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BRIDGING CULTURES: A SEMIOTIC STUDY OF SHANGHAI PROVERB TRANSLATION

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ABSTRACT

Shanghai proverbs, as vibrant expressions of local culture, encapsulate historical depth, social values, and moral wisdom. Their translation extends beyond linguistic conversion, requiring the dynamic reconstruction of cultural signs to preserve meaning, function, and emotional resonance in the target language. Through exploring proverbs from function identification, semantic triad analysis, and context adaptation, translators can clarify the process and identify influencing factors in the translation of Shanghai proverbs. This process aligns with full, partial and non-correspondence cases to demonstrate how linguistic signs, cultural meanings, and pragmatic functions are transformed during translation. It emphasizes the importance of preserving the proverb's communicative intent, cultural significance, and stylistic features.

INDEX TERMS: Shanghai proverbs; semiotics; cultural signs

1. INTRODUCTION

As a typical representative of Shanghai dialect, Shanghai proverbs are linguistic vessels encoded with historical memory, cultural identity and lived wisdom of people in Shanghai. Their linguistic structure, such as dialect and rhythms, is closely tied to unique sociocultural fabric of Shanghai, shaped by its dual identity as a regional Jiangnan watertown and a globalized metropolis. Therefore, translating these proverbs demands not only preserving the features of source cultures, but also ensuring cognitive resonance with the target audiences who are unfamiliar with Shanghai cultural codes.

Proverbs, as a popular annotation of culture, have a long history. Liu Xie references the proverb " 惟忧用志"(wei you yong zhi), meaning only worry inspires concentration, as one of the earliest proverbs recorded in Chinese literature, showcasing the wisdom and experience of ancient people (ca. 5th century, as cited in Liu, 2020). However, as early as the pre-Qin period (before 221BC), proverbs are defined as folk sayings equivalent to common expression.(ca. 4th century, as cited in Zuo, 2021). In 1823, John Russell defined proverb as "One man's wit, and all men's wisdom"(1823) which has become proverb as "The wit of one, the wisdom of many" (Taylor, 1994:3). Wolfgang Mieder provided a more detailed explanation, stating that a proverb is a concise folk expression passed down orally through generations, containing wisdom, truth, moral norms, and traditional concepts and are typically presented in a metaphorical form and in a fixed, easily memorable structure (Mieder 1985: 119). Similarly, Whiting defined proverb as an expression that originates from the people, often in a homespun language, and conveys a fundamental truth, often adorned with wit and wisdom (Whiting &Harris, 1994:80). Winick states that proverbs are brief, sentence-length utterances that derive their sense of wisdom, wit, and authority from explicit and intentional references to a tradition of previous similar wisdom utterances (Winick, 2003:595). Whether it is the Eastern concept of "folk sayings" or the Western concept of "concise folk expressions", proverbs, in their unique form, transcend the boundaries of time and space, becoming a bridge that connects the past with the present and communicates across different cultures and nations. A universally accepted view is that a proverb is a cultural artifact, reflecting the wisdom and values of a society. It is a concise, memorable expression, often rooted in metaphor and tradition, that encapsulates the collective understanding and experience of a community.

2. AN OVERVIEW OF SHANGHAI PROVERBS

Shanghai proverbs originated in the late Qing Dynasty(1840-1912) and are considered a traditional form of oral literature in Shanghai. They are regarded as the essence of the Shanghai language and culture. The central region where these proverbs were most popular was Chenhang in Shanghai, hence they are also referred to as Chenhang proverbs. The main collection of Shanghai proverbs is found in the *Shanghai Proverbs* and *The Supplementary Collection of Shanghai Proverbs*, both compiled by Hu Zude (Hu, 1989). Hu, taught by the renowned late Qing reformist Qin Bingru, was influenced by Qin's efforts to compile local literature and was dedicated to collecting local sayings. Given the widespread poverty in China at the time, which caused many to be unable to attend school, Hu actively engaged in popular education, advocating for folk culture. He organized the materials he had collected over many years into the book *Shanghai Proverbs*. This work is a collection of Shanghai proverbs, extending to include dialects, colloquialisms, maxims, poems, explanations of proverbs, and the study of dialects. It is based in Shanghai but also compares proverbs from Jiangsu, Zhejiang, Tianjin, and other regions, even contrasting them with Western proverbs in English, French, and Italian. What is most interesting is that the book also includes famous quotes from Western figures such as Franklin, Jefferson, and Napoleon, drawing comparisons with similarly meaningful Shanghai proverbs. In addition to collecting modern Shanghai

proverbs, it also gathered a large number of ancient proverbs, tracing their origins and evolution (Feng&Liu, 2025).

