The Process of Adaptation and Selection in the "Three-Dimensional" Transformation of Chinese Slogans into English

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Abstract:

Based on Hu Gengshen's translation theory of adaptive selection and the principle of three-dimensional transformation, this paper explores the cognitive transformation process underlying the traditional "comprehension + expression" model in the translation of Chinese slogans into English. It proposes a "three-dimensional transformation model" for slogan translation. This model analyzes and selects slogans through the dimensions of communication, culture, and language, thereby unveiling and optimizing the English translation process of Chinese slogans. It offers translators a systematic operational framework for handling Chinese slogans in English. Using typical case studies, this paper demonstrates how the model helps translators effectively capture the communicative intent of slogans, adapt to cultural differences, and achieve equivalence in linguistic expression, thus improving the quality and coherence of Chinese slogan translations into English.

Keywords: *Slogan Translation, Three-Dimensional Transformation, Translation Process, Adaptation and Selection*

1 Introduction:

Slogans, as a unique form of text, typically serve informational, evocative, and aesthetic functions. From the perspective of translation studies, slogans combine the characteristics of both literary and pragmatic translation. This dual nature imposes greater demands on translators' creativity and adaptability, making the task more challenging than standard translation assignments. Translating Chinese slogans into English is particularly complex, as Chinese slogans often encompass rich cultural information and expressions characteristic of Chinese culture. They frequently employ rhetorical devices such as parallelism and antithesis (Fan & Liu, 2024). Moreover, many Chinese slogans rely heavily on abstract, exaggerated, or formulaic expressions to achieve their intended effects. In contrast, English slogans prioritize linguistic directness and practicality, favoring specific wording and the provision of substantive information (Xiao, 2011).

Given the wide latitude in slogan translation, this process has been referred to as the "black

box" of translation, representing a topic of significant research value as it uncovers the intricate cognitive processes underlying translation choices. This paper seeks to apply Hu Gengshen's theory of adaptive selection and the principle of three-dimensional transformation to develop a translation model for rendering Chinese slogans into English. The proposed model aims to guide translators in systematically examining, comparing, and selecting translations of slogans across three critical dimensions: communicative intent, cultural connotations, and linguistic forms. By addressing these dimensions in sequence, the model seeks to make the creative process of slogan translation more transparent and methodologically structured.

2 Research on Slogan Translation:

International research on slogan translation has made significant contributions in theoretical frameworks, offering broad applicability and practical guidance, especially for translating tourism and cultural promotion slogans for external audiences. Notable theories include Eugene A. Nida's functional equivalence theory, the German functionalist approaches (encompassing Skopos theory and text typology), Sperber and Wilson's relevance theory, Wolfgang Iser and Hans Robert Jauss's reception theory, Venuti's domestication and foreignization theory, Peter Newmark's communicative translation theory, Julia Kristeva's intertextuality theory, and Andrew Chesterman's translation memetics. Among these, Skopos theory is particularly notable, emphasizing the "purpose rule", which states that the purpose of a translation determines the entire translation process, i.e., the result dictates the method (Christiane, 2001).

Empirical studies on slogans have also been abundant. International scholars have explored various aspects of slogans, including commercial advertising slogans, political slogans, and tourism slogans. Studies also address the characteristics of slogans, how to craft attractive slogans, and language choice in slogan creation. Darryl W. Miller and Marshall Toman (Miller & Toman, 2015) investigated slogans used by Fortune 500 companies in 2011 to identify rhetorical or linguistic techniques that enhance consumer appeal. They found that phonological, syntactic, and semantic devices—such as alliteration, plosives, repetition of words/phrases, puns, and idiomatic expressions—were most frequently employed. Berna Hendriks, Frank van Meurs, and Chantal Poos (Hendriks, van Meurs, & Poos, 2017) conducted an empirical study on the effects of simple versus complex English slogans in commercial advertising targeted at Dutch consumers. Their findings showed that simple slogans outperformed complex ones, eliciting better attitudes toward advertisements and products and higher purchase intentions. Conversely, difficult-to-understand slogans negatively impacted ad effectiveness beyond textual evaluation. Nuria Galí, Raquel Camprubí, and José A. Donaire (Galí, Camprubí, & Donaire, 2017) examined the characteristics of slogans from the world's 150 most popular tourism destinations. They found that simplicity and unique emotional appeal were key, as these traits resonated most with audiences. M. Zain Sulaiman

