

An Overview of German's Functionalist Skopos Theory of Translation Cognition

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Abstract

Functionalist Skopos Theory of translation plays a vital role in the development of translation theory history. Under the background of globalization, the international exchange and cooperation needs the functional bridge of translation to better communicate among countries. This paper generally describes the literature review, original and developing tendency, definition key rules of the Functionalist Skopos Theory of Translation, to guide the translators and English learner for high quality translation products and rouse more attention on the translation theory development.

Keywords

Functionalist, Skopos Theory, translation, globalization

1. Literature Review

Since the birth of Skopos Theorie (ST) in the late 1970s, it has been exerting widespread influences and has meanwhile triggered numerous debates both at home and abroad.

1.1 Current Research in Western Translation Circle

"The advent of Skopostheorie is regarded by Western translation scholars as a mark of a move away from the static linguistic typologies of translation shifts" (Munday, 2001, p. 73). In the framework of Skopostheorie, the functional aspects of translation and the explanation of translation decisions, taking the place of linguistic features of ST, come to be the new focus of academic study. Accordingly, the translator's status is upgraded to the expert of translation process. Besides, translators, freed from loyalty to the ST alone, come to be viewed as TT authors. Therefore, the shift of perspective away from ST reproduction to TT production has infused translation theory with new life. In spite of the

above-mentioned breakthroughs generally agreed upon by Western translation scholars, Skopostheorie has received more criticism than praise from Western translation circle. Christiane Nord, one representative of German functionalism, summarized Western scholars' most representative criticisms in her famous work *Translating as a Purposeful Activity—Functionalist Approaches Explained*, which "so far gives the most detailed analysis of German functionalism" (Bian, 2008, p. 8). These criticisms "have been leveled at the theoretical foundations and applicability of functionalist approaches in general and of Skopostheorie in particular" (Nord, 2001, p. 109). However, her analysis of Skopostheorie and reactions to these criticisms are not without limitations. Firstly, Nord's selective sketch of the formation of Skopostheorie and brief account of its theoretical foundations are far from being enough to present a panorama of the evolution of the theory; Secondly, Nord, as one of the representatives of German functionalism, is unable to stay aloof so as to give an objective account and a justified evaluation of Skopostheorie; Thirdly, Nord's refutation to the opponents' accusation is somewhat off the point and therefore fails to dispel their doubts about the theory.

1.2 Current Research in China's Translation Circle

Compared with its reception in western translation circle, Skopostheorie is more readily accepted than questioned in China. The late 1980s has witnessed the spread of Skopostheorie in China. Ever since then, it has been exerting an increasingly profound influence on China's translation studies. According to the statistics shown by China Academic Journal Electronic Publishing House, the number of academic papers relevant to Skopostheorie published from 1987 to present reaches 1180, including papers from academic journals and 492 excellent masters' theses. These papers outnumber those about many other Western translation theories. Besides, so far dozens of academic works touching upon Skopostheorie are estimated to have also been published. Viewing from the above-mentioned papers and academic works, one can easily find that the scope of research in this field ranges from the construction of translation studies as an independent discipline, the definition and standard of translation, translation strategy, translation criticism, literary and non-literary translation to translation teaching.

The spread of Skopostheorie in China should be credited to early Chinese scholars' translation and introduction, which probably dated back to 1987 when the translation scholar, Qian Guiyuan, first introduced Skopostheorie into China in his paper *On Three Translators of Federal Germany*. Although Professor Gui briefly introduced Vermeer's Skopostheorie in this paper, he put greater emphasis on introducing three major representatives of German functionalism than on the functionalist translation theory itself. At that time, Skopostheorie hardly received any attention from Chinese translation circle, partly because it could not match its predecessor—linguistic approaches to translation such as Nida's formal and dynamic equivalence, in terms of its compatibility with traditional Chinese translation theory which gives high priority to faithfulness to the ST. Belated response did not come until eight years later when two translation scholars, Zhang Nanfeng and Chen Xiaowei, published their papers *Out of the Dead End and into Translation Studies* and *A Brief Comment on Skopos Theory* to introduce

and comment on German functionalist approaches to translation.