Finnish proverb scholars Matti Kuusi and his daughter Outi Lauhakangas initiated to classify proverbs, which includes 13 major themes, including practical knowledge of nature, faith and basic attitudes, basic observations and social-logic, the world and human life, the sense of proportion, concepts of morality, social life, social interaction, communication, social position, agreements and norms, coping and learning, and time and sense of time(Lauhakangas, 2001). As a treasure of regional culture, Shanghai proverbs vividly reflect all of these themes. Proverbs such as "冬前不结冰，冬后冻死人(if It doesn't freeze before winter, it can freezes people to death after winter.)" "清明断雪，谷雨断霜(Snow ceases during Qingming, and frost ends during Guyu. Note: Qingming and Guyu are two solar terms)" and "燕子到，话落秧（三月），乌鸦到，稻上场(When the swallow comes, the seedling falls (in March), and when the crow comes, the rice is in the field)" vividly demonstrate the accurate understanding and practical wisdom of Shanghai people in relation to natural laws. Proverbs like " 救人一命， 胜造七级浮图(To save one life excels building a seven-storied pagoda)" and "想自己，度他人，此即恕道(Think of yourself, treat others with tolerance, this is the way of forgiveness)" profoundly reflect the unique compassion and tolerance values of Chinese people. Proverbs such as "要知山下路，须问过来人(To know the road under the mountain, ask those who have passed)" "大虫欺小虫，蚱蜢欺蝗虫(Big insects bully small insects, grasshoppers bully locusts)" and "吃弗穷，着弗穷，算计弗通一世穷(Earning is easy, spending is breezy, but bad budgeting makes life queasy)" all reveal the keen insight and philosophy of life of Shanghai people. Regarding social life and interaction, proverbs like "远亲不如近邻好(A close neighbors are worth more than distant relative)" and "百万买宅，千万买邻 (A million to buy a house, ten million to buy a neighbor)" emphasize the importance of neighborly relations and reflect the value Shanghai people place on harmonious community life. In terms of agreements and norms, proverbs like "有借有还，再借不难，杀猪容易理肠难，开店容易用人难，创业容易守业难(Borrow and return, borrowing again is not hard, killing a pig is easy, but cleaning the intestines is hard, opening a shop is easy, but managing people is hard, starting a business is easy, but maintaining it is hard)" highlight the indispensable role of integrity and rules in interpersonal communication. Moreover, Shanghai proverbs also contain rich concepts of time, such as "白日莫闲过，青春不再来(Don't waste the day, for youth will never return)" and "一寸光阴一寸金，寸金难买寸光阴(An inch of time is an inch of gold, but you can't buy an inch of time with an inch of gold)" constantly reminding people to cherish time and not let the years slip by. Most proverbs are translated literally, allowing target readers to grasp their general meaning. However, due to differences in cultural connotations, certain proverbs may not be fully understood or appreciated in the target culture.

Shanghai proverbs cover a wide range of topics, embracing differences, integrating diversity and following nature. However, Shanghai proverbs posses other characteristics, such as dialect features, diverse cultural background, distinctive themes and rhetoric methods. Some of expressions in Shanghai proverbs are only used in Wu dialect areas, including Shanghai, Suzhou and Hangzhou.The pronunciation of words can differ significantly with specific tones, sounds, and intonations that are unique to the region. The following chart are some examples that have distinct characteristic of the Shanghai dialect.

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Chinese Expression	Mandarin	Shanghai Dialect	Literal Meaning	Meaning in Shanghai Dialect
伊	yī	yi	He/She	He/She
弗	fu	veq	Not	Not
嗲	diǎ	dia	Coquettish tone	Female's gentle and lovely demeanor
侪	chái	ze	Peer	all, entirely
囡囡	nān nān	noen-noen	/	Little girl
囝囝	nān nān/jiǎn jian	noen-noen/tsi tsi	/	Little girl or boy
爷叔	yé shū	ya-soq	uncle	Respected Elder
白相	bái xiàng	beq siang	/	Play, amuse oneself
贴煞	tiē shà	tie sa	/	Intensify the tone
老举	lǎo jǔ	lao ju	/	someone with rich social experience.
差头	chā tóu	ca tou	/	taxi
吃豆腐	chī dòufu	chiq deu-fu	eat tofu	Sexually harass
十三点	shí sān diǎn	seq-seh-die	thirteen o'clock	Eccentric
小赤佬	xiǎo chì lǎo	siao ts' hq lao	/	Naughty child
触霉头	chù méi tóu	tshoh me-deu	/	Bad luck
老法师	lǎo fǎ shī	lao faq-sy	old master	A seasoned expert
吃讲茶	chī jiǎng chá	chiq kiang-zo	/	negotiate solutions in a teahouse
西洋镜	xī yáng jìng	shi-yang-tsin	Western mirror	Rare novelty
挑上山	tiāo shàng sh ān	thiao zaon-seh	Carry up the mountain	Put someone in a difficult situation
阿木林	ā mù lín	ah moh-lin	/	Clumsy and a bit silly

Some expressions in Shanghai proverbs have distinctive local characteristics. They often feature phonetic traits that differ from Mandarin, reflecting the unique pronunciation and intonation of the Shanghai dialect. Meanwhile, many words in Shanghai dialect have literal meanings that do not exist in Mandarin, for instance, "白相", "贴煞", "老举", and these expressions often carry specific cultural connotations and localized emotional tones that go beyond their literal meanings, reflecting the unique lifestyle and social customs of the area. In addition, Shanghai dialect frequently borrows foreign words and localizes them, integrating Shanghai's historical background and cultural atmosphere, such as " 西洋镜 ", " 差头 ". Furthermore, Shanghai dialect often uses vivid and imaginative expressions to convey emotions and intentions, highlighting the vitality and creativity of the language. These features make Shanghai dialect expressions both locally distinctive and rich in cultural significance.

