

# The Influence of Cultural Differences on English-Chinese Interpreting

Lian, Xiaohui

*Henan University of Economics and Law, Zhengzhou, China.*

*Email:lilian@163.com*

**Abstract:** Interpreting is one of the activities of verbal communication, a process in which the interpreters can comprehend the meaning and convey it to a target language. If interpreters cannot realize the cultural differences and skilfully deal with them, there will be great difficulties in the communication for the two parties. This thesis examines the cultural differences on interpreting in verbal communication, exploring the factors that may lead to these differences and trying to find ways for interpreters to have a better performance in the process of interpreting.

**Keywords:** cultural differences; English-Chinese interpreting; verbal communication

## Introduction

Nowadays, the communication between different nations is becoming more and more popular. No matter what people do, they need to communicate with others. In addition, as globalization is a vogue trend all around the world, communication is not only fashionable but also indispensable. When people communicate with others who come from different nations, they are actually conducting an inter-cultural communication.

According to Samovar and Porter (1994, pp.48), “inter-cultural communication is communication between people whose cultural perceptions and symbol systems are distinct enough to alter the communication event.” Inter-cultural communication can be divided into two categories; one is verbal communication, and the other is non-verbal communication - this thesis will focus on the verbal communication. Verbal communication is regarded as an interactive process between speaking and listening and what is the most important is that the two communicating parties can understand the meaning of each other. In fact, interpreting is

one of the activities of verbal communication. In this kind of situation, interpreters play a significant role in conveying the meanings. It is known that interpreting is not only a process of language shifting, but also a process of culture transferring. Interpreters need to mediate the communication and make sure the correct meaning which includes cultural background information is passed. In such process, cultural differences become a part that cannot be ignored. It can be safely said that whether the interpreters can realize the cultural differences and skillfully deal with them determine the result of the interpreting. This is why cultural differences are pivotal in the process of interpreting.

This thesis focuses on the influence of cultural differences on interpreting in verbal communication. It tries to research the specific cultural differences that may occur in interpreting and analyzing the factors that lead to them. Besides, the thesis tries to explore the strategies and suggestions that will help the interpreters have a better performance in the process.

The research on the influence of cultural differences in interpreting, both at home and overseas, are quite flourishing. Some emphasizes on the inter-cultural background, some studies the cultural barriers, and others research the importance of the cultural consciousness for interpreters and so on. In oversea academia, Cecilia Wadensjo (1998) wrote *Interpreting as Interaction*, which focused on the importance of realizing cultural differences for interpreters. In addition, David Katan (2004) wrote a book named *Translating Cultures - An Introduction for Translators, Interpreters and Mediators*. This book carried on the studies on the research of interpreting across culture. It says that cultural messages are the vital part of interpreting. At home, there are also many scholars who discussed the culture and interpreting in communication. Here will mention the representative ones. Zhao Junfeng and Jiang Nan (1998) studied from the point of view of the cross-cultural awareness of interpreters. They two indicated that if the interpreters can have the realization of cross-culture, they could have a more accurate performance in interpreting. Furthermore, Zhuang Enping (1998) tried to study the thinking differences between nations, especially between the East and the West. These theories indicate that cultural background knowledge and information play a significant role in interpreting. Interpreters should have a wide range of cultural background knowledge in order to avoid mistranslation. This thesis explores further more about the influences of cultural

differences on interpreting and enumerates some comprehensive examples which will help the readers have a deeper understanding of the relationship between cultures and interpreting.

This thesis consists of three parts - the first part is mainly about the basic theory and concepts. It introduces the verbal communication, the interpreting and their relationship. It indicates the significant role of culture in communication. As for interpreting, its definition, types are described. This part points out that interpreting is an activity of verbal communication, because cultural messages are transferred in the process of interpreting.

The second part is mainly about the cultural differences. First, it has a specific classification of different cultural differences and lists concrete examples about them. Next, the thesis explores the factors that may cause the differences from various points of view. Finally, the thesis states the heavy influences of cultural differences on interpreting.

The third part emphasizes on studying ways for interpreters to do better in interpreting. There are some useful strategies and suggestions for interpreters. As interpreters, they need bilingual and bicultural competences at the same time.

## **Verbal Communication and Interpreting**

In order to better study the influence of cultural differences on interpreting in verbal communication, the thesis will firstly introduce the basic knowledge of verbal communication, which includes the definition of communication, culture, and inter-cultural communication. In addition, the thesis will introduce the basic concept of interpreting and the types of it. In the end of this chapter, the thesis studies the relationship of culture and interpreting and has the conclusion that interpreting is one kind of activities of verbal communication.

