

English-Chinese Translation of Names of Racehorses: A Case Study of Four Translation Strategies about the Hong Kong Version

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Abstract: This paper examines the translation of horse racing names, focusing on the Hong Kong translation version as a case study. It explores four distinct translation strategies employed in rendering these names into the target language. The prime principle guiding the translation process is the overarching purpose of the translational action. The four strategies discussed are: transliteration, which focuses on reproducing the sounds of the name in the target language; literal translation, which aims to preserve the phonetic and semantic aspects of the original name; free translation, which involves modifying the name to conform to linguistic and cultural conventions; and mixed strategies, which are combination of the previous and can invent new names that capture the essence of the original. By analyzing these strategies and their application in the context of horse racing names, this paper provides insights into the complexities and considerations involved in translating such names. It highlights the importance of understanding the purpose, cultural context, and target audience in order to effectively convey the meaning and impact of horse racing names in the target language.

Keywords: English-Chinese, horse racing, translation strategies, proper names

1. Introduction

Within the domain of horse racing, the names given to racehorses hold a significant role in capturing attention, evoking emotions, and establishing a distinct identity. When it comes to translating these names from English to Chinese, various factors come into play, including cultural nuances, linguistic considerations, and the preferences of the target audience.

Names are also attached to marketing and branding. A catchy and meaningful name can help in promoting the horse, attracting attention from media, sponsors, and potential buyers or investors. It has been proved that the betting prices are affected by people's feelings towards the horses' names. Specifically, the fast-sounding horses tend to have higher betting prices when people lack other information about their performance [1]. That's because choices are influenced by affective responses aroused by the names and people quickly associate feelings with stimulus images or words like "treasure" or "hate" [2].

Horse racing has a long history in Hong Kong. It was first introduced by the British people in the early days of the colonial period (1841-1997) as a sport exclusively for the upper class [3]. Nowadays,

horseracing is popular among people from all classes and fields. The Hong Kong Jockey Club (HKJC), established in 1884, is widely recognized as one of the leading racing clubs globally and plays a significant role in shaping and promoting horse racing in Hong Kong. Before being used, racehorses in Hong Kong must have a Chinese name and an English name registered with the HKJC, which must be approved by the organization. The Hong Kong version of translation is approved and holds significant research value. In the context of Hong Kong, a region known for its rich horse racing heritage and distinctive cultural background, the translation of racehorses' names necessitates a specialized approach that has to consider local sensitivities and linguistic intricacies.

This paper aims to explore the process of translating racehorses' names from English to Chinese, specifically focusing on the Hong Kong translation approach. By examining the strategies and considerations employed by Hong Kong translators, the author seeks to shed light on the intricacies and challenges involved in this specialized field of translation.

2. Rules for Translating the Names of Racehorses

According to the Hong Kong Jockey Club the names of racehorses should generally following several rules. In general, it is important to strictly adhere to the following rules when translating names:

1) Chinese names should typically consist of 2-4 characters, which may include the Chinese translation of foreign names.

2) Names should not be directly associated with established brand names or well-known individuals who are currently alive.

3) Names should have clear and appropriate meanings, without any intention of causing offense or insult.

4) Names should avoid similarities in spelling or pronunciation to any names that have already been registered [4].

All these guidelines aim to make names lawful and reasonable, avoid copyright issues and other potential problems. On the basis of the official guidance, the translation work can be accomplished effectively and methodically.

3. Strategies for Translating the Names of Racehorses into Chinese

Translation, as defined by the German Functionalist School's Skopos theory, refers to the intentional action carried out in a specific context. The Skopos rule requires translators translate in a way that enables his translation to function in the situation in which it is used and with people who want to use it and precisely in the way they want to function [5]. On the basis of this theory, the translator can adopt the strategies that can better serve the purpose of transforming from the source text to the target text.

