

A Study on the Translation of Traditional Chinese Medicine Terminology Based on 5W Communication Theory

Hui Liu¹

¹ College of Foreign Languages, Nanjing University of Aeronautics and Astronautics, Nanjing, Jiangsu 211106, China

ABSTRACT

Traditional Chinese medicine (TCM) has a long history and has formed its own theory and system. Though difficult, translating the rich philosophical culture, integrated therapies and terminologies in TCM are a must in the process of TCM going global. However, research on publicity of TCM terms shows that there is much room for improvement. This paper analyzes the current status of translation and dissemination of TCM terms based on Lasswell's 5W theory and proposes some suggestions on how to improve the effect.

Keywords: Translation, Traditional Chinese medicine, Terminology, 5W Communication Theory.

1. INTRODUCTION

Ever since the "Belt and Road" initiative was put forward, the research on traditional Chinese medicine (TCM) has become a hot topic. People realize that effective translation and dissemination of TCM not only helps to inherit and promote the excellent Chinese traditional culture, but also further enhances the soft power of it. As proposed by the State Administration of Traditional Chinese Medicine in the "Thirteenth Five-Year Plan", the development of TCM culture is of great significance in promoting the construction of a health culture with Chinese characteristics, improving people's health, building a system of inheriting excellent Chinese traditional culture, and promoting humanistic exchange between China and other countries along the "Belt and Road". However, the process of TCM going abroad is still on the way, among which one of the reasons is the difficulty of translation. As TCM terminology is rich in traditional Chinese philosophy and religion, its expression is both literary and scientific. As a result, it is very difficult to translate TCM terms. This article analyzes the current status of translation and dissemination of TCM terms based on Lasswell's 5W theory and proposes some suggestions on how to improve the effect. The remainder of the article is organized as follows. Section 2 analyzes the main

characteristics of TCM terminology. Section 3 introduces how to use Lasswell's 5W theory of cross-cultural communication to analyze the current state of translation and dissemination of TCM terms based on which Section 4 proposes some strategies for the translation. Finally, conclusions are made in Section 5.

2. MAIN CHARACTERISTICS OF TCM TERMINOLOGY

Generally speaking, terminologies of TCM are abstract and ambiguous, which are not very easy to understand for Chinese native speakers, let alone foreigners. There are some terms, say "阴阳", "气", and "脏腑", which have no exact corresponding words in English. Although such special words represent a unique Chinese culture, they also bring difficulties for TCM translators. According to Shen (2020), TCM terminology can be divided into five categories, namely, TCM terms with philosophical concepts, TCM terms describing etiology and pathology, TCM terms of disease names, TCM terms of diagnostic and treatment methods, and TCM terms of prescriptions.

The uniqueness of TCM terminology lies in the fact that it is different from other natural sciences. This is because most of the terms of natural

sciences in China were introduced from foreign countries and many of these terms are either Chinese translations or unified terms. In contrast, a large number of TCM terms were formed in ancient times, some of them could even be dated back to thousands of years ago. As a result, TCM terms have their own system and characteristics. The characteristics of TCM terms can be roughly divided into four aspects: Firstly, TCM terms are of historic significance. Due to the historical nature of Chinese medicine, most of the TCM terms are in ancient Chinese. Secondly, TCM terms sometimes convey characteristics of terms in other fields. This is because Chinese medicine is a discipline based on biology, intermingled with physics, chemistry, mathematics, and permeated with humanistic philosophy. Thirdly, TCM terminology is mostly qualitative description, as can be seen by cold asthma, hot asthma, etc. Fourthly, abstract concepts in TCM are expressed by concrete terms (a good example is the five elements).

Correct term translation is crucial for TCM going global and there are many factors affecting the translation quality. On one hand, translation proficiency of the translator plays a crucial role. On the other hand, as the philosophical foundation and abstract concepts of TCM may be expressed differently in various versions, inconsistencies are not unusual. Thirdly, translation of TCM terms should take communication into account. In fact, translation is a social communication activity accompanied by language conversion. Or, in other words, translation includes two acts, namely, translation and communication, which complement each other and is a coherent process. According to the theory of translation and communication, translation is usually the process in which the subject of communication, i.e. the communicator, decides or selects the content to be communicated (the original message or source message). The dissemination process is the one in which the dissemination subject conveys the translated information to the audience through a specific medium. The process of Chinese culture translation and interpretation is a unity of translation and communication, which involves not only the factors related to language and culture conversion in the "translation" stage, but also many communication elements in the "dissemination" process, such as the medium of translation, audience, feedback, and communication effect. It should be clarified that the translation which is purpose-oriented and target-language-reader-oriented is communication in essence, and its purpose is also communication.

