

Research on Pragmatic Relevance and Translation of Tea Culture Terminology from the Perspective of Digitalized Teaching

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Abstract: This paper focuses on the teaching of tea culture terminology translation against the backdrop of digital transformation in education. Based on the theory of pragmatic relevance, the research emphasizes shifting the focus of translation from static linguistic equivalence to more dynamic communicative effectiveness. This paper advocates the flexible application of various strategies. These include literal translation, free translation, transliteration with annotation, and adaptive translation based on the target audience's cognitive context. The paper innovatively proposes digitally-enabled teaching implementation paths, including constructing modular online courses, building intelligent terminology case databases, conducting cloud-based workshops on translation, and implementing industry-academia collaborative project practices. These aim to reshape the teaching process utilizing digital technology, effectively cultivating higher vocational students' cultural communication abilities and practical translation skills, thereby providing high-quality language service talent support for the internationalization of Chinese tea culture.

Keywords: Tea culture terminology; Pragmatic relevance; Translation strategies; Digitalized teaching; Business English

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1. Introduction

Tea culture terminology is a linguistic symbol that carries the millennial Chinese civilization, philosophical thought, aesthetic taste, and business practice^[1]. With the continuous deepening of the internationalization and brand transformation of China's tea industry, Business English translation professionals not only need to master language conversion skills, but also should have the ability to interpret culture and convey values. Therefore, studying the translation of tea culture terminology has become crucial for promoting reforms in Business English translation education. From a terminological perspective, the system of tea culture terminology is vast and can be broadly categorized into three types.

- (1) Entity Terminology: Referring to objectively existing tea varieties, tea utensils, chemical components, for example Longjing, Puer Tea, Tea Polyphenols. Translations for these terms are relatively stable,

often employing “transliteration + meaning” or standardized translations.

- (2) **Process and Sensory Terminology:** Describing tea production processes, brewing techniques, and tasting experiences, for example, fixation, shaping, mellow and thick, throat feeling or aftertaste. These terms represent the difficulty in translation, as they are underpinned by unique Chinese experiences and aesthetics, often lacking exact equivalents in English.
- (3) **Cultural and Conceptual Terminology:** Embodying philosophical ideas and aesthetic values, for instance, the “chadao” as translated as teaism or as known as the way of tea, the unity of Zen meditation and tea practice in Chinese spiritual tradition, harmony, tranquility, enjoyment and truth, ichigo ichie, treasuring every encounter ^[2]. Translating these terms goes far beyond the linguistic level, entering the deep field of cultural decoding and re-encoding, serving as a touchstone for testing a translator’s cultural literacy and cross-cultural competence.

The in-depth analysis and precise translation of these three categories of terminology are key to reforming Business English translation teaching from a “language instrumental” model to a “culturally empowering” one. It demands that teaching moves beyond imparting techniques of “how to translate” to delving into the cognitive level of “why translate this way”, fostering students’ ability to make dynamic decisions based on context, audience, and communicative purpose. This is precisely the domain where pragmatic relevance theory can play a significant role.

2. The meaning of pragmatic relevance theory and its guiding significance in the reform of Business English translation

Pragmatic relevance theory, developed by Sperber and Wilson, suggests that human communication is fundamentally an ostensive-inferential process ^[3]. The speaker provides information with most appropriate meaning through ostensive behavior, and the hearer infers meaning based on this information and their cognitive context. Communication success depends on whether the information produces sufficient contextual effects with minimal processing effort ^[4]. Viewing this theory through the lens of Business English translation reform reveals its significant role in guiding the reform of Business English translation.

2.1. Reconceptualizing translation: from “equivalence” to “effectiveness”

It reshapes our understanding of the essence of translation: from “equivalence” to “effectiveness”. Traditional translation teaching pursues linguistic “equivalence”, whereas pragmatic relevance theory regards translation as a cross-linguistic, cross-cultural ostensive-inferential communicative act ^[5]. The translator’s core task is no longer to find word-for-word correspondences but to create most appropriate meaning within the target language cognitive context for the original reader/listener, ensuring the translation yields contextual effects similar to the original, thereby achieving successful communication. This represents a conceptual upgrade for higher vocational translation teaching, guiding students to focus on communicative “effectiveness” rather than mechanical “correctness”.

