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Cultural Translation Strategies from the Perspective of Pragmatic Presupposition

—A Case Study of *The Lo-ch'a Country and the Sea-Market*

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Abstract

In the field of cross-cultural translation, pragmatic presupposition plays a vital role in discourse comprehension and conversational interaction. As a classic piece in Pu Songling's *Strange Stories from a Chinese Studio*, *The Lo-ch'a Country and the Sea-market* contains a wealth of traditional Chinese myths, social systems, and folk culture. Taking Herbert A. Giles' English translation of *The Lo-ch'a Country and the Sea-market* as an example, this paper explores its cultural translation strategies from three perspectives: "retention of cultural presuppositions", "manifestation of cultural presuppositions", and "transfer of cultural presuppositions". Through the analysis of specific examples, the application effects of these strategies in cross-cultural contexts are revealed, providing references for the cross-cultural dissemination of Chinese classical literature and promoting cultural exchanges and mutual learning between China and other countries.

Subject Areas

Culture, Linguistics

Keywords

Pragmatic Presupposition, Translation Strategies, *The Lo-ch'a Country and the Sea-Market*

1. Introduction

Pragmatic presupposition, also referred to as pragmatic premise, is a key concept in pragmatics. It is proposed by Stalnaker in 1974 on the basis of the philosophical presupposition theory of the German scholar Gottlob Frege, and it refers to back-

ground knowledge or beliefs that the speaker assumes in uttering a sentence, are contextually relevant, and are shared by both parties in communication [1]. Pragmatic presupposition provides a foundation for language comprehension and communication, making linguistic expression more concise and efficient. In the field of literary translation, the handling of pragmatic presupposition is particularly crucial, because readers from different cultural backgrounds may differ in their understanding of the same cultural element. A reasonable treatment of cultural presupposition can help target-language readers better understand the cultural connotations of the source text and promote cultural dissemination and exchange.

Strange Stories from a Chinese Studio, as a treasure of classical Chinese literature, has demonstrated strong cultural appeal since its publication. As early as the 18th century, *Strange Stories from a Chinese Studio* began to travel abroad, initially appearing in European periodicals in the form of fragmentary translations. The rich Chinese cultural elements it contains, such as traditional moral concepts, beliefs in ghosts and spirits, and folk customs, opened a window for Western readers to understand ancient Chinese society. Over time, an increasing number of translators devoted themselves to translating *Strange Stories from a Chinese Studio*, and complete translations gradually appeared. The translation published by Herbert A. Giles in 1880, is one of the earliest and most influential complete versions. As a British sinologist, Giles combined a deep grounding in Chinese culture with a Western reader's cognitive perspective. His translation strives to reproduce the plot and linguistic style of the original text, and adjusts translation strategies in response to the cultural background of Western readers.

The Lo-ch'a Country and the Sea-Market is a classic piece in *Strange Stories from a Chinese Studio*, known for its fantastical imagination and profound satire. The story constructs a strange Lo-ch'a Country, where people take ugliness as beauty and reverse right and wrong, forming a sharp contrast with the real world. The protagonist, Ma Ji, experiences various adventures in this absurd country, and through his observations, the author Pu Songling relentlessly criticizes the darkness of society, the corruption of officialdom, and the coldness of worldly affairs. This story incorporates a large number of culture-specific items, including unique place names, official titles, myths and legends, and literary allusions. These culture-specific items are not only important components of the story but also key elements carrying the connotations of traditional Chinese culture. In translating them into English, how to handle these cultural presuppositions so that they can both retain the cultural characteristics of the original text and be understood and accepted by Western readers is an important challenge facing translators. Therefore, this paper takes pragmatic presupposition theory as its core framework, focuses on Giles's English translation of *The Lo-ch'a Country and the Sea-Market*, and analyzes its cultural translation strategies from retention, manifestation, and transfer of cultural presuppositions. It explores the application of pragmatic presupposition in cross-cultural translation and promotes cultural exchange and mu-

tual learning between China and other countries.

