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CULTUREMES AND NON-EQUIVALENCE LEXIS: PECULIARITIES OF FUNCTIONING

The linguacultural works of recent years have accumulated a lot of terminological concepts which in one way or another reflect an important cultural meaning and appeal to the national, cultural specificity of meaning making: cultural component, culture related vocabulary, the national authentic language, linguo specific vocabulary, ethnocultural vocabulary, lexical gaps, non-equivalent lexis, culturecarrying vocabulary, background knowledge, realia, culturemes, culturonym, linguocultural environment, the national specificity of verbal communication, lexical background, linguistic episteme, national concept, national symbol, etc. [4, p. 65].

The research of similar phenomena is moving divergently as well – both by means of language clichés analysis and the study of phraseological units, stylistically marked vocabulary and identification of stereotypes of linguistic consciousness, as well as examination of the underlying word semantics.

A cultureme is any portion of cultural behavior apprehended in signs of symbolic value that can be broken down into smaller units or amalgamated into larger ones. A cultureme is a "cultural information bearing unit", the contents of which are recognizable by a group of people. Culturemes are the bridge between linguistic units and culture [5, p. 200].

Their usage can be seen in cultural expressions, phraseologisms, jokes, slogans, literature, religion, folklore, sociology, anthropology etc. All of which are subcultures in a culture system. Culturemes of this nature have historical relevance that when translated or explained result in a miscommunication and misunderstanding.

Fernando Poyatos breaks down the features of a cultureme into four phases. These phases analysis the broadest of culturemes to the most particular aspects of culturemes [3, p. 76].

Phase one is defined as *basic culturemes*. Basic culturemes are the broadest of culturemes. They characterize the initial semblance of a culture. Basic culturemes are separated into two cultural "realms," urban and rural, and two domains: exterior and interior. The significance of basic culturemes is to give a general sense of surroundings, for instance:

e.g. I guess this means Grand Auntie's funeral will be Buddhist. Although she attended the First Chinese Baptists Church for a number of years.... I don't think Grand Auntie never gave up her other beliefs, just all the superstitious rituals concerning attracting good and avoiding bad. I used to play with her altar, a miniature red temple containing a framed picture of a Chinese god. In front of that was an imitation-brass urn filled with burnt incense sticks and on the side were offerings of oranges, Lucky Strike cigarettes, and an airline mini-bottle of Johnny Walker Red whiskey. It was a Chinese version of a Christmas crèche [2, p. 19].

Phase Two contains *primary culturemes*. Primary culturemes exist in the phase when acculturation occurs, in which one's culture is becoming more complex. The basic four groups of culturemes are subcategorized into environmental (cultural settings) and behavioral (behaviors of people and their interactions). These culturemes are a result of recognizing cultural patterns and "experiencing it through mere observation or systemic learning" [3, p. 80].

e.g. *“Besides, I thought you couldn’t stand your cousin Bao-bao. Not to mention the fact that Mary will be there. God, what a dingbat”* (Dingbat is a vulgar word in Cantonese language) [2, p. 15].

Phase Three can be referred to as *secondary culturemes*. Culturemes are further broken down into settings, in which a specific culture is exemplified. These includes cultures in the school, the park, the bar, etc. These are secondary culturemes. Phase three is the point where the cultures identified in phase two begin to interact; interrelationships are seen among different cultural systems and values.

e.g. *My mother was playing a game with little red and black tablets spread out on a board. She said this was a foreigners’ game called chiu ke, “prison and handcuffs”. It is only now that I think of this game – chiu ke – that I realize she must have been talking about checkers* [2, p. 90].

Phase Four is formed by *tertiary culturemes*. It delves deeper into human senses, analyzing to the fullest extent possible. The completion of phase four allows one to identify the cultureme’s cultural system and subculture. Knowing the cultural system and subculture are important as it helps to navigate through other identifiable systems within the culture.

e.g. *My mother has always been proud of those red banners. She doesn’t write the typical congratulatory sayings, like “Good Luck” or “Prosperity and long life”. All her sayings, written in gold Chinese characters, are of her own inspiration, her thoughts about life and death, luck and hope: “First-class life for your first baby”, “Double – happiness wedding triples family fortunes”, “Money smells good in your new restaurant business”, “Health returns fast, always hoping”* [2, p. 23].

The problem of equivalence lies in the area, in which an interdisciplinary consensus has been achieved: lexicosemantic structures of lexis of a particular language are peculiar, specific to this language and, therefore, they are partially unique. It means that the lexical-semantic structures of two (or more) languages are non-isomorphic. Non-isomorphy of lexis forms the theoretical and observed empirical circumstances, examination of which leads to concrete manifestations of the problem of equivalence in different disciplines. In this case, we are only interested in the metalexicographical aspect of this issue.

The notion of equivalence in the lexicographical research should not be constructed anti-intuitively, away from its use in the common language sense, but must be more precise, and also must be different from the concept of equivalence in related disciplines, especially if it is referred to contrastive linguistics and translation theory. Equivalence (or its absence) is a marginal phenomenon, if lexicological studies are related to only one language.

They are extensionally equivalent, which means they have the same number of meanings. The notion of equivalence, on the other hand, plays a crucial role in contrastive or confrontational lexicology. There are also various lexicological manifestations of the problem of equivalence. Comparative lexicology is regarded as a partial discipline with an emphasis on language [1, p. 176].

Thus, study of culturemes proves that these lexical units function on different levels representing various layers of a national culture through language and their interpenetration between languages poses a challenge for translators, as in order to render their meaning adequately a wider cultural context should be considered.

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