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## C-E Translation of Buzzwords From the Perspective of Eco-Translatology

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### Abstract

Buzzwords, the popular words and expressions, spread widely among the public, as the comprehensive product of society, culture and language, and it has become a new research subject in recent years. This paper analyzes the C-E translation of buzzwords from the perspective of Eco-translatology. Three-dimensional transformations of Eco-translatology provide a new aspect for us to improve the translation of buzzwords. Targeted readers will understand the translated version of buzzwords as much as possible if transformations were made from linguistic, cultural and communicative dimensions.

**Key words:** Translation; Buzzwords; Eco-translatology; “Three-dimensional” transformation

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### INTRODUCTION

Buzzwords are widely used in people’s daily life, which are the product of the current society. The feature of the society and attitudes of people at that time are reflected by those buzzwords. In the global village, people from different countries communicate with each other more and more frequently, so the translation of these buzzwords

are of greater importance since it can be seen as the carrier of the different culture. However, the difference of language and culture and the communicative intention are challenges of the C-E translation of the buzzwords. In this paper, the translation of buzzwords on the basis of Eco-translatology is analyzed, concentrating on adaptive and selective transformations from linguistic, cultural and communicative dimensions.

### 1. THE FORMATION TYPES AND FEATURES OF BUZZWORDS

To study the C-E translation of buzzwords, it is necessary to understand what buzzwords are. This sector is mainly about the definition, formation types and features of buzzwords.

If we want to analyze how to translate the Chinese buzzwords into English, firstly we should make it clear that what does the word “buzzwords” mean. In the *Collins Cobuild Advanced Learner’s English Dictionary* the definition is like this: a buzzword is a word or expression that has become fashionable in a particular field and is being used a lot in the media. As for the *Oxford Advanced Learner’s Dictionary*, it defines the word, buzzword like this: a word or phrase, especially one connected with a particular subject that has become fashionable and popular and is used a lot in newspapers. Here are some examples of the definition in the dictionary. As a newly-emerged linguistic phenomenon, there were few scholars making research about buzzwords and it was difficult to make a unanimous definition to describe it. However, as the society keeps developing, more and more attention was paid to it. Some scholars and experts try to name it. For example, Cui Pengke pointed out that buzzwords are newly created linguistic units used in a certain community for a period, as reflection of the social hotspots and people’s attitudes. They are widely spread among the folk people, easy to replicate, advertise and derivate

(Cui, 2012). Yang Wenquan made such a definition: The buzzwords, usually in oral forms, are the linguistic forms which have been used among people of certain community for a period. It shares similarity with dialect. And it can be seen as a comprehensive product of politics, culture, folklore and the attitudes of people. There are various patterns of buzzwords, including a single word, phrase, sentence and specific sentence pattern (Yang, 2002). So it can be concluded that buzzwords are those popular words widely spread among a certain group of people at a time.

Talking about translation of buzzwords, it is necessary for translators to know something about the five major formation types of buzzwords. Firstly, some buzzwords are old words with new meanings. For example, “雷”, the Chinese character indicates a natural phenomenon, however, as a buzzword, it is used to describe something that is shocking and surprising. “段子”, a Chinese phrase used to describe a certain art form of cross-talk and other opera performances while nowadays it means an oral presentation including jokes and other forms to amuse people. Secondly, some buzzwords are newly-coined words. For instance, “凤凰男” which is used to describe a man who is from a poor family upon whom all of his families rely and then he becomes successful. Thirdly, borrowing from other language is another formation type of buzzwords. In Chinese, such expressions like “丁克 (DINK)”, “派对 (party)” and “酷 (cool)” are borrowed words from English which become buzzwords in China. Fourthly, different dialects interact with each other and some of them become buzzwords (Xia, 2012). For instance, “忽悠”, a phrase of the Northeast China means lying or cheating. “靚” a word of Hong Kong is used to describe a man handsome or a woman beautiful. People from different areas have closer communication and exchange, so their languages have mutual effect on each other. Finally, some buzzwords are from cyber language. With the rapid development of Internet, more and more cyber language are created and widely used by people in our daily life. For example, the word “斑竹” with similar pronunciation with “版主”, is used to describe a person who is in charge of a certain part of the BBS. As we can see from the above, there are various formation types of buzzwords, making it colorful and diverse.

