

Research on the Translation of Chinese Twenty-Four Solar Terms: A Skopos Theory Perspective

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Abstract

In the current era of rapid development, excellent culture needs to be inherited and spread to the world. Therefore, it is essential to consider the translation of the 24 solar terms. China persists in the principle of the Belt and Road Initiative, adheres to the guidance of Chinese traditional excellent culture goes global, and enhances the influence of Chinese culture on the words, the culture of the words communicating and developing constantly. This paper analyzes and compares translations of different versions, explores the necessity of translation strategies for translation, then summaries the translation strategy, ultimately figures out the development space, text and promote the exchange of Chinese and foreign cultures.

Keywords

The Twenty-Four Solar Terms, Translation Aesthetics, Translation Skills

1. Introduction

1.1. The Historical Background of the Twenty-Four Solar Terms

In ancient China, agricultural development was the most important productive force. It is the foundation of national stability and development. Chinese has an old saying: We speak of Spring and Autumn, we speak of Winter and Summer, these four seasons revolve without ceasing (“春秋，曰冬夏，此四时，运不穷”—《三字经》) oracle bone often uses spring and autumn to represent the change of seasons, people were mainly farmers who focused on agricultural production. Based on the observation of seasonal changes and the result of astronomical observations, they evolved from the two seasons of Spring and Autumn to four seasons: Spring, Summer, Autumn, and Winter. For a long time, the ancestors

felt the changes of the four seasons by observing the changes in the starry sky. They found the star signs and the chronograph measuring the length of the sun's shadow (日圭表). In the Qin and Han Dynasties, with the developments of the astronomical observation method, the ancestors divided the sun's orbit into twenty-four parts equally so that every solar term has its accurate sun exposure angle.

Therefore, people have fully grasped the relationships between solar terms and the sun. As a guide to produce and life in the farming society, the twenty-four solar terms were spread throughout the country and adopted by all Chinese nationalities. As a knowledge system with Chinese characteristics and its practical activities, the Twenty-four Solar Terms severely affect people's way of thinking and standard of behavior. They are an essential carrier of traditional Chinese culture. For understanding Chinese culture, the twenty-four solar terms are the key to seeing big things through small things. It connects ancient society to modern society and Chinese people to nature. In ancient times, it was the traditional calendar and the most clear embodiment of the traditional relationship between Dao (道) and man in China. Suppose people do not understand the twenty-four solar terms. In that case, there is no way to discuss the view that hummable beings are an integral part of nature because people cannot understand this philosophical concept. That is where the foundation of physics is. Today, Chinese people live in spring, summer, autumn, and winter, sunny, wind, rain, and snow, which is no different from ancient times. For example, when they think of spring's beginning today, a spring breeze will be stroking their faces in their hearts. As a nonphysical cultural heritage, the English translation of the Twenty-four Solar Terms is an integral part of promoting its dissemination worldwide, which also plays a crucial role in Chinese traditional culture going abroad to the world [1].

1.2. Research Significance

The Twenty-four Solar Terms have had an essential impact on the culture and minds of the Chinese people, which made our nation have the cultural concept of respecting the regularity of nature and getting along with nature harmoniously. At the same time, China insists on cultural exchanges and different translations. However, the translation activities could be more precise, especially the translation of traditional Chinese culture. On the one hand, it belongs to the objective expression of the human spiritual world, and on the other hand, it also straddles different societies and cultures. The festivals and customs represented by the Twenty-four Solar Terms are well known to every Chinese. Since Chinese Twenty-four Solar Terms became an intangible cultural heritage, people have learned more about them.

The purpose of studying the translation and comparison of the 24 solar terms is to promote and protect the traditional Chinese culture, to inherit and spread the excellent traditional Chinese culture more perfectly, to make the cultural

exchanges between Chinese and foreign countries closer, and to make the translation skills more mature. Under the theoretical guidance of “Faithfulness, Expressiveness, and Elegance” to realize the goal that excellent translation could convey cultural connotation. In order to not be bound by the original translation, improve the quality of the translation, master the translation method, determine how to convey the intention of the original text, master the central idea, and make the translation more perfect and meaningful. The significance of the study is to find the essence of translation to provide guidance and direction for future translated texts, make Chinese-English translation more vivid and is an essential means to show Chinese culture to the world. Under the theoretical guidance of “Faithfulness, Expressiveness, and elegance”, this paper analyzed the study of different 24 solar terms emphatically.

