Peculiarities in Translating the Names of Acupuncture Points in Traditional Chinese Medicine

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The first information about acupuncture and moxibustion reached Europe in the 13th century, thanks to missionaries, merchants and travellers. It was only in the 1950s, however, that work began on elaborating these two methods on a scientific basis.

In the 1970s, they became popular all over the world. Today, traditional Chinese medicine (TCM) is recognized as alternative medicine in over 123 countries.

The wide use of TCM in clinical practice has made it necessary to understand and rationalize its traditional theoretical principles. It is also necessary to elaborate on matters related to the interpretation and translation of the fundamental philosophical categories of traditional medicine. Only in that way can we ensure its proper application in treating various diseases from the point of view of its theoretical foundations.

The elaboration of correct and exact terminology of concepts used in TCM theory is still a process not subject to control. The main difficulty in guiding terminology formation stems from the ever-increasing growth of the volume of translated scientific literature in the field, and the mass influx into Bulgarian of terms chiefly from Russian and English sources. Usually it is up to the specialist who uses the language to decide how to translate or transcribe the terms without taking into account the peculiarities of Chinese. It is necessary to regulate that process; otherwise we see incorrect terminology formation, especially when there is no analogous word in Bulgarian for the specific concept or general concept (which occurs frequently in TCM theory).

In Bulgarian TCM terminology, we find a considerable number of examples of uncritical acceptance of Chinese terms through the medium of Russian, English or French. This is undesirable and harmful. It is extremely important to become aware of the fact that the way a term travels from the source language to the receiving language should be reduced to a minimum, i.e., it is suitable to translate and transcribe directly from the source language and not to use an intermediary language (T. Kuteva, 1986; A. Danchev, 1986).
One of the biggest difficulties in translating from the Chinese is to give meaning to and translate into Bulgarian those parts of the essence (the meaning) of the hieroglyph, the word, the combination of words, or the sentence as a whole which are not explicitly expressed, but are only implied.

A distinct feature of the TCM texts is the implied character of the written signs established as terms. The texts use some specialized terms that indicate explicit description, while the rest of the information is implied and should be shown during the translation. This fact poses the question of determining the character of the terms in TCM, i.e., whether they are term-words, terms that are combinations of words, or term-sentences. The main task of translation is to bring semantic losses to a minimum (I. Vasseva, 1982).

Profound studies on the interpretation of the names of the acupuncture points can be found only in original Chinese literature on traditional medicine. An analysis of that literature has shown that there exists special literature on the problem. This complicates, both from a theoretical and practical point of view, the question of translating the names into Bulgarian.

_Zhenjiuxue_ (translated title: _A Textbook of Acupuncture and Moxibustion_, published in 1988) has set aside a special chapter on the names of the acupuncture points of the human body. It stresses that they are important terms with a definite content.

The semantic significance of the names of these points has been the object of study already since antiquity. The treatise _Qianjinyi_ (_The Priceless Help_) notes the following: "The names of the acupuncture points have not been put at random; each of them contains profound meaning." This means that all names bear a definite meaning.

According to TCM theoreticians, one of the most important problems in the early training of specialists in the field is to give meaning and understand the names of these points because they contain specific information about their topography and function. If they are interpreted improperly and hence translated in the same way, it leads to erroneous ideas or senseless names. This can be seen often in translated literature.

That makes the question as to the means of expression to be used in translating the names of the points and as to the devices for stressing the semantic components which the terms consist of a matter of the utmost importance. The main goal of the present paper is to choose a concrete conception on the matter. The following theoretical and practical tasks stem from it:
1. A comparison of the semantic-semiotic models of the translations of the names of the acupuncture points in available literature.

2. Noting the most essential differences between Chinese and Bulgarian in connection with terminology formation from the point of view of the explicitness/implicitly factor.

3. Improving the translations in two directions:
   - translations from an intermediary language (such as Russian and English);
   - translations from the source language

The main problem about translation is its linguistic sufficiency, i.e., its ability to achieve complete coincidence with the original. Difficulties here arise when translating the general concepts such as the terms yin and yang. The basis of their interpretation should be sought in antiquity.

The French author B. Auteroche (the "Meridiens" Journal, 1981) has made a profound study of the interpretation of the names of the acupuncture points. According to him, the semantic content of the hieroglyphs that denote these names makes it possible to give meaning to their function. The author says that the practice accepted outside Asia of giving numbers to the acupuncture points of the main channels is a fundamental mistake in training Western specialists because no such practice exists in TCM. In the traditional doctrine, every point has its own name. The study of that name is very important, as it leads to definite associations with regard to its topography and function. Therefore, for the specialist from Europe as well, it will be important and useful to have an exact translation of the name. The author of the article also stresses that in order to reduce to the minimum the risk of mistake when translating the names of the acupuncture points, profound knowledge of both TCM and Chinese is needed. It is in that way that it will become possible to restore the missing context.