and Rita Wilson (Sulaiman & Wilson, 2018) argued that while the demand for translating global tourism promotional materials is high, quality remains problematic due to cultural differences. They proposed the "Cultural-Conceptual Translation" (CCT) model, which emphasizes reconstructing "positive" destination images based on the cultural conceptualization of target audiences. Ying Qu, Limei Cao, and Feifei Xu (Qu, Cao, & Xu, 2021) linked the attention-grabbing ability of slogans to the quality of destination branding. They developed and validated a 10-rule guideline for designing destination slogans based on cognitive psychology's attenuation model and the human tendency for shared attention. The framework effectively improved the salience of slogans and bridged the projection-perception gap. Sariah, Rini Widiastuti, and Nia Kurnia (Widiastuti & Kurnia, 2023) applied Searle's indirect speech act theory to analyze the beauty of slogans from 27 West Java cities. Their findings revealed the frequent use of assertive and expressive speech acts in tourism slogans, serving to inform potential visitors and emphasize the uniqueness of each city. English was the preferred language for slogan creation, followed by Indonesian and local languages, reflecting the perception that English has greater market value. These findings underscore that the creativity and uniqueness of tourism slogans can effectively convey a city's charm through concise language.

Domestically, a review of 34 representative papers from the past decade revealed diverse research interests in slogan translation. Some scholars, such as Zhang Shuai (Yan & Zhang, 2022), conducted comprehensive reviews summarizing the current state of research, while others focused on specific areas like local tourism slogans, corporate advertising slogans, international sports event slogans, and slogans for global events. Noteworthy examples include Wu Qingwen's (Wu, 2017) study on military parade slogans and Chang Chengxia's (Liu & Ren, 2023) empirical research on the effectiveness of slogan translations among target readers. Wang Dongfeng (Wang, 2009) and Yang Quanhong (Yang, 2010) engaged in a thought-provoking academic dialogue on the significance of slogan translation. Wu Weixiong (Wu, 2006) addressed common issues such as literal, mistranslations, or arbitrary translations in Chinese slogans. He proposed using concise, impactful language while considering the cultural background and psychological factors of the target audience to ensure acceptability and achieve appealing aesthetic effects.

Studies based on Hu Gengshen's eco-translatology framework are prominent in domestic research. For instance, Fan and Liu (2024) analyzed Chengdu's tourism slogans, emphasizing that in the linguistic dimension, the fundamental meaning of the source text should guide translation; in the cultural dimension, restructuring may be necessary to convey cultural imagery; and in the communicative dimension, implicit messages in the slogans should be explicitly expressed.

Overall, research has exhibited theoretical and subject-matter diversity, addressing both challenges and strategies in slogan translation. Scholars have explored linguistic and textual characteristics, as well as broader themes like form and content, source and target cultures,

translation commissioners, translation intentions, and international communication. This body of work reflects the growing importance of slogans in external communication and the increasing emphasis on flexibility, creativity, and innovation in their translation. Ultimately, the goal is to produce authentic translations that effectively convey the source text's intended meaning and engage target audiences.

3 The Theory of Translation as Adaptation and Selection and the Principle of Three-Dimensional Transformation:

Hu Gengshen's theory of translation as adaptation and selection emphasizes a translator-centered approach, with the central premise that "translation is adaptation and selection". This theory highlights the dual processes of "selective adaptation" and "adaptive selection" across multiple dimensions. It defines translation as an activity in which translators adapt to and make choices within the translational ecological environment. This "environment" encompasses the shared world of the source text and the translated text, including their social, communicative, cultural, and linguistic contexts, as well as the interconnections among commissioners, readers, and authors. Consequently, translators must examine these dimensions comprehensively to make selective adaptations and adaptive selections, with particular attention to three key dimensions: the communicative intent, cultural connotations, and linguistic forms. These three dimensions are commonly considered in translation studies (Yang, 2023).

