"Quemoy" or "Kinmen"?: A Translation Strategy for Communication

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The word *Quemoy* has existed for about 400 years. It is a widely accepted name and most often used and recognized in the West for an island in the Taiwan Strait. However, the government of the Republic of China (Taiwan) has adopted and used a different romanized spelling, *Kinmen* (written with the Chinese characters 金門) to signify this outlying island for about six decades. Both *Quemoy* and *Kinmen* represent in actuality the small island, causing much confusion in symbolic exchanges or outside communication about the island. This paper discusses the significance of the island's English name when the islanders try to communicate with other countries or other cultures in the modern context and analyzes the island's translation strategy within the international society.

On August 23, 1958, Quemoy and Matsu drew international headlines when Chinese shells rained down in the "Quemoy Incident." Moreover, Quemoy and Matsu became a major election issue during the 1960 U.S. presidential debates between the candidates, John F. Kennedy and Richard Nixon. Quemoy, or Kinmen, is a small island of about 150 square kilometers situated on the far west side of the Taiwan Strait, about 200 kilometers (125 miles) west of Taiwan, and much closer to the southeast coast of mainland China than Taiwan. The shortest distance from the main island of Quemoy to Communist-held territory is only 2310 meters. Although the island is geographically very near the Chinese mainland, politically it belongs to the Republic of China (Taiwan). It was heavily fortified and has been administered by Taiwan's government since the Chinese civil war of 1949.

The island is known by two English names, Quemoy and Kinmen. However, most scholars[1] in the West and most international media outlets[2] use the term *Quemoy* rather than *Kinmen*. We can trace the word *Quemoy* back to Portuguese influence to understand why the Western world has known the island by the name *Quemoy*. In the late 15th and early 16th century Portuguese navigators (and traders) arrived in Fujian Province and named the island *Quemoy*, a Portuguese transliteration of *Jin-men* as spoken in the South Min (South Fujian) dialect or *min-nan-yu*. The Portuguese heard *Jin-men* and spelled it *Quemoy* (Wei, 2003). The place-name *Quemoy* is used on most antique maps. For example, "I. Quemoy" (See Appendix A) appeared on *Blaeu's The Grand Atlas of the 17th-century World* (first issued in Amsterdam, 1662).[3] The name *Quemoy* has existed for roughly 400 years. On the other hand, Taiwan's government has adopted and used the other spelling, *Kinmen*, for about six decades. In this process, the government has sown some confusion by re-naming the island *Kinmen*.

Apparently, *Quemoy*—a place-name historically used in the West[4]—is a more popular usage than *Kinmen* in the West. This begs the question—which one is a preferable English name for Quemoian people or the local government to use to stand for the island when communicating with the West? This paper will analyze the interaction between symbols (signs), realities and identity, and suggest a preferable translation strategy for Quemoy or Quemoian people based on principles of effective communication.

Literature Review

Translation and Intercultural Communication

Translation is a process involving the transfer of word(s) written in one language into another, or how the word(s) are transferred from a source-language text into a target-language text. Catford (1965) defines *translation* from linguistics thus: "Translation is an operation performed on languages: a process of substituting a text in one language for a text in another" (p. vii). Translation deals with not only wording but also meaning. Hence, translating means translating meaning or channeling meaning (Robinson, 2003). Translation also involves symbol or sign systems. "If translation is defined as some kind of communication of significance, and if we accept the structuralist principle…it follows that translation is merger of sign system" (Bassnett & Trivedi, 2002, p. 185). Translation theories have evolved from word-for-word versus sense-for-sense approaches before early 20th century into more complex approaches in 1970s (Quah, 2006). One of the so-called "functional approaches" to translation is the Germann school, variously called skopos theory, functional translation theory or translation-oriented text analysis, which was developed in Germany in the late 1970s. Justa Holz-Manttari, one of the skopos theorists, developed the "translational action theory," representing a function-oriented approach to the theory of translation.

Intercultural communication refers to communication between people from different cultures, and a number of scholars limit it to face-to-face communication. One theory about effective outcome of intercultural communication is cultural convergence theory, which is based on Kincaid's (1979) convergence model of communication. He stated that mutual understanding can be conducted but never perfectly achieved, and through iterations of information-exchange, the people who communicate with each other "may converge towards a more mutual understanding of each other's meaning" (p. 32).

The process of translation is influenced and determined by many factors such as the needs (or function-orientation) and the culture of the target-language text recipients. Nida (1964) contended that "a translation may involve not only differences of linguistic affiliation but also highly diverse cultures" (p. 160). Because different cultures usually speak different languages, translation becomes critical, especially for intercultural communication. Hence, "Holz-Manttari views translation as intercultural action" (Mason, 2001, p. 33). Translation is an essential element in fostering intercultural communication and can be regarded as a bridge not only between languages but also between the differences of diverse cultures.