The names given to racehorses can be viewed as proper names for they are used to uniquely identify specific horses and are typically chosen by the horse owners. Proper names may be non-descriptive, but they are obviously not non-informative [6]. Translating proper names can often be challenging because they often have specific cultural and contextual dependencies. According to Soltesz, there are contradictions between the two opposing principles: the untranslatability of names which is connected with their identifying function, and the requirement of intelligibility [7]. In any specific scenario, since it is impossible to satisfy both principles concurrently, one of them must be compromised or forfeited [7].

According to Fernandes' model of proper name translation [8], there are generally ten ways, including re-creation, transcription, deletion, substitution, addition, conventionality, copy, phonological replacement, rendition, transposition. However, there are some differences between the typical proper names, which can be classified as people's names, names of objects, geographical

terms [9], and the names of racehorses. For the latter it can be the mixture of the three types. However, the strategies used in proper names translation can be referred in the specialized field of translating the names of racehorses.

Based on the background information, the strategies for names given to racehorses can be roughly divided into four categories: transliteration, literal translation, free translation and the mixture of the other.

3.1. Transliteration

The transliteration is similar to the concept of the concept of transcription discussed by Fernandes. This is a procedure in which an attempt is made to transcribe a name in the closest corresponding letters of a different target alphabet or language. In other words, this procedure occurs when a name is transliterated or adapted at the level of morphology, phonology, grammar, etc., usually to conform to the target language system [10].

Zhang and Schmitt proposed the phonetic translation method for brand names [11]. An effort is made to mimic the sound of the original English names in the Chinese translation by disregarding the meaning. Although racehorse names differ from brand names, these translation methods can be applicable in some situation. Sometimes the names are merely names without any additional connotations, or they are coined words made up by the owners. Under these circumstances, transliteration or phonological replacement, can be a proper choice. To be specific, the translators can choose characters with similar pronunciation while following the rules. Considering the original names may contain too many syllables, the techniques of deletion and re-creation: can also be applied. All these strategies are shown in the following examples.

e.g.1 Cesario——西沙里奥

The name originates from the eponymous character in the romantic comedy play ‘Twelfth Night’ written by the famous English playwright William Shakespeare.

e.g.2 Frankel——范高尔

The famed horse is named after the American horse trainer Robert Julian Frankel, who passed away in November 2009. The Chinese translation is the same as the transliterated name of the trainer.

e.g.3 Lyphard——利法尔

The horse’s owner chose to name the horse after the French-Ukrainian choreographer Serhiy Mykhailovych Lyfar.

e.g.4 Maurice——满乐时

This name is a common male. In order to leave a good impression, the translation chooses the characters “满 (fulfillment)” “乐 (happiness)” “时 (time)” to approximately imitate the original pronunciation.

e.g.5 Marcellina——马莎莲娜

“Marcellina” is a feminine name derived from the Latin name “Marcellinus” which is a diminutive form of “Marcellus” and means “warlike” or “dedicated to Mars” (the Roman god of war).

e.g.6 Pilsudski——必得时机

The name is a Polish surname. The translation is a phonetically similar phrase which means “must-seize opportunity” which implies an opportune moment or a must-win situation and can create a sense of anticipation and excitement among fans and bettors.

e.g.7 Danzig——单色

The name is from the German pronunciation of the Polish port city Gdansk.

e.g.8 Zenyatta——信雅达

The owner was inspired by an Italian song and came up the name Zenyatta after a line of lyrics. The name is a coinage meaning “forever living with you”.

e.g.9 Youmzain——跃升

The name comes from the Arabic word meaning “excellent” and “beautiful”. The Chinese characters convey a sense of upward movement and advancement, creating a positive and aspirational image.

e.g.10 Lammtarra——临泰来

The name has its origins in Arabic. It can be translated to “the immortal” or “eternal” in English. The translation combines Chinese characters that carry positive connotations, which can evoke a sense of confidence and optimism, reflecting the horse’s potential for success and triumph on the racetrack.

