

# Subjectivity Identification: A Case Study of Chinese-to-English Translation of Hakka Proverbs

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## Abstract

This paper proposes some strategies for translating Hakka proverbs from Chinese into English. Unlike the previous scholarship, this research emphasizes the identification of the subjectivity of source culture and the subjectivity of translator by investigating the English translations of eighty Hakka proverbs, randomly collected from Hakka websites, using source-oriented strategies and annotations. Drawing on L. Venuti's (1995) foreignization translation and K. A. Appiah's (1993) thick translation as the theoretical framework, this research discussed how proverb translation could send the audience toward the source culture and how in-text annotations rendered the translation contextually thicker and revealed the translator's opinions. The results of investigation showed that in order for source cultural attributes to be vividly replicated, some strategies can be used including: 1) literal translation with grammatical modification and 2) literal translation with syntactic, grammatical and lexical modifications. In addition, for the translator to unveil his/her subjectivity, the strategies can be: 1) supplementing explanations and 2) adding a commentary note to the literal translation. The strategies together help proverb translation take on the new significance of dual subjectivity by demonstrating the true identity of the source culture on the one hand and exposing the translator's own voice on the other hand.

**Keywords:** Hakka proverbs, foreignization translation, commentary notes, explanations, dual subjectivity

## 1. Introduction

This paper proposes some strategies for translating Hakka proverbs from Chinese into English to support the implications of dual subjectivity in cultural translation. Like other types of proverbs in the world, Hakka proverbs show their distinctive cultural images, value and reveal their ethnic identity, thus deserving an in-depth study for local cultural promotion under the push of globalization. Until now, researches on proverbs are devoted to some subjects of exploration, including: 1) specific themes of husband-wife relations, life and death and others (Xu, 2007; Huang, 2009, 2010); 2) rhetorical devices (Chan, 2002; Zhang, 2012); 3) linguistic features (Bergman, 1992, 1996; Ghaly, 2000; Lin, 2010; Lu, 2002; Hong, 2007); 4) history review (Mieder, 2003; Taylor, 2006); and 5) metaphorical meanings (Gibbs, Johnson & Golston, 1996; Herzfeld, 1990; Honeck, 1997; Ntshinga, 1999; Osoba, 2005). However, little attention has been paid to the translation of proverbs from one language into another. Furthermore, the translation of Hakka proverbs in Taiwan cannot be found in the existing literature either in print or on the web. For this reason, I want to initiate a research on the Chinese-to-English translation of Hakka proverbs and propose some strategies for translating the proverbs to identify the translator's subjectivity and the genuine attributes of Hakka culture.

Culture translation, recognized as a challenging area, has been defined as the translation of a text that contains some cultural references such as proper nouns, fixed phrases, idiomatic expressions and others. Most translators of cultural texts are encouraged to use audience-emphasized and communication-oriented strategies, and thereby the translation can achieve Nida's (1964) dynamic equivalence between source language (SL) and target language (TL). Some scholars' translation theories, such as Newmark's (1995) communicative translation and Gutt's (1990, 1998) optimal relevance, similarly view effective communication as the primary concern of cultural translation. Gutt claimed that a successful translation should be contextually relevant to the target audience so that the message could be easily and clearly grasped without much effort. In contrast, some Chinese scholars (Jiang, 2004; Wang, 2012) favor literal translation because they think adaptation or paraphrase cannot reveal the genuine cultural connotations of the source text. From Jiang's view, when a Chinese idiomatic

expression 阿彌陀佛 [Amitabha] was rendered as *May God bless my soul*, the foreigners would assume that all the Chinese were Christians. Thus, Jiang recommended rendering it as *May Buddha bless my soul*. To prevent the distortion of original cultural images and meanings, Venuti (1995) proposed the use of a foreignization strategy to retain original presentations and forms. Moving the target audience toward the author and the source text, the foreignization translation hinders the source culture from being ideologically colonized. Agreeing with Venuti's anti-colonization translation policy, I propose the use of foreignization strategies along with added explanations/comments to make Hakka proverb translation take the authentic, original form on the one hand and reveal the translator's opinion on the other. To be specific, the translation will reproduce original cultural images, forms and meanings to show the subjectivity of the source culture. Also the translation gives some explanations and comments to show the translator's subjectivity. Figure 1 shows how the dual subjectivity is justifiably unveiled in the process of translating Hakka proverbs.