Furthermore, most Shanghai proverbs were orally created by those who were "illiterate", appearing crude and lacking elegance, thus labeled as "vulgar" by the literate. However, they discuss matters and reason from the perspective of ordinary people in traditional society, with a basically peaceful mindset, without affectation or arrogance, solely focused on advising others to do good. For instance, "儿不嫌娘丑，狗不嫌家穷"(A son does not dislike his mother for her ugliness, and a dog does not despise its home for being poor) embodies this principle, emphasizing unconditional loyalty and love. These expressions, though simple, carry profound wisdom rooted in the lived experiences and values of the common folk.

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Shanghai proverbs employ diverse language expression methods and abundant rhetorical devices, such as metaphors, similes, personification, parallelism, and other rhetorical techniques. The inclination toward metaphorical expressions in Shanghai proverbs is particularly notable. Metaphorical expressions in Shanghai proverbs allow for the conveyance of complex ideas in a vivid and relatable manner, making them both memorable and impactful. As Mieder (2004:8) states, metaphors enable proverbs to communicate indirectly, often embedding deeper truths within simple imagery. This rhetorical technique enhances their persuasive power, as they resonate with the lived experiences and cultural values of the audience (Rotasperti, 2021). For instance, the proverb "大鱼吃小鱼，小鱼吃虾子" (Big fish eat small fish, small fish eat shrimp) uses the natural hierarchy of aquatic life to metaphorically represent the power dynamics and exploitation within human society. This proverb critiques the inequalities in social and economic systems, urging listeners to reflect on the struggles faced by the disadvantaged. The statements in Shanghai proverbs are sincere in expressing aspirations, inspiring people to strive forward, frank in warning the world, clearly distinguishing between love and hate, persuasive in giving advice, earnestly and patiently and humorous in jest, without vulgarity. Numerous sentences use vivid metaphors and apt satire, making them unforgettable and deeply impressed upon people's hearts, encouraging their transmission.

Given the distinctive and unique features embedded within Shanghai proverbs, the task of translating them presents a formidable challenge. On one hand, it is imperative to maintain the core meanings that these proverbs convey, ensuring that the essence of their original intent is not lost in translation. On the other hand, it is equally important to craft translations that are culturally relevant and understandable to those within the target audience, especially respecting the dialect and cultural signs that exist in the source and target context.

3. SEMIOTIC DYNAMICS IN PROVERB TRANSLATION

Bogatyrev posits that investigating the semiotic dimensions of proverbs represents one of the most valuable endeavors for folklorists (Bogatyrëv, 1971: 366). Seitel further emphasizes that proverbs derive their meaning from social contexts, which dynamically shape their usage and interpretation (Seitel, 1976). Rather than static linguistic units, proverbs function as dynamic cultural symbols, evolving through adaptation and transformation across diverse communicative settings. This perspective underscores the necessity of analyzing proverbs from both structural and semiotic frameworks, as Grzybek (2015) advocates.

Ferdinand de Saussure introduced "semiotics" to examine sign systems, emphasizing the dual composition of signs: the material "signifier" (e.g., sound, script) and the conceptual "signified" representing meaning (Saussure, 1916). Building on this binary model, American philosopher Charles Peirce expanded semiotic theory by introducing "semiotranslation" and categorizing signs into icons, indexes, and symbols. Peirce proposed a triadic structure: the representamen (material sign form, e.g., a proverb's literal expression), the object (referenced concept/reality, such as cultural elements in source traditions), and the interpretant (context-dependent understanding in the receiver's mind) (Peirce, 1935). Charles Morris systematically advanced semiotics by defining semiosis as a five-element process. See figure 1:

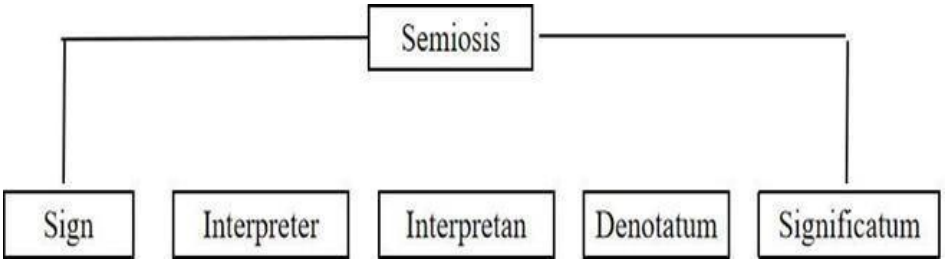

Figure 1: Five elements of semiosis

Morris divided semiotics into syntactics (sign-to-sign relations), semantics (sign-to-referent relations), and pragmatics (sign-to-interpreter relations), formulating this as L = Lsyn + Lsem + Lp (Morris, 1946). Correspondingly, linguistic meaning encompasses three layers which are intralingual meaning (intra-systemic sign relations), referential meaning (sign-to-object denotation) and pragmatic meaning (context-specific interpretation). Figure 2 shows Morris's semiotic framework.