When interpreting the translation process through the lens of adaptation and selection, translation is essentially a series of adaptations and choices made by the translator. The translator adapts to the "world" presented by the source text, source language, and target text. Choices are made regarding the degree of adaptation to the translational ecological environment and the final form of the translated text. This process can be expressed mathematically: Translation = Translator's Adaptation to the Translational Ecological Environment + Translator's Selection of the Degree of Adaptation to the Environment + Translator's Selection of the Final Text Form (Hu, 2008).

The theory of translation as adaptation and selection, along with the principle of three-dimensional transformation, is particularly instructive for slogan translation. Producing an ideal translation requires substantial adaptation and repeated decision-making, which is especially true for the creative nature of slogan translation. Translators must consider the communicative, cultural, and linguistic dimensions in a holistic manner, demanding a high degree of subjective initiative from the translator.

4 The Proposal and Application of the Three-Dimensional Transformation Model for Slogan Translation:

As a cross-cultural communicative activity, slogan translation involves comprehensive transformation of the source text's information, cultural connotations, and linguistic forms. To

achieve optimal communication in the English translation of slogans, this paper proposes a "three-dimensional transformation model". This model provides a systematic operational framework that addresses slogans' communicative intent, cultural connotations, and linguistic characteristics through a step-by-step analytical process. By employing this model, translators can ensure equivalence in information delivery and alignment with cultural nuances in the target language.

Supported by Hu Gengshen's theory of translation as adaptation and selection, the proposed three-dimensional transformation model aims to provide translators with a concrete operational pathway. It ensures harmony and integration across different dimensions of slogan translation, enabling the translated text to retain the original slogan's aesthetic value while meeting the comprehension needs of the target audience.

4.1 Proposal of the "Three-Dimensional Transformation Model" for Slogan Translation:

In translating Chinese slogans into English, the process can be divided into three stages based on the theory of translation as adaptation and selection and its principles of "communication, culture, and language" three-dimensional transformation. The detailed translation process is illustrated in the following flowchart:
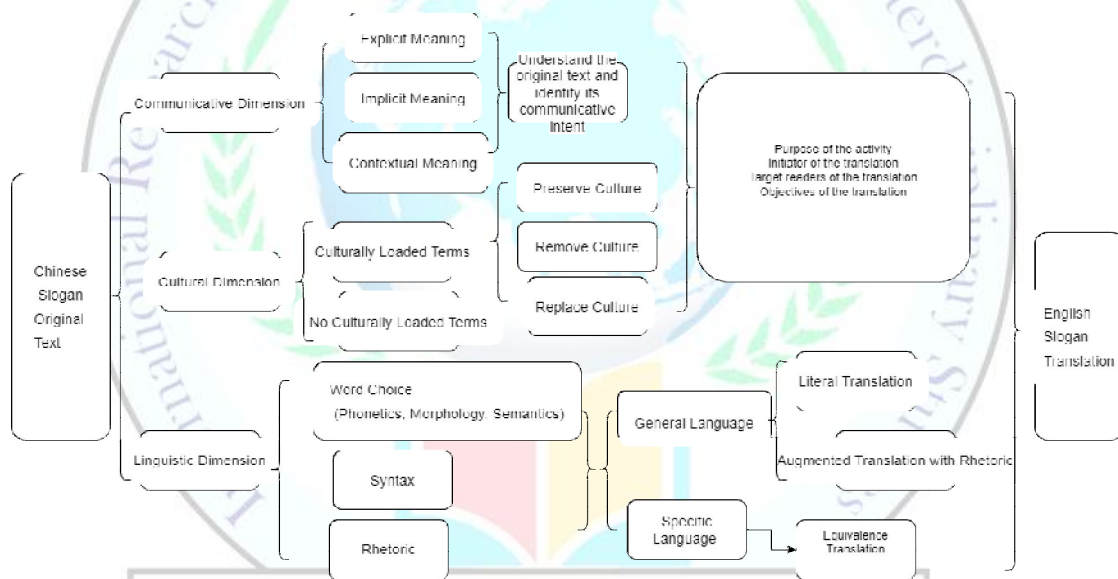
Figure 1 Three-Dimensional Transformation Model Flowchart