Examples 1-7 consist of original names known as sign names, derived from individuals or places, and are characterized by their lack of descriptive, connotative, and motivated qualities. In this case, the translators substitute the names by a corresponding name in Chinese or left unchanged. In the examples 8-10, the translators modify the names, substituting the names by expressions in Chinese, the receptor language. The expressions are extended from the original meanings and are not directly corresponded with the origins.

3.2. Literal Translation

If the names consist of common words or phrases that have straightforward translations in Chinese, literal translation can be employed to ensure clarity and understanding among Chinese speakers. This approach enables the Chinese audience to comprehend the meaning of the race name easily without requiring further explanation or interpretation. Additionally, in some cases, literal translation may be preferred to maintain the cultural relevance of the names. Certain names may carry specific connotations, historical significance, or cultural references that are important to preserve. By using direct translation, the intended cultural context can be conveyed to the Chinese audience.

e.g.11 Sunday Silence——周日宁静

e.g.12 Seabiscuit——海洋饼干

e.g.13 Northern Dancer——北地舞人

e.g.14 Animal Kingdom——动物王国

e.g.15 Arctic Prince——北极王子

e.g.16 King Halo——帝皇光辉

e.g.17 Nice Nature——优秀素质

In the examples above, the translators can partly or wholly translated or substituted the names, for these names are combinations of sign names and elements from the common word classes which may be adjectives, suffixes or most frequently, words naming a higher-level conceptual category.

3.3. Free Translation

In a naming process, whether translating or giving a new name, culture has an important role in specifying what is acceptable and appreciated, and what is taboo [12]. A good translated name should function in the target culture as well as in the source culture. Idioms and allusions are often described as the embodiment of language, vibrant and impactful, therefore reflect the cultural connotation and national characteristics. Idiom is defined as set phrases or sentences, whose structure is often established and can not be easily changed, including set phrase, proverb, maxim, Chinese common saying, and a two-part allegorical saying [13]. If used properly, idioms and allusions can make the name impressive and easily accepted by people from the target culture. Chinese culture, in particular, has a special preference for four-character phrases, which are characterized by neat structure and

harmonious phonetics. More importantly, some idioms or phrases can evoke shared cultural memories and imagery, eliciting unique emotions within individuals.

e.g.18 Unrivaled——所向披靡

e.g.19 Ambitious——鸿鹄大志

e.g.20 Daring Tact——谋勇兼备

e.g.21 Heart's Cry——真心呼唤

e.g.22 Soul Stirring——触动心弦

e.g.23 Überleben——安身立命

The name means “to survive” in German, and is translated based on the allusion to the story of “安身立命” which means to settle down and to get on with one’s pursuit.

e.g.24 Normcore——朴素无华

The name is a combination of “normal” and “hardcore”, meaning extremely ordinary.

e.g.25 Sol Oriens——初日高升

“Sol Oriens” is a Latin phrase that translates to “Rising Sun” in English.

e.g.26 Lauda Sion——礼赞歌咏

The name is derived from the eponymous hymn written by the Sicilian theologian Saint Thomas Aquinas for the Feast of Corpus Christi. Drawing inspiration from the maternal lineage “Antiphona” (meaning “antiphon” in Latin), it can be translated as “礼赞歌咏” (Hymn of Praise).

e.g.27 Do Deuce——胜局在望

The word Deuce coming from tennis, meaning both sides of the match reach a difference of only one point from the deciding point and the score remains tied. The name “Do Deuce” can be metaphorically interpreted as “victory is imminent” in English.

e.g.28 Contrail——铁鸟翱天

The name “Contrail” which refers to the visible trail left by an aircraft in the sky, can be metaphorically translated as “铁鸟翱天” (Iron Bird Soaring the Skies). This translation captures the imagery of both the aircraft and its trail, evoking the idea of freedom, flight, and a majestic presence in the sky.