Translating the Twenty-four Solar Terms aims to protect and carry on the excellent traditional Chinese culture. In recent years, cultural traditions have been thought of by the word; the translation of culture is finding a new position and plays a crucial role in promoting cultural communication. The purpose of studying the translation and comparison of the 24 solar terms is also to help translators understand the application of “Faithfulness, Expressiveness, and Elegance”. Helping translators make better use of this theory, making the translated texts more vivid.

1.3. Related Studies at Home

As early as 1815, British missionary Robert Morrison published the world’s first Chinese-English dictionary, “Chinese-English Dictionary” in Guangzhou, and later published the second “Five Cars Yun Fu” in 1819. However, there is no separate appendix or general table to summarize the translation of the 24 solar terms and other traditional Chinese culture-related terms, and the translation of the 24 solar terms is scattered in various articles, and only a simple explanation, but no independent translation. In the Chinese-English Dictionary published by the Commercial Press in 1978 and written by Wu Jingrong, the translation of the 24 solar terms was mainly based on Ji Lifei’s system, and the original individual names were revised according to the translation method of Charles Ellis.

However, the translation of solar terms still needs to be fixed. There are still many different voices within the academic community. There is a great debate on how to translate the 24 solar terms at home and abroad, and no definitive version exists. Scholars in different fields have personalized opinions on the 24 solar terms, but there needs to be translation research according to the requirements of Mr. Yan Fu. It is difficult for scholars to find a perfect solution due to the asymmetry between languages and cultures, and it requires multi-party discussion and research to change the chaotic phenomenon of translation of Chinese and English nouns.

In the *Pekinese Dialect*, published overseas as early as 1871, *A Chinese and English Vocabulary in the Pekinese Dialect* introduces the 24 solar terms of

China to the world in detail. However, the first English translation of the solar terms was published in the Chinese-English Dictionary in 1887, in which only six solar terms were mentioned. Since modern times, there have been different translations of solar terms. Contemporary Chinese-English Dictionary (Lin Yutang, 1972), published by the Chinese University of Hong Kong Press, The Far East English-Chinese Dictionary (Liang Shiqiu, 1977), the first Chinese-English dictionary of New China published by the Beijing Commercial Press (Wu Jingrong, 1978) have given a complete translation of solar terms in the appendix. Since then, large dictionaries such as the New Century Chinese-English Dictionary of FLTRP (Hui Yu, 2003) and the Chinese-English Dictionary of Shanghai Translation Publishing House (Wu Guanghua, 2010) have adopted the translation method of the Commercial Press. In 2019, the Chinese Astronomical Society and the National Science and Technology Words Committee released the names of the 24 Solar Terms. Through the efforts of many generations of scholars, the English translation of the 24 solar terms has gradually formed two sets of systems: the Commercial Press edition and the Astronomical Society edition [2].

1.4. Related Studies Abroad

As early as 1815, British missionary Robert Morrison (1782-1834) published the world's first Chinese-English dictionary "Chinese-English Dictionary" in Guangzhou and later published the second "Five Cars Yun Fu" in 1819. However, there is no separate appendix or general table to summarize the translation of the 24 solar terms and other traditional Chinese culture-related terms, and the translation of the 24 solar terms is scattered in various articles, and only a simple explanation, but no independent translation. Mindende, a former British Legation escort group member, published the Sino-English Joint Glossary in 1871. The concept of the dictionary and the quality of its entries are superior to those of previous works. The dictionary finally provides many English translations and introductions of traditional Chinese culture and customs in the form of notes, and the first complete English translations of the 24 solar terms came from this dictionary. Later, the Canadian missionary Jili Fei published a revised edition of Chinese and English Idioms in 1898. In this edition, he continued to translate the original solar terms. Later, German missionary Withelm Lobscheid (1822-1893) and Cambridge University Sinologist Herbert Allen Giles (1845-1935) revised the translation of the 24 solar terms in the Chinese-English Combined Characters. Herbert Allen Giles also translated the English names of the 24 solar terms [3].