2.2. Clarifying the translator’s subjectivity and decision-making role

It clarifies the translator’s role as an active participant and decision-maker. Relevance theory emphasizes that the translator is a “participant” in communication, not an “invisible” conduit. In business translation, the translator must fully consider the target reader’s cognitive environment (including cultural background, knowledge reserve, reading expectations) and the communicative situation (e.g., product manual, e-commerce product

page, high-end tasting session) ^[6]. For instance, the translation strategy for the term “huigan” would necessarily differ when promoting a new tea drink to young North American consumers versus providing a professional tea evaluation report to a British tea buyer. The former might require a free translation like “a sweet aftertaste that lingers”, while the latter could use a more professional “Hui Gan (returning sweetness).” This capacity for dynamic decision-making based on audience and purpose is a core competency for modern business translation professionals and a key focus of teaching reform.

2.3. Providing a robust theoretical framework for translation strategy selection

Literal translation, free translation, transliteration, explanatory translation, and other strategies, are no longer arbitrarily chosen methods but rational decisions guided by relevance theory. The criterion for decision-making is whether it can bring target readers the best contextual effects with minimal processing effort, achieving effective cultural transmission. Use literal translation when it creates sufficient relevance for example “Green Tea; when literal translation causes relevance failure or comprehension barriers, for example “Red tea”, alternative strategies like free translation, transliteration with annotation, or explanatory translation must be employed. This provides students with a clear, explainable, and operational theoretical basis for their translation practice, avoiding pedagogical blindness and empiricism in teaching.

Therefore, introducing pragmatic relevance theory into business English translation teaching is not merely a simple theoretical addition but a profound paradigm revolution. It shifts the teaching focus from “text” to “communication”, from “teacher-led” to “student decision-making”, from “knowledge transmission” to “ability empowerment,” fully aligning with the goal of higher vocational education to cultivate high-quality, application-oriented skilled talents.

3. The specific application of pragmatic relevance theory in the Chinese-English translation of tea culture terminology

Guided by pragmatic relevance theory, the practice of translating tea culture terminology from Chinese to English can be transformed into a series of well-founded strategic choices. The following section elaborates on its specific application with examples and how these can be converted into teaching content.

3.1. Literal translation

When the literal meaning can produce the most appropriate meaning, for terms that either have established cognitive counterparts or represent conceptual gaps, literal translation is the most economical and efficient approach ^[7]. For example, “lǜchá” Green Tea. Since the association between green and tea color already exists in the Western cognitive context, literal translation can instantly activate the correct concept with minimal processing effort and strong relevance.

3.1.1. Teaching implication

Teachers should integrate digital tools and guide students in using online collaboration platforms such as WPS Office, Tencent Office to create, maintain, and update a digital terminology database. Besides, students can utilize the terminology module in Computer-Assisted Translation (CAT) tools for practical training. This helps systematically distinguish which terms fall into the category of directly transferable “universal terminology”. Furthermore, virtual simulation scenarios or corpus retrieval tools can be used to train students’ ability to quickly identify, automatically match, and effectively apply such terms, enhancing their translation efficiency

and accuracy empowered by technology.

3.2. Free translation

When the literal meaning fails to establish sufficient relevance, that is, when the cultural connotations of a term far exceed its literal meaning and a literal translation would lead to confusion or misunderstanding, free translation should be employed to reconstruct the relevance^[7]. For example, a literal translation “gongfucha” as “Kungfu Tea” may mislead Westerners into associating it with “martial arts”. However, its core connotation is “the art of tea preparation that involves spending time, emphasizing skills, and brewing carefully”. Therefore, free translations like “brewed with great skill and care” or “artisanal tea preparation” can better convey its essence. Although more processing effort is required, a more accurate contextual effect is achieved. For another example, “lenghouhun” refers to the milky coagulation that occurs when tea soup cools down, which is a sign of high-quality black tea. A literal translation like “cold after muddy” would be a complete failure. Free translations such as “creaming down (a sign of quality tea)” or “Tea cream formation” establish the correct relevance^[8].

