

## *Original Paper*

# A Study on the English Translation of the *Three-Body* Problems' Terms from the Perspective of Cognitive Terminology

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### **Abstract**

*The emergence of the The Three-Body Problem series has reintroduced the marginalized literary genre into the critics' field of view. The story background of the first part of The Three-Body Problem takes place during the Cultural Revolution. As a masterpiece of Chinese science fiction literature, the English translation of The Three-Body Problem has been studied actively, but the English translation of it is still relatively blank. Taking cognitive linguistics as an entry point, this paper attempts to describe how cognitive linguistics can guide translators to translate, in order to provide theoretical reference for the translation practice of science fiction works.*

### **Keywords**

*cognitive terminology, terms, the Three-Body problem*

### **1. Introduction**

The story of the first part of *The Three-Body Problem* takes place during the Cultural Revolution, During this period, astronomer Ye Wenjie experienced catastrophe and participated in the Red Bank Project, a top-secret project of the military. Ye Wenjie, desperate for human nature, exposes Earth's coordinates to the, A huge Trisolaran Fleet marches toward Earth, and the end of mankind comes quietly. The emergence of the *The Three-Body Problem* series has reintroduced the marginalized literary genre into the critics' field of view. Inheriting the tradition of Chinese science fiction reflecting reality, and deeply excavating the thought of science fiction texts, the novel is full of rich humanistic care.

## 2. Terminology Translation in General Terminology

Austrian natural sciences, languages and philosophy have always had a tradition of common research, and language criticism has emerged with the development of a high degree of specialization in natural sciences, especially in the fields of mathematics, physics and mechanics. Eugen, the father of modern linguistics. In 1931, West published his doctoral thesis “International Language Standardization in Technology: Especially in the Field of Electrical Technology”, which marked the beginning of modern linguistics. It can be seen that the motivation of West’s study of linguistics is to ensure the accuracy and uniformity of professional communication in the natural sciences. The idea that West wants “absolute equivalent communication” is actually a reflection of the Vienna School’s effort to find “world discourse” to overcome the limitations of ordinary language. In 1972, he proposed to the whole world that “General terminology is a marginal subject (interdisciplinary) of cross-linguistics, logic, ontology, information science and specific sciences”. “Introduction to General Terminology and Terminology Dictionaries”, a university textbook written by West in 1974, discusses the basic theory of terminology and the methods of terminology dictionaries. In the book, West proposed three characteristics of terminology, which form the basis of terminology standardization. Feature 1: Terminology should start from the study of concepts. In terminology, the field of concepts is independent of denotations. The meaning of each term name must be defined in the correct form in a serious professional dictionary, delineating the boundaries between concepts. Therefore, each term work is based on the study of “concepts”, whereas linguists talk about “Wortinhalt”, which is an indivisible whole consisting of the form of words and the content of words. Feature 2: Terminology is limited to the study of “Wortschatz”. West points out that terminology does not study word “flexionlehre”, nor “syntax”. It is also a big difference between linguistics and linguistics. Feature 3: Linguistics should be studied in synchronic language. In terminology, language correspondence should be absolute and unique, and language correspondence should be considered for a certain moment, and in most cases for the present.

Under the guidance of the theory of general terminology, Vester set many requirements for the implementation of standardization of terms, such as accuracy, systematicity and unidentification. As more and more scholars study terminology standardization in depth, a large number of principles emerge. These principles complement the terminology standardization principles proposed by Vester and show the change and development of terminology standardization principles.

The practical part of the theory of terminology standardization principle can be applied directly to the application of terminology, such as the establishment of terminology library, the translation of terminology, the codification of terminology dictionaries etc. Therefore, the principles of terminology standardization can provide methodological guidance for term translation. The essence of term translation, guided by Vister’s theory of ordinary terminology, is to match between equivalent references to different languages of the concept.