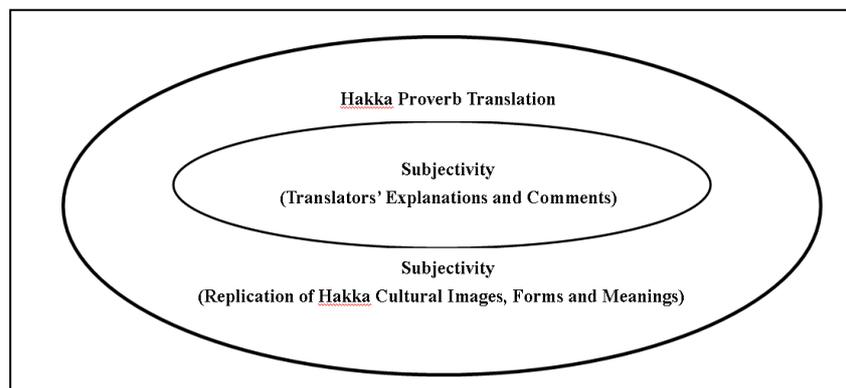


Figure 1. The dual subjectivity identified in the Hakka proverb translation

Faithful rendition of source culture and the conveyance of the translator's opinion are crucial and cannot be sacrificed at the cost of effective communication in a translation. Taking this goal in mind, I raise two questions to investigate what appropriate strategies can be used to translate Hakka proverbs.

1. How can source cultural images and values be successfully replicated to show the cultural subjectivity when Hakka proverbs are translated from Chinese into English?
2. How can the translator's voice be heard to show the translator's subjectivity by inserting explanations and adding commentary notes in proverb translation?

To answer the two research questions above, an empirical research was conducted by translating 80 Hakka proverbs with some strategies and supplementing personal views where appropriate. The proverbs, which were extracted from online materials (see Hakka online references), were randomly selected. The proverbs deal with diverse themes such as education, family relationship, career and others, and are categorized into people-specific, action-specific, animal-specific and nature-specific proverbs. For the identification of dual subjectivity in the Chinese-to-English proverb translations, a process-based analysis was made. The process-oriented analysis, as contrasted with the product-oriented one, explores how some strategies are intentionally adopted for achieving a purpose, not analyzing the translation to evaluate or criticize its strength and weakness.

## 2. Theoretical Review

Since this paper relates to the translation of Hakka proverbs and specific strategies adopted to reveal the dual subjectivity, the definitions of proverbs and subjectivity are given first. Furthermore, drawing on Venuti's foreignization translation and Appiah's (1993) thick translation as the theoretical framework, this paper will discuss the basic concepts of the two theories at some length in this section.

### 2.1 Defining Proverbs and Subjectivity

In *The Free Dictionary*, the word "proverb" is defined as "A short pithy saying in frequent and widespread use that expresses a basic truth or practical precept" (2013, p. 1). Normally, proverbs are viewed as words of ancestors' wisdom and were handed down from generation to generation in the oral form. Although people rarely learn them through formal education, proverbs are highly valued because they are identified as the collective memory of an ethnic group in a region or a country. Take Hakka proverbs as example; they account for the typical living patterns of Hakka people in early times when they emigrated from mainland China and settled

down in Taiwan. According to Liu's (2010) description, "Hakka proverbs register the spirit of Hakka people, reflecting Hakka's historical cultural background and ethnic collective thinking ways. They serve as a valuable asset left by ancestors to descendents" (p. 2; trans. mine). The value of Hakka proverbs exceeds time and space, and we can investigate how to translate these proverbs accurately and appropriately to represent/reproduce their moral and educational implications.

With regard to the word "subjectivity", it is defined by online *Your Dictionary* (1996-2013) as "a decision or understanding based on a particular person's opinion or life experiences" (p. 1). In the translation studies, the translator's subjectivity is often viewed as the translator's act of choosing some strategies based on his/her knowledge and life experiences in the translation process. Regrettably, the issue of subjectivity is often overlooked because translation has been for ages viewed as an act of faithfully transferring a text from SL into TL without the translator's active engagement. Actually, starting from reading the text, the translator has been cognitively and emotionally involved. After that, the translator has to determine what strategies can be adopted and what words/sentences can be used for translation. The translator's decoding and encoding integrate personal judgments, interpretations and writing styles, so different translators display different styles in their translations. A comparison of different translation styles leads to the identification of the translator's subjectivity. In affirming the translator's subjectivity, Schwartz & de Lange (2006) claimed that the translator demonstrated his/her own choice when one word was prioritized over other words. Furthermore, the annotations, such as endnotes, footnotes and inserted explanations, serve as an index to the translator's subjectivity because the translators have to determine what to add and what to delete.