The first and core dimension in the three-dimensional transformation is the communicative dimension, as the essence of translation lies in communication. However, this dimension must be addressed through the linguistic dimension by comprehending the source language. The primary purpose of slogans is to convey communicative intent and achieve communicative goals. This is particularly critical for English slogans, which emphasize substantive information delivery. To analyze the communicative intent of a Chinese slogan, one must consider its explicit meaning (Literal meaning), implicit meaning (Implied meaning), and contextual meaning (Subtextmeaning). This involves eliminating uncertainties to understand the source text and identify its communicative intent. This process inevitably involves external linguistic factors, including the translation's purpose,

initiator, target audience, and broader socio-political and cultural contexts of the translation ecology. If the slogan's communicative intent is explicit, it can be derived from the surface language (explicit meaning). If it is embedded in deeper meanings (implicit meaning), a nuanced analysis is required to extract keywords relevant to the communicative intent for further processing. For communicative intent beyond linguistic context (contextual meaning), such as historical or social context, the translator must adapt to these broader contextual factors to identify the slogan's communicative intent.

The second dimension of transformation is the cultural dimension. The communicative dimension determines whether specific cultural elements are retained or omitted. This stage involves examining the source text to identify culturally loaded terms and deciding whether to preserve, omit, or replace them based on the slogan's intended purpose. Due to the concise nature of slogans, translators must carefully assess cultural information within the constraints of limited textual space. Preservation (Foreignization): If cultural information is central to the communicative intent, it should be retained, such as in tourism slogans promoting local culture. Omission (Concealment): If the cultural element is not central to communication and only serves as a rhetorical device in the source language, it can be omitted to enhance the slogan's reception among the target audience, as seen in some commercial slogans. Substitution (Domestication): If the cultural element supports communication but would hinder comprehension among the target audience, it can be replaced with a culturally equivalent concept, achieving the same effect through adaptation.

The third dimension is the linguistic dimension. If the source text lacks cultural elements or their treatment has already been determined, the process advances to this stage. The linguistic dimension involves understanding, transforming, and expressing the content through language. It focuses on lexical choices (e.g., phonetics, semantics), syntax (e.g., standard linguistic rules for slogans), and rhetorical elements (e.g., aesthetics and imagery). Translators must assess whether the source slogan contains general language or specific linguistic features. Subsequently, the slogan undergoes "recontextualization" in the target language to ensure alignment with linguistic norms, aesthetic standards, and functional requirements of the target audience. The translator must decide on a translation method that conveys the original's linguistic features or enhances aesthetic qualities in the target language. This leads to three main approaches:

Literal Translation: Retains the slogan's basic meaning without aesthetic embellishment, focusing on the slogan's informational and evocative functions. Augmented Translation: Adds aesthetic elements and rhetorical devices absent in the original to enhance its impact while maintaining informational and evocative functions. Equivalence Translation: Replicates the aesthetic and rhetorical features of the original slogan while preserving its meaning, ensuring that the translated slogan achieves equivalent informational, evocative, and aesthetic effects in the target

language. This three-dimensional transformation model provides a structured pathway for translators to achieve communicative, cultural, and linguistic coherence while retaining the original slogan's intent and style in the target language.

4.2 Application of the "Three-Dimensional Transformation Model" in Slogan Translation:

The following analysis applies the proposed "Three-Dimensional Transformation Model" to the translation of three Chinese slogans: "停课不停教，停课不停学" (No Suspension of Teaching, No Suspension of Learning), "凤栖梧桐，才聚肇庆" (Phoenix Perches on Wutong; Talent Gathers in Zhaoqing), and "国庆节，把爱车贷回家" (National Day: Bring Your Dream Car Home with a Loan).