In 1996, Professor Chen published *A Tentative Study on the Role of Functionalist Translation Theory in Pragmatic Translation*, the first paper in China to apply the functionalist translation theory to China's translation practice. Systematic introduction of German functionalist theory didn't appear until in 1999 when Zhong Weihe and Zhong Yu published their collaborated paper *On German Functionalist Approaches to Translation* which provided rudimentary material for the research of Skopostheorie in China. German functionalism made its debut as an independent trend of translation in the academic book—*Selected Works of Western Translation Theories* coauthored by Zhang Nanfeng and Chen Dehong. However, Skopostheorie, which deserves a detailed analysis, takes up only a small section of the book. Since the arrival of the 21st century, the study of Skopostheorie has been accelerated and facilitated by the publication in China of the English versions of two classics of German functionalism—*Translating as a Purposeful Activity: Functional Approaches Explained* and *Translation Criticism: the Potentials & Limitations*. Thanks to their publication, Chinese translation scholars came to have direct access to the theory and came up with a more profound understanding. Subsequently, a new wave of enthusiasm for the study of Skopostheorie came into being. An increasing number of papers further interpreting Skopostheorie from various perspectives were published, thereby making it among the most popular translation theories in China.

In 2002, Fan Xiangtao and Liu Quanfu pointed out the purposiveness inherent in all selections of translation action as well as the multi-leveledness of translation purpose in their coauthored paper *The Purposiveness of Selections in Translation*. In 2003, Fang Xiangtao verified in his paper "Multidimensional Description of Hierarchical Purposes of Translation" once again the multi-leveledness of translation purpose by seeking theoretical support not only from Skopostheorie but also from descriptive translation studies, making his argument even more convincing. Furthermore, numerous academic works touching upon Skopostheorie such as *A Survey of Contemporary Western Translation Theories*, *A Study on Schools of Western Translation Theories*, *A Short History of Translation in the West*, *A Dictionary of Translation Studies* and *An Introduction to Translation Criticism* came out in this period. With further study of Skopostheorie in China, quite a few Chinese scholars began to apply it to explain translation phenomena rooted in China's soil. Viewed from the content, papers of this period in this respect can be classified into three categories, namely, the application of Skopostheorie to translation criticism, the application of Skopostheorie to the selection of translation strategies, and the application of Skopostheorie to translation teaching.

Due to students' superficial understanding about Skopostheorie, they don't know whose purpose the term "skopos" actually refers to, nor can they distinguish Skopostheorie from German functionalist translation theory as a whole. In case study, while analyzing the TT, they either confuse the ST author's intention of producing the ST with skopos or fail to bind the introduction of this theory and the analysis of translator's selection of translation strategies together to form an organic whole, resulting in a loose connection between theoretical framework and case study. Moreover, the most serious problem arises

from students' cognitive model. While studying Western translation theories, they accept various theories as they are with little critical thinking about their possible defects and applicability. Therefore, they generally take it for granted that Skopostheorie is applicable to the translation of all types of texts, intentionally or unintentionally ignoring the fact that translation scholars haven't yet agreed on the applicability of Skopostheorie to literary translation.

On the whole, problems exposed from these four stages of research of Skopostheorie in China are listed as follows. First, the research of Skopostheorie is imbalanced. There are more papers introducing the theory than studying it; more papers applying the theory to pragmatic translation than discussing the applicability of Skopostheorie to literary translation. Papers applying the theory to translation teaching are even fewer even though Skopostheorie itself evolves from this field. Second, quite a large part of the research about Skopostheorie is incomprehensive and even logically questionable. The scope of research is limited to several important rules and concepts such as the function of TT and translation strategy, translation purpose and translation strategy, skopos rule, coherence rule and fidelity rule, with Vermeer's discussion of the ST status, literary translation, translator training and the origin of Skopostheorie receiving little attention. Some academic papers even make logical mistakes when justifying the applicability of Skopostheorie to China's translation study through the application of the theory. However, to what extent and in what aspect can Skopostheorie effectively explain translation phenomena and guide the development of China's translation studies remain to be a problem. Third, among numerous papers about Skopostheorie published in China, many are no more than repetition of others' research, with few attempting to blaze a new trail by exploring rarely touched aspects of the theory. Moreover, comments on Skopostheorie are oversimplified, for scholars either embrace the theory wholeheartedly or negate the theory as a whole.

