

# The Translation Principles of University Motto Based on Cultural Differences

Xianzhi Wang<sup>1</sup>, Lun Zhou<sup>2,\*</sup>

<sup>1</sup>International Cooperation Department, North China University of Science and Technology, Tangshan 063210, Hebei, China

<sup>2</sup>College of Foreign Languages, North China University of Science and Technology, Tangshan 063210, Hebei, China

\*Correspondence Author

**Abstract:** *As the soul of a university, the university motto has profound cultural heritage and effective external publicity. Its content is rich in connotation and concise in language, which is the concentrated embodiment of educational philosophy and school spirit. In university motto translation, there are obvious cultural differences between China and the West, especially in ideas and language. Therefore, it is necessary to accurately understand the original meaning and express the thoughts of the original work based on the translation principles. By analyzing a large number of examples of university motto translation, this paper highlights different translation principles, such as text conversion, aesthetic color of the original text and conciseness of translation. This study is of great significance in promoting cross-cultural communication, enhancing the international influence of universities, promoting cultural integration, and provides reference for future translation practice.*

**Keywords:** University motto translation; cultural differences; language; translation principles.

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Qin Lei (2005) noted that the university motto is the core of a university's educational philosophy and is the centralized summary of its educational goals and principles. It not only summarizes the educational purpose and characteristics of a university, but also carries the school spirit of keeping pace with the times[1]. In addition, Wang Zhenhua and Zhang Qingbin (2013) proposed that as a cultural carrier, the university motto can reflect the teaching concept, cultural tradition and values of the university[2]. Therefore, from the perspective of culture, the university motto has profound cultural heritage, and it is an indispensable branch of the university's external publicity and communication. It also embodies the spirit of the campus, the fine style of study construction and the superior educational philosophy. Qin Lei (2005) also claimed that in terms of function, the university motto influences and standardizes the behavior of teachers and students, and guides the university's thinking and development direction. Externally, it plays a role in social culture and civilization concept, highlighting the spirit of the university, holding high the banner of truth and advocating science, so as to promote social development[1]. With the increasing progress and development of society, the multi-dimensional opening of the cultural level, different countries have different cultural thinking, although these thinking concepts are complementary to each other, but there are still aspects of mutual incompatibility. Therefore, it is of practical significance to carry out research on the translation of university motto. From the perspective of cultural differences, this paper explores the translation principles of university motto, aiming to make a thorough understanding of it.

## 2. CHARACTERISTICS OF UNIVERSITY MOTTO

Zhou Yongmo (2008) pointed out that the formulation of university motto is closely related to educational objectives, university history, traditional culture, contemporary requirements, and university characteristics. Therefore, university mottos have different characteristics in terms of their origins, content, and language expression[3]. Besides, Fan Wuqiu and Fan Toujiao (2008) cited that influenced by both Chinese and Western cultures, domestic and foreign university mottos have their own unique styles. Chinese university mottos are often in a concise and straightforward form, using traditional parallelism. On the other hand, Western university mottos do not emphasize rhyme and parallelism as much and often adopt a sentence-listing form, frequently using noun phrases[4]. From the perspective of wording, the wording characteristics of university mottos are often unique, just like slogans, with resonant and rallying power. The wording of university mottos is concise and clear, usually consisting of verbs, nouns, and adjectives. The content of the words is positive and vibrant, with rich connotations. From the perspective of syntax, some mottos come from conventional expressions and fixed idiomatic patterns. Therefore, in terms of sentence structure, they often consist of four-character or eight-character phrases, such as the motto of National Taiwan University, “敦品,励学,爱国,爱人” or the two-character, eight-character form like the motto of Nanjing University, “诚朴雄伟,励学敦行”. These motto structures are concise, neat, and impactful, with few words carrying significant meaning, making them easy to spread and promote. From a rhetorical perspective, mottos often use well-known sayings and aphorisms to achieve a special communicative function. In terms of form, they are well-balanced, distinct, and powerful, with a pleasant and catchy rhythm when read aloud, such as the motto of Fudan University, “博学而笃志,切问而近思”. In terms of content, they are clear, fluent, profound, and resonate with each other, creating a striking aesthetic. In conclusion, Zhang Shunsheng (2021) indicated that the most prominent characteristic of Chinese university mottos is the number of characters, which can be roughly classified into several categories: four characters (mainly consisting of four-character phrases and two-character phrases), eight characters (mainly consisting of four-character phrases and two-character phrases), sixteen characters (consisting of four-character

phrases), six characters (consisting of two-character phrases), ten characters (consisting of two-character phrases), and ten characters (consisting of five-character phrases). Other categories make up a very small proportion[5].

