

# The Stumbling Blocks on the Silk Road of Tibetan Culture——Analysis of the Influencing Factors on Tibetan Culture's International Communications

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## Abstract

Tibetan culture has its long history and rich content and it is also an integral part of Chinese culture, which is an important symbol of the soft power of our country. The Tibetan culture's overseas promotion is an indispensable part of the strategy for "Chinese Culture Going Global", in the process of which "Tibetan-English translation" is the key. However, in the practice of English translation of Tibetan culture there are still many problems that need further study and many things that need to be improved. Based on the outlines of "Chinese Culture Going Global", the author aims to sort out some problems in the course of English translation of Tibetan culture and then put forward six major factors that influence the Tibetan Culture's International Communications.

**Keywords—** Tibetan Culture, International Communications, Influencing Factors.

## I. INTRODUCTION

The serious shortage of the Tibetan-English translators has hindered the effective development of strategy for "Chinese Culture Going Global" and there has been an obvious contradiction between the need of "Tibetan Culture Going Global" and the shortage of Tibetan-English translators. Furthermore, the majority of translators engaged in English translation of Tibetan culture are not native Tibetans but are from the Han nationality (one of the 56 nationalities of China). This makes it difficult to evade the phenomenon of "Re-translation" in the process of English translation of Tibetan culture, which results in a loss and even variation of cultural information. In addition, there are something unreasonable and need to be improved in the training of English professionals in Tibetan areas. Generally speaking, all of these factors have caused various obstacles to the "Silk Road" of Tibetan culture and have put negative impact on the implementation of the "Chinese Culture Going Global" strategy. The details of the Influencing factors on Tibetan culture's international communications are analysed below.

## II. OUTDATED TEACHING METHOD

In order to find out the current situation of English teaching in Tibetan areas, the author interviewed respectively two teachers from the Third Middle School of Kangding and three teachers from Kangbei National High School (both of the two schools are typically the famous middle school in Ganzi area). Although the teaching experiences and qualifications of the five teachers interviewed are different, their teaching methods are generally the same: Grammar-translation Method.

Such teaching method just makes English learning stay on the surface of the language, instead of focusing on the pragmatics function, and therefore it just makes the students do a lot of tedious repeated reading and writing rather than trains their communicative competence, failing to provide students with a real and visible communicative context. The teachers usually spend a lot of time in repeating what the textbook says, ask students to do the exercises on the textbook, and then check the answer. So such outdated teaching methods just make the students gradually lose their motivation and interest of English learning, because if language learning is separated from culture and life, it will lose its meaning and charm.[1]

## III. TEXTBOOKS' LACK OF NATIVE CULTURE

The textbooks currently used in the high schools mentioned above are the "New Standard English Senior High Student's Book (series)" published by the Foreign Language Teaching and Research. The content covers social, economic and humanities, which helps students broaden their horizons. However, all of the textbooks are centered on foreign culture and foreigners' daily life, which is far away from the actual lives of Tibetan students, namely those textbooks are not suitable for such a special group of students who live in backward mountainous areas of Ganzi.

The teachers said in the interview that during morning reading the students just read Buddhist

scriptures instead of their textbooks in the classroom, which indicates that although the students' attitude toward English learning is negative, Tibetan students have a strong sense of pride in their own culture. That is to say, to some extent, those textbooks whose contents are all about foreign modern urban life are not attractive or applicative to the Tibetan students who live in backward mountainous areas of Ganzi and who are more interested in their own native culture: Tibetan Buddhism.[2] No exaggeration, Tibetan students in mountainous areas are a special community, and we should take it into consideration and add in their textbooks some content which is related to their native culture or their actual life to help them express their own culture and life in English so as to enhance their sense of cultural identity as well as their enthusiasm and interest for English learning.

#### IV. THE BURDEN OF "DOUBLE-NEGATIVE-TRANSFER"

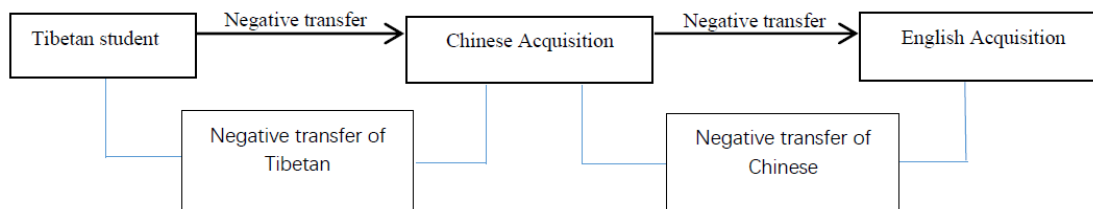
In the field of English teaching in Tibetan areas, there are many things that need to be improved. One of them is " trilingual teaching mode ", which is to say, many English teachers in Tibetan areas cannot speak Tibetan and they have to use mandarin as their language medium to communicate with students,

resulting in some Tibetan students have to bear the burden of "double-negative-transfer".