e.g.29 Torquator Tasso——惊世奇才

This name derives from the renowned Italian literary figure of the Renaissance, Torquato Tasso. The translation means genius in English.

e.g.30 Scenic Blast——热爆景点

The name “Scenic Blast” suggests a combination of picturesque scenery and explosive speed. It conveys the idea of a visually stunning and fast-paced experience. The name choice reflects the horse’s racing style or the excitement it brought to the track.

e.g.31 Cheval Grand——高尚骏逸

The name is of French origin and is translated to “Great Horse” or “Grand Horse” in English. The translation conveys the meanings of nobility, elegance, and excellence, aligning with the qualities represented by “Cheval Grand”. The localized translation approach may be more readily understood and accepted by Chinese.

e.g.32 Songline——前人足迹

The name refers to the “Songline” mentioned in the pantheistic beliefs of Australian Aboriginals. In their belief system, it represents the ancestral guidance and connection. Drawing inspiration from the paternal lineage’s name Kizuna (a Japanese term that represents the concept of deep emotional bonds or connections between people, 高情厚谊), it can be translated as “前人足迹 (Ancestral Footsteps)”.

e.g.33 Stay Gold——黄金旅程

The name is from the song of the same name performed by the renowned blind singer Stevie Wonder in the American film “The Outsiders,” and carries the meaning of “to remain radiant, to stay true”.

e.g.34 Moanin——爵士蓝调

The name is derived from the song of the same name by Art Blakey and The Jazz Messengers. The translation directly captures the style of the song, which is “爵士蓝调(jazz blues)”.

e.g.35 Just a Way——一路通

The translation retains the meaning of “Just a Way,” implying that the horse has a unique path or method to achieve victory, and is easily understood and remembered by Chinese users.

e.g.36 Grass Wonder——草上飞

The translation creates vivid imagery, suggesting the idea of a horse soaring or flying above the grass. It evokes a sense of speed, agility, and grace, which can be appealing to horse racing enthusiasts. In the meantime, it incorporates Chinese characters and imagery, which can resonate with Chinese-speaking audiences, adding a cultural depth to the name and may enhance its reception among Chinese horse racing enthusiasts.

e.g.37 Wonder Acute——奇锐骏

The translation “奇” (wonderful) “锐(sharp or smart)” sharp or smart “骏(horse)” horse combines characters that evoke a sense of wonder, sharpness, and excellence. And it seems like the name that would appear in Chinese martial arts novels so can draw Chinese audiences’ attention.

e.g.38 Baaeed——胜千里

The name “Baaeed” is an Arabic word that means “to be visible” or “to be evident”. It is often used to describe something that stands out or shines brightly. The translation implies the idea of triumph and success and creates a memorable and rhythmic sound.

e.g.39 Mr. Prospector——淘金者

The name was chosen by the horse’s owner and refers to the horse’s lineage and potential as a sire. The term “prospector” typically refers to someone who searches for valuable resources, such as gold or minerals.

e.g.40 Efforia——乐透心

The name means euphoria in Greek. Based on the meaning, the translation “乐透心” shows extreme joy. The word “乐透” can mean “lottery” in Chinese, so the whole translation can attract the attention of Chinese horse racing fans and bettors.

In examples 18-25, the translators use common Chinese idioms and allusion with the similar meanings as translated names, which are easy to remember and understand. The strategies of conventionality and transcription are well shown in the examples. In example 27-34, when there are no directly corresponding idioms, the translators re-create the names into four-character phrases on the basis of addition or deletion of the original names to some degree. In example 35-40, some well-known and catchy three-character phrases are adopted, and they achieve the same effectiveness as idioms and four-character phrases.

