

学校编码: 10384
学号: X2008110039

分类号 密级
UDC

厦门大学

硕士学位论文

模因视角下的汉语流行语英译分析及口译策略

A Memetic Study of Chinese Buzzwords and Interpreting Strategies for Them into

English

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专业名称: 翻译硕士英语口译

论文提交日期: 2016年4月

论文答辩时间: 2016年5月

学位授予日期: 2016年6月

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2016年 月

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Abstract

Buzzword is a kind of language phenomenon, which appears constantly and updates with time. It has an important influence on people's life. As a kind of social phenomenon too, buzzword has important social functions. A buzzword is closely related to language development, social factors, cultural elements and even psychological factors of people. It records changes of the society and evolution of the language. Buzzword is different from traditional language in breaking pragmatic rules and grammar rules, which brings unlimited varieties for Chinese language and new challenges for interpreters.

Memetics can be conducted in extensive fields, such as linguistics, philosophy, sociology psychology and culturology. Memetics can also be applied to language study and interpretation. In this paper, the writer tries to explain buzzword phenomenon with language meme and discuss interpretation strategies of Chinese buzzwords from a memetic perspective. Through research and analysis, the writer finds out that a buzzword is actually a kind of language meme and the transmission and development of the language meme reveals some general rules of Chinese language. The Translation Memetics is helpful in guiding the practice of interpretation.

Based on the fact that Memetics is still in its infancy in Chinese academic world and there is not much memetic study on interpretation and interpretation strategies, the writer attempts to explore and discuss Chinese buzzword interpretation and its strategies from a memetic perspective. Different interpretation strategies are suggested for different language module types accordingly. Some examples from a national interpreting contest have been selected and presented on Chapter Five for case studying. Studying from the interpretation output, the writer summarizes coping strategies and proposes some criteria for evaluation as well. This paper is a tentative study of Translation Memetics on interpretation. The writer hopes that the memetic study in this paper can be beneficial for interpreters in mastering more effective strategies.

Keywords: Meme; buzzword; interpreting strategies

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摘要

流行语是随着时代的发展而不断出现及更新的一种语言现象，它对人们的生活产生着不可忽视的影响。同时作为一种社会现象，流行语具有重要的社会功能。它与语言发展、社会文化变迁以及人们的心理都有密切关系。流行语打破传统的语用规则和规范基础，为汉语的运用和发展增添无限的表现可能；但同时也给口译员带来了新的挑战。

模因论是基于达尔文进化论的观点而产生的一种解释文化进化规律的新理论，它可以运用在许多领域，尤其翻译研究方面。模因与语言、模因和口译联系密切。本文把流行语纳入模因理论研究范畴，用语言模因解释分析流行语现象，用翻译模因论指导分析汉语流行语的口译。通过对流行语进行分析研究，笔者总结出流行语从本质上说是一种语言模因，而语言模因的传播与影响又揭示了语言文化传播发展的规律。模因理论下的翻译模因论对指导翻译实践特别是口译实践也有积极作用。

基于当前国内模因理论运用在口译实践方面几乎属于空白，笔者尝试运用模因理论来讨论汉语流行语的口译及其策略。在口译策略方面，本文分别讨论了有相同或相似译语模因和没有相同或相似译语模因的口译策略；并利用第一届海峡两岸口译大赛的实例，来评析和总结口译技巧，从实战中体会流行语口译的魅力和背后隐藏的模因意义。本文希望借用初浅的模因探究，吸引更多关于翻译模因理论的实践研究，从而更好地指导口译领域的实战策略，为口译实践服务。

关键词： 模因 流行语 口译策略

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Chapter One Introduction

1.1 Research background

Buzzword is a kind of language phenomenon, which appears and prevails in a certain period of time. It gathers different kinds of opinions, shows viewpoints of mainstream people and reflects social contradictions. So it is often compared to a mirror, which reflects changes of the society. It also embodies the wisdom and the mentality of people. By studying buzzword, one can learn more about people's psychological state, Chinese language, and even the whole culture.