Some Tibetan students, especially those in the backward mountainous area cannot speak Chinese well, and their mandarin is poor. Therefore to those Tibetan students the teachers' language medium: mandarin is actually the second language, and the English learning is actually the learning of third language. What counts is, we know that in language learning the mother tongue has both "positive transfer function" and "negative transfer function", but for those Tibetan students the "positive transfer" of the mother tongue (Tibetan) cannot work effectively because the teachers' language mediums are Chinese and English instead of Tibetan, and therefore there is just "negative transfer function" left for those students. The result is that Tibetan students cannot make use of the "positive transfer function" of their mother tongue and they also cannot make good use of the rules of the second language (Chinese) to learn the third language (English). [3]

Due to there is objectively "negative transfer" in second language acquisition and third language acquisition, then the Tibetan students actually have to bear a burden of "double-negative-transfer". The specific process is shown in the figure 1 below.

Figure 1: Process of Tibetan Students' English Acquisition



Explanation for Figure 1: First the Tibetan students have to understand the teacher's language medium: mandarin (Chinese), which makes the students experience the first "negative transfer" because of the different language habits between Tibetan and Chinese. Then the students have to learn English in accordance with the Chinese grammar, which makes the students experience the second "negative transfer" because of the different language habits and rules between Chinese and English. Therefore Tibetan students actually have to bear a burden of "double-negative-transfer" in the process of English acquisition.

#### V. THE SHORTAGE OF TIBETAN-SPEAKING ENGLISH TEACHER

As is illustrated above, Tibetan students actually bear a burden of "double-negative-transfer", which makes it more difficult for them to learn English. However, what is worse is that there are really so few English teachers who can speak Tibetan throughout China that a famous scholar has written an article to make a special study on the serious shortage of Tibetan-speaking English teacher. [4] Therefore the suggestion is that Education Department in our country should be aware of the importance of bilingual and trilingual teachers, and should see the

necessity of training Tibetan-speaking English teachers in Tibetan areas. It should be encouraged that minority normal colleges and universities give full play to their own advantages to train a group of specialized teachers who can speak both Tibetan and English well.

#### VI. THE PHENOMENON OF "RE-TRANSLATION"

Translation is a process that translator, based on the understanding of the original text, use target language to reproduce the content of the original language. The first step is translator's understanding of

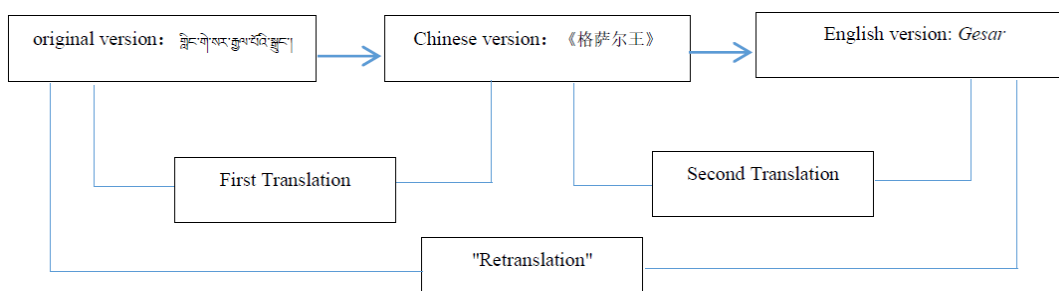
the original text, which embodies the translator's cognitive level and thinking mode, and the second step is to express, including the choice of words and the use of figures of speech etc., which reflects the "translator's subjectivity."

However, as is analyzed above in point 5, there are so few Tibetan-English translators, let alone the native Tibetan translators working in the English translation of Tibetan culture, which results in such a fact that so many Tibetan literatures' English versions are not translated directly from Tibetan into English, but experience some "intermediary", namely "retranslation".

For example, Gesar, the English translation of རྗེ་གེ་སར་རྒྱལ་པོའི་སྐུ་ལྷན།, a famous heroic epic in Tibetan language, is not translated directly from Tibetan into English, but from Chinese into English. It underwent a "retranslation" and the details are below.