Successful translation is the basis of communication (Hua, 2015).

3. AN ANALYSIS ON CURRENT STATUS OF TRANSLATION AND DISSEMINATION OF TCM TERMS BASED ON LASSWELL'S 5W THEORY

Lasswell's model of communication is one of the first and most influential models of communication. It was initially published by Harold Lasswell in 1948 and analyzes communication in terms of five basic questions including "Who?", "Says What?", "In What Channel?", "To Whom?", and "With What Effect?". These questions pick out the five fundamental components of the communicative process: the sender, the message, the channel, the receiver, and the effect. Lasswell's model is still being used today and has influenced many subsequent communication theorists. Some of them expanded the model through additional questions like "Under What Circumstances?" and "For What Purpose?". Others used it as a starting point for the development of their own models. According to the theory of communication, the success of a communication activity is inseparable from the joint action of five elements of the process. And Lasswell's 5W theory of cross-cultural communication can also provide great inspiration for the translation of TCM terms.

3.1 The Subject of Translation ("Who")

The purpose and motivation of the subject of translation are often the primary criteria for the selection of works to be translated. At present, English books related to TCM are mostly published by academicians or research teams. Their main target readers are either college students or Chinese culture lovers. As a result, the number of general western readers is still quite small.

3.2 Translation Content ("Says What")

Translation of representative works of TCM can facilitate its dissemination. For example, *The Infertility Cure: The Ancient Chinese Wellness Program for Getting Pregnant and Having Healthy Babies*, which is on the top sales list of Amazon, its author, Randine Lewis, is the founder of Eastern Harmony clinic in Houston, Texas, and the director of a series of medical programs and initiatives. She also teaches for the integrative doctoral program at

Daoist Traditions College of Medical Arts. And the language she uses is more authentic and better caters to western readers.

3.3 Translation and Introduction Channels ("in What Channel")

There are many communication channels in the information age, including traditional media such as newspaper, radio, magazine, television, as well as new media such as Weibo, WeChat and mobile apps. The top-down promotion is more effective among the communication channels by means of publishing houses, mass media, international exchange and conferences. In addition, some dissemination channels of TCM such as new media and self-media are still in early development and the attention attached to them is not enough. The development of TCM in China is also somewhat restricted, one of the reasons for this is that when people talk about TCM, they first think of famous doctors such as Hua Tuo and Li Shizhen, which seems ancient and far away; and some long-standing books such as *Huangdi Neijing* are obscure and difficult to understand. Secondly, the status quo concerning the dissemination of TCM is, to some extent, related to the lack of breakthroughs in academic innovation. The unity of man and nature, yin and yang, five elements, meridians and acupoints also give people a sense of mystery, which is related to the fact that TCM has not yet been truly integrated with modern scientific and technological achievements.

3.4 Audience Analysis ("to Whom")

Audience is the recipient of translated works, mainly including general readers, translators, commentators, language and TCM students as well as teachers. If the translation does not study the audience's acceptance and reading habits, the dissemination and effect is likely to be limited. In fact, during the process of Chinese culture going global, some translated works were not well received in the foreign book market. One of the reasons may be that the analysis of the audience is not clear and the positioning of the book is not so accurate.

3.5 Communication Effect ("with What Effect")

The acceptance of TCM is different around the world. Countries such as Japan and South Korea are not very different from China, neither are their

customs. As a result, these countries have a stronger sense of recognition and higher acceptance of TCM concepts, while European and American countries have a lower level of acceptance of TCM due to a lack of understanding of the special characteristics of TCM products and the absence of corresponding regulatory regulations or access conditions. Take the United States as an example, Chinese medicine (e.g. Yunnan Baiyao and Liu Wei Dihuang Pills) enters the American market either as a botanical medicine according to western theories or as a dietary supplement, which cannot be used to promote medical effects. The development of TCM is somewhat restricted by the publicity of medical effects. Hence, TCM needs to be standardized, which requires comprehensive consideration of various factors including differences in system, culture, market, medical regulation, etc.