### ***A Brief Introduction to Verbal Communication***

Firstly, in order to have a better understanding of verbal communication, this thesis will briefly introduce one key word: communication. Communication is a common word around people's life. Although it is normal, there is a lot of difficulty in giving communication a concrete definition. Different people have different opinions of communication. Scholars have

researched this word for a long time, and there are plenty of various definitions of communication. For example, Samovar and Porter define communication like this:

Communication is that which happens whenever meaning is attributed to behavior or to the residue of behavior. When someone observes our behavior or its residue and gives meaning to it, communication has taken place regardless of whether our behavior is conscious or unconscious, intentional or unintentional. (Samovar & Porter, 1994, pp.22)

In this thesis, communication is defined as “the process of understanding and sharing meanings” (Pearson & Nelson, 1997). According to this one, communication is a process that conveys information, concepts and emotions. The word “share” is the pivotal one in this sentence, because it means that all people evolved in the communication are exchanging their minds and ideas. This is a similar process with interpreting, which is more proper for this thesis.

Secondly, after learning communication, culture is another necessary part to study. Culture is also a hard to give a definition as communication. Scholars who come from different disciplines all define culture from their own perspective. Here is a typical example:

“文化是人类在社会历史发展过程中所创造的物质和精神财富的总和，特指精神财富，如文学、教育、科学、艺术等”（《现代汉语词典》，pp.1192）.

Culture is everything and is everywhere. There is not a concrete definition for culture. This thesis uses the definition which is related to communication: “culture is the deposit of knowledge, experience, beliefs, values, actions, attitudes, meanings, hierarchies, religion, notions of people in the course of generations through individual and group striving (Samovar et al, 2000).

Thirdly, when communication is linked to culture, it becomes more complex. Communication is only one of the most significant aspects of people’s life subject to the influence of culture. In various cultures, people communicate with each other by extremely different symbols. One kind of symbols which conveys certain meaning in one culture may transfers a completely opposite meaning in another culture. Thus, when people from different culture background communicate with each other, inter-cultural communication occurs. Still, there are plenty of definitions of inter-cultural communication. This thesis chooses the one which is defined by Samovar: “inter-cultural communication is communication between people whose cultural perceptions and symbol systems are distinct enough to alter the

communication event” (Samovar et al, 2000, pp.48). When inter-cultural communication happens, people in this communication need a mediator to help them understand others’ meaning. In this sort of situation, culture is one thing that cannot be ignored by mediators.

Finally, this thesis gives the definition of verbal communication, which is one of the important concepts in this thesis. Communication is made up by verbal communication and non-verbal communication. Inter-cultural communication is not an exception. Verbal communication is regarded as an interactive process between speaking and listening. Verbal communication mostly points out the linguistic parts of communication. Language is no doubt the most explicit way for people to communicate. “Language is potentially the most precise vehicle we have for human communication” (Tubbs & Moss, 1994, pp.86). Consequently, this thesis focuses on the relationship between language and culture with specific emphasizes on the linguistic aspects of language to state the influence of cultural differences on verbal communication.

### ***A Brief Introduction to Interpreting***

The terms “interpret”, “interpreter” and “interpretation” have several different meanings in English. “Interpret” may mean “to understand the likely meaning of a statement or action, etc.” or “to show one’s own ideas of the meaning of a work of art in one’s performance” (Sumner, 1940). In this thesis, interpreting adopts another definition which is more proper. “Interpretation, essentially, means an extempore oral reproduction, in one language, of what is said in another language” (Zhong, 1999). According to this definition, interpreting is a process that transfers one language to the other one for the two communicating parties. In this process, interpreters play a role of mediators. They have the duty to convey the specific meanings, not only about the linguistic but also about the cultural background information.

In addition, there are many different ways classifying interpreting. The most common one gives two main types for interpreting:

The first one is consecutive interpreting. In consecutive interpreting (CI), the interpreter speaks after the source-language speaker has finished speaking. The speech is divided into segments, and the interpreter sits or stands beside the source-language speaker, listening and taking notes as the speaker progresses through the message. When the speaker pauses or

finishes speaking, the interpreter then renders a portion of the message or the entire message in the target language (Wikipedia, 2009).

The second one is simultaneous interpreting. In simultaneous interpreting (SI), the interpreter renders the message in the target-language as quickly as he or she can formulate it from the source language, while the source-language speaker continuously speaks; an oral-language SI interpreter, sitting in a sound-proof booth, speaks into a microphone, while clearly seeing and hearing the source-language speaker via earphones. The simultaneous interpreting is rendered to the target-language listeners via their earphones. Moreover, SI is the common mode used by sign language interpreters, although the person using the source language, the interpreter and the target language recipient (since either the hearing person or the deaf person may be delivering the message) must necessarily be in close proximity (Wikipedia, 2010).