2. Origin and Development of Skopostheorie

Skopos is a Greek word for "purpose". According to *Skopostheorie* (the theory that applies the notion of *Skopos* to translation), the prime principle determining any translation process is the purpose (*Skopos*) of the overall translational action. This fits in with intentionality being part of the very definition of any action (Nord, 2001).

Although Skopostheorie didn't appear until the late 1970s, views similar to this theory can be found in early translation scholars' theory. They have realized that "different situations call for different renderings" in spite of the fact that during those days word-for-word fidelity to the source text was generally considered as the overriding rule of translation, whatever the translation purpose might be (Nord, 2001, p. 4). It might be safe to say that the existence of views similar to Skopostheorie at least dated back to St. Jerome's time. St. Augustine (354-430), a theologian in Roman Empire, bears some relation to Skopostheorie for advocating the decisive roles of TT readers and the intended translation purpose in translators' choice of translation style. As far as he is concerned, Bibles translated for ordinary Christians should be plain and simple so as to enlighten them; for well-educated TT readers,

elegant translation style should be adopted in order to sing praise to God; when aiming at TT readers as a whole, the translation should be solemn so as to exhort and guide them. Nevertheless, no matter which style is adopted in the above-mentioned specific cases, the overall purpose is to facilitate different TT readers' reception of what is conveyed in Bible (Tan, 2004, p. 29). In other words, the end justifies the means. Martin Luther King (1483-1546), the leader of the Reformation as well as an outstanding German translator, follows St. Jerome in emphasizing the comprehensibility of the TT. With TT readers—ordinary Germans in his mind, Luther adopted their “regional yet socially broad dialect” to translate Bible so that they could get to the core of Bible (Munday, 2001, p. 23).

Thus, Luther's concern about TT reader and the intended translation purpose in the choice of translation strategy serves as another evidence for the existence of early views similar to Skopostheorie before the theory itself came into being. Eugene A. Nida, also a famous Bible translator and the most influential representative of linguistic approaches to translation, exhibited his emphasis on the purpose of translation and the roles of TT receivers as follows: when the question of the superiority of one translation over another is raised, the answer should be looked for in the answer to another question, “Best for whom?” The relative adequacy of different translations of the same text can only be determined in terms of the extent to which each translation successfully fulfills the purpose for which it was intended (Nida, 1976, p. 64). The evaluation of different translations of the same text according to TT receivers' expectation and the fulfillment of intended purpose, together with Nida's dynamic equivalence with focus on TT receptor's linguistic needs and cultural expectation as well as complete naturalness of TT expression are more than enough to prove Nida's functionalist view of translation. However, Nida's dynamic equivalence exerted less influence on the development of Western translation theory during the 1960s and 1970s than his linguistic approach. The popularity of his linguistic approach must be understood in its historical background. Linguistics came to dominate humanistic disciplines in the 1950s and 1960s and provided new perspectives to translation study. Thus, many translation scholars, placing hopes on linguistics to solve translation problems, began to view translation as primarily a code-switching linguistic operation. They were fully convinced that as long as they figured out how equivalence could be reached between languages in words, phrases and sentences, translation problems could be solved. Therefore, they tried enthusiastically, one after another, word, phrase, sentence, and text as the basic unit of translation so as to seek equivalence both in content and inform. The feasibility of such a seemingly promising translation model conceived in translation scholars' mind can be confirmed only if it can stand the test of translation practice.