As comprehensive product of society, culture and politics, buzzwords are featured by timeliness and high frequency. Those buzzwords can be seen as the mirror of the era. As time passes by, some of the buzzwords will be obsolete. For instance, those buzzwords related to policies and some hotspot issues are widely spread for a time and will fade out from people's daily life. We can call it the timeliness of buzzwords. For example, “包产到户”, “万元户” and “一国两制”, these words are buzzwords in the 1980s which imply the fact that the policy, reform and opening-up were initially adopted and at that time Chinese government took measures to take pilot reforms.

However, these words are not so popular at present because the society keeps developing. Words like “三个代表” and “科学发展观” are buzzwords during the first decade of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, nevertheless, nowadays, they are not as popular as that time. So it can be concluded that buzzwords are featured by timeliness. With the development of society, language keeps improving and upgrading, so do buzzwords. When talking about the high frequency of buzzwords, it means that once the buzzwords are created and coined, they will be spread among the public quickly and people use them in their daily life. What's more, due to the rapid development of the Internet and mass media, the buzzwords can be spread more and more quickly and widely. In order to follow the trend, people, especially those young people are eager to learn those popular expressions and words. Therefore, effective mass media, together with people's attitudes towards being fashionable, make it possible that the buzzwords are used frequently and widely spread. These are the two major features of buzzwords.

## 2. THE ECO-TRANSLATOLOGY AND TRANSFORMATIONS OF “THREE DIMENSIONS”

The Eco-translatology provides us a new perspective to analyze the translation of buzzwords. Here we will make a brief introduction of the Eco-translatology and the “three-dimension” transformations, that is, adaptive and selective transformations from linguistic, cultural and communicative dimensions.

### 2.1 The Eco-Translatology

The Eco-translatology is proposed by Professor Hu Gengshen from Tsinghua University. It can be seen as an ecological approach to translation studies or translation studies from an ecological perspective, which is based on his research subject, translation as Adaption and Selection (Hu, 2008). The theory of translation as Adaption and Selection, a paradigm of translation theory which can be used to provide new explanations for the translation texts, is under the guidance of the fundamental principles and ideas of Darwin's theory on Adaption and selection. What's more, it is themed as translation is adoption and selection. The central idea of it is that translators play the most important role in the translating process. Eco-translatology is interdisciplinary and help in translation research. By applying the ecological rationality, eco-translatology makes a comprehensive study of translation from the perspective of ecology. It is also an ecological paradigm and research subject concerning the concept that translation is adoption and selection.

### 2.2 The Ecological Environment of Translation

As one of the most important concept of the Eco-translatology, the ecological environment can be a

combination including the relative texts, cultural context, the original paragraphs, the spirit and material. Usually, the ecological environment of translation is classified into three kinds—large-scale environment, middle-scale environment and small-scale environment, and sometimes the material environment and spiritual environment are included. As for translation, everything except the translators can be seen as the ecological environment of translation and each of the translators is the component of others' ecological environment of translation (Hu, 2011). Professor Hu Gengshen once adopted an English prologue, "No context, no text" to express the importance of ecological environment of translated version. The content, style, diction and sentence structure of the text are all related with the ecological environment of translation.

### 2.3 Transformations of the "Three Dimensions"

According to the fundamental theory of the Eco-translatology, translation methods can be summarized as the transformations of "three dimensions". If the multi-dimensional adaption and selection are made, the language, culture and communication dimensions should be considered and adaptable and selective transformations should be finished.