### ***Interpreting as a Verbal Communication***

People of different cultural backgrounds will always have various cultural differences. When they have verbal communication, these differences will definitely block the process of communication. During the process of interpreting, the interpreters must realize their responsibilities that help people in verbal communication to overcome the cultural gaps. Any words have meaning only after they are linked to culture. Therefore, studying the cultural differences that may happen in interpreting is a necessary way to make the verbal communication successful.

The aim of interpreting is to convey the meaning of the two sides, and both sides need the help of a mediator (who is the interpreter) to understand and share the messages in the process of verbal communication. Interpreting is not only a process of language shifting, but also a process of culture transferring; that is, if the interpreters only express the literal meaning of the words, there may be an error or omission of the messages in the process of interpreting. Besides, interpreting is also an interactive process between speaking and listening. In fact, interpreting is not just an inter-lingual communication, and it is also an inter-cultural communication. Thus, interpreting is also one kind of activities of verbal communication. This thesis focuses on the interpreting in verbal communication and explores the cultural influence on it.

## **Cultural Differences in Interpreting of Verbal Communication**

This chapter focuses on the cultural differences that will happen in the process of interpreting. It deeply studies the specific cultural differences and classifies them. Besides, the thesis also explores the factors that lead to the differences.

### ***Specific Cultural Differences and Their Influences***

Because of the differences between different communicating parties are in so many aspects, there will be a lot of various kinds of cultural differences in the process of interpreting. It is necessary to study the specific cultural differences and one way that is effective to learn the differences is to classify them. This thesis lists some categories of cultural differences and explores their influence on interpreting.

### ***Cultural Differences in Idioms and Phrases***

With different cultural background, every language has its own habits. In the long period of each country's development, each of them has formalized its own featured idioms and phrases. Hence, there are often many idioms and phrases in their talking to express some special meaning or to make the speech more vivid. There is no doubt that these idioms and phrases have very close relationship with the culture. If the interpreters want to obtain the true meaning, the literal meaning is obviously not enough. They have to understand the deep meaning behind the idioms and phrases, which is linked to different culture. This requires the interpreters to keep in mind some fixed expressions. However, the interpreters certainly cannot remember all of the idioms and phrases, so they need to have a quick and accurate reaction during the process of interpreting. This thesis will analyze the cultural differences of idioms and phrases from the following perspective:

First, the interpreters should act as the mediators between the speakers and the listeners. They should find the right way which is proper for the other side's culture to understand instead of interpreting from word to word. The cultural differences between the East and the West are the most obvious and typical, so the thesis will pay more attention to them. For example, there is a famous idiom in China that is “金窝银窝,不如自家的稻草窝”. This means that wherever people go or stay, their home is always the most comfortable. In English, if this idiom is only interpreted literally, it will be like “golden nests and silver nests are worse than straw

nests of ones' own". However, in this kind of expression, there will be difficult to understand the real meaning for westerns. People may not figure out the importance of home in Chinese. Therefore, the correct expression of this old Chinese idiom is that "home is home, be it never so homely".

Second, it is same in all nations that metaphor is a useful way to make the speech vivid. However, when the interpreters come across the metaphor, it is not easy for them to have a vivid translation in a short time. The interpreters must express the metaphor and reveal the real meaning in order to keep the words clarifying. Here is an example: 这大岩洞的钟乳千奇百怪, 形象奇特。这里是“瓜果丰收”, 那里是“天女散花”。 The translation of this sentence is that, "In this grand cave, the rocks and stalactites, with myriad of forms, are shaped in different grotesque images. This cluster here looks like a bumper harvest of fruits and vegetables; that group over there gives one a mirage of 'celestial fairies scattering flowers'." In reality, the interpreters seldom have the perfect interpretation in a short time. In order to overcome this, what the interpreters can do is to practice more in daily time, because practice makes perfection. Besides, the interpreters should remember that the completion and correction of the sentence is always more important than its elegance and beauty.

It is known that it's not difficult to notice the big cultural differences in idioms and phrases that exist in various cultures. Besides, this is absolutely a huge barrier for interpreters in interpreting. Idioms and phrases are always the marvelous results of the development of one country. Hence, they are usually the crucial parts during the interpreting. There is no possibility for the interpreters to remember all idioms and phrases, so they should be more flexible and rely on the real context.