1.5. Review of Current Research Status

In terms of the translation of the 24 solar terms at home and abroad, only some translation methods can be studied. Many scholars have provided English translations of the terms for hundreds of years. However, there is yet to be an indus-

try or national standard for English translating solar terms in China. In the dissemination, many “improvised” versions lack a deep understanding of the climatic and phenological implications behind the solar term names. Based on sorting out the origin and flow of the English translation of solar terms, by focusing on the connotation of climate and phenology of the terms and their subtle orientation, it is helpful to put forward the sequence of English translation names that accurately fit the climate and phenology of solar terms and promote the international communication of the 24 solar terms [3]. However, there are only four results of an advanced search using the keyword “English translation of the 24 Solar Terms”. Compared with the literature on the 24 solar terms, there is a considerable gap in number, and the content of the research is mainly about the unification of the English translation of the 24 solar terms. Whether foreign readers can accept the existing English translation has yet to be examined.

2. Guiding Theory

“Faithfulness, Expressiveness and Elegance” comes from the Chinese translator Yan Fu, who regards achieving “Faithfulness, Expressiveness and Elegance” as the three major problems in the translation career. According to its internal law, Yan Fu summed up into three essential words, laying a solid foundation for Chinese translation theory. The principle and standard of translation is “faithfulness, Elegance, and Elegance” [4].

2.1. “The Faithfulness” in Translation

Different from direct translation, “Faithfulness” means to convey the meaning and content of the original text completely, also called the translation should be accurate. “Faithfulness” slightly modifies the sentence structure to accurately convey the original text’s information rather than corresponding word for word. “Faithfulness” requires the translator to be sincere. The translator should not only be faithful to the ideological and cultural background of the original work but also accurately convey the original author’s views rather than the views created by the translator through his modification, but also be responsible for the readers and his translation. If the original author’s argument needs to be stronger, we need not add to it. If the original author’s ideas need to be updated, we do not need to adapt them to the trends of the times.

For example, if the background of the original text is ancient China, then the background of the translation should not be Westernized. “Faithfulness” is the basis of translation. Only by achieving “Faithfulness” can we achieve “Expressiveness” and “Elegance”. As translators, we should be faithful to the original text and avoid arbitrary exertions.

2.2. “Expressiveness” in Translation

“Expressiveness” refers to the smoothness of sentences, which means that the translation should be smooth and precise, that is, complacent and forgetful, and

convey the meaning of the original text without being affected by the words and phrases of the original text. Yan Fu believes that translators should fully understand the content of the original text before translating. The translator should pay more attention to what the original text wants to express rather than how the original text expresses the meaning. The translation sentence is fluent without speech. “Expressiveness” does not need to be translated mechanically. Sometimes, the original text’s meaning can be expressed in another way. Translation does not have to be bound to the sentence pattern of the original text. Zevon does not have to use the passive voice if the original text does so deliberately. If the original phrase is capitalized, the translation need not be capitalized. “Expressiveness” is the core of translation; “Faithfulness” and “Expressiveness” complement each other. If a translation cannot be understood after reading, it is also useless that the translation is accurate and flowery for the words. The ultimate goal of translation is to communicate between different cultures and make readers understand the original text.

The ultimate target group of translation is readers. The translators should pay attention to the reader’s understanding of what is rather than the consistency of sentence pattern and sequence.

2.3. “Elegance” in Translation

“Elegance” refers to elegant and beautiful words; it emphasizes not only the artistic conception of the original text but also lines with the language and logical habits of the Chinese people and the literary value and artistic value. “Elegance” is not antique; it does not need to require the translation to be neat. “Elegance” is not pretentious and showy deliberately. It is a measure that conforms to the linguistic norms of the translatable article.

The translation should align with the original artistic conception, the modern mainstream aesthetic, to achieve both elegant and widespread appreciation. Chinese people like to use four-character phrases and idioms, which are prominent in political discourse and literary styles. “Elegance” requires the translator to be proficient in the target language and to have a thorough understanding of the target language. Using Yan Fu’s theory, translators can adopt correct methods to translate articles grounded in the original text, making it easier for people from different cultures in the world to understand other cultures [5].