Symbols (Signs) and Realities

A *symbol* is a thing used to represent something else (Gudykunst & Kim, 2003). Symbols can be used to represent ideas, feelings, people, places, objects, and so forth. Hence, symbols are abstract, not concrete; they are not the things they represent (Wood, 2003). In other words, when a symbol or name stands for or symbolizes something concrete or a reality, the symbol or name is not the reality or the actual object itself (DeVito, 2003). Peirce, an important theorist of signs, defined a *sign*, a term similar to *symbol*, as anything that represents an object,

or referent, and referred to the representation of the object by the sign as *interpretant* (Littlejohn, 2002). Morris divided semiotics into semantics, syntactics, and pragmatics. His study of semantics focuses on the link between signs and referents (Miller, 2005). However, some scholars argued that *sign* is different from *symbol*. For example, Susanne Langer "uses the term *sign* in a more restricted sense than Morris to mean a stimulus that signals the presence of something else….Symbols allow a person to think about something apart from its immediate presence" (Littlejohn, 2002, p. 62).

Everything has a symbol or a name in its culture. However, a symbol is not invariably attached to its referent. Symbols can be replaced or changed because human beings manipulate and generate new symbols. In other words, a reality or an object may express itself in two (or even many) symbols or names, especially when two different cultures communicate. For example, when people from a different culture come to a place, they may create a new name for it, and then the place has two place-names. Different cultures usually have different language systems or symbol systems such as writing, so it is natural that the new name of a place is created according to the designators' (e.g., foreigners' or non-residents') language system, symbol system or culture.

Symbols and Communication

Symbols, since they represent something else, help us communicate with the outside world; they make everyday interaction possible. However, "symbols are symbols (only) because a group of people have agreed on their common usage" (Gudykunst & Kim, 2003, p. 6). If two groups of people (or two persons) use different symbols (e.g., place-names) which represent or symbolize the same reality or object (e.g., an island), and do not know the two symbols actually mean the same thing, the relationship between the two symbols may be confused and form a communication barrier between these people (or two persons). In this case, the communicators require the construction of a joint understanding of what the symbols actually refer to. Without some degree of understanding regarding the symbols designating the same thing between the two (groups of) users, we cannot say that communication occurs.

Communication involves the transmission and reception of symbols. When the meaning of a symbol is understood through symbolic transmission and reception, the communication process is effective. Lustig and Koester (2006) point out that "symbols are central to the communication process because they represent the shared meanings that are communicated" (p. 10). Communication is a symbolic activity or a symbolic exchange process, and, indeed, we live in a symbolic world. The purpose of this paper is to examine why *Quemoy* is a more preferable translation than *Kinmen* from the perspective of intercultural communication.

Analysis

When I studied the identities of Quemoy (Kinmen), I found the West uses the term *Quemoy* in most cases to designate the island instead of *Kinmen*. I determined to study the translation and naming problem about *Quemoy* and *Kinmen*. I searched the Internet and online database of the KMIT (National Kinmen Institute of Technology), and found several books

that led me to other books and articles. While reviewing all the relevant literature, I examined the relationship between symbols (signs) and realities, and the importance of symbols (signs) in communication. I then applied a conceptual framework based on scholarship that would help lead to a symbolic construction and therefore effective communication. Thus, these methodological approaches were employed to help adopt a preferable translation strategy.

Translation and Naming

Portuguese navigators named the island "Quemoy," which became its first non-Chinese name and one that has been used in the West until the present day. Some places in the world were colonized and often given a new place-name by the colonizer(s). For example, the western colonizers named the island of Taiwan *Formosa* and the Dutch even colonized Taiwan for several decades. Another example is *Saigon*, which was later changed to *Ho Chi Minh City* with an ideological consideration. However, the Portuguese naming the island *Quemoy* was not a consequence of Western colonization or domination. They did so only in order to facilitate communication. In this respect, the term *Quemoy* does not have the tint of past colonization. Translating the Chinese name of the island into *Quemoy* could provide a way for Quemoians (people of Quemoy) to construct a joint understanding of what *Quemoy* means; that is, to cultivate a stronger sense of identity with the name *Quemoy*, both with regard to its international interaction and Quemoians' cognizance of the island's historic role.

Naming is a social act or a social process. The construction of our own identities is closely related to the naming process. People construct their identities through naming, "and in turn their naming and labeling process shapes how they view themselves and others" (Ting-Toomey, 1999, p. 92). By displaying their "new" label, *Quemoy*, and using it when communicating with the rest of the world, Quemoians may be able to construct a new, more clearly defined identity with *Quemoy*.