2. Pragmatic Presupposition Theory and Cultural Translation

The concept of presupposition was first proposed by the German philosopher Frege. He defined presupposition as the precondition for a proposition to have a truth value or a false value [2]. After the 1950s, linguists began to pay attention to the relationship between presupposition and context. Strawson pointed out that presupposition is not a property of the proposition itself, but an assumption made by the speaker about the truth value of the proposition [3]. This view linked presupposition with the speaker's cognitive state for the first time, laying the foundation for the proposal of pragmatic presupposition. Jackendoff argued that presupposition is in fact information about the sentence shared between the hearer and the speaker [4]. In 1974, Stalnaker formally proposed the concept of pragmatic presupposition and emphasized that if the speaker's presupposition is not shared by the hearer, the utterance may not be understood [1].

As an important concept in linguistic communication, pragmatic presupposition is not only of great significance in theoretical research, but also plays a key role in translation practice and the construction of literary discourse. Xiao Hui took several different pragmatic presuppositions as examples and discussed respectively the different methods of handling pragmatic presupposition in English-Chinese and Chinese-English translation [5]. Zhu Yongsheng and Miao Xingwei explored the functions of presupposition from the perspective of discourse, arguing that presupposition is inseparable from the information flow of discourse and can reveal the organizational features and coherence of discourse [6]. Geng Zhi and Wang Yuping discussed the application of structural presupposition, semantic presupposition, and cultural presupposition in translation from the perspective of pragmatics [7].

Presupposition plays an important role in the construction of literary discourse [8]. At present, research on the translation of pragmatic presupposition in literary works in China is becoming increasingly abundant. Li Tuwang explored the relationship between translation strategies and the translator's cultural orientation through a comparative analysis of the English translations of *Six Chapters of a Floating Life* by Lin Yutang and Shirley Black [9]. Yu Jie and Tian Xia proposed multiple translation methods to achieve the effective transmission of folk cultural presuppositions [10]. Xu Yizhong and Meng Hong explored the operational methods of presupposition equivalence and the manifestation of the translator's subjectivity in the translation process through a comparative analysis of two English translations of *A Dream of Red Mansions* [11]. Wang Min and Luo Xuanmin explored the English translation strategies of Chinese myths from the perspective of cultural presupposition, pointing out that the external dissemination of Chinese myths needs to be carried out within a macro multimodal narrative system [12].

3. Cultural Translation Strategies in the English Translation of *The Lo-ch'a Country and the Sea-Market*

Wang Jianrong, Guo Haiyun, and Sun Qian explored cultural presuppositions in the language of cultural relics and their English translation strategies [13]. They believe that cultural presuppositions in the language of cultural relics are of great value in the translation of cultural relics and cross-cultural dissemination. Translators can, according to the purpose and target audience of cultural relic dissemination, adopt translation strategies such as literal translation, transliteration, annotation, and in-text explanation to retain, manifest, or transfer cultural presuppositions. The selection of these strategies requires translators to fully understand the cultural backgrounds of both the source language and the target language, ensuring that the translation can effectively convey the cultural connotations of cultural relics.

With reference to this research framework, this study focuses on three dimensions—retention of cultural presuppositions, manifestation of cultural presuppositions, and transfer of cultural presuppositions—to conduct an in-depth analysis of the cultural translation strategies adopted in Giles's English translation of *The Lo-ch'a Country and the Sea-Market*. Through the analysis of specific examples, this study reveals the application effects of these strategies in cross-cultural contexts, aiming to provide useful references for the cross-cultural dissemination of Chinese classical literature and to promote cultural exchange and mutual learning between China and other countries.