### 2.2 Venuti's Foreignization Translation

In boycotting the prevalence of aggressively monolingual Anglo-American culture through the domestication translation in the western world, Venuti (1995) proposed the foreignization translation, which was source-oriented and preserved the foreign, alien and exotic attributes of the source text. Since the conventional domestication translation reduced the foreign text to the target linguistic form and target cultural values, Venuti opposed this by calling for the use of the foreignizing strategy that registered "the linguistic and cultural difference of the foreign text, sending the reader abroad" (p. 20). The foreignization translation not only allowed the translator to be visible but also revealed the true identity of the ST, protecting it from being ideologically distorted by western translators.

However, Venuti's ideal comes into conflict with reality. For grammar, syntax and pragmatic accuracy, we cannot render a translation without adaptation, particularly when the linguistic and cultural features of SL and TL have great differences. Thus, the foreignization strategy can be defined in this paper as the reproduction of original cultural meanings (based on the cultural connotations of each word), adherence to the original cultural images (use of original metaphors), similes (a figure of speech using the word "like"), paradox (juxtaposition of two opposite ideas) and relevant others. In the Chinese-to-English translation of Hakka proverbs, we have to add words (e.g., subjects, conjunctions and indeterminate articles) to render English translation grammatically correct. However, this act does not change the original message and cannot be viewed as an act of domestication because the translations do not use equivalent proverbs directly loaned from the target culture.

### 2.3 Appiah's Concept of Thick Translation

In his essay, "Thick Translation", K. A. Appiah (1993) argued that annotations could bridge the gap between source and target cultures. With the help of annotations, the source text can be effectively translated into a TL. A translation dotted with annotations, be they presented with inserted notes or endnotes or footnotes or others, is favored due to the "thicker contextualization" (p. 394). By giving annotations, target readers can have a broad view of the source culture. Generally viewed, annotations fall into two types: background information and linguistic information (Blight, 2005). The former means specific explanations of proper nouns, including geographic locations, people, objects, occupations, beliefs, customs and others. The latter gives explanations to some words, quotes, metaphors, puzzles or allusions. For Blight, annotations help resolve "major differences" between source and target cultures (p. 1). However, I emphasize that annotations in the English translation of Hakka proverbs do not provide background or linguistic information. Rather, they only help clarify the implicit meanings and reinforce the thematic messages.

In applying the concept of Appiah's thick translation to the present study, the annotation is endowed with a new function, i.e., to reveal the translator's voice or opinions because the annotation does not exist in the source text and is fully supplemented by the translator. All the supplementary information is the translator's own choice and determination. Additionally, annotations often appear in the text (i.e., endnotes, footnotes) or off the text (inserted comments or explanations) (Rao, 2007). In the proverb translations, there is only the in-text form

because proverbs in general are short and have no context. Explanations or notes that are inserted in the translation tend to help the target audience quickly catch the message.

### 3. Foreignization Translation to Show the Subjectivity of the Source Culture

By investigating the translations of 80 Hakka proverbs using the method of process-oriented analysis, it is found that two foreignization translation strategies were used to support the subjectivity of Hakka source culture. One is the reproduction of original cultural images and word sequence without adaptation, and the other is the reproduction of original thematic messages with slight modification of wording, syntax and grammar. These two strategies are suitable for the translation of the four types of Hakka proverbs. The following examples support how the proposed strategies successfully reveal the true color of Hakka's culture.

#### 3.1 English Translation of People-Specific Proverbs

Example 1 uses the literal translation without syntactic and semantic editing, and Example 2 reproduces original cultural images with slight modification of wording, syntax and grammar.

Exs.1 & 2

Hakka Proverbs	English Translation
1. 生為客家人，死為客家鬼。 [lit: Born as (a) Hakka person, die as (a) Hakka ghost.]	1. Born as a Hakka person; dead as a Hakka ghost.
2. 孳仔有，不如丈夫有，丈夫有，不如自己有。 [lit: Your son has (money), not better than your husband has; your husband has (money), not better than you have.]	2. A woman would rather have a rich husband than have a rich son and have money herself rather than have a rich husband.