A. "停课不停教，停课不停学" *(Ting ke bu ting jiao, ting ke bu ting xue.)*

Translation Process Analysis through the Three Dimensions. Linguistic Dimension. The slogan uses rhetorical devices such as repetition and antithesis. Simplifying the slogan reveals its core meaning: "No suspension of teaching." Based on common sense, teaching implies learning, making the slogan potentially interpretable as "No suspension of teaching, no suspension of teaching", which appears contradictory. This step highlights the need to delve deeper into communicative and contextual aspects for accurate translation. Cultural Dimension. Since the slogan does not involve culturally loaded terms, the focus shifts to the Communicative Dimension. Communicative Dimension. The slogan originates from the context of the COVID-19 pandemic (late 2019 to early 2020). In response to widespread school closures due to lockdowns, the Chinese Ministry of Education launched the slogan to emphasize transitioning from in-person to online teaching. The essential meaning is "Stopping physical classes while continuing online teaching". The target readers, in a low-context culture, may find a direct translation unclear due to the implicit nature of the original slogan. Keywords such as "online learning", "COVID-19", "lockdown", and "isolation" must be highlighted to ensure clear communication.

Proposed Translations:

1. *Campus Locked Down, Class Clouding Up*
2. *Cloud Class after COVID Closures*

Translation 1 adopts antithesis and alliteration, with "Campus" and "Class" at the start of each line and "Locked" and "Clouding" reflecting parallel structures. The contrast between "Down" and "Up" emphasizes resilience. Translation 2 uses alliteration with "C" sounds, creating a rhythmic effect. Both translations convey the core message while incorporating rhetorical features that align with the linguistic expectations of English-speaking audiences.

B. "凤栖梧桐，才聚肇庆" (Feng qi wu tong, cai ju zhao qing.)

Translation Process Analysis through the Three Dimensions. This slogan contains rich cultural connotations. In Chinese culture, the "phoenix" is regarded as the king of birds, symbolizing supreme

nobility, while the "wutong tree" represents the king of trees, known for its upright stature. The proverb "栽下梧桐树，引得凤凰来" (Plant a wutong tree, and the phoenix will come) metaphorically refers to creating favorable conditions to attract talent. However, in Western culture, the phoenix is associated with rebirth and renewal through fire, a concept that does not align with the Chinese context. Additionally, the wutong tree lacks cultural significance in English-speaking cultures. As a result, these metaphors may not evoke the intended imagery or meaning for English readers. The slogan was created in the context of the 2019 Zhaoqing Regional Sustainable Development Forum and Talent Festival. The event aimed to bridge talent resources with organizational demands, enhancing Zhaoqing's branding as a hub for talent. The communicative intent focuses on highlighting Zhaoqing's efforts to attract and retain professionals. In the Chinese context, the slogan uses the rhetorical device of analogy, which creates a strong aesthetic effect. However, directly translating the first half into English would result in a loss of meaning and may confuse readers. Therefore, focusing on the latter half—"才聚肇庆" (Talent Gathers in Zhaoqing)—and eliminating the cultural references ensures clarity and resonance with the target audience. Adding appropriate rhetorical elements can maintain the slogan's aesthetic appeal in English.

Proposed Translations:

1. *Zhaoqing Provides Professionals a Platform to Perform.*
2. *Zhaoqing Needs Talent, Talent Needs Platform.*

Translation 1 uses alliteration with "Provides" and "Perform", enhancing the slogan's rhythm and appeal while clearly conveying the message of Zhaoqing as a platform for professionals. Translation 2 employs anadiplosis (repetition of the last word of a phrase at the start of the next phrase) to mirror the parallelism in the original slogan, creating a balanced and rhythmic effect. Both translations adopt an implicit approach by removing the cultural references in the first half of the Chinese slogan. They ensure that the core communicative intent—Zhaoqing's role as a hub for attracting talent—is effectively conveyed in a way that is both accessible and engaging for the target audience.