3.4. Mixed Strategy

In certain circumstances, especially for horse with prefixes or suffixes given by the owners which can serve as the surnames, the translators tend to adopt the mixed strategies. The most common approach is a combination of transliteration and free translation. To be specific, the prefixes or suffixes are usually transliterated or deleted and the given names can be translated with strategies discussed before. The combined phono-semantic translation method takes the middle ground and looks at both phonetic and semantic aspects of a translated brand name [14].

e.g.41 Transcend——创昇

The name “Transcend” with its connotation of surpassing or going beyond, can be translated into Chinese as “创昇”. This translation combines the sound and meaning of the English term to convey the idea of creating or ascending to new heights.

e.g.42 Goldikova——金刚威

The name is derived from the Russian fairy tale character “Goldilocks” or “Zolotaya Kosa” in Russian, which means “golden hair” or “golden braid”.

e.g.43 Curren Black Hill——机伶猎驹

The name “Curren” in the horse’s name is derived from the owner’s daughter’s name and phonetically translated as “机伶”. “Black Hill” is a breed of hunting dog originating from the mountainous regions of Nepal. It is translated as “猎驹” which is a combination of “hunting dog” and “foal”.

e.g.44 Logi Universe——宇宙无极

The prefix “Logi” is derived from the owner’s company name, Logiflex Co. “Universe” represents the cosmos and is inherited from the sire’s name, Neo Universe. Ignoring the prefix, the name can be loosely translated as “宇宙无极(Infinite Universe)”.

e.g.45 Victoire Pisa——比萨胜驹

“Victoire” in the horse’s name is derived from Mont Saint-Victoire in France and carries the meaning of victory in French. It can be translated as “胜驹” (Winning Foal). “Pisa” is from the name of the owner’s jewelry company, Pisa Diamond. It is phonetically translated as “比萨”.

e.g.46 Justin Palace——骏天宫

The name “Justin” derived from the owner’s nickname and used as a prefix, is phonetically translated as “骏天”. “Palace” is inherited from the maternal lineage name “Palace Rumor.”

e.g.47 Trot Star——多乐星

The word “Trot” refers to the sound of a horse’s hooves in English, and can be translated phonetically as “多乐” in Chinese.

e.g.48 Mikki Isle——觅奇岛

The name “Mikki,” derived from the owner’s name and used as a prefix, can be phonetically translated as “觅奇”. “Isle” carries the meaning of an island and is inherited from the maternal lineage name “Star Isle”. The translation “觅奇岛” means “Seeking Wonderful Isle” in English.

In examples 41-48, the translators use multiple methods or strategies. In examples 41-42, the meaning and pronunciation are cleverly combined. Generally, if the names can be cut into parts, like examples 43-48, every part can be translated with different methods as long as their meanings are unrelated.

4. Conclusion

In this paper, the author explored the translation of horse racing names, using the Hong Kong translation version as an example. The primary principle that governs the translation process of the overall translational action. Based on this principle, the paper discusses four translation strategies employed in translating horse racing names.

Firstly, the strategy of transliteration focuses on rendering the sounds of the original name into the target language. This strategy is frequently employed when the name possesses unique phonetic features that are challenging to translate directly.

Secondly, the strategy of literal translation aims to maintain the original name's phonetic and semantic aspects as closely as possible. This strategy is commonly used when the name has a direct correspondence, or when preserving cultural or historical references is important.

Thirdly, the strategy of free translation involves using idioms and allusions, modifying the original name to suit the linguistic and cultural conventions of the target language and capture the essence and spirit of the original name. This strategy is employed when the literal translation or transliteration does not convey the desired meaning or when the name needs to resonate with the target audience.

Lastly, the strategy of mixed strategies is the combination of the previous strategies. This strategy is often employed when the names have prefixes or suffixes.

Overall, the translation of horse racing names requires careful consideration of the purpose, cultural context, and target audience. The four translation strategies discussed in this paper provide translators with a range of options to effectively convey the meaning and impact of these names in the target language. By understanding and applying these strategies appropriately, translators can ensure that the translated horse racing names resonate with the audience and serve their intended purpose.

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