### 3. Terminology Translation from the Perspective of Cognitive Terminology

According to the previous section, West studies the motivations and orientations of terminology in the natural sciences, pursuing standardization and simplicity of terminology. The nature of humanities and social sciences determines the plurality and ambiguity of its terms. Thus, beginning in the 1990s, terminologists recognized that the principles of traditional terminology hindered realistic and pragmatic descriptions of terminology in the life sciences. Combining new theories and methods of work in various disciplines (such as linguistics, sociology, cognitive science and psychology etc.), lexicologists are either gentle or fiercely critical of traditional language thought. The representative of cognitive terminology is Temmerman, who focuses on the cognitive potential of professional languages in the subject area, as well as the term variables associated with speech scenarios and cognitive contexts in discourse. While there are some similarities between her theory and Kabli's communicative terminology, there are differences. Both agree that the term is a multidimensional "unit of terminology". Communicative terminology is the study of units of terminology from linguistic latitude. Cognitive terminology is based on cognition, but also includes the existence of other dimensions. Based on this, Temmerman's new approach starts with "understanding units", not concepts.

Cognitive linguistics introduces a series of concepts such as metaphor, metaphor, conceptualization and categorization from cognitive science, thus forming its own independent research object, category mechanism, research method, etc., the most important of which is categorization and conceptualization. The author believes that the principle of term translation from the perspective of cognitive terminology in this study can be summarized as standardization, context of application and re-categorization.

### 4. Application of Cognitive Terminology in Translation of Terms in the Three-Body Problem

#### 4.1 Standardization of Term Translation

From the perspective of cognitive terminology, the study of terminology starts from the unit of understanding, psychological characterization. Although cognitive terminology criticizes standardization, it is not a complete denial. It also follows the standardization of terminology.

When the accuracy translates a source term into a target term, the translator needs to establish a correct cognition, restore the meaning of the source term as much as possible, and enable the target term to be faithful to the source term.

#### 4.2 Context of Application of Term Translation

Under traditional terminology, a term has context-independent properties, and no chapter condition changes the conceptual content of the term. Unlike traditional terminology, cognitive terminology considers terminology to be dynamic and evolving, not independent of context, and should use the chapter of terminology as the basic unit of research to study the terminology's use and characteristics from the discourse of the terminology. Under this premise, a series of concepts such as the terms "discourse", "industry discourse", "scientific discourse", "terminology discourse" etc. have attracted

much attention.

From the perspective of cognitive terminology, we should pay attention to the features and functions of terminology in the chapter and the variation of terminology in the chapter. Variants are inevitable if the expression of terms is consistent with evolving systems of meaning. For example, in literary creation, especially science fiction writing, there will be many new concepts (things), existing concepts change, and thus new terminology and terminology change.

Because of the cognitive differences between different language groups, the understanding of terminology is limited by the time, space, cognitive structure, cultural atmosphere, social environment, etc. Therefore, the translation of terms should be based on the study of discourse and cultural background. Supplementing context and cultural information in the process of translation.

#### 4.3 Re-categorization of Term Translation

From the perspective of terminology, firstly, the terminology system is based on strict logical classification, and the names and numbers of categories in each terminology system are different; Among them, the formation of categories will be different because of cognitive subjects. For example, people of different nationalities, cultural regions etc. have different cognitive perspectives. Therefore, in the process of interlingual conversion, due to the differences in the category systems of the two languages, translators need to consciously mobilize the respective category systems of the two languages. If there is correspondence, corresponding categories should be used; if there is no correspondence, translation strategies of re-categorization should be implemented. The unequal cognitive categories can be subdivided into category dislocation and category vacancy.

#### 4.4 Specific Exegesis:

##### 4.4.1 干部 (Cadre)

**Original Text:** 天黑前来了两个人，其中一名是年长些的女干部...

**Translate Text:** Two officials came to her before it got dark. The older one, a female cadre...

**Translator's Note:** "Cadre", when used in the context of Chinese Communism, does not refer to a group, but to an individual official of the Party or the state.