As a part of language elements, buzzword attracts much attention and researches from China. Buzzwords come from many sources, such as political events, sports and entertainment. It is transmitted by different channels like TV, Internet, newspapers and so on. It highlights new spots in both society and language. At the same time, it adds new words, meanings and usages to language itself.

Meanwhile, buzzword is not only popular at home, but also attracts attention from abroad, especially from some foreign media. Since China is open to the outside world, Chinese buzzword interpretation and translation are considered to be important parts of cross-cultural communication. The purpose of buzzword interpretation and translation is to introduce new things and new development of China, enhance mutual understanding and deepen friendship between Chinese and foreign people. In view of the above, the study of Chinese buzzword and its interpretation strategies is of great significance in helping foreigners understand the new trends of Chinese society and to promote cultural exchanges between China and foreign countries.

1.2 Questions to be answered

The writer studies Chinese buzzwords from a memetic perspective and puts forward some questions as follows:

First, what are the reasons for a memetic study of buzzwords?

Memetics and buzzword belong to different matters at first sight. Though Memetics was first proposed by a zoologist, its application is far beyond biology—it can be applied to linguistics, philosophy, sociology psychology and culturology. Buzzword study is one kind of language study, the imitation, replication and influence

of buzzword can be well explained by Memetics. The writer uses Chinese buzzwords as examples, explores language meme behind buzzwords, and uses Translation Memetic for practice guiding.

There are so many occasions that buzzword interpretations encounter: from escort interpreting, business talks, foreign touring to formal and informal cultural exchanging, press conference, etc. The writer believes that as Memetics can be applied to different fields, it can also be well applied to interpretation and translation. Buzzword is a kind of social and cultural phenomenon which can be directly observed as units of imitation. Using Translation Memetics to observe and analyze buzzwords has some theoretical significance in improving interpretation output.

Second, what are the reasons for a memetic study of interpretation?

Memetics, buzzword and interpretation are different things sharing something in common. Scholars from home and abroad have proposed some theoretical conceptions of Translation Memetics such as Chesterman's theory which considers translation as a branch of the Meme and trying to explain translation with memes. From a view of mental infection, meme is an imitation unit and a social and cultural phenomenon which can be directly observed. This makes the study practical and meaningful. The writer attempts to do a comprehensive and problem-solving memetic study by cases of buzzword interpretation, especially Chinese buzzword interpretation. The study covers theory, phenomenon and practice. The writer tries to explain theory by phenomenon, summarize rules of phenomenon by practice and explain and test memes and translation memes by vivid examples from an interpretation competition.

Third, why did this paper study Chinese buzzwords in particular?

Because living in China and speaking Chinese as the first language can really facilitate Chinese buzzword studying. Since Memetics covers a wide scope, it requires much more than the studying of language alone. Living in China really helps in understanding culture memes behind buzzwords. So the writer decided to choose Chinese buzzwords as studying objects.

Fourth, what are the coping strategies for interpretation?

Some discussions on interpretation strategies have been made in Chapter Four. The writer classifies interpretation into two main kinds—interpretation for the same or similar language module type and interpretation for different language module type. Some general evaluation criteria for interpretation output are listed and summarized. Discussion on interpreting “*tough*” buzzwords is also presented later in Chapter Four.

Coping strategies such as Literal translation, Free Translation, Zero Translation and Back-translation are suggested for specific situation accordingly.

1.3 Research methods and significance

Research in this paper is done from three aspects: theory, phenomena and practice. Methods for theoretical research are done by books and relevant dissertations reading. Through theory studying, some basic knowledge about Memetics and buzzwords is acquired, and achievements from home and abroad are observed. Method for phenomena research is mainly done by sample collecting and classifying. After learning and deliberating, the writer suggests that different interpretation strategies should be applied for different target language module types. This section of research is considered as a language and behind-language learning process. Method for practice research is done by case studying. The writer selects some examples of buzzwords interpretation from a national competition and analyses translation memes behind those examples and then the writer also explores some coping strategies for a more professional oral performance.

