

The Influence of Christian Culture on English

Shuting Wu¹, Shuying Wu², Yiting Lan¹, Shaoqi Cen¹, Zhiqun Yi¹

1. South China Normal University, Guangzhou, 510631, China

2. Shen Zhen University, Guangdong, 518060, China

Abstract: Cultures and languages are interdependent and evolve through history. As an important element of cultures, languages promote the change and formation of culture, while culture, the soil of breeding languages, has a direct impact on the use and evolution of languages similarly. Since the influence of religious cultures on languages shows in a wide range of aspects in society, which can find proofs in the course of loan words, network buzzwords and abbreviations, the culture-free patterns are nonexistent in the world. People from different cultural backgrounds have religious beliefs which make various discourse communities and accents possible. Therefore, the article attempts to analyze the obvious features of Christianity believed by most foreigners in the West in terms of doctrines, values, customs and conclude the absorption, extension, and evolution of English under the impact of the culture deeply to strengthen the social influence of religious cultures on the use of languages.

Keywords: Christianity; Religious culture; Relationship of culture and language

According to the *Bible*, Adam and Eve^[1], the first ancestors of human beings, were expelled from Eden for their original sin of eating the forbidden fruit. Therefore, the Christianity preaches the theory of original sin, which means that people are born with inherited sins and cannot be saved independently. Only those who believe Christianity and are closer to Christ can be redeemed by God and avoid falling into the hell after death. Additionally, Christianity thinks that the world of afterlife exists, and anyone must be judged when dies. To clear sins, people need to atone in the real-life world to seize the opportunity of eternal happiness and well-being in another world. On these levels, God, the father of Jesus Christ, has supreme power to be charge of the world, sends Jesus Christ to guide and help people purify their souls, so God is the divine redeemer for faithful Christians. There are countless idioms about God and these idioms are used extremely frequently. For example, “Thank God” shows that people have sincere gratitude for God, especially when they go through tough time and overcome adversities. Examples also include that “God tempers the wind to the shorn lamb”^[2], “God writes straight with crooked lines” and “man proposes? God disposes”. These examples show that God is fair and always makes fair judgement. If man is hard-working and prepares well, God will help him exercise potential, broaden his mind, advance career, and fulfill dreams. God will not favor anyone, because the responsibility of God is to guide Christians to their ideal destinations. Similarly, “God is above all”, “God bless me”, “God knows” and “God is where he was”^[3] all show that God has paramount power and is the symbol of generosity and kindness. In addition to it, “for God’s sake”, “honest to God” and “help me God” all demonstrate that God has enormous power and Christianity has been rooted deeply in the society. What is more, Christianity advocates “The Trinity”^[4]. In other words, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit are the same in all aspects and equal in power and glory. The Father is the creator and master of the world; The Holy Spirit is the God; The Son of God, namely Jesus Christ, is sent by God to redeem all mankind through the incarnation of the Virgin Mary. Therefore, words associated with Jesus Christ also are used frequently. “Jesus Christ” is normally used orally under some circumstances to express one’s happiness, surprise, and fears. For instance, actors in TV series usually use “Jesus Christ” to express astonishment when there is something unexpected.

Apart from the word of “God”, “church” is also made up of many idioms affected by Christianity. Church symbolizing purify refers to the place where Christians attend Mass and hold weddings. But there are many interesting idioms, like “as poor as the church mouse”^[5] which implies that church is the place where food is stored less so mouse there hardly can find sufficient food to survive. When someone is described to be as poor as the church mouse, the person is in extremely impoverished background and has problems in surviving for the shortage of money. By contrast, hell is the place where demons and evils accumulate, and souls there must suffer pains for original sins and bad behavior. As a result, “go to hell” is the curse and even cause hatred. For instance, in the popular TV series *Vampires*, to express his emotional aversion to vampires like Damon, Jeremy curses these vampires to go to hell for their criminal activities.