### *Cultural Differences in Allusions*

In order to make the conversation vivid and interesting, people may use allusions. Most of the allusions are from the literature characters. In most time, the allusions come up due to the long history and they often reflect the cultural background information. People use the characters' feature to describe other people. However, without knowing the background information, there will be great difficulties for the interpreters. For example, if one has no idea of *The True Story of Ah Q* by a Chinese well-known writer Lu Xun's, he or she will not

understand the real meaning when another people is described as Ah Q. Here are some examples of allusions from different nations. For instance, a Shylock is a cruel, greedy and money-grabbing person. He will take every ways to be rich. This is a character from the Merchant of Venice, a famous play by Shakespeare. In China, “智多星”, for example, Zhi Duoxing is the nickname for Wu Yong. He is a very resourceful strategist of the peasant army in Water Margin. This is used to describe a resourceful person.

Except for the characters from literature, allusions can also come from legends and mythology. For example, the story of Trojan horse is a famous one, and it usually indicates a warning to be vigilant against the enemies from the inside. In addition, “杞人忧天”, the man of Qi who was haunted by the fear that the sky might fall, is used to mean unnecessary worries.

Understanding allusions is a high request for interpreters but also a necessary one. The interpreters must have some study about literature, legends even religions of the country. Every different language has its own cultural inside information. Only after the interpreters have learned the cultural background information can they express the accurate and cultural meaning during interpreting.

### *Cultural Differences in Customs*

Living in different social environment, people will naturally form various customs. The special formalization is because of the unique historical background and social tradition. Besides, the customs is reflected in people's daily life habits and communication activities. These customs include greetings, farewells and so on.

As for greetings, the East and the West have different ways. In China, it is known that people all have a strong sense of collectivity, so they always pay more attention to the collectivistic interests. Chinese people often show their kindness and care by the way of asking others' questions. For example, when people meet friends outside, they may ask “Where are you going?” or “Have you got your meat?” Actually, people do not really hope for the answers. That is, they don't really want to know where the others are going or whether they already have the meal. This is just a functional greeting. However, in West, this sort of questions is

unfriendly and nearly banned because it shows no respect for people's privacy. Westerners only say "How are you?" or "How do you do?" to express their care for friends. In addition, euphemism is normal in West. It is not polite for people to ask the name directly of a stranger. There must be "May I...?" in front of the sentence in order to show the respect. When the interpreters are helping greet to each other, it's better to be familiar with the cultural customs so that there will be less misunderstanding.

There is also another big difference. In China, modesty is a traditional merit. People in China are accustomed to saying "您过奖了" (I'm not as good as you say) when they get others' praise to show their humility. Things are totally different in the West. Westerners are pleased to accept the compliment and say "Thank you!" happily. In reality, if Chinese people says "No, no, I'm not as good as you said just now." when they respond to the English's compliment, the English will definitely be puzzled and confused.

The number of this kind of differences is too big to count. Moreover, these differences appear almost everywhere and every time in people's life. It's a difficult task for the interpreters to deal with the differences in interpreting. They need to study the basic social customs and resolve them. After all, greeting is the beginning part of the interpreting, and the first impression is always pivotal and hard to change.

### *Cultural Differences in Thinking Modes*

Thinking modes or thinking patterns are an important factor in culture which has influence on verbal communication. Because of the different customs and habits, people form their typical ways of thinking, which are called thinking modes. The interpreters should notice the different patterns of thinking in different cultures. That is, they should know how people express ideas and how they can understand each other. Here are some examples of the differences of thinking modes.

First, the Westerners' mode of thinking is much straighter than people in China. The Westerners prefer giving their major point at the beginning part. Meanwhile, they like to hear the main contents at first, too. Instead, the Chinese prefer spiral thinking. They always tell others their major statements at the last part of their speaking. For example, the Chinese

sentence “昨天下午 3 点在人民大会堂，我接见了来自加拿大的代表团” is interpreted as “I met with the Canadian delegation at People’s Hall at three yesterday afternoon”.

Next, the Westerns incline to abstract thinking but the Chinese like concrete thinking. In the West, people prefer abstract thinking and use it to express concrete ideas. However, the Chinese like to use specific concepts to describe abstract things. For instance, in English, sentences like “It is other people, constituting a collective, who benefit from the actor’s concern for them, self-restraint, care for their security, and respect for shared traditions”, with so many abstract words and convey an abstract thinking. However, in Chinese, there are very few of this kind of sentences.

Finally, the Chinese prefer dialectical thinking while the Westerns prefer logical thinking. In English, for example, there are many logical words in sentences to link one to another. People in the West get used to knowing the meaning through the logical words. In Chinese, sentences seldom have logical words. They just combine real things and ideas.

The differences of thinking modes give the interpreters much difficulty in understanding the meaning and transferring it into the target-language quickly. This sort of cultural differences make the interpreters study the speaking and thinking habits of people from different cultural background. They need to be familiar with the thinking modes so that the interpreting can be accurate.