C. "国庆节，把爱车贷回家" (Guoqingjie, ba aiche dai hui jia.)

Translation Process Analysis through the Three Dimensions: This slogan, used in a 4S dealership advertisement, clearly conveys the message of encouraging customers to purchase a car on loan during the National Day holiday. The focus is on prompting action—taking advantage of the holiday to secure a loan and buy a car. The cultural reference to "National Day" does not require specific explanation in translation, as the concept is straightforward for international readers. However, understanding Chinese holiday traditions adds depth: holidays often involve bringing gifts or significant items home, symbolizing prosperity and family unity. During this festive period, purchasing big-ticket items like cars or houses is seen as auspicious and celebratory. This cultural

insight can subtly influence the choice of words and tone in the translation. The original slogan features a pun on "贷" (loan) and "带" (bring/take), creating a clever play on words. While replicating this pun in English is challenging, rhetorical devices such as rhyme, alliteration, or parallelism can achieve a similar effect. The key elements of the slogan—"car," "loan," and "home"—must be emphasized, while maintaining the rhythm and promotional tone.

Proposed Translations:

1. *To Own a Car on National Day, A Loan Is All You Need to Repay.*
2. *Take out a Loan, Take the Car Home.*
3. *To Loan a Car and to Own It All.*
4. *A Loan for Car, Alone No More.*

Each of the four translations employs parallelism as a rhetorical device. Translation 1 also uses end rhyme and incorporates "National Day" into the phrasing. Translation 2 employs end rhyme, translation 3 utilizes internal rhyme, and translation 4 adopts alliteration. These rhetorical techniques contribute to achieving equivalent translation. The adaptations not only reflect the rhetorical style of the original slogan but also prioritize clarity and impact. By integrating elements such as rhythm and wordplay, the translations ensure flexibility for diverse promotional contexts. This approach aligns the communicative intent with the cultural and linguistic expectations of English-speaking audiences while maintaining functional equivalence.

5 Conclusion:

The English translation of Chinese slogans is a highly challenging task. Significant differences between Chinese and English in grammatical structures, rhetorical styles, and cultural connotations lead to substantial variations in linguistic expression. Chinese slogans are often concise and culturally rich, utilizing rhetorical devices such as parallelism and wordplay to convey profound meanings. In contrast, English slogans prioritize straightforwardness and practicality, emphasizing clear and functional language. These differences make it difficult to not only faithfully convey the basic information of Chinese slogans but also preserve their unique cultural charm and aesthetic value.

In practice, the creation and translation of slogans are strongly influenced by communicative and cultural factors. The primary function of slogans is to achieve effective information transmission while maintaining cultural adaptability to meet the acceptance habits of the target audience. Translators must balance cultural differences between the source and target languages, considering the actual communicative needs during the translation process. Particularly for slogans with rich cultural backgrounds, the key challenge lies in deciding which cultural elements to retain or adjust. This demands a multidimensional approach to evaluation and selection throughout the translation process.

Based on Hu Gengshen's theory of translation as adaptation and selection and the principle of three-dimensional transformation, this paper proposes a practical and logically clear "three-dimensional transformation model". This model categorizes slogan translation into three dimensions: communication, culture, and language. By analyzing communicative intent, cultural load, and linguistic effectiveness, the model guides translators in achieving optimal transformation from the source language to the target language. It refines the traditional "comprehension + expression" model by revealing the cognitive pathways in translation, enhancing the overall adaptability and selectivity of slogan translations.

The three-dimensional transformation model significantly improves the operational feasibility of slogan translation. Through systematic analysis of the communicative, cultural, and linguistic dimensions, translators can more accurately capture the core messages of slogans while preserving their original intent and cultural ambiance in the target language. Moreover, the model's structured workflow allows for flexible application in translation practice, enabling translators to efficiently produce high-quality translations with integrated adaptability and selectivity. This enhances translation effectiveness and optimizes information delivery.

By constructing the three-dimensional transformation model, this paper provides a new perspective on the English translation of Chinese slogans. The model offers strong practical value in addressing linguistic and cultural differences, providing theoretical support and methodological reference for translators. Future research on slogan translation can delve further into areas such as cross-cultural communication and multidimensional adaptive selection, contributing to the continuous refinement and development of theories and practices in Chinese-English slogan translation.

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