3. Translation and Comparison of the Twenty-Four Solar Terms under the Direction of Faithfulness, Expressiveness, and Elegance

3.1. The Translations of “霜降”

“霜降” is the 18th solar term in the 24 solar terms. It occurs on October 23 or 24 of the Gregorian Calendar, when the sun reaches celestial longitude 210 degrees. “Shuangye red flowers in February”. After “霜降”, the leaves of the maple trees will turn brilliant red of golden when touched by the wind. In ancient China,

there were many poets who would write about the scenery at this time. Also, the time of “霜降” is the percent time for persimmon fruit and chrysanthemums to bloom. Until now, every time at this time of year, there is also a chrysanthemum viewing party in China.

“霜降” has three different translations. The first is “First Descent”; it is a free translation. The second one is “Frost’s Descent”, the literal translation. The last version is “Frost”; it is a literal translation.

“霜降” is the transition from autumn to winter. When “霜降” comes, the temperature drops sharply, with a significant temperature difference between day and night. At this time, the first Frost generally appeared in the Yellow River Basin of China. This is the last solar term in autumn, but the first descent is too absolute. Even in the same area, the landing time of the first descent may change depending on the altitude or terrain. Generally, from late October to early November, the dry, cold air gradually dominated the area in China. First descent, this word is relatively easy to understand. It means the first descent of the whole year. However, it has a flaw. Descent means to fall, and as a noun, when used alone, it can only vaguely convey part of the meaning of “霜降”. There are two characteristics or properties of “Frost”. It could be used as a verb and a noun. The noun means rime and cold. The verb means covering something with Frost. It can easily be understood as a noun and makes people not comprehend what it feels like when Frost and snowfall. The better of the three translations is Frost’s Descent. In the phrase, Frost is used as a noun, and descent is used as a verb. Not only does this phrase explain the characteristics of this solar term, but it also emphasizes the proceedings of the fall of this Frost. Going by the criteria of “faithfulness, expressiveness, and elegance”, there is no doubt that the translation for Frost’s Descent is more appropriate than others. “Frost’s Descent” allows English natives to have a more accurate understanding of this solar term through imagery. It also makes it easy for people to understand the characteristics of this solar term, using phrases to show the beauty of the text.

3.2. The Translations of “清明”

“清明” gains the name from “Huainan Zi Astronomical Instruction”, “清明” is a solar term that reflects the change of natural phenology. “清明” is the fifth solar term in the 24 solar terms, and the time varies between April 4 and 6 in the Gregorian Calendar every year, when the sun reaches celestial longitude 15 degrees. This time, the sun shines brightly, the plants sprout, the flowers bloom, the air becomes clear, the natural world is full of vitality. In the south of China, the climate is fresh and cool at this time, in the northern regions, the snow is beginning to break, gradually entering the sunny spring. In ancient China, people usually kick Cuju, go hiking, fly kites and plant willow trees.

“清明” has three different translations. The first version is “Clear and Bright”. It is the literal translation. The second version is “Pure Brightness”. It is the literal translation. The last version is “Qingming”, which is transliteration.

When “清明” comes, temperature rises and rainfall increases; therefore, it is the best time to cultivate the land. During this solar term, the weather is getting warmer, and the grass is full of verdure, the sky is bright, all nature is being renewed. Accordingly, this solar term brings people a clear and bright feeling. People usually go on an outing during this solar term, enjoying spring scenery and the fresh vitality of green. First, it must be clear that the solar term “清明” and the traditional “Qingming Festival” are two different concepts. “清明” literally means “clear and bright”, referring to the “清明” solar term is precise. Everything is clear and bright; the translation of “Pure Brightness” could give the English natives a more accurate understanding of this solar term: Pure means free from impurity; using the structure of the adjective with noun makes the translation more concise and descriptive. “Qingming” uses the transliteration method. It follows the Chinese pronunciation into the English pronunciation directly.

Nevertheless, transliteration does not go by the “Faithfulness, Expressiveness, and Elegance” criteria, so “Qingming” is not the best translation under theoretical guidance [6]. “Clear and Bright” directly used the climatic characteristics of this solar term to translate. It is also corresponding to the original meaning of Chinese. Under the guidance of “Faithfulness, Expressiveness, and Elegance”, the translation of “Pure Brightness” is better than the literal translation, which is “Clear and Bright”.