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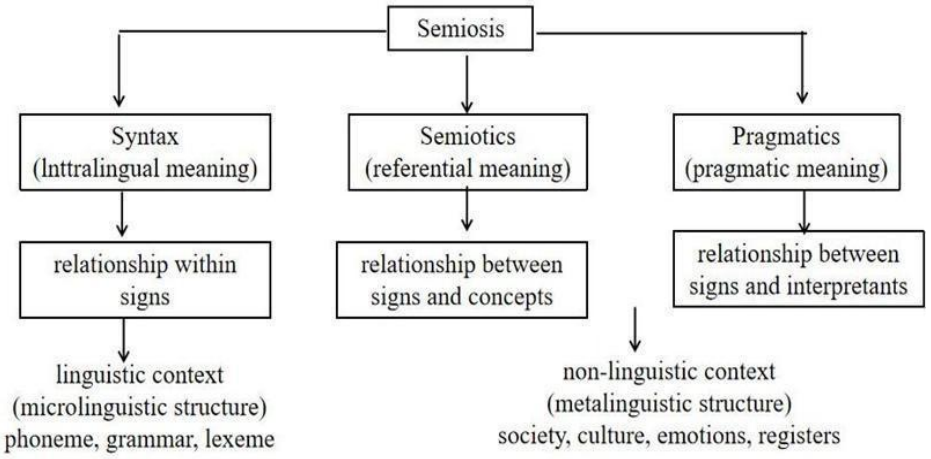

Figure 2: Morris's semiotic framework

Although different languages often differ in their forms of expression, they may still serve similar communicative functions. Mieder (1977) proposes that proverbs have functions like warning, persuasion, admonition, reprimand, statement, characterization, explanation, description, justification and summarization. The function of proverbs is different in different context. Grzybek(1987) states that proverbs serve cognitive, communicative, normative, phatic, aesthetic, argumentative, therapeutic, and metalinguistic functions in human communication. These functions are particularly relevant when translating culturally embedded expressions like Shanghai proverbs. In the process of translation, it is important to minimize information loss and maintain equivalence in both meaning and function (Huang & Wang, 2006). Given the unique features of these proverbs, including their dialectal specificity, rich rhetorical devices, and deep cultural symbolism, it becomes essential to address not only the intralingual structure but also the referential and pragmatic meanings during translation. Ideally, translation should follow the principle of "proverb to proverb" preserving the original's brevity, rhetorical flair, and colloquial tone, thus requiring translators to achieve equivalence both in meaning and function. When conflicts arise between form and meaning, the translator should prioritize meaning, a principle championed by Nida (1986), who emphasizes the importance of communicative effect over literal equivalence. Figure 3 illustrates the core elements of translating Shanghai proverbs.

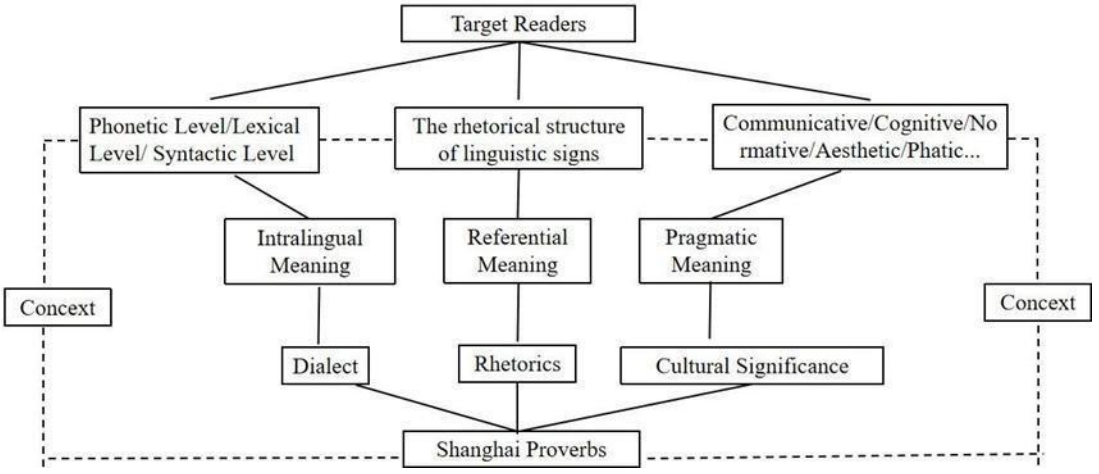

Figure 3: The core elements of translating Shanghai proverbs.

4. SEMIOTIC PROCESS OF TRANSLATING SHANGHAI PROVERBS

As a crystallization of regional cultural wisdom, Shanghai proverbs not only convey linguistic information but also reflect culturally shaped value systems rooted in specific social contexts. In the process of translation, the challenge faced by the translator is not merely lexical conversion, but also the transfer of cultural connotations and the reconstruction of semiotic systems. Semiotic transformation includes function identification, semantic triad analysis and context adaptation, with this factors ensuring both meaning and functional equivalence across cultures.