In addition, the language of university mottos is often characterized by eloquence and inspiration. They use positive words and expressions to motivate students to pursue excellence and forge ahead. These characteristics of language can inspire students' enthusiasm and drive, guiding them to achieve better academic, character, and social responsibilities. Moreover, the language of university mottos is also enlightening. They contain profound thoughts and philosophies, expressed in concise yet powerful language, triggering people's thinking and inspiration. This enlightening language can stimulate individuals' wisdom and creativity, guiding them to grow and progress in their academic and life paths. In summary, the language characteristics of university mottos include being concise and clear, eloquent and inspiring, combining abstract and concrete elements, highly summarized, and having an enlightening nature. These characteristics enable university mottos to effectively convey the core values and educational philosophies of the institutions, guiding students and faculty members to achieve positive development in academics, character, and social responsibilities.

### 3. THE TRANSLATION PRINCIPLES OF UNIVERSITY MOTTO BASED ON CULTURAL DIFFERENCES

Yue Zhongsheng (2005) argued that translation principles are guiding norms for interlingual conversion of language information, cultural information, textual information, and aesthetic effects. They are also important criteria for evaluating the quality of translation[6]. In recent years, many universities have attached more importance to the English translation on their university websites with the aim of enhancing external publicity, disseminating university resources, and attracting international students. In university motto translation, it is necessary to first understand the intended meaning of the source text, including the origin and cultural connotations of the motto, carefully select the wording of the translation, and finally make some refinements to meet the requirements of external publicity. Fan Wuqiu and Fan Toujiao stated that (2008) due to the profoundness of Chinese culture, powerful words are often rich in connotations and have an antique charm. The wording of many university mottos is simple, refined, and concise, posing a great challenge in translation[4]. Besides, Zhang Shunsheng (2006) cited that although the meaning of some mottos in Chinese is clear, a thorough understanding is still required[7]. Therefore, to do a good job in university motto translation, the following principles should be followed:

#### 3.1 Conversion

Zhou Yongmo (2008) emphasized that translation itself is a transformative activity that takes place on multiple levels, including language, text, culture, and thought. Any text is exchanged with the symbol system of other texts, formed in the absorption and transformation of other texts and it cannot exist independently without other text forms[3]. Therefore, in the process of translating university mottos, attention should be paid to the text characteristics of the motto, and the corresponding form of translation should be used to reproduce the original text. The focus should be on the activity of text conversion, so as to accurately convey the original information. When translating Chinese university mottos, translators often consider using imperative sentence structures to convey the original information. However, authentic English expressions are often translated using noun structures or declarative sentences, which align with the inherent logical structure of the original text. According to the above, the translation principle of text conversion can be adopted.

Example 1:

Source Text: 北京大学(创建于1898年): 爱国、民主、进步、科学

Target Text: Peking University (founded in 1898): Patriotism, Advancement, Democracy and Science

Example 2:

ST: 暨南大学(创建于1906年): 忠信笃敬

TT: Jinan University (founded in 1906): Loyalty, Credibility, Sincerity, and Piety

Although the translation does not have the antithesis of the Chinese form in structure, it maintains the conversion activity of the text and accurately conveys the information of the source text. Wang Caixia (2006) claimed that this is related to the thinking characteristics and language habits of China and the West, and the verb motto in China reflects a strong spirit of practical rationality[8]. In this way, when translating the university motto, it is necessary to pay attention to the English expression habit, that is, to convey the internal logical structure of the original text in noun form or declarative sentence.

#### 3.2 Aesthetics

Li Jian (2013) believed that based on the values of truth, goodness, and beauty embodied in the spirit of university motto, it often reflects the education aesthetic[9]. Moreover, Zhou Yongmo (2008) proposed that university mottos often adopt classical aphorisms and concise words from ancient and modern times. In terms of form, they have a balanced and neat appearance[3].

From an aesthetic perspective, the language of university mottos is concise, and their meaning is graceful, making them easy to read and recite. Chinese university mottos often follow a structure of two phrases with eight characters each, with each word almost embodying a spirit. Moreover, Chinese university mottos have a profound warning function, often conveying the meaning of “encouragement” and “spur”. Therefore, when translating such mottos, attention should be paid to the beauty of the original text, thus faithfully conveying the original information.

Example 3:

ST: 山东大学(创建于1901年): 气有浩然 学无止境

TT: Shandong University (founded in 1901): Noble in Spirit; Boundless in Knowledge

Example 4:

ST: 厦门大学(创建于1921年): 自强不息 止于至善

TT: Xiamen University (founded in 1921): Emulate Excellence, Pursue Perfection

Example 5:

ST: 哈尔滨工业大学(创建于1920年): 规格严格 工夫到家

TT: Harbin Institute of Technology (founded in 1920): Strict Standard and Sufficient Effort

Zhang Shunsheng (2021) revised the motto of Xiamen University. It should be said that there is no problem in the meaning of the translation, but there seems to be room for improvement in the beauty of form (two words in the first half, three words in the second half), which can imitate the English text and adopt the alliteration method[5]. The above examples exhibit a balanced structure, rigorous writing, and concise yet vivid expression. It not only captures the linguistic characteristics of the original text but also fully embodies its aesthetic effect.