3.2.1. Teaching implication

This is the focus and difficulty of teaching. Against the backdrop of digital education, teachers can fully utilize virtual simulation laboratories or online collaboration platforms (such as Miro and Padlet) to create cross-cultural communication situations and organize students to conduct online group discussions and case comparison analyses. Teachers should guide students to search for and analyze parallel corpora or using interactive translation teaching systems, therefore, they can intuitively compare the effects of literal and free translations and train their ability to accurately “deconstruct” the deep cultural connotations of terms. At the same time, students can be encouraged to use AI-assisted translation tools to initially generate translations, and then critically evaluate and optimize them around “relevance” and “contextual effect”, ultimately enhancing their digital practice ability to accurately “reconstruct” meaning in the target language context.

3.3. Transliteration and annotation

For core concepts with extremely high cultural load and complete conceptual void in English, transliteration is the first step to preserve cultural identity, but it must be supplemented with annotation to establish relevance^[9]. For example, “wulongcha” as “Oolong Tea”. The transliteration has been widely accepted. And teachers should thoroughly explain its etymology (the legend of “black dragon”) in teaching, thereby establishing a strong association between “Oolong” and “a type of semi-fermented tea” in students’ minds. For another example, “liubaocha” as translated to “Liubao Tea”. Adding a brief note after the transliteration: “Liubao (a famous dark tea from Liubao Town, Guangxi, China)” can convey the information that Liubao is a famous tea-producing area in Guangxi, China, helping to enhance international audiences’ awareness and interest in Guangxi Liubao tea^[1].

3.3.1. Teaching implication

Teachers should emphasize that transliteration is never the endpoint of translation but the starting point of cross-cultural transmission. In a digital teaching environment, students can be guided to use online collaboration platforms to jointly build a “Digital Knowledge Base for Characteristic Chinese Cultural Terms”, which includes not only the standard transliteration but also etymology, cultural background, recommended

explanatory phrases, and multimedia resources (e.g., images, short videos). At a practical level, students can be encouraged to use the terminology and translation memory features of CAT tools to automatically add brief, standardized parenthetical notes or footnotes for transliterated terms like “Tieguanyin” when translating product descriptions, ensuring consistency and explanatory professionalism^[10].

Additionally, the production of micro-lesson videos or AR/VR immersive cultural experience projects can be employed to vividly narrate the legends associated with “Oolong” and dragons, as well as the historical connections between “Tieguanyin” and Buddhism. Through this in-depth cognitive process, students can internalize the application scenarios and business value of the “transliteration plus annotation” strategy. This enables them to more skillfully create accurate and profound new associations for concepts unique to Chinese culture in future cross-cultural business communication.

3.4. Adaptive translation

Dynamic Adaptation for Business Communication: This represents the highest-level application of Relevance Theory in business contexts. To achieve optimal promotional impact (contextual effects) in target markets, translators may strategically add, delete, restructure, or culturally adapt source information^[11]. For example, the Chinese description “zhe kuan pu er cha chen xiang chun hou” is rendered as “This aged Puer Tea boasts a complex, earthy aroma and a smooth, mellow taste, highly valued by connoisseurs for its unique character developed over time”. The translation incorporates marketing-oriented phrases like “highly valued by connoisseurs” and reinterprets “chenxiang” which means aged fragrance, through Western wine-tasting terminology such as “earthy aroma” and “complex”, effectively evoking quality associations among target consumers and fulfilling commercial promotional objectives.