When translating Shanghai proverbs, it is essential for translators to identify the cultural signs and functions of the proverbs. As highly condensed cultural texts, proverbs may have multiple functions, such as communicative, normative, phatic, aesthetic and so forth. Take the Shanghai proverb "宁做鸡头，不做凤尾" (Better be the head of a chicken than the tail of a phoenix) as an example, this proverbs mainly exhibits two signs "the head of chicken" and "the tail of phoenix" with normative function, aesthetic function and argumentative function. It communicates cultural knowledge

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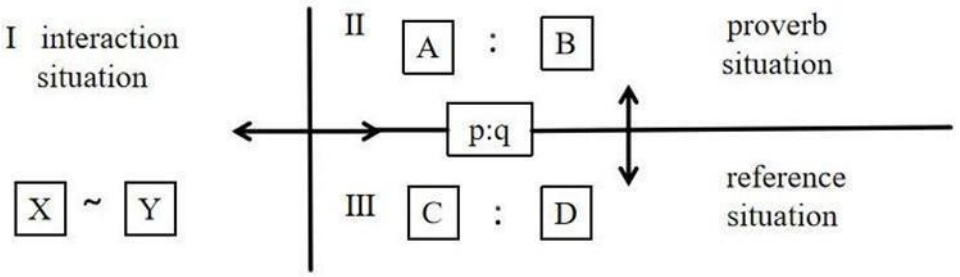
about social hierarchy and individual agency and reinforces a locally embedded moral value that autonomy and leadership. Meanwhile, its contrasting structure "chicken head" and "phoenix tail" enhances rhythm effect. It can be used as persuasive evidence to support a viewpoint or justify a decision. If the translator fails to recognize the functions and merely translate the literal meaning, the result may be semantically accurate yet pragmatically flat. Meanwhile, the literal translation may seem awkward or obscure to target-language readers who are unfamiliar with the symbolic meanings of chickens and phoenixes in Chinese culture, leading to a loss of cultural resonance. In the West, the "Phoenix" originates from ancient Greek mythology and is known as an immortal bird. Its most iconic characteristic is that at the end of its life, it self-immolates and is reborn from its own ashes. In contrast, Chinese phoenix is often regarded as the king of all birds and is often associated with imperial power, femininity, and harmony. To preserve both the semantic and functional values of the original proverb, a translator must go beyond literal rendering and adopt culturally adaptive strategies, such as cultural analogy, replacing "chicken head" and "phoenix tail" with culturally equivalent symbols that evoke a similar value judgment in the target culture.

Based on Seitel's (1972) view that proverb usage involves two distinct processes of mapping the proverb's situation onto a real-life context and executing a speech act through its application and Crépeau's (1975) theory of double-layered analogy in which the literal meaning becomes a symbolic vehicle for deeper interpretation, Grzybek (2015) synthesizes these insights into a model of double analogy in proverbial usage which can be illuminated in the following schema:



However, in the case of Shanghai proverbs, which are often rich in regional signs and pragmatic subtlety, this dual-analogy model may not be sufficient. Therefore, a triadic semiotic approach as an extension of Grzybek's model, emphasizing the dynamic interplay between linguistic form, cultural reference, and pragmatic intent. By structurally distinguishing these three dimensions, translators are better equipped to make informed decisions about form preservation, cultural substitution, and communicative equivalence. For instance, when translating the proverb "宁做鸡头，

不做凤尾" ("Better to be the head of a chicken than the tail of a phoenix"), the translator must maintain its idiomatic symmetry (L), adapt culturally loaded metaphors like "鸡头" and "凤尾" to similarly resonant signs in the target culture (R), and preserve its normative function of asserting personal autonomy over subordinate prestige (P). This expanded framework provides a more nuanced and culturally responsive method for translating proverbs in cross-cultural contexts. The translator may choose analogous animals or signs that better reflect status and hierarchy in the target context, or opt for domestically familiar idioms that convey a similar hierarchical dichotomy. The proverb can also be translated into "Better to be the head of a dog than the tail of a lion" or "Better to be a big fish in a small pond than a small fish in a big pond". Both expressions emphasize the value of control and autonomy, highlighting the importance of personal status and leadership. Additionally, this expression has a good rhythm and flow, making an analogy of the signs in the target culture thus to ensure effective communication.

When translating Shanghai proverbs, context also serves as a semiotic factor that shapes both the meaning and function of the original expression. Proverbs, as culturally embedded and pragmatically charged expressions, derive much of their significance from the situational and social environments in which they are used. Proverbs cannot be fully understood or translated without considering its actual use in context(Krikmann, 1974; Grzybek,2015). Seitel emphasizes the importance of context in understanding proverbs, however, he advocates abstracting contextual variables in order to identify and explore the underlying ethical and social normative structures behind proverb usage. (Seitel,1972).