3.3. The Translations of “惊蛰”

“惊蛰” is the third solar term in the 24 solar terms. It occurs on March 5 or 6 of the Gregorian Calendar, when the sun reaches the celestial longitude of 345 degrees. Since the “惊蛰”, the spring ploughing officially began, the vast number of farmers engaged in various farming activities on the basis of farmer proverbs. The main production of “惊蛰” is cultivation, fertilization, insect control, afforestation. “惊蛰” is of great significance in busy farming. China has attached great importance to “惊蛰” since ancient times, and regard it as the beginning of spring farming.

“惊蛰” has five different translations. The first version is “Awaking of Insects”; it is a literal translation. The second version is “Excited Insects”; it is a literal translation. The third version is “Awaking from Hibernation”, and it is free translation. The fourth version is “Waking from Hibernation”, and it is free translation. The last version is “Insects Waken”, and it is the literal translation.

The “惊蛰” reflects the phenomenon that natural organisms germinate and grow under the influence of rhythmic changes. When it comes to the “惊蛰”, the sunshine rises, the temperature warms up, the spring thunder suddenly rises, the rain increases and everything is full of vitality. The so-called “spring thunder shocks hundreds of insects” refers to the time of the “惊蛰” when the spring thunder begins to sound, awakening the worms that are dormant in the ground for winter. In Chinese culture, the “惊蛰” refers to the days when the sky wakes

the living animals with thunder. According to Yu Heng's perspective, insects that wake up in spring and all hibernating animals are contained. Because the word “蛰” is not dedicated to insects [7]. The translations of “Awaking of insects”, “Excited insects”, and “Insects Waken” are all literal translations, but the contents that this solar term wants to express are more than that. It is difficult for English natives to understand the meaning of this solar term to get through the literal meanings.

“Waking” has an action continuity suffix. It could be understood as the waking period and emphasizes a period. “Awake” emphasized a particular time when they woke up. “Wake” refers to natural waking and can be used as transitive or intransitive verbs. “Waken” is used chiefly for written formal articles. It is often used in dynamic and extended meanings. While “Awake” is a formal word, it is primarily used in metaphors. “Awake” is usually an adjective, and “Waking” means the present tense, generally meaning waking up. “惊蛰” represents the return of spring to the earth, and everything rouses up from sleeping. So, in the translation of “Awaking from Hibernation”, it is not just insects that wake up from winter. It is everything. In Chinese culture, “蛰” means that hibernating animals such as snakes, insects, rats, and ants do not eat or move. “惊蛰” means that the spring thunder wakes these hibernating animals. After “惊蛰”, it is the time for all things to come back to life. So, “Awaking from Hibernation” is more in line with requirements.

3.4. The Translations of “处暑”

“处暑” is the 14th solar term in the 24 solar terms, and the time varies between August 22 and 24 of the Gregorian Calendar, when the sun reaches the celestial longitude 150 degrees. The approach of “处暑” means that the temperature begins to drop significantly. Since then, the autumn wind gradually rises, and people can enjoy the cool autumn days. In China, the customs of “处暑” include dragon boat races and fishing festivals. Also, in some areas, sacrificial activities are held to prey for a good harvest and peace in the coming year.

“处暑” has three different translations. The first version, “Stopping of Heat”, is a free translation. The second version, “Limit of Heat”, is a literal translation. The third version, “End of Heat”, is the literal translation.

“处暑” is the period of the intense heat of summer. The word “处” means to hide and stop. The pronunciation of “处暑” sounds similar to the pronunciation of leave the heat in Chinese. The arrival of this solar term means the end of the torrid weather. A Chinese proverb says: The hot weather in that time that it is also a spell of hot weather after the Beginning of Autumn and an old wives' summer (处暑天还暑, 好似秋老虎).

In Chinese, the sound of “处” is close to the sound of “出”, the meaning of “出” is “hide” or “end”. The translations are all popular and easy to understand, concise and elegant. Limit is the meaning of a restriction on something. This word does not meet the standard of “expressiveness”. “Stop” contains “cease”

and “prevent”. It could be extended as suspension or discontinue. “Stop” is a common word to halt any activity or task. It is often used to mean to stop doing something.