As for the adaptive and selective transformations from the linguistic dimension, it means translators make linguistic transformation of the vocabulary and language from various aspects and perspectives when they translate. The adaptive and selective transformations from the cultural dimension mean that translators should pay attention to the cultural content. It is necessary and important for translators to understand the differences of the cultural quality and content of the source language and target language. In this way, misunderstanding of the source text can be avoided to a large extent. Apart from the transformations of language, translators are supposed to focus on the cultural system. When we talk about the adaptive and selective transformations from the communicative dimension, it means that translators should attach great importance to the communicative intentions of translation. Whether the communicative intentions are achieved should be taken into consideration. As a whole, the "Three Dimensions" transformations stress that translators should make conversion of the source and target text from the linguistic, cultural and communicative dimensions.

## 3. THREE-DIMENSIONAL TRANSFORMATIONS IN BUZZWORD TRANSLATION

Eco-translatology is a newly-proposed translation theory which stresses on the whole including the translator and the environment at the same time. The fundamental

concept of it is the adaptive and selective transformations from three different dimensions, that is, linguistic, cultural and communicative dimension. In this part, we will list some of the Top 10 Buzzwords, which is proposed and published by a Chinese magazine, that is, 《咬文嚼字》, and their translated version. Some of the translated versions are from the official website of China Daily and other renowned English study websites. We will analyze the buzzwords and their translated versions to find out how the translators make adaptive and selective transformations from the three dimensions.

### 3.1 Adaptive and Selective Transformations from Linguistic Dimension

When we talk about the adaptive and selective transformations of linguistic dimension, it means that translators should make transformations of the language from different aspects. As we mentioned above, some of the buzzwords are old words with new meanings. So when translate these words, translators should understand the real meaning of the buzzwords and then make adaptive and selective transformations when it is necessary.

The formation types of buzzwords are diverse. Sometimes there are pronunciation variations of the buzzwords and also the meanings of the buzzwords are not in line with the literal meaning. Therefore, translators should make adaptive and selective transformations in order to achieve the bilingual transformation. For example:

(1) 神马都是浮云 — Everything is nothing but floating clouds./Something is not worth mentioning.

(2) 围脖 — micro-blog

As the above two examples, there are pronunciation variations of these two buzzwords. The first example, the pronunciation of "神马" is similar with another Chinese word "什么" and it is a pronunciation variation. So we cannot translate "神马" as a magic horse and so on. Linguistic dimensional transformations should be made here. Here the author lists two popular translated versions. The first one is the literal translation of the phrase in which "浮云" is translated into English as "floating clouds" and the phrase "nothing but" is used here to emphasize. This one can be seen as faithful to the source text, however, "floating clouds" maybe confusing to English readers. People use this phrase, "神马都是浮云" to express their detachment or their indifference to something. The second one is free translation that underlines the meaning of this phrase while the former one stresses on the sentence pattern.

As for the second example, the buzzword is from cyber language. The pronunciation of "围脖" is similar to that of "微博", a newly-emerged social network. The rapid development of Internet acts as a driving force to promote the wide use of cyber language. People are accustomed to use "围脖" instead of "微博", however, it cannot be translated as "scarf". Here translators make

transformations due to pronunciation variation, and by doing so targeted readers will understand the real meaning of this buzzword.

Apart from pronunciation variations, there are also meaning expansion of buzzwords. When this happens, it is necessary for translators to make choice, understanding the real and new meaning of the buzzwords. For example,