3.4.1. Teaching implication

Project-based learning such as designing an English website for a tea brand can be used to simulate real business scenarios. Students can be tasked with writing different translated copy for the same product based on different audiences and platforms, deeply experiencing the strategic and creative nature of “adaptive translation”.

4. Suggestions for teaching implementation: Reform and innovation empowered by digitalization

In order to effectively transform the translation strategies of tea culture terminology guided by pragmatic relevance theory into teaching achievements and deeply integrate them into the wave of educational digitalization, this study proposes the following systematic suggestions for teaching implementation:

4.1. Digital modular teaching reconstruction

The traditional linear teaching sequence should be broken, and a modular teaching system integrating “online theoretical foundation-virtual case exploration-digital training empowerment” should be established^[12]. The theoretical module can rely on online course platforms (such as Chaoxing Platform) to release micro-lessons, lecture videos, and interactive quizzes to consolidate students’ foundation in pragmatic relevance theory. The case module can make use of virtual simulation laboratories or interactive translation teaching systems, embedding rich real materials such as tea export packaging, international e-commerce detail pages, and exhibition materials to create immersive problem-solving situations. The training module should focus on introducing computer-assisted translation (CAT) tools, corpus search platforms, and AI-assisted

translation systems to guide students in completing the whole process of terminology management, translation, proofreading, and quality assessment under the support of technology.

4.2. Intelligent teaching case database construction

A digital teaching case database should be built integrating Chinese-English terminology, correct/incorrect examples, cultural background explanations, and multimedia materials ^[13]. Teachers and students should be encouraged to use network technology to collect and annotate authentic materials from tea cross-border e-commerce platforms, international brand websites, overseas social media, etc., and use databases or online collaboration platforms for intelligent classification, retrieval, and sharing. This case database should support multi-dimensional tagging, for example, by strategy: literal/free/transliteration/adaptive; by terminology type: tea type/process/sensory evaluation, and more which use to facilitate independent inquiry and comparative analysis by students, providing strong data support for translation decision-making.

4.3. Cloud-based translation workshop simulation

The “cloud-based translation workshop” teaching model should be fully implemented ^[14]. Students use online meeting platforms and collaborative whiteboards to organize online group discussions, translation presentations, and peer reviews. Teachers can share screens in real-time to demonstrate how to use CAT tools for terminology unification and management, or guide students in critically optimizing and evaluating the relevance of AI-generated initial drafts. The core of the workshop is to use digital tools to make students’ thinking processes, collaboration workflows, and draft iterations visible, thereby deepening their understanding and application ability of pragmatic relevance principles.

4.4. Collaborative digital project practice between higher vocational colleges and enterprises

Teachers should actively establish cooperative relationships with tea export companies, cross-border e-commerce firms, or localization service providers and introduce real localization projects (such as the creation of English product catalogs, website globalization, and translation of e-commerce detail pages) ^[15]. Through remote collaboration platforms and cloud-based project management tools, students form online project teams to assume roles such as project manager, translator, and reviser, applying learned strategies and technical tools to complete tasks within authentic business processes. Industry experts participate in online mid-term reviews and final defenses, providing real-world feedback. This approach not only enables students to accumulate practical experience but also deepens their understanding of collaborative models and the commercial value of translation work in the digital age.

5. Conclusion

This paper explores the guiding value and application strategies of pragmatic relevance theory for the translation of tea culture terminology from the perspective of educational digitalization. The research indicates that this theory provides a solid theoretical foundation for terminology translation, while digital tools and platforms such as CAT, online corpora, cloud-based workshops do offer efficient pathways for translating theory into practice. The integration of modular courses, intelligent case libraries, and real-world project practice can not only significantly enhance teaching efficiency and students’ learning experiences but also cultivate their core competencies in cross-cultural communication and digital collaboration.

In the future, researchers could further explore the application of artificial intelligence technology in the precise assessment of term translation and personalized teaching feedback, continuously deepening the reform and innovation of business English translation teaching.

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