Context serves as a semiotic element in the translation of Shanghai proverbs that dually shapes both the meaning and function of the original expressions. As an international metropolis where Eastern and Western cultures converge, the translation of Shanghai proverbs requires particular attention to the dialectical unity between contextual factors and abstract meaning. These proverbs often embody dual characteristics of folk wisdom and business ethics. Take "螺蛳壳里做道场(Holding Buddhist rituals in a snail shell)" as an example, this proverb reflects both the spatial wisdom of Shanghai's alleyway life (physical context) and the commercial philosophy of "creating value within constraints" (abstract ethics). Translators must strike a balance between preserving cultural imagery and conveying core values. For proverbs containing historical memories, such as those involving colonial-era terms, a strategy combining cultural substitution with explanatory annotations is recommended. The translation of modern urban proverbs needs to accommodate both rhetorical structure and cultural adaptability, preserving linguistic features while ensuring contemporary comprehensibility. This layered approach validates contextual stratification theory, requiring translators to simultaneously address three

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dimensions: the dialect foundation layer, the living-scene intermediate layer, and the cultural-spirit top layer, ultimately achieving the cultural transcoding of Shanghai proverbs from local sayings to universal wisdom. By systematically accounting for contextual elements, the translation of Shanghai proverbs can not only accurately convey linguistic information but also facilitate the cross-cultural communication of the Shanghai-style cultural ethos. This process transforms these proverbs from linguistic artifacts into dynamic carriers of urban identity, allowing international audiences to appreciate both the linguistic ingenuity and philosophical depth of Shanghai's unique proverbial tradition.

5. TRANSLATION OF SHANGHAI PROVERBS

The translation of Shanghai proverbs is a tough task requiring to pay attention to the cultural differences, linguistic nuances, and the underlying meanings of the proverbs while preserving their intended function within the same context. In certain cases, translators can map proverbs directly between languages, while in other cases, they must reconstruct and adapt the proverb to ensure its cultural significance is maintained.

6. FULL CORRESPONDENCE OF SIGN SYSTEMS

The concept of full equivalence refers to a situation where the signs in the source language and target language correspond with each other, and the translation generates the same or similar meaning and function in the target language culture. This type of equivalence occurs when the cultural frameworks of the source and target languages overlap significantly, especially when proverbs encapsulate universally accepted truths or ethical principles.

Take the Shanghai proverb " 树倒猢狲散" ("When the tree falls, the monkeys scatter") as an example. This expression exhibits a high level of sign correspondence between the source and target languages. Functionally, it performs normative and satirical roles by critiquing opportunistic behavior, those who abandon a leader or powerful figure when they fall from power. Semantically, the proverb demonstrates clear triadic sign structure: at the linguistic level (L), "tree" and "monkeys" are easily translatable; at the referential level (R), they symbolize authority and dependents, respectively; and at the pragmatic level (P), they convey social commentary on disloyalty and pragmatism. Contextually, the proverb fits both Eastern and Western discourse traditions, allowing the translated version to preserve not only meaning but also rhetorical impact. This instance exemplifies what is known as full sign system equivalence, where both the symbolic imagery and communicative intent are effectively mirrored in the target culture.

Signs	Meanings	
树(Tree)	L(linguistic meaning)	A tree
	R(referential meaning)	A symbol of a central figure, leader, or authority
	P(pragmatic meaning)	Representation of a foundation or support system
猢狲 (Monkeys)	L(linguistic meaning)	Monkeys
	R(referential meaning)	Symbolizing the dependents or followers
	P(pragmatic meaning)	Individuals who benefit from the central figure or support system

The following are some Shanghai proverbs which have full correspondence in the target culture.

Chinese Proverbs	Translation
水能载舟，亦能覆舟	The water that bears the boat is the same that swallows it.
大鱼吃小鱼	Big fish eats little fish.
猫哭耗子假慈悲	The cat cries over the mouse, pretending to be merciful.
早起的鸟儿有虫吃	The early bird catches the worm.

Similarly, other Shanghai proverbs such as " 猫哭耗子假慈悲" (The cat cries over the mouse, pretending to be merciful) can also achieve near-full equivalence. The signs of cat and mouse resonates across cultures, and the

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expression retains its satirical function and pragmatic effect in English. These examples validate the application of semiotic translation theory by demonstrating how linguistic symbols, cultural connotations, and communicative purposes intersect in cross-cultural contexts. By systematically addressing the interplay among signs, context, and function, translators can ensure that Shanghai proverbs are not merely rendered literally, but are transformed into idiomatic and culturally intelligible expressions that resonate with target-language audiences.

7. PARTIAL CORRESPONDENCE OF SIGN SYSTEMS

Partial equivalence refers to the signs or concepts in the source and target languages that do not fully correspond in some aspects, but they share similarities in function or meaning. In translation, although the specific cultural signs may differ, the core message of the translation is retained, and it conveys similar social functions and linguistic effects.

In the Shanghai proverb "远亲不如近邻好" (A distant relative is not as good as a close neighbor). The signs of "远亲"(distant relative) and "近邻" (close neighbor) carry deep meanings rooted in Shanghai's local culture, reflecting the region's unique social structure and interpersonal relationships. However, these signs may not have direct equivalents in every culture, especially in terms of their emotional weight and social significance.