Firstly, the translators Jingbian Jiaquo and Wu Wei translated the original version ( རྗེ་གེ་སར་རྒྱལ་པོའི་སྐུ་ལྷན།) into Chinese version(《格萨尔王》), and then Wang Guozhen, Zhu Yongmei and Han Jia, three famous translators of China, translated the Chinese version(《格萨尔王》) into English version: Gesar. [5] (Shown below in Figure 2)

Figure 2: the process of "Retranslation"



Explanation for Figure 2: It is worth mentioning that the negative influence of such "Retranslation" should not be underestimated, because each translating process embodies different translators' unique cognitive levels, including modes of thinking and "translator's subjectivity", and these cognitive differences will eventually result in "distortion of translated information" and even "cultural variation", which is unfavorable to the English translation and the spread of Tibetan culture.

### VII. THE SHORTAGE OF TIBETAN-ENGLISH TRANSLATORS AND SCHOLARS

The serious shortage of Tibetan-English translators and related scholars has always been the direct influential factors in English translation of Tibetan culture. On the one hand, comparatively speaking, of the 56 nationalities of China Han nationality being the major nationality, the whole society has more or less been influenced by the leading role of Han nationality, and therefore most of the translators and scholars have paid their attention to the mainstream culture (the literature and custom etc. of Han nationality) and few scholars have realized the big importance of translating Tibetan culture into English, which means when the government encourages the policy of "Tibetan Culture Going Global", we just find that there are few translators and scholars who actively devote themselves to English translation of Tibetan culture. Here below is a statistics in point: with "Tibetan, English" as the subject searching in CNKI (China National Knowledge Infrastructure, one of the most authoritative databases in China), you will find that there are only 32 articles (shown below in figure 2), which indicates that the Tibetan-English translators and related scholars are definitely not enough.

Figure 3: Search Results in CNKI

No.	Title	Author	Sources	Publication Date	Database source
1	藏族学生英语元音习得实证研究	王健美	西南民族大学	2013-04-05	硕士
2	语言迁移对藏族英语专业学生句法习得的影响	白欠欠	中南民族大学	2013-05-10	硕士
3	西藏地区大学生英语学习动机的现状调查	刘彬	扬州大学	2007-04-01	硕士
4	西藏地区藏族高中生英语写作错误分析	唐鑫	苏州大学	2015-05-01	硕士
5	藏族高中生的汉语学习策略对英语学习策略的影响研究	陈利书	四川师范大学	2017-04-10	硕士
6	语言迁移对藏族英语专业学生英文写作的影响研究	高晓辉	中国海洋大学	2010-05-20	硕士
7	藏族学生英语写作错误分析	李玲	华中师范大学	2012-05-01	硕士
8	藏、英、汉三种语言的人称代词用法比较研究	才让三智	西北民族大学学报(自然科学版)	2011-03-15	期刊
9	藏—汉—英三语环境下藏族中学生英语学习的认知基础和学习机制分析	杜洪波	西华大学	2008-04-01	硕士
10	中国英语学习者与美国英语使用者的尾端音丛(UD)删除现象的社会语言学研究	徐苗苗	天津大学	2014-05-01	硕士
11	藏族英语学习者学习风格偏好研究	洪玉蓉	西北大学	2005-05-01	硕士
12	青海藏族高中生英语学习动机研究	东主卓玛	青海师范大学	2013-03-01	硕士
13	基于语料库的涉藏英语词汇研究	周江萌	大连海事大学	2012-05-01	硕士
14	任务型语言教学在藏族高中英语阅读教学中的应用研究	朱进慧	西北民族大学	2011-04-01	硕士
15	藏语语音美式英语双元音的声学特征及影响因素分析	暴文富	天津大学	2016-05-01	硕士
16	藏语(拉萨方言)语音单元音习得中迁移现象的实验研究	赵颖	天津大学	2015-05-01	硕士
17	文化视角下藏族大学生英语课堂内交际意愿研究	张林慧	西南交通大学	2012-05-01	硕士
18	内地西藏班初中生英语学习动机的研究	裴锦华	陕西师范大学	2014-05-01	硕士
19	藏族学生英语学习兴趣与动机的调查分析	央金卓嘎	陕西师范大学	2015-11-01	硕士
20	藏族中学生英语学习动机研究	李志明	西北师范大学	2010-05-01	硕士

### VIII. CONCLUSION:

Tibetan culture's overseas promotion is an important part of the strategy for "Chinese Culture Going Global", in the process of which "Tibetan-English translation" is the key. However, in the practice of English translation of Tibetan culture, there are six major factors that negatively influence the Tibetan Culture's international communications, and they are: the shortage of Tibetan-English translators and scholars, the phenomenon of "re-translation", outdated teaching method in Tibetan area, textbooks' lack of native culture, Tibetan students' burden of "double-negative-transfer", and the shortage of Tibetan-speaking English teacher. Generally speaking, all of these factors above have caused various obstacles to the "Silk Road" of Tibetan culture and have put negative impact on the implementation of the "Chinese Culture Going Global" strategy.

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