There are two research significances for the topic: one is the significance of memetic study on buzzwords. Buzzwording generates from almost all aspects of social life and it may come in the shape of words, phrases or sentence styles. But no matter which part of our society do those buzzwords come from or how their formations are, there are always language memes behind them. Along with more using frequency of buzzwords, language memes behind those buzzwords are fast replicated. Those language memes enrich language itself and widen the scope of interpretation. In short, the study aims to explain the influence of language memes on buzzwords so as to make interpretation practice better done.

The other significance is about memetic study of interpretation strategies. The writer studies some coping strategies from schools of translation and believes that different strategies should be applied according to specific language module types. Through case studying, the write concludes that Translation Memetics actually helps in interpretation. Some regular patterns for Chinese buzzword interpretation are summarized from the theory's point of view.

Memetics is yet a newly emerged theory in China, the study is still limited to some specific areas. By March 2nd 2016, no more than 20 dissertations about memetic

study of interpretation can be found on National Knowledge Infrastructure. 16 out of them were about interpretation teaching, while only one was about practice and interpretation strategies. So the special significance of this paper lies in filling the blank of memetic study in the practice of interpreting

1.4 Introduction of the structure

There are six chapters in this paper.

Chapter One is about the research background. There are several questions being about to answer, such as why this paper use Memetics to study buzzwords and interpreting; why this paper study Chinese buzzwords especially, and what is the significance of memetic study on interpretation practice.

Chapter Two is the theoretical framework of the study, which contains studies from two aspects: buzzwords and Meme. Theoretical study of buzzwords starts from conception to their nature; while the memetic study in this paper covers from literal review to fields of application. Then the theory of Translation Memetics is introduced and its basic principle is demonstrated.

Chapter Three is a specific study on Chinese buzzwords. Some details about their forming, mechanism of popularity and transmission are observed and studied. Three properties of strong memes are observed and listed. Then four stages of meme's life circle is illustrated.

Chapter Four and Five are considered to be the highlights in this paper. Chapter Four is a memetic study of interpretation and interpretation strategies. After some theory study of Memetics, the writer proposed that Chinese buzzword interpretation can be divided into two different kinds: interpretation with or without the same or similar language module type. Strategies on specific language module type are proposed accordingly.

Chapter Five is case study. The writer selects some buzzword interpreting examples from the First Cross-Strait Interpretation Competition. After searching for language memes and translation memes behind the study cases, the writer summarizes coping strategies as well as evaluation criteria for interpretation.

Last but not least, Chapter Six comes to the conclusion of this paper. Major findings, as well as limitations are listed. Then the whole paper ends with suggestions for further researches and acknowledgement.

Chapter Two Theoretical Framework

2.1 A brief introduction of buzzword

2.1.1 Definition of buzzword

With the rapid development of society, a great number of buzzwords have come into being and drawn people's attention. As an ever-emerging phenomenon, buzzword has become a hot topic for language study. Scholars from home and abroad have devoted to buzzword studying and had their own definitions for buzzword, such as "Buzzword is popular language that reflects the local society, culture and custom in a certain period of time, including words and phrases"(Han Li 2007: 181). "A lot of fashion words are slang or net languages which are created by young people"(Ding Jiayong 2004: 79) or "forms of words prevailed in a certain period of time and in certain social groups"(Guo Xi 2004) and "language performance of people, reflecting politics, economy, culture and psychology in a certain period of time (Lu Keyin& YangWenquan 2006:239) On summarizing above, the writer defines buzzword as: some typical words, phrases or even sentence styles generated from multiple social factors and transmitted through different channels in a certain period of time.