- (3) 雷 — shocking
- (4) 奇葩 — weirdo
- (5) 土豪 — nouveau rich

Meanings of the buzzwords listed above are expanded from the original ones. The Chinese word, “雷”, is used to describe a natural phenomenon and its English counterpart is thunder. However, recently this word is used by people to describe their surprises and shocks. After working out the real meaning of the buzzword “雷”, translators translate it into “shocking”. The phrase “奇葩” is used to describe beautiful and colorful flowers and also it refers to excellent literary works or outstanding people. Nowadays, it becomes a buzzword whose meaning has been changed and expanded. People use it to describe someone who is weird and acts differently with common people. *The Collins Cobuild Advanced Learner’s English Dictionary* gives a definition of the word “weirdo” like this: If you describe someone as a weirdo, you disapprove of them because they behave in an unusual way which you find difficult to understand or accept. So “奇葩” was translated into “weirdo”, and in this way English readers will understand its meaning. As for “土豪”, which is used to describe bullies who are very rich in their community nowadays is used to describe those rich people especially the upstarts who spend their money willingly. So “土豪” is translated into “nouveau rich”, explaining the real meaning of this word.

When translating buzzwords, the most important step for translators is to understand the real meaning of them and then try to find proper English counterparts for them. For example:

- (7) 获得感 — sense of acquirement
- (8) 卖萌 — act cute
- (9) 山寨 — copycat

As for the 7<sup>th</sup> example, the phrase “获得感” was proposed by President Xi Jinping when he delivered a speech in 2015 and after that it became popular. In English, there are phrases like sense of humor (幽默感) and sense of responsibility (责任感). So translators translate it into “sense of acquirement”, by doing so, English readers will understand its meaning, what’s more, such kind of translation conforms to the linguistic rules of the native speaker. The 8<sup>th</sup> example, “卖萌” means someone being cute and lovely and the word “卖” does not mean to sell. After understanding the real meaning of this phrase, translators made free translation of it. It is same with the 9<sup>th</sup> example, “山寨” cannot be translated literally as “mountain village” because its real meaning is copying and faking. The definitions of the English word,

copycat, are: A copycat crime is committed by someone who is copying someone else; If you call someone a copycat, you are accusing them of copying your behavior, dress, or ideas (*Collins Cobuild Advanced Learner’s English Dictionary*). So copycat is a relatively proper counterpart of “山寨” in English.

Just like the above examples, when there are pronunciation variations and meaning expansion of the buzzwords, translators will make adaptive and selective transformations from the linguistic dimension. Sometimes translators will also do this in order to maintain and keep the real meaning of the buzzwords and try to find the proper counterpart of them. All in all, pronunciation, meaning and vocabulary are three main factors of linguistic dimensional transformations.

### 3.2 Adaptive and Selective Transformations From Cultural Dimension

Cultural dimension stresses that translation itself is an activity concerning with culture and it is a trans-cultural communication. So, when they translate buzzwords, translators should not only pay attention to the meanings from the perspective of language, but also they should try every effort to shorten the distance between different cultures so that unnecessary misunderstanding can be avoided. For example:

(10) 元芳，你怎么看 — Yuanfang, what’s your opinion? Yuanfang, who is the partner of Di Renjie, is a figure from TV play, Detective Di Renjie.

(11) 打虎拍蝇 — crack down on both tigers and flies

(12) 大V — big V (verified micro-blog users who have more than 500,000 followers)

(13) 不折腾 — buzheteng

As the 10<sup>th</sup> example listed above, Yuanfang, an unknown name to English readers. In order to make it clearer and shorten the cultural distance, translators make an explanation of Yuanfang. The 11<sup>th</sup> example, “打虎拍蝇” means that the Chinese governments will regulate those bribery and corrupt behaviors from the top-class to the low-level government at the same time. “虎” and “蝇” are used to represent respectively the corrupt officials from superior and inferior governments. The buzzword is a reflection of the resolution of Chinese government to crack down on those corrupt behaviors. Translators translate it literally. As China becomes more and more influential in the world, people in the world will get familiar with Chinese culture, English readers will gradually know what do “tigers” and “flies” mean. In the 12<sup>th</sup> example, the translator also makes explanation of the big V which can be seen as a part of cyber culture. The explanation is necessary since this phenomenon is unique in China which is unfamiliar with English readers. The 13<sup>th</sup> example, “不折腾” was proposed by President Hu Jintao and there are lots of translated versions of this phrase, however, “Buzheteng”, the one which the translator uses the Chinese phonetic alphabet to translate



is the most popular. Sometimes, transliteration is a good way to shorten the cultural distance and publicize the source language.