Effective Communication

In the West, most people who use the name *Quemoy* understand the relationship between it and its referent—the island, but do not comprehend the connection between *Kinmen* and the island. On the other hand, most people in Taiwan and especially people in Quemoy do not know to what *Quemoy* refers; they use another English name *Kinmen.* In other words, Westerners are quite clear about what they mean when they use the name *Quemoy*, but most people in Taiwan and on Quemoy do not know what *Quemoy* means, and do not recognize the word or use it to refer to the island. Word meanings are context-dependent. Generally (and paradoxically) speaking, *Quemoy* is a "new" word in the Chinese context.

People in different contexts need to agree on a shared meaning of a word or symbol if they wish to use it effectively in communication. Effective communication takes place when two persons trying to communicate with each other share the same system of symbols (DeVito, 2003). Apparently, there is insufficient agreement on the English designation for the island, and, as a result, both people in the West and the R.O.C. (Taiwan), growing up in different cultures and using different symbol systems, cannot communicate in English

effectively or accurately on most topics regarding the island and hence a communication barrier may arise or a gap in understanding may come to exist. However, effective communication is able to be achieved. According to Kincaid's (1979) convergence model of communication, the westerners and the people of the R.O.C. may converge towards a more mutual understanding of the island's English translation *Quemoy* by means of iterations of information-exchange.

Translation Strategy and Intercultural Communication

In the West, *Quemoy* is a commonly used place-name for the island, but the designation *Kinmen* is not internationally recognized. Since the two mutually unrecognized place-names (symbols), *Quemoy* and *Kinmen*, may obstruct communication between the two groups of users of the two place-names, agreement on the usage of one coherent English name for the island may have to be established. In this respect, Quemoians need to take a good translation strategy to promote the island and effectively communicate with other cultures. So, what translation strategy will work best?

Names are a kind of symbol, and if a preferable translation strategy is appropriately employed, the name *Quemoy* can help increase the recognition and appreciation of the island's historic role, raise the island's international status and thus enhance communication with the outside world. Quemoians could consider taking *Quemoy* as its English name (symbol) to go global and view this as a useful part of a symbolic construction, especially when seeking to promote tourism on the island. The local government or Quemoians could associate the island's English name with a positive value, enhancing the name's profile and elevating the island to a more advantageous position (Chung & Busby, 2002). By translating the Chinese name of the island into *Quemoy* and using it, the island would become more visible in other cultures, and it would therefore be much easier to increase international contact and interaction and foster intercultural communication.

Conclusion

A place-name is an important symbol for a place. Quemoy holds two English names: *Quemoy* and *Kinmen*. The former, translated, or created, by Portuguese navigators, has existed for about four centuries and is widely used by the West; the latter, adopted by Taiwan's government, has existed for only about 60 years and almost exclusively used in the Republic of China (Taiwan). "With most symbols, some degree of shared meaning exists between interactants. This is true because symbols are developed through shared social experience and exist within a system of other symbols" (Miller, 2005, pp. 7-8). However, so far the symbol *Quemoy* is only developed and accepted within Western society; its shared meaning does not yet exist between Western people and Quemoians. In other words, the term *Quemoy* has long been used and understood by the West as a symbol for the island, but not by most Quemoians, For them, the relationship between the symbol *Quemoy* and its referent (the island) is not yet clear or recognizable. Similarly, most Westerners are unclear about the relationship between the symbol *Kinmen* and the island. A gap exists in the two groups'

understanding of the two symbols.

Communication occurs to the extent that a communicator can share the same symbol system (e.g., English) with other people. In order to effectively communicate in English with the West, should Quemoians and Taiwanese adopt *Quemoy*, or continue to use *Kinmen* as the island's English name? Because the island now has two English names, which actually refer to the same reality (the island), it is probable that a communication barrier will emerge between Western and local use of these names. If the people of Taiwan, especially Quemoians, want to participate in the international society or achieve more recognition in the world, using the island's English translation *Quemoy* might be facilitating the most effective intercultural communication with the West. Even though Taiwan's government ignores this *Quemoy/Kinmen* translation problem, Quemoians must recognize that *Kinmen* is a name not understood universally, and that a more global thinking may be necessary to solve the dilemma: *Quemoy* is the only reference to the island that is recognized in the West, whereas *Kinmen* is the only name recognized within the East. It is this author's opinion that *Quemoy* is a clear, communicable symbol between the West and Taiwan or *Quemoy* when there is a shared meaning for this symbol.