Almost all authors of Russian monographs on acupuncture and moxibustion have made attempts to translate the names of the acupuncture points of the 14 channels. Some Bulgarian authors such as G. Gutoranov (1992) and G. Dimov (vol. I - 1993, vol. II - 1995) have used these translations also. In their books, the structural units of the names of the acupuncture points have been conveyed on the level of words. This way, however, not only fails to bring out the information, but also leads to literal translating and hence to absurdities. Here follows a glaring example:

D. Tabeeva (1980) - 5 I (P 5) in Russian: triasina metra
G. Gutoranov (1992) (P 5) in Bulgarian: drusane na matkata
In English: "shaking of the uterus")

In fact, the content and structure of the name of the acupuncture point in question as seen in specialized Chinese literature are as follows:

*Chize* -- LU 5

*Chi* - the pit in the elbow (the ulna = the measure *chi*); *ze* - a tank where water collects.

[The place is] in the pit in the elbow, [where energy qi] flows into and collects.

The example makes it clear that the Bulgarian author has translated the term improperly, and it sounds absurd.

Such absurdities are frequent in translated literature. This provides the basis for establishing absurd terms because the reader enters the terminological vocabulary by way of an intermediary language. There also are many mistakes when transcribing Chinese names. Therefore, close cooperation between the linguist and the TCM specialist is needed.

The analysis of available literature on TCM shows that when translating the names of these points, one should follow scientific standards and should also use literature in the original. Besides that, the Chinese names of these points should be transcribed on a phonetic principle and in accordance with the phonetic peculiarities of Bulgarian.

The problem of translating the names is one of great importance also with regard to present-day needs concerning the establishment of scientifically based terms and the proper training of specialists. In scientific literature, the term has a name-determining function, i.e., it denotes a precisely defined scientific concept. That is why it is necessary to adhere to TCM terminology and seek an equivalent in the language into which the text is translated. In Bulgarian, the term-sentence is the adequate means for translating the hieroglyphs denoting the acupuncture points. In that way, it is possible to reveal more fully the context hidden in their semantic structure and to enable the reader to give meaning to them and to understand them in the maximum way. With regard to the technical side, when translating, the semantic meaning of the term-sentence which denotes the point should be differentiated by means of square brackets. In this way, one can retain and stress the two- or three-component character of the names. Thus, the translation gets near the structures given in Chinese sources treating these problems.
Scientific literature on TCM needs a correct structure of the translation of the names of the acupuncture points, which would reflect in the fullest way the meaning of the hieroglyphs. Such a structure includes (in the first place) the referential meanings of the semantic field of the hieroglyphs which form the name of the acupuncture point, and (in the second place) the term-sentence, which fully reveals by means of the words in square brackets the implicitness of the name. In the case of some names, the translation can be given in two or three variants, which depends on the implicitness of the text and on its interpretations from the aspect of historical development. Variants of the translation need to be given in such a situation. They do not reject one another in any way, but in fact complement each other from the point of view of knowledge of TCM. The translation of the name of acupuncture point heyang (BL 55) is an example in that respect, and we shall compare it with the translations of the authors already quoted:

D. Tabeeva (1980) - 55 VII heyang (the point of the meeting of yang);
G. Gutoranov (1992) - heyang (V 55) (point of the yang meeting)

**Heyang (BL 55)**

*He* - gather, collect; *yang* - a yang-channel = the urinary bladder channel, yang-area = the proximal hind part of the crus.

1. [The place is on the proximal hind part of the crus] - yang-part, [where] there gather [the two tips (heads) of m. gastrocnemius].

2. [The place is on the proximal hind part of the crus] yang-part, and is the first (the upper place = yang) [after the weizhong BL 40 point in which place] there gather [the medial and the lateral branches of the Urinary Bladder channel].

The examples discussed show that an attempt has been made to bring the translation of the acupuncture points as close as possible to the meaning revealed in interpreting in the original Chinese sources. A similar translator’s conception can be achieved satisfactorily only through the joint work of an expert on Chinese and an expert on TCM. The formation of a scientifically based terminology and the implementation of a successful process of training can both be guaranteed in that way.

The scientific investigation of the problem concerning the translation of the names of acupuncture points gives one the grounds to draw the conclusion that translation should be done from the source language and not from an intermediary language. If that is not done, a senseless and absurd terminology will emerge.
Besides that, when the terms from TCM are formed in Bulgarian, it is necessary to obtain profound knowledge of its theoretical foundations. It is also necessary for one to have extensive knowledge of Chinese language and culture.