Signs	Meanings	
远亲 (distance relatives)	L(linguistic meaning)	Blood ties
	R(referential meaning)	Emotional estrangement
	P(pragmatic meaning)	Clan concept
近邻(close neighbors)	L(linguistic meaning)	Geographical proximity
	R(referential meaning)	Mutual aid relationships
	P(pragmatic meaning)	Alley culture

Partial correspondence comes into effect because while the idea of "distant relatives" and "close neighbors" exist across cultures, their specific cultural meanings may differ. In this proverb, "远亲" refers to relatives who, despite sharing blood ties, are emotionally distant due to factors such as geographic separation and different life environments. Compared to neighborly relationships, distant relatives are less involved in daily life, offering less emotional support. In contrast, "近邻" represents a closer, more interactive, and mutually supportive relationship. In Shanghai's community culture, neighbors are highly valued, and although they may not share blood ties, living close to one another often leads to shared responsibilities, mutual support, and bonds that can resemble familial ties. In Shanghai proverbs, there are some proverbs related with neighbors(邻居), the following are some examples:

百万买宅，千万买邻	A good neighbour is worth more than a mansion.
邻居好，赛金宝	Kind neighbors are treasures beyond measure.
邻家失火，不救自危	If your neighbor's house burns, ignoring it endangers your own.
打不断的亲，骂不断的邻	Family ties endure fights, neighbourly bonds survive quarrels.
阴险的邻居比敌人更可怕	A treacherous neighbour is worse than a declared foe.
宁可得罪远亲，不可得罪近邻	Better to offend distant kin than alienate close neighbors.
金邻居，有事有人；银亲眷，无事无人	Golden neighbors help in need; silver kin vanish when not wanted.

In English-speaking cultures, there are also a lot of proverbs relating with neighborhood.

Love your neighbor, yet pull not down your hedge.
Live for thy neighbor if thou wouldst live for thyself.
No one is rich enough to do without a neighbor.
Love thy neighbor as thyself.
The neighbor's grass is always greener.
Keep your friends close, and your neighbors closer.

Although neighborly relationships are important across different cultures, their social functions and emotional significance may vary, particularly when compared to Chinese culture. The Chinese proverb "远亲不如近邻" is often translated as

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"Good fences make good neighbors" which emphasizes the importance of boundaries and mutual respect, rather than fostering closeness and support in the relationship. Partial correspondence allows for adaptation of the proverb to fit the cultural context of the target language. While "Good fences make good neighbors" focuses on boundaries, a more fitting English equivalent might be "Good neighbors are worth more than distant relatives." This translation better reflects the essence of the original Chinese proverb, highlighting the practical and supportive nature of neighborly bonds. Though not as deeply ingrained in Western culture as in Chinese culture, this concept of neighborly support surpassing distant family ties still resonates with the value of reliable, supportive neighbors.

Similarly, "一寸光阴一寸金，寸金难买寸光阴," which literally translates to

"An inch of time is an inch of gold, yet an inch of gold cannot purchase an inch of time". The signs of "光阴"(time) and "金"(gold) have different meanings.

Signs	Meanings	
光阴(Time)	L(linguistic meaning)	The concept of time
	R(referential meaning)	The value of time
	P(pragmatic meaning)	Cherish the time
金(Gold)	L(linguistic meaning)	Metal elements
	R(referential meaning)	Symbol of wealth
	P(pragmatic meaning)	Economic Efficiency

From the intralingual level, these two sings mean that time is gold, however, gold began to be used as currency in China during the Warring States period(475 BC).The history of gold as currency is not limited to China but also in the other countries around the world. For instance, in the 6th century BC, gold began to be used as currency by the Kingdom of Lydia. In modern times, the global adoption of the gold standard, where national currencies were pegged to gold and based on gold reserves, became widespread. Whereas, with the expansion of international trade and the evolution of the financial system, gold gradually ceased to be used directly as currency, but its status as a precious metal and reserve asset remains significant. Thus it also means "Time is money" which is also the proverb in the target culture. The meaning of both proverbs is approximately the same, as both convey the idea that time is extremely valuable and should not be wasted. They both use the metaphor of something valuable (gold/money) to highlight the importance of time. Although the cultural contexts differ, source culture emphasizes the relationship between time and personal life or agricultural labor, while the target culture emphasizes connection of time to the economy and efficiency, the underlying message remains aligned. Both cultures view time as a precious resource that should not be squandered. So when this proverb "一寸光阴一寸金，寸金难买寸光" is translated into "An inch of time is an inch of gold, but you can't buy an inch of time with an inch of gold" might lead to confusion or a lack of resonance in the target culture. "Time is money", on the other hand, succinctly captures this essence, avoiding potential confusion from literal translations while preserving the proverb's pragmatic force.

Partial correspondence in proverb translation involves maintaining equivalence in function and pragmatics, even when linguistic or cultural signs do not fully align. By employing semiotic analysis and contextual adaptation, translators can preserve the social resonance and communicative purpose of Shanghai proverbs while tailoring them to the cultural logic of the target language.

8. NO CORRESPONDENCE OF SIGN SYSTEMS

Non-equivalence refers to situations where there is a lack of direct correspondence between the sign systems of the source and target languages, particularly when dealing with specific historical, religious, cultural customs, or local metaphors. In such scenarios, the absence of shared semiotic reference points necessitates strategies beyond literal translation, such as cultural reconstruction, explanatory annotation, or metaphor substitution, to convey the embedded meaning and function of the original proverb.