In Example 1, the literal translation that is based on the surface meaning of each word clearly presents the theme--the importance of keeping Hakka's ethnic identity. However, to make the English translation grammatically correct, the indeterminate article "a" is added before the words "Hakka person" and "Hakka ghost". In Example 2, the original word sequence is modified for grammatical accuracy, and the words "rich" and "money" are added to explicate the implicit meanings. The added words do not distort the original message. Rather, they explicate the implicit meaning and the message that married women should seek financial independence is accurately conveyed.

#### 3.2 English Translations of Action-Specific Proverbs

In the translations of action-specific proverbs, the two strategies, as proposed above, similarly reproduce original cultural images and meanings. Examples 3 and 4 support this strategic operation.

Exs. 3 & 4

Hakka Proverbs	English Translation
3. 買衫看袖，娶妻看舅。 [lit: Buy (a) shirt (by) seeing (its) sleeves; marry (a) wife (by) seeing the (future) brother-in-law.]	3. Buy a shirt by seeing its sleeves; marry a wife by seeing the future brother-in-law.
4. 人害人，肉積積，天害人，一把骨。 [lit: Persons harm persons, (and) much flesh remains; God harms persons, (and) one bone (remains).]	4. When people are framed by people, they are fat; when people are punished by God, they have only bones.

In Example 3, the original word sequence is followed, but "a" (the indeterminate article) and "its" (the possessive determiner) are added for grammatical accuracy. Additionally, the word "future" is added for semantic explication. In Example 4, a conjunction "when" and a subject "they" are added for grammatical accuracy. Furthermore, "much flesh" (肉積積) is edited as "fat" and "harm" (害) as "punished", so the genuine meanings can be clearly presented. The two renditions have correctly delivered the original messages—it is important to judge by some norms and it is necessary to respect God's power. As Venuti (1995) has put it, foreignization strategies sent the target audience toward the source cultural values.

#### 3.3 English Translations of Animal-Specific Proverbs

When it comes to the translation of animal-specific proverbs, Examples 5 and 6 support the use of the foreignization strategies to reproduce original cultural images.

## Exs. 5 &amp; 6

Hakka Proverbs	English Translation
5. 狐狸同雞公拜年—不懷好意。 [lit: (A) fox wishes (a) cock Happy New Year—not to have (a) good intention.]	5. A fox wishes a cock Happy New Year—not to harbor a good intention.
6. 蝮蛇腰，飯甑肚，好食又畏苦。 [lit: (You) like eating, (and) fear hardship, (you) will have a snake-like waist (and) a rice-bucket-like belly.]	6. One has a waist as large as a boa and a belly as big as a rice bucket because of eating much and not working hard.

Example 5 indicates that the original animal image can be clearly presented using a literal translation. But, the indeterminate article “a” should be added before “fox”, “cock”, “good intention” for English grammatical accuracy. The slight modification does not affect the vivid representation of original animal images. In Example 6, the missing subject “one”, the verb “has” and the prepositional conjunction “because of” are added for grammatical accuracy. However, the original images of snake and rice bucket are lively replicated. Once again, the literal translation with slight grammatical modification, identified as the foreignization strategy, contributes to the replication of source cultural images.

### 3.4 English Translations of Nature-Specific Proverbs

Similarly, we find that the two foreignization strategies can be effectively used to replicate original cultural images and forms in the translations of nature-specific proverbs.

## Exs. 7 &amp; 8

Hakka Proverbs	English Translation
7. 牡丹開花毋結子，榕樹結子毋開花。 [lit: Peony flower blooms, not bearing fruits; (a) ficus bears fruits, not blooming.]	7. Peony flower blooms, not bearing fruits; a ficus bears fruits, not blooming.
8. 未落雨先唱歌，有落也有多。 [lit: No rainfall but singing song; rain (is) also not much.]	8. If rain does not fall and there is song-singing (thunder) in advance, there would not be much rain.

Example 7 shows that the translator completely rendered each word without modification and also followed the original word sequence to transfer the message. The literal translation vividly reproduces the original images of flower and tree, and conveys the message that different types of plants have different functions. In Example 8, the original metaphor “song-singing” is retained, but a note “thunder” is added to help the target audience easily understand the genuine meaning. Furthermore, to avoid lexical repetition, “before it rains” is converted into a concise phrase “in advance.” The above two modifications do not ruin the original message and suggest that Hakka people often predict the climate by observing natural phenomena.