**Explanation:** The meaning of cadre in English generally means the backbone or cadre of an army (of an army, political or commercial organization). In Chinese, a cadre means a public official in a state organ, army, or people's organization, a person holding certain leadership or management work, not a team. This is a polysemical term that requires the translator to establish accurate cognition, so in the translation of cadre, the annotation specifically refers to the use of communism in the context of communism. After the 18th National Congress of the Communist Party of China, the translation of "cadre" was changed from "cadre" to "official".

##### 4.4.2 二锅头 (Er guo tou )

**Original Text:** “二斤爆肚，一瓶二锅头。”

**Translate Text:** “Two orders of quick-fried tripe, and a bottle of er guo tou!”

**Translator’s Note:** Er guo tou is a distilled liquor made from sorghum, sometimes called “Chinese vodka”.

**Explanation:** In this column, because the concepts referred to by Chinese terms do not exist in the western cognitive world, they belong to the cognitive category dislocation. Both China and the West have the basic category of “wine”, but the western culture lacks the subordinate category of “Er guo tou”. Instead of adopting the translation strategy of shifting categories, the translator literally translates it as “er Guo Tou” and gives a specific explanation in the annotation. This not only ensures the accuracy of translated names, but also realizes the conciseness of terminology requirements.

#### 4.4.3 塞外风光 (a frontier scene)

**Original Text:** 他的目光落在了一幅塞外风光上...

**Translate Text:** His eyes fell on a frontier scene...

**Explanation:** Outside, the Great Wall was the boundary in ancient times, and the area to the north had already left the frontier fortress, hence the name Saibei, Saibei. The meaning of “frontier” means the boundary between farming civilization and nomadic tribes in the north in different periods in history. People who lack the cultural background of China can’t know the specific geographical area beyond the Great Wall, so the translator takes the place name “beyond the Great Wall” and transforms it into the upper level category frontier, so that the target language readers can know it at a glance. A new conceptual system can be constructed in the cognitive system.

#### 4.4.4 知青

**Original Text:** 很多兵团知青都怀着一个浪漫的期望：

**Translate Text:** Many of the corps’ “educated youths”—young college students who no longer had schools to go to—had been sacrificed a romantic wish. ...

**Original Text:** 这三个人 都是返城知青，现在她们都没有工作。

**Translate Text:** all three had been sent down to the country and then returned, and all were unemployed.

**Translator’s Note:** Many of these so-called “Rusticated Youths” were former Red Guards...

**Original Text:** “队支书就冲知青们喊”

**Translate Text:** “So the party secretary called to the sent-down students...”

**Original Text:** “于是，红静就和另外三个知青跳下河去捞羊”

**Translate Text:** “and so, honor and three other students jumped into the river to save the sheep”.

**Original Text:** “回来的知青日子都不好过”

**Translate Text:** “rusty youths who have returned don’t lead very good lives”.

**Explanation:** Intellectual youth, referred to as educated youth for short, is a historical term for intellectuals during the Cultural Revolution. The original meaning of educated youth refers to educated youth or youth who have received higher education. The term “educated youth” started from 1950s until the end of the last batch of middle school students who went to the countryside in 1977. It refers

to young people who voluntarily moved from cities to rural areas to become farmers.

The term “educated youth” appears five times in the original text, and each time the corresponding translation is not uniform. This term is a typical term with China characteristics, and it is a historical term. In English language and culture, there is no corresponding cultural concept category and language cognitive model. Therefore, it is necessary to understand the cultural concept of the source language, and reclassify and compensate it by introducing etymology, cultural background, applicable context and other information. Translation is the only way to truly understand the meaning of terms.

## 5. Conclusion

Under the background of China’s cultural going out, the quality of English translation of literary works directly affects its spread, and also reflects our attitude towards cultural self-cultivation. The essence of terminology translation is the cross-cultural renaming of terminology concepts. The author believes that the principles of terminology translation from the perspective of cognitive terminology can be summarized as follows: standardization, application context and re-categorization. Translators should give consideration to various principles, carefully consider and comprehensively name in relevant translation practice, so as to help the overseas spread of China culture.

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