### 3.3 Conciseness

Zhou Yongmo (2008) pointed out that Chinese university mottos are mostly derived from famous sayings and Confucian classics, characterized by concise language and high information density[3]. What's more, Zheng Houyao and Liu Hongquan (2002) remarked that the translation of proverbs should be succinct in writing. It is not necessary to provide background information or annotations, and English words have more flexibility in meaning, with many synonyms available[10]. Normally, the English version is several times longer than the original Chinese text. Therefore, in the translation of university motto, it is important to convey the original message, pay attention to the aesthetic color and ensure the conciseness. In addition, Zheng Houyao and Liu Hongquan (2002) cited that university mottos are written in a concise manner with highly condensed meanings and deep cultural implications, making it difficult to grasp their true essence without proper interpretation[10]. Consequently, to achieve the same level of concise expressiveness in translation, various translation techniques should be employed to skillfully transform the meaning and achieve the effect of conciseness.

Example 6:

ST: 中国海洋大学(创建于1924年): 海纳百川, 取则行远。

TT: Ocean University of China (founded in 1924): Vast Ocean Embraces Streams, Norms Promise One's Dream.

Example 7:

ST: 南京大学(创建于1902年): 诚朴雄伟 励学敦行

TT: Nanjing University (founded in 1902): Sincerity with Aspiration and Perseverance with Integrity

Zhou Yongmo (2008) noted that the premise of achieving “conciseness” in translation is to respect the original work and the pursuit of “conciseness” should not damage the information density of the translation. Efforts should be made to minimize the differences in information density between English and Chinese[3]. As can be seen, the above examples exhibit a well-structured and balanced form, accurately conveying the information of the source text while showcasing aesthetic features. The greatest characteristic is that they are concise and lively, without losing the essence, conveying the information of the source text while being easy to read and pleasant to the ear.

## 4. CONCLUSION

Whether in China or abroad, university mottos play a role in external promotion. Therefore, outstanding university motto translation not only contributes to cultural exchange between nations but also represents a certain cultural heritage. The genre of university mottos is characterized by rich linguistic connotations, well-structured parallelism, and strict clarity. Therefore, in

the process of translation, multiple factors need to be considered, including accurately conveying the original information, and focusing on the aesthetic color as well as the rigorous conciseness of the translation. Based on the analysis of numerous examples, it is evident that the university mottos of different institutions have their historical and cultural heritage, thus making university motto translation particularly important. In the process of translation, translation principles can be flexibly adopted to integrate the cultural connotation of the source text with the background of the target culture, cultivate cross-cultural awareness and ability, and promote cultural innovation and development. From the perspective of cultural differences, the significance of studying university motto translation lies in promoting cross-cultural communication, maintaining the consistency of core values, enhancing the international influence of universities, and providing a certain reference for future translation practice.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

This study was supported by “Hebei Province 2017 Professional Degree Teaching Case Base Construction Project ‘Translation Theory and Practice Course Teaching Case Base Construction’ (Project No. KCJSZ2017058)” and “Hebei Social Science Foundation Project ‘Research on Public Opinion of Caofeidian Development in the New Era—Based on the Establishment of Xiong’an New Area’ (Project No. HB18YY024)”.

## REFERENCES

- [1] Qin Lei. On University Motto and Condensing University Spirit[J]. *Modern Education Science*, 2005(05):69-71+90.
- [2] Wang Zhenhua, Zhang Qingbin. Corp-based Research on the Significance of Chinese and Foreign University Mottos: from the Perspective of “Evaluation System”[J]. *Foreign Language Education*, 2013, 34(06):7-12.
- [3] Zhou Yongmo. The Main Characteristics and Translation Principles of University Motto[J]. *Chinese Science & Technology Translators Journal*, 2008(2):51-53.
- [4] Fan Wuqiu, Fan Tou Jiao. University Motto Translation: Existing Problems and Tentative Solutions [J]. *Shanghai Journal of Translators*, 2008(2): 41-44.
- [5] Zhang Shunsheng, Robert Elliot. A Comparative Study on the Characteristics and Translation of University Mottos of Chinese-English Universities[J]. *Shanghai Journal of Translators*, 2021(05):39-44.
- [6] Yue Zhongsheng. On the Translation of University Motto[J]. *Journal of Henan University of Science & Technology (Social Science)*, 2009, 27(01):63-65.
- [7] Zhang Shunsheng. Aim High with Will; Probe Far for Truth: on the Translation of Publicity Materials of Suzhou University of Science and Technology[J]. *Chinese Science & Technology Translators Journal*, 2006,(04):1-2+6.
- [8] Wang Caixia. The Differences of the Mottos of the West and China[J]. *University Education Science*, 2006(01):82-84.
- [9] Li Jian. Differences between the Chinese and the Western University Mottos: Transcendence and Dual Opposition[J]. *Journal of National Academy of Education Administration*, 2013(09):16-19.
- [10] Zheng Houyao, Liu Hongquan. On the English Translation of Mottos[J]. *Chinese Science & Technology Translators Journal*, 2002, (03):57-59.