In short, the use of foreignization strategies helps replicate the original images of animals, natural phenomenon, human acts and others in the proverb translations. Hakka settlers in Taiwan used to live by the sea and in the mountain, and had to cope with natural disasters in a harsh environment. Thus, many proverbs were created in relation to nature and animals. Furthermore, they are a minority group in Taiwan and therefore emphasize expanding the population through marriage. They were also isolated from other ethnic groups in early times, so the elders often advised younger generations to beware of crafty persons and cruel social reality. More importantly, they lived in a man-centered society, and some proverbs show a discrimination against women. These themes that reflect the true attributes of Hakka culture have been successfully preserved by using the foreignization strategies in Hakka proverb translation. This act concurs with Venuti’s argument that we should respect the minority culture by sending the audience toward the author and the source culture in the translation. In this paper, the foreignization translation of Hakka proverbs has shed light on the significance of identifying the subjectivity of source culture by faithfully replicating the original cultural images and linguistic forms.

### 4. Added Explanations and Comments for the Identification of the Translator’s Subjectivity

In addition to the foreignization translation above, the results of investigating proverb translations through the process-oriented analysis indicated that the translator’s active involvement could be justified by using two types of annotations, including: 1) an embedded explanation; 2) a supplementary comment in a parenthesis after a literal translation. Some translations of the four types of proverbs are given below to help illustrate the

application of the two types of annotations as introduced above to show the translator's subjectivity.

#### 4.1 English Translation of People-Specific Proverbs

Examples 9 and 10 denote that the translator has given explanations and comments to present her viewpoints, thus allowing the audience to identify her subjectivity when cross-referring to the source text.

Exs. 9 & 10

Hakka Proverbs	English Translation
9. 人求我三月春風，我求人六月雪。 [lit: People ask me (like) March Spring wind, I ask people (like) June Snow.]	9. When people ask me for help, <u>they treat me well</u> , making me feel being blown by the spring wind in March, but when I ask them for help, <u>they treat me bad</u> , making me feel being hit by snow in June.
10. 三個婦人家當過一張車。 [lit: Three women (are) louder than a car.]	10. Three women together create a louder noise than a moving car ( <u>satirizing talkative women</u> ).

In Example 9, the underlying segments are the translator's explanations and help the target audience easily catch the message—the importance of self-reliance. The explanations effectively communicate the message to the audience, and justify the translator's subjectivity. Example 10 also supports the identification of the translator's subjectivity because the added comment is not found in the source text. The added comment helps western audiences understand the message that the traditional man-centered Hakka society devalues women by satirizing their talkative trait.

#### 4.2 English Translation of Action-Specific Proverbs

With respect to the English translations of action-specific proverbs, either inserting explanations or adding a commentary note, is applicable and helps clearly communicate the original message to the audience.

Exs. 11 & 12

Hakka Proverbs	English Translation
11. 窮富不過三代。 [lit: Poverty (or) richness does not exceed three generations.]	11. A rich or poor family does last longer than three generations, <u>so there is no eternal richness and poverty</u> .
12. 不孝有三，無後為大。 [lit: Non-filial piety has three (misconducts), (and) no decedents (is) the greatest.]	12. Lack of decedents tops the list of three non-filial acts ( <u>indicating the importance of carrying on the family name</u> ).

Example 11 uses an embedded account (the underlying segment) to pinpoint the cause-effect relationship and allows the audience to quickly grasp the message. Example 12 also provides the translator's comment to help the audience easily understand Hakka's emphasis on having decedents to continue the family name.

#### 4.3 English Translation of Animal-Specific Proverbs

Moving to the translations of animal-specific proverbs, we find that the two types of annotations can still be used to justify the translator's cognitive engagement and interference.

Exs. 13 & 14

Hakka Proverbs	English Translation
13. 狐狸莫話貓。 [lit: Fox should not criticize cat.]	13. A fox has no right to criticize a cat <u>because both are equally crafty</u> .
14. 老鼠跌落米缸肚——一重歡喜一重愁。 [lit: (A) mouse falls into (a) rice vat—not only happy but also sad.]	14. A mouse falls into a rice vat – happy on one hand and sad on the other ( <u>suggesting the coexistence of positive and negative impacts of one thing</u> ).

In Example 13, a supplementary explanation, "...because both are equally crafty" (the underlying segment), is used to present the cause-effect relationship. The short supplementary account matches well the short proverb, not stealing the focus of the main message. In Example 14, by adding a comment in a parenthesis, the translator shows us her own interpretation of the thematic message and helps the audience easily understand the message.