In terms of notions of animals, lamb always represents the Jesus Christ while sheep is on behalf of Christians in Christianity. The lamb is associated with good qualities, like atonement, humility, kindness, purity, and softness, because this kind of animals is rarely provocative in nature but tolerant. According to the Old Testament, lambs are killed for sacrifice. The god’s servants are lambs, because they sacrifice their precious lives for sinners and provide sinners with opportunities of survival. As a result, the “Lamb of

God”^[6] represents Jesus, who redeems people from sins. Similarly, according to The Gospel of Matthew, sheep represents the good man and will be blessed by the Father forever while goats are progressive and selfish, representing villains and Satan, the devil who suffers from purgatory in the hell. For instance, “a lost sheep” means that the person goes astray or fails to find the right direction of the life temporarily. Additionally, a scapegoat refers to someone who is blame for others’ sins. When a worker is regarded to be a scapegoat, it means that the employee must undertake extra responsibilities which should not have been admitted by him or her. What is more, sheep and goats represent goodies and baddies respectively so the idiom “distinguish the sheep and goats” means that people should be close to good people of kindness but stay away from people of poor qualities, who may do something harmful to others out of interest. Meanwhile, a wolf in sheep’s clothing^[7] represents a wicked man who conceals his bad intentions under a kind face and may do evil deeds. When it comes to the animal which is appreciated and worshiped by Christians most, there are many records about different kinds of birds in *Bible* and the images of birds are various, including nobleness, sacrifice, evil and disgust. To cite some examples, birds in their little nests agree. The idiom shows the strong coherence between birds in the same nest and can be described the cooperation and collaborative work of people. You cannot catch old birds with chaff. The denotative meaning of the sentence is that sophisticated people, especially those who are rich in experience in their professions are not easily to be deceived. Similarly, the idiom “it is an ill bird that fouls own nest” shows that people are conscious of concealing some truths which may have an adverse impact on one’s image, fame and even relationship. The expression of the early bird catches the worm reveals the secret of birds feeding themselves successfully. And the idiom encourages people to make better preparations to outstrip others.

Conclusion

Throughout the thesis, the religious culture has an extremely strong impact on languages. Christianity, worshiping the Father, God, and Jesus Christ, directly generated many words which are related to the doctrines, images and religious events of the religion. Because Christianity has a long history and is rooted in Christians, many expressions and words also change and evolve, even the original connotative meanings are not consistent with terms in Christianity. Free-culture language is not existent, which is the norm. The thesis analyzes English affected by Christianity by citing many idioms. These idioms are from a wide range, including emotional expressions and notions of animals. These idioms of common language reflect the deep-root thought of Christianity specifically. The coherence between language and culture is strong, so people from various religious backgrounds should comprehend some certain words of religions and learn some basic ideas of religious cultures before communication; otherwise, the semantic barrier is produced, and the conversation may not be continued smoothly. What is worse, some conflicts may be engaged because of the different doctrines of religions. Compared with other essays written by linguists and culture specialists, the essay has some improvement. The passage neither analyzes the impact of language on culture in return nor compares the cases of Chinese and English, influenced by Christianity and Chinese religions. Therefore, authors will continue making some corrections and revisions based on more document literature to upgrade the passage.

References

-
- [1]Yuxin Jia. Foundation of Intercultural Communication[M]Shanghai Foreign Language Teaching Press, 2006:23.
 - [2]Qinqin Shi. the Relationship Between Language and Culture-the Influence of Culture on the Formation of English and Chinese Idioms[J]. Cultural and Educational Information,2014(27):26-27+38.
 - [3]Guijin Wu. A Comparative Study of Chinese and Western Religious Culture[J]. Cultural Journey,2010(01):157-161.
 - [4]Feng Dai. the Influence of Religious Culture on Languages- Taking English and Chinese as An Example [J]. Cultural and Educational Information,2009(11):44-45.
 - [5]Guimin Yu, Lili He, Linan Fan. the Relationship Between Religious Culture and Idioms [J]. Journal of Liaoning Normal University(Social Science Edition),2008(06):17-19.
 - [6]Ryan S. Higgins. The Good, the God, and the Ugly: The Role of the Beloved Monster in the Ancient Near East and the Hebrew Bible. 2020, 74(2):132-145.
 - [7]Haiyan Han. the Influence of Christian Culture on English in Terms of Idioms [J].Journal of Xuzhou Normal University(Social Science Edition),2009,35(06):54-56.