4. STRATEGIES FOR TRANSLATING TCM TERMS

Experts like Liu Qingquan, deputy head of the National TCM Medical Treatment Expert Group, believe that the internationalization of TCM will take a long time. At the end of 2019, during the "Online Seminar on Traditional Medicine for Global Prevention and Treatment of COVID-19", he suggested that "the traditional medicine of each country is deeply connected with its unique culture and philosophy, so there will be cultural collisions in the process of promotion. From this perspective, in order for TCM to go global, TCM and Chinese culture must be accepted and recognized first." To achieve this goal, joint efforts of many parties and the adoption of effective strategies to help the cross-cultural dissemination of TCM are needed.

Firstly, it is necessary to carefully select the translator of TCM-related material. In terms of the dissemination effect of TCM, the translation and dissemination behavior will be more effective with experts from all levels of the government and other competent departments. And the government's policy and funding will guarantee the translation and cross-cultural dissemination behavior. Up till now, TCM has been disseminated to more than 180 countries. The Technical Committee on Chinese Medicine, which was established by the International Organization for Standardization, has promulgated 21 national standards. The white paper "Chinese Medicine in China" and the "Law of the People's Republic of China on Chinese Medicine", which were introduced in 2016, have elevated the

development of TCM to a national strategy (Tao and Zhou, 2018). The importance the state attaches to TCM will also promote its development and dissemination. In addition, some industry organizations and government departments are also involved in the dissemination, leading to a series of influential projects including "Chinese Keywords" by the China Translation Association. It is also a good idea to include western translators in the project. Studies have shown that when the translation is completed by western translators, the translated works are relatively more acceptable (Qian and Zhang, 2017). This is because western translators have more in common with western readers and can often choose the most appropriate translation strategy for them.

Secondly, deep understanding of the cultural connotation of TCM terms is needed. TCM has a long history, which requires a language to reflect the unique ideas of that particular nation. TCM differs in many ways from the western medical system and is rich in traditional Chinese culture, philosophy, scientific outlook and values. Terminology of TCM, therefore, is the basic unit of language loaded with a large amount of information in the process of cultural exchange. The formation of TCM terminology is closely related to the development of traditional Chinese culture and philosophy, and there are many general and vague rhetorical expressions with rich information. If the translation of TCM terminology ignores these cultural connotations and the translator simply adopts the method of translation corresponding to western medical vocabulary, problems may arise. In addition, TCM terms have some core concepts or theoretical bases, such as yin and yang, qi, etc., which lack correspondence in English. So these terms need to be further explained by transliteration with notes.

Thirdly, importance should also be attached to the dissemination of TCM. Quite often, inconsistencies in the translations are encountered. Professor Wang (2020) finds that the three authoritative Chinese-English dictionaries in China have different language and word classes for the same TCM term. For example, the word "electrotherapy" is a verb in the *New Century Chinese-English Dictionary*, which is translated as give/receive electrotherapy. In the *Chinese-English Dictionary*, it is "cure by using electric currents; electrotherapy", while in the *Chinese-English Translation Dictionary*, it is a noun and refers to electrotherapy, diathermy or electrorial treatment. However, according to terminology theory, a term

should have the characteristics of semantic non-contradiction and univocity. As the meaning of a term should fully reflect the characteristics of the concept, there should be no synonyms (Wang and Sun, 2020).

Last but not least, attention should be given to the reserve and training of cross-cultural translation and communication talents. At present, more than 20 TCM universities and various research institutions at all levels in China are responsible for training talents, but compared with the booming development and ever-increasing communication need, there is still a lack of talents who have studied TCM theory, translation and cross-cultural communication. In terms of talent training, language proficiency and cross-cultural communication ability should be given priority in accordance with the requirements of national standards and professional guidelines.

5. CONCLUSION

The research on TCM translation started late and is still in the preliminary step of development. On one hand, TCM has a unique theoretical system in which some terms are profound in meaning and not easy to understand. On the other hand, there is no established and ready standard to follow. Therefore, the quality of TCM translation is still not satisfactory. Sometimes the translation of terms is far away from or even opposite to their original meanings. Therefore, the translation of TCM terms is a burning question to be resolved. Based on Lasswell's 5W theory, this paper proposes some suggestions on how to improve the translation and dissemination of TCM terms. Hopefully, these suggestions will be helpful for TCM to go global.

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