3.1. Retention of Cultural Presuppositions

As a classical Chinese supernatural tale, *The Lo-ch'a Country and the Sea-Market* features concise language and rich imagery, and the cultural presuppositions it contains play a crucial role in text comprehension and translation. These cultural presuppositions not only provide readers with rich background knowledge but also enhance the cultural connotations and artistic value of the text. In the process of translation, completely dissolving these presuppositions may lead to information overload in the translated text and excessively lengthy language expression, causing readers to experience information fatigue. Therefore, when dealing with cultural presuppositions, translators should fully consider their cognitive effects in different linguistic environments. If certain cultural presuppositions can produce roughly the same cognitive effects in different linguistic environments, they should be retained as much as possible in translation. This can not only maintain the cultural characteristics and artistic charm of the original text but also enable target-language readers, in the absence of relevant cultural background, to obtain an understanding and feeling similar to that of the original readers through such presuppositional information.

Transliteration and literal translation are the most common translation strategies. When cultural presuppositions have similar pragmatic effects in the source language and the target language, literal translation can be adopted, enabling tar-

get-language readers to intuitively understand the intention and background of the original text. For some proper nouns or terms with specific cultural backgrounds, if literal translation makes it difficult to convey their cultural connotations, transliteration can be adopted. Transliteration not only retains the pronunciation of the original text but also, to a certain extent, preserves its cultural characteristics. In some cases, a single literal translation or transliteration may be insufficient to convey all the cultural presuppositions of the original text. In such cases, a combination of literal translation and transliteration can be adopted, which not only retains the pronunciation of the original text but also supplements necessary cultural background information through literal translation. This method can more comprehensively convey the cultural presuppositions of the original text and enable target-language readers to better understand the intention and background of the original text.

Example 1

Original text: “马骕，字龙媒，贾人子。” [14]

Giles’s translation: “Once upon a time there was a young man, named Ma Chün, who was also known as Lung-mei. He was the son of a trader.” [15]

In this translation example, “马骕” is translated as “Ma Chün”, and “龙媒” is also translated as “Lung-mei”, both using Wade-Giles romanization, fully retaining the original pronunciation of the names. From the perspective of presupposition handling, this strategy retains the cultural uniqueness of the names. As markers of Chinese personal names, “Ma Chün” and “Lung-mei” can help Western readers establish cognition of Chinese culture-specific items. However, it should be noted that the term “龙媒” in the original text is a pun; “媒” implies “媒介”, suggesting that 马骕 is the medium connecting the human world and the Dragon Palace. This presupposition serves as a foreshadowing for the subsequent plot in which 马骕 falls in love with the Dragon King’s princess, whereas transliteration only retains the pronunciation and does not convey this implicit information, resulting in the loss of part of the cultural presupposition. Therefore, the translator could consider providing an in-text explanation here to help Western readers understand the meaning of the protagonist’s name.

3.2. Manifestation of Cultural Presuppositions

Chinese national culture has a long history and is broad and profound. In cross-cultural translation practice, many Chinese cultural presuppositions are self-evident to Chinese people but may be completely unfamiliar to Westerners. Therefore, when translating, translators need to render these cultural presuppositions explicit so that Western readers can understand them. With detailed explanation, the translated text can more accurately convey profound cultural deposits, significantly enhance the effectiveness of cultural dissemination, reduce the difficulty for English readers in the process of comprehension, and thereby enable them to accurately grasp and deeply appreciate the cultural value therein. Common meth-

ods include in-text explanation and extra-textual explanation. In-text explanation refers to directly adding explanatory content into the original text so that readers can understand it immediately during reading. Extra-textual explanation refers to providing detailed explanations of cultural presuppositions outside the main text, such as in footnotes, endnotes, or appendices.

Example 2

Original text: 生曰：‘其女耶，可名龙宫；男耶，可名福海。’ [14]
Giles's translation: To this Ma replied, 'If a girl I would have her called Long-gong; if a boy, then name him Fuhai.' [15]
(Footnotes: "Dragon Palace" and "Happy Sea," respectively.)