#### 4.4 English Translation of Nature-Specific Proverbs

In examining the English translations of nature-specific proverbs, we find that the translator has added some comments (underlying segments) to explicate implicit meanings. Since the supplementary information suggests the translator's thinking and interpretation, it allows us to identify her subjectivity.

Exs. 15 & 16

Hakka Proverbs	English Translation
15. 三年水流東，三年水流西。 [lit: (For) three years, river flows (to the East), (for another) three years, river flows (to the West).]	15. The river flows to the East for three years and flows to the West for another three years, <u>so life is full of ups and downs.</u>
16. 清明前好蒔田，清明後好種豆。 [lit: Before the Qingming Festival, (you) can tile the farmland; after Qingming Festival, (you) can sow seeds.]	16. You can tile the farmland before the Tomb Sweeping Festival and sow the seed afterwards ( <u>suggesting doing right things at the right moment</u> ).

Example 15 uses a comment, namely the translator's response to the proverb, helps the audience accurately process the thematic message. The comment can be changed depending on the translator's interpretation and therefore it might be "...so there is no fixed thing in the world" or "...so life is changeable and cannot be predicted". For this reason, the added comments, absolutely the translator's creation, serve as an index to the translator's cognitive engagement. Similarly, Example 16 gives a comment to show the translator's reflection on the message. The commentary note could change as the translator has changed. For example, Translator A might give a comment of "...so good preparation leads to a success" and Translator B, "...so everything must be done in due time". The possibility of different comments supports the translator's subjectivity.

Above all, the exemplary translations indicate that in tackling the English translation of Hakka proverbs, the translator is allowed to voice out his/her mind. As mentioned earlier, when the translator is considering what to add and how to present it, s/he is a master, not a slave to the source text. The translator's choice, either supplementing explanations or advice or comments, concurs with Schwartz & de Lange's (2006) argument that the translator can show his/her subjectivity by performing some modifications during the translation process. Furthermore, as Appiah (1993) has put it, annotations allow the translation to be thicker for easier understanding, and added comments or explanations in the Hakka proverb translation not only account for the translator's reader-friendly intention but also reveal her own responses and opinions.

#### 5. Conclusion

This research takes on new significance since it emphasizes the dual subjectivity of the source culture and the translator by tackling the translation of Hakka proverbs using specific strategies. In order for the source cultural attributes to be authentically replicated, the translation strategies include: 1) the literal translation with grammatical modification and 2) the literal translation with slight syntactic, grammatical and lexical modifications. The modification for grammatical and syntactic accuracy does not affect the representation of original cultural images, forms and meanings. For example, we render "近河多風，近山多雨" [lit: Near a river, more wind; near a mountain, more rain] as *Windy near a river and rainy near a mountain*, retaining the original images of river and mountain. We do not loan a western proverb to substitute it as *There is no smoke without fire*. This act suggests that the foreignization strategy helps unveil the subjectivity of the source culture by faithfully replicating the original images in the proverb translation.

In the meantime, for a translator to justify her/his cognitive engagement, s/he can use the translation strategies including: 1) inserting personal explanations and 2) giving commentary notes after the literal translation. For example, we translate "好天不出門，等到雨淋頭" [lit: On good days, there are no outings; to wait until the rain wets the head] as *You do not go outside until it rains, a stupid choice without seizing a good chance* and "有錢就阿哥，沒錢就猴哥" [lit: With money is the brother; without money is monkey] as *With money, you are a big brother; without money, you are a monkey, so money is important*. The supplementary comments (underlying segments), which are cognitively relevant to the target audience's socio-cultural background, can help the target audience easily and clearly catch the thematic messages. In this respect, not only can the supplementary information reveal the translator's subjectivity but also boost the communication effectiveness. Generally viewed, this research presents a novel form of proverb translation or, specifically described, a dual-processing approach to cultural translation—to keep intact the source cultural image/meaning on the one hand and to foster cultural communication through the translator's active engagement by adding para-textual information on the other. The

dual-subjectivity implications of this research are confirmed by showing the integrity of source culture and by allowing the translator to present his/her voice and opinion, thus different from the conventional ones—adopting either a foreignization or a domestication strategy.

In the end, I admit that this research simply used four types of Hakka proverbs as translation samples and therefore affected the validity of the investigation results. To seek more genuine results, the future research can collect a bigger size of proverbs and examine if the proposed foreignization strategies with added notes/explanations still work effectively to allow us to identify the dual subjectivity of the source culture and the translator in the Chinese-to-English cultural translation.

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