

## Material for Untranslatable Words

### 1. Examples

a) 土豪(tǔ háo)/壕(háo) - local tyrant<sup>[1]</sup>

Literally, “土” means earth or soil, which infers to a certain place or community, and “豪” is approximately equal to the word “rich”. So in ancient China, “土豪” is used to describe someone of wealthy background in a certain region. But actually, most of the usage in modern China seems imply that the one is young money liking to show off his wealth and having no idea of how to use the money in a proper way.

At the same time, we create (or maybe borrow) a word “壕”, which is the combination of “土豪”.

b) 舅舅(jiù)和叔叔(shū)和伯伯(bó) - uncle

Within western countries or some other societies, there is no such conception of a huge family banding by the same last name and serving for the same ancestor, that is called “家族/宗族” in China. So those words related are hard to translate like “舅舅和叔叔”. The first one is the uncle from mother’s family, and the second one comes from the father side. Sometimes the age will also affect how to call, such as “叔叔” is younger than your father and the “伯伯” is older.

c) 西江月(xī jiāng yuè) - Xijiang month

Literally, “西” means the west and “江” is river and the moon is called “月”. Based on that, we can imagine a scene that, you stand nearby a river and look westward through the river, and there is a moon above the river. The word is used to describe this scene but far more than that.

In ancient China, there is a dynasty called “Zhou” and there is a king living in the west called “Wu”. Many years after its destruction, a poet use “西江月” to recall “Wu” and his own life, since everything will change even disappear except the river and the moon. It is a word full of sadness.

d) 犬子(quǎn zǐ) - canine

Let me explain the meaning of “canine”. It is something of or relating to dogs in Cambridge Dictionary. And Literally, the word “犬子” means the son of a dog. Similar with the Japanese, there exists some honorifics or self- effacing words like “犬子”. So actually the word is used to call the son of someone in the first-person side.

e) 江河(jiāng hé) – river

There is no problem to translate “江河” into river, but it will go wrong when we use it separately. As the stated above, the word “江” within “西江月” is translated into river, and so as “河” in other situation. So the difference cannot be distinguished.

The word “江” is mostly used in the south part of the China and the “河” is north part,

which means we can imply the location by its name. And the “江” seems longer but more narrow than “河”.

f) 人中 – People

It is a word from traditional Chinese medicine, which points at the middle of the junction of upper lip and nose. There is also another word “philtrum” used to describe it.

Literally, “人” is people and “中” means the middle. Based on my understanding to traditional Chinese medicine, it is the middle of our body in one sense.

g) 四个全面战略布局 - four comprehensive profile layout

The official translation from the government is “Four-Pronged Comprehensive Strategy”<sup>[2]</sup>.

## 2. Category

a) Newborns - 老司机, 屌丝, 土豪/壕

b) Historic {

Kinship – 舅舅和叔叔, 妯娌, 二大爷
Literature – 红尘, 西江月, 揠苗助长
Honorifics – 鄙人, 犬子, 令尊, 高寿
idiomatic usage – 称呼, 江河, 雾蒙蒙
culture – 烹饪, 忠孝仁义, 人中, 甲午

c) Politics - 人民民主专政, 四个全面战略布局, 包产到户

## 3. Features

Based on my understanding, there are two reasons for why it is difficult to translate the Chinese into other language, especially English. The first one should be blame on the special background of China, such as the history, the culture and the politics.

Most important thing is that Chinese is a kind of Analytic Language. *Analytic languages show a low ratio of morphemes to words. Sentences in analytic languages are composed of independent root morphemes. Grammatical relations between words are expressed by separate words where they might otherwise be expressed by affixes, which are present to a minimal degree in such languages. There is little to no morphological change in words: they tend to be uninflected. Grammatical categories are indicated by word order or by bringing in additional words. Individual words carry a general meaning; nuances are expressed by other words. Finally, in analytic languages context and syntax are more important than morphology.*<sup>[3]</sup>

[1] All translation comes from google translation system

[2] People's Daily Overseas Edition, 2015/05/11, the seventh version

[3] [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Morphological\\_typology](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Morphological_typology)