2.1.2 Neologism and buzzword

Neologism, in a general sense, is known as a new word or a coinage which is created for alleging new things, new phenomenon or new expression. (Sun Wenjing)

According to Wikipedia, a neologism is "a newly coined term, word, or phrase that may be in the process of entering common use, but has not yet been accepted into mainstream language". Neologisms "are often directly attributable to a specific person, publication, period, or event". Neologism is language phenomenon too, which has much similarity to buzzword. They are both newly coined, entering common use, and attributable to specific person or event. Taking *Xinhua Dictionary* (2014) as a reference, 10 revised versions have been published one by one because of the non-stop emergence of Chinese Neologism. Recently, even some buzzwords such as "秀", "门", "晒", "奴" can be found in the latest edition. Neologism, as well as a buzzword, spreads fast and wide among people because of novelty, preciseness and informational-richness. With so many things in common, is neologism equal to buzzword? Neologism may become buzzwords in certain period of time due to

several reasons. Buzzwords, on the other hand, may be totally new words or old words with new meanings and usages. So the writer holds an opinion that there is an intersection between them but they are still different in a way.

2.2 The classifications of buzzwords

Some buzzwords from the year 2010 to 2015 have been collected and sorted. They are classified according to word formation, structure and meaning respectively.

2.2.1 Classification on word formation

Buzzwords can be divided into symbol type, digital type and language type according to word formation. Under language type, there are solo-language, hybrid language and acronyms.

Figure 2.1 Classification of buzzword on word formation

Symbol type	(⊙o⊙) O(∩_∩)O L(^o^)^ →_→ (ノ ^ ㄟ)	
Digital type	886 7456 9494 584	
Language type	solo-language type	神马 有木有 伤不起 坑爹 悲催
	hybrid language type	hold住 G友 小case 江南style
	Acronyms type	GF BF

2.2.2 Classification on structure

Chinese buzzwords are not just restricted to *word*, they also can be shaped in the form of single character, phrase, sentence, writing style and so on.

Figure 2.2 Classifications of buzzword on structure

Single character	汗 糗 囧 雷
Word	秒杀 蜗居 蚁族 酱紫 路过 菜鸟 恐龙 给力 围脖 坑爹
Phrase	打酱油 不差钱 躲猫猫 羡慕嫉妒恨 一个非常艰难的决定
Sentence	哥只是个传说 神马都是浮云 我爸是李刚
Style of writing	凡客体 TVB体 高铁体 淘宝体 Hold住体 撑腰体

2.2.3 Classification on meaning

Chinese buzzwords can be used on different occasions and for describing different things.

Figure 2.3 Classification of buzzword on meanings

For describing people	蚁族 宅男 萝莉 凤凰男 xx 哥 xx 姐 xx 奴
For describing things	x 具 裸 x 糖高宗 豆你玩 我爸是李刚
For describing emotional states	雷 囧 神马都是浮云 给力

2.3 Characteristics of buzzwords

Paul Mc Fedries once wrote in the book *Word Spy: The Word Lover's Guide to Modern Culture* (1988) that new words which can pop up in natural language are always easy to pronounce, easy to understand and can *fill* language vacancy. Buzzwords also have those characteristics. They are flexible in word formation, unique in structure and meaningful in expression. So characteristics of buzzwords can be classified as follows:

2.3.1 Characteristics on formation

Buzzwords do not follow regular language rules. Take “我勒个去” which become very popular in the year 2011 for example, “个”and“去”do not follow Chinese grammar rules. But it is widely used by many Internet users and often be seen on QQ chatting and games of *Tencent*. Some Chinese buzzwords like “被就业”, “被幸福” do not conform to the passive voice in Chinese, but they are functional on expressing “not the real intention of the parties”. So these buzzwords go fast and wide on Internet and even on some mainstream media after a short while.

2.3.2 Characteristics on meaning

Buzzwords are brief and concise, which are in line with people's needs of rapid exchange of information. Many of the buzzwords are concentrated, which agree with the economic principle of language. Take Chinese Internet buzzword “汗”for instance, it is used for expressing surprise or frightening. Another example is “顶”, which means “strongly approve and support”. Those buzzwords are few in characters but rich in meaning, so they become popular by Chinese netizens and other people.

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