If the local government and Quemoians want to promote tourism globally, they must realize the power and significance of intercultural communication, and carefully consider what translation strategy for the island to use in communicating with the West. The tourism industry on the island is weak; using *Quemoy* may *only* be useful in promoting the island to the West, Western visitors or in English-language texts. In fact, it would seem the name *Quemoy* is in itself an excellent form of advertisement because of its long history and reognizability throughout the West. *Quemoy,* as a transliterary equivalent in Portuguese or English and not a symbol of Western imperialism, can be viewed as a tool or instrument for intercultural communication. If Quemoians reclaim their island's historic, internationally-known name, *Quemoy*, it would be much easier to gain attention and enhance their island's popularity as a tourist destination. The preferable translation strategy for Quemoians would likely be the adoption of *Quemoy*. There would be no need to initiate a "name rectification movement," since all that is needed is to adopt *Quemoy* as the island's English name and use it.

Notes

1. In the following books, for example, the authors or scholars used the term *Quemoy*, instead of *Kinmen*:
   (1) Cook, C. (1995). *World political almanac* (3rd ed.). New York: Facts On File.
   (2) Arms, T. S. (1994). *Encyclopedia of the Cold War.* New York: Facts On File.
   (3) Frankel, B. (Ed.). (1992). *The Cold War 1945-1991*. London: Gale Research.
   (4) Nolan, C. J. (1995). *The Longman guide to world affairs*. New York: Longman.
   (5) Canly, C. (1984). *The encyclopedia of historical places*. London: Mansell Publishing.
   (6) Palmowski, J. (1997). *A dictionary of twentieth-century world history.* Oxford, England: Oxford University Press.
   (7) Szonyi, M. (2008). *Cold War island: Quemoy on the front line.* Cambridge, MA:

Cambridge University Press.

2. At the end of the 20th century or even in the early 21st century, most international media still use the term *Quemoy*. Some examples of their reports about Quemoy are:

(1) *Quemoy's mines to be cleared as cold war gives way to tourism*, March 26, 1998, AP.

(2) *Taiwan ends decades-old ban on direct trade ties with China*, March 21, 2000, CNN.com.

(3) *Thaw on Taiwan*, December 29, 2000, The Guardian.

(4) *Taiwan further eases curbs on China trade, travel*, June 19, 2002, Reuters.

3. "Quemoy" and "QUEMOY" appear in *Reader's Digest Illustrated Great World Atlas* (1997) and *Britannica Atlas* (1990) respectively. However, some other atlases use "Chinmen" or "Jinmen." "Jinmen" is a spelling based on the Chinese Hanyu Pinyin system.

4. In the following encyclopedias and geographical dictionaries, we can look up entries *Quemoy* or *Quemoy Island*:

(1) *Britannica*, 1995.

(2) *Encyclopedia Americana*, Year 2000 Edition.

(3) *Encyclopedia International.*

(4) *The New Illustrated Columbia Encyclopedia*, 1981.

(5) *Grolier Encyclopedia of Knowledge, 2000.*

(6) *World Book 2002.*

(7) *Merriam Webster's Geographical Dictionary,* 3rd ed. 1997.

(8) *Oxford Dictionary of the World*, 1995.

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Chung, J., & Busby, R. (2002). Naming strategies for organizational communication: The *Chi'i-Shih* approach. *Intercultural Communication Studies, 11*(1), 77-95.

DeVito, J. A. (2003). *The interpersonal communication book* (10th ed.). Boston: Pearson.

Gudykunst, W. B., & Kim, Y. Y. (2003). *Communicating with strangers: An approach to intercultural communication* (4th ed.). New York: McGraw-Hill.

Kincaid, D. L. (1979). *The convergence model of communication.* Honolulu, HI: East-West Communication Institute.

Littlejohn, S. W. (2002). *Theories of human communication* (7th ed.).Belmont, CA: Wadsworth.

Lustig, M. W., & Koester, J. (2006). *Intercultural competence: Interpersonal communication across cultures* (5th ed.). Boston: Pearson.

Mason, I. (2001). Communicative/ functional approaches. In M. Baker (Ed.), *Routledge encyclopedia of translation studies* (pp. 29-33). New York: Routledge.

Miller, K. (2005). *Communication theories: Perspectives, processes, and contexts* (2nd ed.). New York: McGraw-Hill.

Nida, E. A. (1964). *Towards a science of translating.* Leiden, The Netherlands: E. J. Brill.
Quah, C. K. (2006). *Translation and technology.* New York: Palgrave Macmillan.
Robinson, D. (2003). *Becoming a translator: An introduction to the theory and practice of translation.* New York: Taylor & Francis.
Ting-Toomey, S. (1999). *Communicating across cultures.* New York: Guildford Press.
Wei, J. F. (2003). *The English translation of "Jin-men (golden gate)": A communication perspective* [In Chinese]. Paper presented at the International Conference of History and Culture of South Min, South Fujian, China.
Wood, J. T. (2003). *Communication in our lives* (3rd ed.). Belmont, CA: Wadsworth.

Appendix A. The Ancient Map of Quemoy

Source: *Blaeu's The Grand Atlas of the 17th-century World* (1991), pp.210-211.