Furthermore, “end” is the official word. It denotes finishing something and completing it naturally. Comparing the two translated texts, the translation of “End of Heat” is more in line with the requirements of “Faithfulness, Expressiveness, and Elegance” than the other translation is.

4. Strategy and Suggestions

From the examples, the most common translation strategies of the twenty-four solar terms translation are free translation and literal translation.

4.1. Free Translation

Translation scholars have put deep thought and effort into translation. There are inevitably two obstacles in Chinese-English translation: language and culture. These make the problem of non-translatability a vital part that must be addressed in the field of translation research. There is a certain untranslatability in translation activities, reflected in two aspects: the non-translatable language and cultural non-translatable. The principle of faithfulness is an important criterion, which means that the translations should be as faithful as possible to the original text to ensure the authenticity and accuracy of the information. “Expressiveness” means the translation does not adhere to the original form and the translation is smooth and precise. The translation, which achieves “Expressiveness”, can make the readers feel like reading the original texts and be personally on the scene. “Elegance” requires the translated text to accord with the specification, the artistic effect of being accurate and vivid, and the style to fit in with the colloquialism of the original texts. “Elegance” differs from the above two principles, “Elegance” requires the translators and the translation to be more abstract and also requires the translators to sort out their experiences in continuous practice. On the premise of not affecting the original text’s meaning, translators need to appropriately add relevant cultural content to help readers understand and effectively avoid ambiguity and misunderstanding. The function of free translation is to help readers cross the gap of cultural differences through individual efforts.

4.2. Literal Translation

The literal translation is to retain the sentence structure and expression of the original text, basically without changing the form of the original text, let alone the content of the original text. In recent years, various scholars and translators have also profoundly studied the connotation of literal translation. The most significant advantage of literal translation is that it can directly reflect the structure of the original text and is easy to understand. It is the translation method most often used by translators. Nevertheless, the literal translation is different from the hidebound translation. The hidebound translation is a mechanical

transformation of the expression form, but the literal translation differs [8]. It emphasizes on “appearance”. Although different scholars have different understandings and definitions of literal translation, they all reach the same goal, emphasizing that “literal translation” should be faithful to the original text not only in content but also in language form, including words and sentences, grammatical forms and pragmatic scope, and should be consistent with the original text as much as possible, while requiring the language to be smooth, smooth and easy to understand [9].

4.3. Suggestions

Excellent translations should consider the original text’s content and a series of questions about the emotional volition, the writing style, and the writing structure of the original texts. Due to the lack of understanding of the Chinese cultural background when transmitting traditional culture, English natives will still misunderstand or be confused about the translation even if the translators transliterate the original contents accurately. The translation process is not limited to the form and structure of the original texts. Only seeks to express the details of the original texts correctly and helps readers understand the original texts better. For example, four-character words, idioms, allusions, and phrases are prevalent in Chinese, but it takes work to express them perfectly in English. This requires the translators to have insight into the culture and background of the original texts [10].

Firstly, the translators need to analyze the background of the culture, make the translations easy to understand, make the expression simple, and avoid pretending to be elegant purposefully, such as using complex phrases and uncommon collocations. Secondly, translators need to pay attention to details, improve the quality of the translations, and make the language concise and clear. Thirdly, delving and innovating, deepening the characteristics of the text, and grasping the text’s overall structure are also essential parts of translating. Translators must be faithful to the original text and pursue truth and elegance. Last, translators must read many translated books to master the translation skills of different related languages. In a word, the translator also needs to keep learning and making progress. Only in this way the translator can achieve a fluent translation [11].

5. Conclusion

This paper is based on the theory of “Faithfulness, Expressiveness and Elegance”, comparing different versions of parts of the twenty-four solar terms, analyzing the structure and diction of the examples, and providing some suggestions. The three principles are interrelated and are essential in researching the translations of the twenty-four solar terms. Translating the twenty-four solar terms is crucial to publicizing the excellent traditional Chinese culture. Taking advantage of the “Faithfulness, Expressiveness and Elegance” principle could help readers better understand Chinese culture’s connotations.

Conflicts of Interest

The authors declare no conflicts of interest regarding the publication of this paper.

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