### ***The Factors Leading to the Cultural Differences***

The thesis analyzes the specific cultural differences that will happen during the process of interpreting above, then what factors lead to the differences happen. There are several factors below.

#### ***Different Historical Background***

Over the past millions of years, every country has its own development tendency. During this process, every country form their own language, own laws and of course, own culture, which make them typical and unique in the whole world. In every country’s development, there are always some significant events which have fixed historical and social meaning. Once they come into in language system, they will be given the fixed meaning and the meaning will come down. At present, all countries need to cooperate, in order that they can still hold their place in

the highly competitive international stage. However, they will never abandon their special feature that shape in the development of their country. In the meantime, all people have no chance to get rid of it, because the special feature has become the part of their bodies already.

For example, China has a long history and during that period, the emperors had their dictatorship from one dynasty to another. The men who had the power would have the control of the district, and the common people were always under heavy pressure, especially the women who are discriminated more severely. Consequently, in Chinese, there are some sayings like: “君叫臣死臣不得不死”, “只许州官放火不许百姓点灯”, “女子无才便是德”, etc.

However, in Britain, the feudal history is a little bit shorter. Moreover, the English are heavily influenced by the freedom and equality thinking and they are pursuing the equal interpersonal relationship. Hence, in English, there are some sayings like: “A cat may look at a king.”, “A king without learning is but a crowned ass.”

Therefore, when the verbal communication occurs, people from different cultures need to clearly know others’ meaning. The interpreters need to be as mediators and convey the literal meaning and the cultural meaning, which is more important. This requests the interpreters to be familiar with the country’s history, so that they can interpret the words more easily to be learned and this will decrease the misunderstanding and impoliteness.

### *Different Customs*

Because of the different history and social environment, the West and the East have very different customs. Customs appear everywhere in people’s daily life, and it reflects in many aspects, such as living habits, language, eating habits and so on, so the different customs will definitely lead to the cultural differences. During the process of interpreting, the interpreters should notice the two communicating parties’ different customs and choose the comfortable way for them to understand the meaning. Here is an exemplary aspect.

This is about different eating culture. As the old saying goes, food is the paramount necessity of the people. Hence, the various eating culture cause various metaphor used by food in the communication. For example, in Chinese, “萝卜青菜，各有所爱” means that different

people have different ideas about the same thing. This expression is very vivid in Chinese's minds because they are two common vegetables in China. However, in English, these two cannot express the same meaning. The English use "Different people have different opinions, some like apples and some like onions." to express the same meaning, because in Britain, apples and onions are two popular foods.

In order to have a better performance in interpreting, and decrease the misunderstanding between the two communicating parties, the interpreters should learn the different customs in different nations so that they can help the communication be more relaxed and easily understood.

#### *Other Important Factors*

Besides the two mentioned above, there are also some other factors. The first one is different religious beliefs. Religious belief is one important aspect of people's mental activities, and it has influence on national culture to some extent. Hence, people from different cultures have different religious beliefs. For instance, in China, people believe in Buddhism and Confucianism, until Buddhism, Confucianism and Taoism become one. There are many temples around China in the old times. Therefore, there are many words about old religious beliefs, such as "临时抱佛脚", "一人得道鸡犬升天" and so on. In Western countries, people mostly believe in Christianity, and they believe that the God is the sole and sovereign deity. Hence, there are some sayings like "God is where he was." and "God helps those who help themselves."

In most time, for people who have their own religious beliefs, their beliefs are sacred and inviolable. Considering this, the interpreters have to pay attention to different religious beliefs in order to avoid the misunderstanding and be polite and respect both sides.

The second one is the different living environment. There are plenty of differences in the environment among different nations, such as weather, geology and so on. This may cause different expressions during communication. For instance, in West, navigation is an important way for business and transportation because there are many islands. As a result, there are some sayings like "It is hard sailing where there is no wind." and "A smooth sea never made a skillful

mariner.” However, in Chinese, there are few expressions about sea. Because China is an agricultural nation, there are sayings like “种瓜得瓜种豆得豆” and “仰面求天不如扑面求土” .

The interpreters should learn the different expressions that caused by different living environment. People from various nations will have various living habits and speaking habits. The interpreters should study those and accord to the context during the process of interpreting.

### **Strategies and Suggestions for the Interpreters**

After exploring the specific cultural differences and the factors, the thesis focuses on the strategies for the interpreters to prepare for the interpreting.

#### ***Strategies for the Interpreters***

All interpreters are eager for their better performance. Besides, there are always some unexpected things during the process of interpreting. Here are some strategies for interpreters.