As we can see from this part, translators make transformations from cultural dimension in order to shorten the cultural distance between source and target language. This is very important since language is the carrier of culture, if translators ignore the cultural contexts of buzzwords, the translated versions will confuse targeted readers.

### 3.3 Adaptive and Selective Transformations From Communicative Dimension

The communicative intention is another important factor in the translation process on which the communicative dimensional transformations focus. Translating means provide convenience for people to communicate. Hence, the targeted readers are supposed to have the same response as the original readers after they read the translated text and the source text respectively. To do this, translators will make communicative dimensional transformations. For example:

- (14) 光盘 — clean your plate
- (15) 女汉子 — manly woman
- (16) 伤不起 — too delicate to bear a blow
- (17) 拼爹 — daddy-is-the-key
- (18) 吐槽 — make complaint/disclose one's secret
- (19) 逆袭 — counterattack under unfavorable circumstances

The 14<sup>th</sup> example, the buzzword “光盘” listed here is not the counterpart of disc, while it means a campaign which was launched in 2013 to advocate saving and thrift and the Chinese word “光” can be seen as a verb. It is translated into “clean your plate”, which is an imperative sentence. As the English readers read it, they will know the meaning of the buzzword and they will have the same feeling and response as the Chinese readers. The 15<sup>th</sup> example, the phrase, “女汉子” is used to describe girls who are straightforward and cool which praises and compliments girls. The adjective “manly” is a word to describe men's courage and strength. Translators use such a commendatory term as the attribute to modify “woman” so that English readers will know that people use this buzzword to praise women and girls. The 16<sup>th</sup> example, people use this phrase, “伤不起” expresses their helpless and sadness. In the translated version, translators use “delicate” and “blow”, which have the same meanings as the Chinese counterparts. By doing so, English readers will have the same feedback as the original readers and they will understand that this buzzword is an expression of one's feelings and emotions. As for the 17<sup>th</sup> example, “拼爹” is used to criticize the social phenomenon that people from rich family are easy to success. Daddy-is-the-key, the word “key” acts as an indicator, which stresses

on the importance of someone's father. The 18<sup>th</sup> example, the phrase “吐槽” has two meanings. On the one hand, it means complaining, on the other hand, it means that someone's secrets are disclosed. And the above listed translated versions explain the meaning of the buzzword properly. The 19<sup>th</sup> example, “逆袭” is a borrowed expression from Japanese which means the disadvantaged finally surpass the advanced. It is a commendatory term whose meaning is surpassing. Translators translate it as “counterattack under unfavorable circumstances”, which makes it clear for targeted readers to understand its meaning. What's more, it is possible for English readers to arouse the same feeling as we Chinese when they read the buzzword.

As mentioned above, the communicative dimensional transformations are mainly about the intention of communication. It emphasizes the feeling and emotion of the original readers when they use the buzzwords. Furthermore, translators should consider the response and feedback of the target readers. Their transformations should make the target readers have the same feeling about the target text as the original readers.

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## CONCLUSION

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Buzzwords can be seen as the reflection of the social development. People often use buzzwords to comment some social phenomenon or express their emotions and feelings. Rapid development of the Internet also makes it easy to spread quickly. As China is playing an increasingly important role, C-E translation of buzzwords is a new research subject in recent years. The Eco-translatology proposed by Professor Hu Gengshen provides us a new way to study the translation of buzzwords. Main ideas of Eco-translatology are adaptive and selective transformations from linguistic, cultural and communicative dimensions. By doing such transformations, comprehensive transformation can be done between different languages.

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