Chinese personal names often emphasize implied meanings and cultural background. In "The Lo-ch'a Country and the Sea-Market", "龙宫" and "福海" are the names of the children of the Dragon King's daughter and Ma Ji, embodying unique cultural connotations. "龙宫" refers to the place where the Dragon King lives, while "福海" implies happiness and abundance. For Chinese readers, such implied meanings can be automatically inferred through cultural background, but Western readers lack the relevant presuppositional repertoire. If only transliterated, they would easily become meaningless combinations of syllables, resulting in the loss of cultural connotations. Therefore, for the two personal names "龙宫" and "福海",Giles not only transliterated them but also explained them in footnotes after the main text, with "龙宫" being "Dragon Palace" and "福海" being "Happy Sea". This translation strategy not only retains the phonetic form of the personal names in the original text but also conveys their approximate cultural meanings to Western readers through extra-textual explanation, helping Western readers better understand the cultural background behind these two personal names.

Example 3

Original text: 盈盈一水，青鸟难通…. 顾念奔月姮娥，且虚挂府；投梭织女，犹怅银河。[14]
Giles's translation: Across the great ocean, the letter-bird would find no path … Yet Ch'ang-ngo lives solitary in the moon, and Zhi Nü laments that she cannot cross the Silver River. [15]
(Footnotes: letter-bird: Alluding to an old legend of a letter conveyed by a bird.)

Ch'ang-ngo: The beautiful wife of a legendary chieftain, named Hou I, who flourished about 2500 B.C. She is said to have stolen from her husband the elixir of immortality, and to have fled with it to the moon.

Zhi Nü: The "Spinning Damsel," or name of a star in Lyra, connected with which there is a celebrated legend of its annual transit across the Milky Way.

In "The Lo-ch'a Country and the Sea-Market", "青鸟", "姮娥", and "织女" all originate from traditional Chinese myths, and the vast majority of Chinese people are very familiar with these stories. "青鸟" is the divine messenger of Xi Wangmu,

responsible for delivering letters. In this example, "青鸟" is translated as "letter-bird", and the translator adds an extra-textual explanation, "Alluding to an old legend of a letter conveyed by a bird", to help Western readers understand.

The stories of "嫦娥奔月" and "牛郎织女" are widely known in Chinese culture. 姮娥 stole the elixir of immortality and fled to the moon, living alone in the moon palace; 织女 and 牛郎 gaze at each other across the Milky Way and can only meet once a year on the seventh day of the seventh lunar month. They both depict a tragic scene of lovers who find it difficult to meet, and this emotional resonance is easily aroused among Chinese readers. However, Western readers may know nothing about the cultural implications behind these stories. Therefore, Giles explained in detail in footnotes the stories and cultural meanings behind them. This translation strategy not only retains the cultural charm of the original text but also builds a bridge of understanding for Western readers through extra-textual explanation, enabling them to better appreciate the charm of Chinese literary works.

3.3. Transfer of Cultural Presuppositions

The transfer of cultural presuppositions refers to the process of transferring the cultural background information of the original text into the cultural environment of the translated text during translation, so that it can be understood and accepted by target-language readers. This is because some cultural presuppositions are rooted in specific cultural backgrounds, historical traditions, and social customs, and for readers with different linguistic and cultural backgrounds, even with extra-textual explanation, they cannot fully understand the implied meanings. This often requires appropriate adjustment and conversion of the cultural presuppositions of the original text to make them conform to the characteristics of the target-language culture. *The Lo-ch'a Country and the Sea-Market* employs rich linguistic rhetoric, such as metaphor, exaggeration, and allusion, which, although capable of enhancing the expressive force and appeal of the original text, may also cause ambiguity or misunderstanding in meaning during translation due to cultural differences. In view of this, translators can flexibly employ various strategies such as assimilation, substitution, and deletion.