#### ***Literal Interpreting***

Literal interpreting, also named direct interpreting, is a method that just interprets the sentence from one word to another. Literal interpreting is the most effective way to interpret when the words for the interpreters are not difficult to understand. What they need to do is just interpreting the sentence without thinking too much. Here are two examples. The first one is addressed by Premier Wen Jiabao of China at Luncheon Hosted by the American Bankers Association in New York “Work Together to Open a New Chapter in China-US Trade and Economic Cooperation” on Dec 8, 2003:

温家宝：描写登泰山感受的古诗：“会当凌绝顶，一览众山小”。我们对中美贸易问题，要有这种高瞻远瞩的战略眼光。诸如美中贸易逆差问题，人民币汇率问题，知识产权保护问题，贵国社会各界甚为关注。所有这些问题，是在中美贸易发展中出现的问题，是可以取得共识，也是可以逐步得到解决的，不应该也不可能影响中美经贸发展大局。

Interpreter: Depicting how climbers of the towering Mount Tai feel, an ancient Chinese poem goes. “I must ascend the mountain’s crest; it dwarfs all peaks under

my feet.” When approaching problems in Chinese-US trade, we also need to take a strategic perspective of vision and foresight. Problems such as US trade deficit with China, the RMB exchange rate, and IPR protection, are of concern to many quarters of US society. But they are also problems that come along with expanded China-US trade, and they can be ironed out gradually since common understanding on them is entirely obtainable. They should not, and will not, stand in the way of the larger interests of China-US trade.

In this example, the poem is from “望岳” by 杜甫, a famous poet in China. The poet describes the magnificence of Mount Tai in order to express his strong desire to reach the top of the mountain and his ambitious attitude towards life. If the westerners don't know the mountain before, it will be difficult for them to imagine the greatness of Mount Tai. In the interpretation, the poem is given a literal interpreting so that it can arouse the same feeling between the two communicating parties.

The second example is from English to Chinese:

People often say: if you have a hammer, everything you see is a nail. So when some people know how to make predictions, they try to predict everything. But a predictive system is not always more effective. (Mei, 2006, pp.311)

译文：人们常言：如果你有一把锤子，你看见的一切都是钉子。因此，当某些人会做预测后，他们就要设法预测一切，而这样的预测并不总是那么可靠。

In English, there is a saying about golden hammer. It means that when someone has the tool to complete one task, he or she will want to use the tool to finish all the other things because it is available and he or she already has the capability to use it. However, in Chinese, the interpreters cannot find the words which can convey the accurate meaning because of the cultural differences. In this kind of situation, the interpreters can use literal interpreting which means they can interpret this sentence from one to another and just convey the surface meaning to the other side. In this way, the meaning of the source language can be delivered successfully.

#### *Transliteration Combined with Cultural Explanation*

Every culture is unique all over the world. Although people from different cultures manage to find the corresponding expressions from the words of other cultures, there are still some special words that cannot be translated into the target language, because one cannot find the

equivalent part. Because of this situation and considering the different cultural background, transliterating becomes a way to solve this problem. Transliteration is the conversion of a text from one script to another. There are two types of transliteration. One is complete transliteration and the other is to combine sound and meaning. In the process of interpreting, the second one is used more popular, because the interpreters must realize the cultural differences. The following are two examples. The first one is from China's policy on "Three Direct Links Across the Taiwan Straits" in 2003:

直接、双向、全面“三通”的实现有利于两岸同胞共同顺应世界经济全球化和区域化发展的趋势，加强合作，抓住机遇，应对挑战。

Interpreter: The direct, two-way and complete "three links" of trade, mail, and shipping and air services will help compatriots on both sides of the Taiwan Straits jointly to adapt to the trends of economic globalization and regionalization, strengthen cooperation, seize opportunities and meet challenges.

In this example, the words "三通" and "两岸" are unique in Chinese culture and one cannot find their equivalent part in the target language. If the interpreter just put them in the way as "three links" and "both sides", the westerners cannot catch the real points. Therefore, in order to accurately interpret the cultural meaning, the interpreter adds more explanation of "three links" and "both sides" which make the interpreting easily understood.

The following is the second example:

Cruises, known at least since the days of Cleopatra, became the perfect vacation for the elderly: We move you; you don't have to move. Some owners of cruises lines have become billionaires by exploiting sociological disequilibria. (Mei, 2004, pp.395)

译文：至少从埃及艳后克利奥帕特拉那个时代起就出名的航海旅游业，现在成了老年人的最佳休闲方式：我们载您走，您不必自己迈步。一些航海旅游公司的老板利用社会领域的不平衡而成为亿万富翁。

In this example, "Cleopatra", a Hellenistic ruler of Egypt can be a famous name in the English-speaking world, but it is a strange word for most Chinese. If the interpreters only interpret it literally, it will be difficult for the target listeners to understand the real meaning. However, if the interpreters add "埃及艳后" after the word, which can indicate the position

and title of the person and is known by Chinese, the meaning can be more easily understood for the target listeners. Besides, the interpreters can also deliver the source language's meaning more accurate, which includes the cultural background information.

