as the translation for "tian", reflecting a strategy of domestication in which some of the meaning of the original text is lost in the translation, but the translation is easier to understand for the reader.

In addition, for the word 'yan', which is the most frequent word, all three translators have adopted a translation strategy that combines both domestication and foreignization. *The Analects of Confucius* discusses "yan" from a variety of perspectives, such as emphasizing the importance of "yan", the moral and ethical standards of "yan", and the consistency of "yan" and action. These perspectives have had a profound impact on the formation of the spirit and cultural personality of traditional Chinese culture (Zhang Liling, 2010, p115). The three translators choose "parole", "promesse", "discours", "dire", "essentiel", "phrase", "formule" and so on for the translation.

The three translators have adopted different translation strategies for the words "ren", "dao" and "wen". Anne Cheng and Dong Qiang translate "dao" as "Voie", while Pierre Ryckmans adopts a domestication strategy, translating it as "ordre moral" or "droiture". Pierre Ryckmans translates "wen" as "savoir et culture" or "belles-lettres", while Anne Cheng and Dong Qiang use a foreignization, transliterating it as "Wen". The translation of the word "ren" also reflects this difference. "Ren" is the core and essence of Confucius' thought, and the term refers both to the ideal personality of benevolence and to the highest norm of harmony in human relations and social order (Yang Ping, 2008, p. 63). "The meaning of "ren" is diverse, and the three translators understand and translate it differently; Pierre Ryckmans translates "ren" as "humanité". In French, "humanité" can mean "certains des traits de personnalité d'un individu qui, par exemple, amplifient les qualités ou les valeurs considérées comme essentielles à l'humain, telles que la bonté, la générosité." However, the Western perspective on humanism is quite different from Confucius' "benevolence". "Ren" refers to the ideal personality and good humanity based on the Zhou rites. Its aim is to cultivate benevolent people who know what they are talking about, to maintain the clan system of rule, and to repair the collapsed social system of rites and music, so as to achieve a harmonious

commonwealth of nature, society and people. Dong Qiang translates "ren" as "bienveillance", which in French means "disposition affective d'une volonté qui vise le bien et le bonheur d'autrui". Confucius' "ren", however, emphasizes not only the practice of goodness but also the observance of rites.

From the above analysis, it can be seen that Pierre Ryckmans and Dong Qiang use different Western concepts to translate "ren". This domestication strategy is conducive to improving the readability of the translation, but it also creates the dilemma that the meaning of the original text cannot be conveyed in its original form. Anne Cheng, on the other hand, translates "ren" directly as "ren", reflecting the strategy of dissimilation. In her preface, Anne Cheng provides a thick explanation of "ren", which is kindness to the other, a rare human virtue, a central word in Confucius' thought, and a concept unique to Chinese culture. Anne Cheng, a French sinologist of Chinese descent who has studied *The Analects of Confucius* and Chinese culture in depth, has therefore chosen to transliterate the term rather than using a French word that covers part of the concept. This shows that the translator's cross-cultural background and study of the original text will influence the translator's translation strategy.

#### 4. CONCLUSION

Cultural loaded words are a reflection of linguistic and cultural differences, and how to translate and introduce other cultures across the cultural gap is an important issue for every translator of canonical texts. The translation of culture-loaded terms requires both an accurate understanding of their rich cultural connotations and the translator's ability to use the target language appropriately to convey their meaning to the reader. *The Analects of Confucius*, as an important Chinese text, is rich in culture-loaded terms with Chinese characteristics. According to Zheng Dehu, in order to promote Chinese culture to the world, the translation of Chinese culture-loaded terms should reflect Chinese characteristics as much as possible, and translators should try to adopt a foreignization strategy when translating (Zheng Dehu, 2016,53). In this paper, the translation of high-frequency culture-loaded words of *The Analects of Confucius* is analyzed with the help of corpus software, and the results show that the three French translations are dominated by domestication and supplemented by foreignization in their choice of culture-loaded terms translation strategies. Some of the translators

have also adopted the strategy of foreignization and transliteration for some representative culture-loaded terms, such as "ren" and "wen", and supplemented them with annotations or explanations in order to preserve, supplement and introduce Chinese cultural information. Although the domestication-based translation strategy cannot fully restore Chinese cultural features, it reduces the difficulty of reading the French versions of ancient Chinese texts and is still important for the promotion of Chinese texts abroad.

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