Many Shanghai proverbs possess local practices, historical events, or regional customs that may be unfamiliar or even absent in the target culture. Take the Shanghai proverb "救人一命，胜造七级浮图" (To save one life excels building a seven-storied pagoda) as an example. The proverb contains two significant signs: "救人" (saving a life) and "七级浮图" (seven-story pagoda). "浮图 "(pagoda, or stupa) is a highly revered sign in Buddhist culture, representing an act of accumulating merit, with the seven-story pagoda being considered the pinnacle of religious merit. This reflects the idea that saving a life holds greater merit than constructing such a structure, a belief rooted in Buddhist teachings about the spiritual value of helping others. However, this concept may be challenging for readers unfamiliar with Buddhist culture, especially those in Western contexts. A culturally analogous expression in Western discourse "He who saves a life, saves

the world", derived from the Talmudic passage in the Mishnah Sanhedrin (4:5), which states, "Whoever saves a life, it is as if he has saved an entire world". This emphasizes the universal value of humanity and the profound

impact one person's actions can have on society and the future, framing the saving of a life as not only a personal act but also a global one. The proverb's focus in Shanghai is on spiritual merit from a Buddhist perspective, while the English proverb centers on the humanistic and universal implications of saving a life. While both proverbs share the communicative function of exalting altruism, their referential signs differ significantly. A literal translation of the Chinese proverb may preserve semantic content, but it requires supplementary cultural annotation to recover its full pragmatic value for the target audience.

For some Shanghai proverbs that presents challenges due to its localized context. For instance, proverb "浦东人乖做乖，年年代南浔人煨稻柴" exhibits contrast between "浦东人（Pudong People)" and "南浔人(Nanxun Poeple)", Pudong located on the eastern bank of the Huangpu River in Shanghai, Nanxun nestled in the Hangzhou-Jiaxing-Huzhou Plain of northern Zhejiang Province and stands as a strategic water town gateway at the junction of Jiangsu, Zhejiang and Shanghai. In the Wu dialect, " 乖做乖(Guai-zuo-guai) doesn't just mean "good" or "obedient", it's saying Pudong people are practical and reliable." 煨 稻柴(Wei-dao-chai)" means simmering with rice straw warmth which may lead a frugal and pragmatic lifestyle or Nanxun residents place great importance on familial affection and family. Context determines the depth of word meanings and cultural connotations, and directly affects whether readers can "decode" the cultural signs embedded in the translation. Therefore, when translating Shanghai proverbs, it is essential to consider the socio-cultural context and flexibly choose appropriate strategies.

In the process of translating Shanghai proverbs, one common challenge arises when unique cultural metaphors or references are used that may not have direct counterparts in the target culture. These metaphors, deeply embedded in local customs and traditions, require thoughtful adaptation to make them comprehensible to the broader audience. An example of such a situation can be seen in the proverb "三个婆婆，抵一面镗锣" (Three old women are like a drum). This metaphor is deeply rooted in local Chinese culture, with " 镗锣" (tang luo, a type of traditional Chinese drum) symbolizing a loud and attention-grabbing sound. In this context, it is used to describe the noisy and energetic chatter of a group of women, which is a social phenomenon. The word " 婆婆" (popo), which means "old women" or "grandmothers", adds an extra layer of social context, representing a specific demographic of women, usually in a communal, social setting. However, translating this directly into English as "three old women, like a drum" could be seen as limiting, or even alienating for an audience that may not share the same cultural reference points. The translation "Three women gather, like a drumbeat of chatter" subtly adjusts the focus while maintaining the core metaphor. The decision to translate "婆婆" (old women) as simply "women" serves a dual purpose. Firstly, it neutralizes the cultural context of "婆婆", making the proverb more universally relatable, rather than narrowing it to an older age group. This makes the proverb accessible to a broader audience and shifts the focus to the collective experience of women rather than their specific age. Secondly, the translation highlights the action (chattering) and the resulting noise (like a drumbeat), ensuring that the essence of the social gathering and the loudness of the chatter are conveyed, rather than focusing solely on the demographic. The metaphor "drumbeat of chatter" effectively conveys the original meaning, as the sound of a drumbeat is universally understood to represent something loud, repetitive, and attention-drawing. This choice captures the essence of the original Chinese metaphor while adapting it to a more global context. The translation retains the loudness and energetic nature of the conversation, which is central to the proverb's meaning, and uses "drumbeat" to indicate the rhythmic and inevitable flow of the chatter, ensuring that the cultural impact is preserved while preserving the same function.

The translation of Shanghai proverbs represents a complex semiotic negotiation that extends beyond linguistic transfer to encompass the dynamic interplay of cultural memory, pragmatic function, and contextual stratification. By prioritizing the reconstruction of proverbs as living semiotic ecosystems where Wu dialect substrata, historical hybridity, and metropolitan modernity converge, translators can preserve both the conceptual depth and communicative vitality of Shanghai's proverbial wisdom. Ultimately, this process underscores translation as an act of cultural semiosis, where the mediator's task is to re-encode localized meaning structures without reducing their sociohistorical resonance, ensuring these microcosms of urban identity remain legible to global audiences.

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