Example 4

Original text: "海市何地？"曰："海中市，四海鲛人，集货珠宝。四方十二国，均来贸易。"[14]

Giles's translation: Ma asked them where that was. They said it was at the bottom of the sea, where the mermaids kept their treasures, and that as many as twelve nations were accustomed to go thither to trade. [15]

"鲛人" in the original text refers to a mysterious creature living in the sea in Chinese mythology. Legend has it that they are half-human and half-fish, are good at weaving silk, and the tears they leave behind turn into pearls. This concept has no directly corresponding image in the West at all. If transliterated as "Jiaoren"

with annotations added, it may cause comprehension obstacles due to differences in mythological systems; if literally translated as "fish-man," it would lack the fantastical and beautiful image of "鲛人". Giles translated "鲛人" as "mermaids". "Mermaids" refers to the widely known mermaids in the Western cultural system, which are also half-human and half-fish in form. In Western culture, "mermaids" are often associated with undersea treasures and fantastical wealth, which coincides with the gathering of jewelry by "鲛人" and their trade with people in "The Lo-ch'a Country and the Sea-Market". This translation strategy not only enables Western readers to more easily understand the original text but also retains the fantastical color and cultural connotations of the original text.

Example 5

Original text: 君似征人，妾作荡妇. [14]
Giles's translation: You are my Ulysses, I am your Penelope, To keep off the much-dreaded wind, which disturbs the rest of the departed. [15]
(Footnotes: These are of course only the equivalents of the Chinese names in the text.)

"征人" refers to a person who travels far away, and "荡妇" refers to the wife of a man who has left home and gone far away and forgotten to return. "荡子" and "征人" are mutually defining, and for Chinese readers, "征人思妇" is a common image in traditional literature, such as the Tang poem "忽见陌头杨柳色，悔教夫婿觅封侯". In Western culture, Ulysses is the hero in Homer's epic Odyssey, who wandered abroad for twenty years and still kept his belief in returning home; Penelope is his wife, who silently waited for her husband's return. Their story is a symbol of faithful love and reunion after a long separation in Western culture. Giles replaced "征人" and "荡妇" with "Ulysses" and "Penelope" respectively, and noted in a footnote that these are only equivalent substitutions for the characters in the original text. This translation strategy enables Western readers to more easily accept the emotional expression of the original text and quickly understand the emotional depth between Ma Ji and the Dragon King's daughter.

4. Conclusions

This paper has conducted an in-depth exploration of the cultural translation strategies in the English translation of *The Lo-ch'a Country and the Sea-Market* from three aspects: retention, manifestation, and transfer of cultural presuppositions. Through the analysis of specific examples, it has revealed the application effects of these strategies in cross-cultural contexts. The study finds that cultural presuppositions play a crucial role in the translation process, and translators need to flexibly employ multiple translation strategies according to different cultural backgrounds and reader needs, so as to ensure that the translated text can accurately convey the cultural connotations and artistic value of the original text.

In the translation process, translators should retain the cultural presuppositions in the original text as much as possible. Literal translation, transliteration, and the

combination of the two can effectively retain the cultural characteristics and artistic charm of the original text. For presuppositions with unique cultural connotations, translators need to help Western readers better understand the cultural background of the original text through supplementary means such as annotation and in-text explanation. In some cases, translators need to appropriately adjust or rewrite cultural presuppositions to make the translated text closer to the expression habits of the target language and enhance the readability and acceptability of the translated text.

Future research can further explore presupposition differences under different cultural backgrounds and, through comparative analysis, identify more effective translation strategies to promote cross-cultural communication. It can also consider using empirical research methods such as questionnaires and interviews to understand the degree of understanding and acceptance of translated texts by readers from different cultural backgrounds, thereby providing a more scientific basis for the selection of translation strategies.

In conclusion, the application of pragmatic presupposition in translation is an important topic. Through continuous exploration and innovation, translators can better handle cultural presuppositions and promote exchange and mutual learning between different cultures.

Conflicts of Interest

The author declares no conflicts of interest.

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