This kind of situation happens often in Chinese, such as “三资企业” (the three forms of foreign-funded enterprises: joint venture, cooperative venture and wholly foreign-funded enterprises). In this process, adding more explanation can help the target side easily catch the real meaning and the culture behind the words.

### *Free Interpreting*

In reality, there are still some situations that cannot be literally interpreted because of some heavily culture-bound terms. Under this circumstance, the interpreters can use the free interpreting strategy, but it will not be vivid as literal meaning or even omission. For example, in Chinese, “路上辛苦了，今晚我公司将为您接风洗尘” is interpreted as “How is your flight? My company will hold a reception dinner for you.” In Chinese, “接风洗尘” is used to mean to host a reception dinner in order to welcome someone, so the interpreter cannot be only interpreted it as “wash your journey dust off”. In this way, the interpreting skillfully deals with the cultural differences and conveys the accurate meaning. Here is an example:

近年来，上海浦东为龙头的整体工业快速更新，出现了汽车产业、电子信息产业、钢铁产业、石油化工以及精细化工产业、家用电器产业和生物医药产业 6 大支柱。(Mei, 2006, pp.166)

Interpreter: The last few years have seen a rapid upgrading of Shanghai's industrial sector as a whole, led by Pudong, which is best captured by the emergence of six pillar industries: the automaking industry, the electronics-information industry, the steel-making industry, the petrochemical and fine chemical industry, the home electronical appliances and the bioengineering and pharmaceutical industry.

In this example, “龙头” is a strange word for foreigners to understand. They may think it means “dragon head” according to the literal interpreting. However, in Chinese, “龙头” as a typical culture-bound word means “leading position”. Therefore, if the interpretation can be “led by Pudong”, the interpreters skillfully deal with the cultural differences and convey the accurate meaning.

### *Suggestions for the Interpreters*

Apart from the strategies which can be used during the process of interpreting, the interpreters should also make some preparations in their daily time. In this way, the interpreters can be more confident so that have a better performance. The thesis will introduce some suggestions for the interpreters.

### *Cultivating Inter-cultural Awareness*

“Inter-cultural awareness is the cognitive aspect of inter-cultural communication competence that refers to the understanding of cultural conventions that affect thinking and behavior” (Samovar et al, 2000, pp.347). It is known that interpreting is an activity of verbal communication. Thus, the cultures are transferring in this process. Inter-cultural awareness is a necessary ability for the interpreters, and this ability can help the interpreters have a better performance during interpreting.

In the process of interpreting, the interpreters are actually showing their inter-cultural communicative competence. This competence can be seen from two aspects. The first one is that the inter-cultural communicative competence reflects the interpreters’ ability to receive the messages and decode them, to understand the words and reorganize them and to express the meaning accurately. Interpreting is not only a process that transfers messages from the source-language to the target-language, but also from the source culture to the target culture, which is bilingual and bicultural. If the interpreters just notice the literal meaning and ignore the cultural meaning, there will be misunderstanding with no doubt. For instance, when the interpreters hear the word “black tea”, they cannot just interpret it as “黑茶”. The real meaning of this word is “红茶”.

The second aspect is the knowledge of culture that the interpreters have. As an interpreter, one should learn both the native culture and the foreign culture. Let’s take a Chinese native interpreter for example. Although he or she grows up in China, Chinese traditional culture may still not enough for interpreting. There is no doubt that if the interpreters cannot know the native culture better, they cannot transfer the meaning correctly. Here is an example which comes from the public speech “Turning Your Eyes To China”, and this speech

is delivered by Chinese Premier Wen Jiabao at Harvard University, the U.S., on December 10<sup>th</sup>, 2003:

温家宝：特别是“天下兴亡匹夫有责”的爱国情操，“民为邦本”、“民贵君轻”的民本思想，“己所不欲勿施于人”的待人之道，吃苦耐劳、勤俭持家、尊师重教的传统美德，世代相传。

Interpreter: Especially, patriotism as embodied in the saying “Everybody is responsible for the rise or fall of the country”, the populist ideas that “people are the foundation of the country” and that “people are more important than the monarch”, the code of conduct of “Don’t do to others what you don’t want others to do to you”; and the traditional virtues taught from generation to generation: hard work and self-denial, diligence and frugality in household management, and respecting teachers and valuing education. (Zhuang, 1998, pp.98)

This example shows the significance of improving the interpreters’ knowledge of native culture. The interpreters may always meet Chinese ancient quotations in interpreting, like “天下兴亡匹夫有责” etc. At this time, they need to understand the deep meaning and interpret it in a proper way. If the interpreters cannot know the meaning, the target-language will not be perfect.

