Abstract

Medicine labels play a significant role in indicating how to use the drug correctly, yet it has to be written accurately. However, there are some medical labels, such as herbal medicines which are incorrect in some ways, which may lead to one's misunderstanding or even misusing the medicine. To some extent, such labels implied that there is a lack of standard texts on herbal medicines. This study aimed to investigate the English which is used in traditional Chinese medicine (TCM) labels that may cause misunderstandings. The data of this study was collected from Chinese medicine products websites. The labels were analyzed mainly based on Baker's theories of translation, which focuses on various areas of language, ranging from the meaning of single words and expressions to grammatical categories and cultural contexts.

The findings showed that, due to TCM being distinct from western medicine to a large extent, the language being used tended to be highly culture-specific. This becomes the main source of confusion. Further, the differences between words in English and Chinese lead to literal translation out of context which also can be seen as a confusion source. In addition, owing to Chinese influence on text organization, the labels thus appeared to be highly context dependent which may confuse the readers. Lastly, vague language showing vagueness by implications generated an imprecise word or sentence that could also be considered as a cause of misunderstanding.

It was expected that the findings could benefit the readers in understanding the TCM labels written in English. In addition, it was hoped that the findings could

enable translators, English language teachers and language learners to become aware of how culture or subculture influence language use.