The inter-cultural communicative competence cannot be formed in a few days, it needs a long time of studying and accumulating. The interpreters must learn all the time, though they can’t know everything. During the process of interpreting, the more knowledge of native and foreign cultures the interpreters know, the better they can perform and the less misunderstanding they cause.

#### *Enhancing Awareness of Mother Culture*

As the interpreters, they should never ignore learning their mother culture. Learning mother culture can indirectly help the interpreters study foreign culture and can give them a lot of confidence. Through learning, they can compare their own mother culture to other cultures, which can help them have a more profound understanding of their mother culture. During the process of interpreting, if the interpreters can command enough mother culture, it will definitely help them deal with some interpreting problems. In addition, they can be

confident and leave a wonderful impression on others. Here are two examples. The first one is from Premier Wen Jiabao addressed at the University of Cambridge on February 2<sup>nd</sup>, 2009:

温家宝：我愿借用两句唐诗形容中国的现状：“潮平两岸阔，风正一帆悬。”中国人正在努力实现现代化，这是一个古而又新的发展中大国进行的一场伟大实践。掌握了自己命运的中国人民，对未来充满信心！

Interpreter: I want to quote from a Tang Dynasty poem to describe what is happening in China, “From shore to shore it is wide at high tide, and before fair wind a sail is lifting.” The Chinese people are working hard to modernize their country. This is a great practice in a large developing country both ancient and new. The Chinese people, with destiny in their own hands, are full of confidence in their future.

In this example, the poem is a difficult part to interpret. In order to interpret it correctly, the interpreters should have the basic knowledge of this poem, which is closely related to Chinese culture because they don't have enough time during the interpreting to think about the meaning. Interestingly, foreigners sometimes use our famous words in their speech. For example, in the first round of high-level strategic and economic talks on the day of July 27<sup>th</sup>, 2009, the US President Obama quoted from Mencius in English:

President Obama: A trail through the mountains, if used, becomes a path in a short time, but, if unused, becomes blocked by grass in an equally short time.

Interpreter: 山径之蹊间，介然用之而成路；为间不用，则茅塞之矣。今茅塞子之心矣。

This interpretation represents the high requests of the interpreters' knowledge of Chinese culture. From the examples, it is obvious that the need of mother culture is so much important for interpreters.

## Conclusion

Interpreting is one of the activities of verbal communication. Whether the interpreters can understand the meaning of the speakers and convey it correctly affect the result of the interpreting. Besides, the interpreters convey not only the language itself but also the different culture. Therefore, the awareness of cultural differences is becoming an important part of

interpreters. If interpreters cannot realize the cultural differences and skillfully deal with them, there will be great difficulties in the communication for the two parties. Hence, whether the interpreters can correctly comprehend the meaning and convey it becomes especially crucial. This thesis is aimed at exploring the specific cultural differences and the factors that cause them. Besides, this thesis studies the ways for interpreters to make the verbal communication between different speakers and nations delivered more successfully.

Cultural differences appear in many aspects, such as idioms, allusions, custom and thinking modes. There are also many factors which can lead to these differences, such as historical background, religious belief and living conditions. The cultural differences can influence the process of interpreting in many ways. First, cultural differences can cause the error even omission while conveying the messages because the interpreters cannot accurately understand the meaning. Then the two communicating parties will not understand the meaning of each other, which may cause the failure of communication. Second, cultural differences can cause misunderstanding of each other. Different cultures always keep different living habits. If the interpreters cannot realize this, there will be impolite or disrespect in interpreting which is harmful for both sides. Finally, cultural differences can make interpreters nervous and affect their performance. The interpreters will feel anxious because of the unpredictable situations which will happen during interpreting so that they cannot perform better even make more mistakes. The thesis provides some useful strategies for interpreters, such as literal interpreting, transliteration and free interpreting.

As for interpreters, it is much more significant for them to realize the urgent situation: cultural differences do have a heavy influence on interpreting in verbal communication. Thus, the interpreters cannot ignore their cultural differences. Moreover, in order to have a better performance, they need to study them and be familiar with them. When they know the cultural differences more specifically, they can avoid them more easily during the process of interpreting. In addition, by way of exploring the strategies and suggestions for interpreters, they can be more confident in the process of interpreting after commanding them. The interpreters can also have a more concrete idea about enhancing their basic abilities. In all, the process of interpreting will be more successful.

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