However, this equivalence-based linguistic approach which focuses on ST whose features have to be preserved in the TT lacks consistency in practice: “some scholars praise literalism as the optimum procedure in translation; others allow a certain number of adaptive procedures, paraphrases or other non-literal procedures in specific cases” (Nord, 2001, p. 8). The utopian thought of seeking equivalence also exposes its limitation in face of the ever developing translation practice. After WWII, with accelerated development of industry and commerce, international exchanges in politics, culture and

trade became increasingly frequent. There was thus growing need for the translation of non-literary texts, threatening the dominance of literary translation in translation practice. Translation scholars came to realize that the contextual factors surrounding translation such as the target culture, the client, the intended TT function could not be ignored and that the equivalence-based linguistic approach became more and more unsuitable for explaining newly emerging translation phenomena and for meeting diversified demands of translation practice. Some of them, working in training institutions, found that equivalence, in many cases, was either unable to achieve or undesirable. Therefore, they became increasingly dissatisfied with the relationship between translation theory and practice and started to question this trend. Having realized the limitations of linguistic approaches, translation scholars began to seek a way out from other disciplines. Four theories then popular in Western academic circle came into sight—action theory, communication theory, reception theories as well as text linguistics, which have greatly inspired translation scholars. Action theory was put forward by Georg Henrik von Wright, a prominent European philosopher. As a key term of this theory, action is defined as a process of “intentionally (at will) bringing about or preventing a change in the world (in nature)” (Wright, 1963, p. 28) with “intentionality as one of its most important features” (Feng & Laite, 2003, p. 13). According to this theory, “an action, with its intention interpreted from a different perspective, will become a different action” (Feng & Laite, 2003, p. 13), which can be interpreted as follows: the participant performs an action with his/her own intention, but the observers may interpret, from various perspectives, the intention of the same action differently, resulting in distinctly different kinds of actions. Under the inspiration of action theory, some translation scholars came to realize that translation could also be viewed as a type of human action which was characterized by intentionality or purposefulness. Nevertheless, as the intentionality of human action has not yet been generally agreed upon among academic circles all over the world, the action-based translation theory—Skopostheorie with such a seemingly shaky theoretical background would naturally arouse heated debate among translation scholars as well. Apart from action theory, communication theory also arouses translation scholars’ great interests for its strong relevance to translation. Evolving from a wide variety of disciplines such as philosophy, psychology, anthropology, sociology, semiotics and journalism, communication was fully recognized as a legitimate field of study in the 20th century. As its key theory, communication theory “focuses on communication as central to the human experience, which involves understanding how people behave in creating, exchanging, and interpreting messages”.

- 1) The process of communication—the transmittance of information from one person to another—is described by Harold D. Lasswell as “who says what to whom in which channel with what effect”.
- 2) In view of this, the sender, receiver, channel, decoding, encoding, feedback and message are among the most important factors to be considered in communication. Translation, a transfer of ST message from ST author to TT receiver, can also be viewed as a form of communication. Accordingly, the above-mentioned factors should be given due attention in translation as well. As the latter four factors have already been thoroughly analyzed in linguistic approaches to translation, all the parties involved

in the whole communication process of translation—the initiator, translator, ST producer, TT receiver, TT user, most of which have previously been neglected in translation study, come to receive due attention. Therefore, communication theory contributes to the shift of academic focus away from linguistic features of the ST to extra linguistic and situational features of translation, blazing a new trail for translation scholars to explore. The influence of reception aesthetics to Western translation circle can never be ignored. In 1967 a German scholar—Hans Robert Jauss made a speech entitled *Literary History as a Challenge to Literary Theory* which marks the advent of a new era of Western literary criticism—the era of reception aesthetics. In the framework of this theory a literary work is no longer viewed as “an object which stands by itself and which offers the same face to each reader in each period” (Jauss, 1970, p. 10). As a matter of fact, the realization of the artistic value of a literary work is indispensable to readers’ active participation. Reader is to literary work what player is to orchestration. It is only through the performance of the player that an orchestration becomes beautiful music. Similarly, only through active interpretation of the reader can lifeless words in literary works become vivid artistic figures (Jauss, 1970, p. 10).

In the process of translation, not only the text itself but also the TT addressee, the intended function of the TT and the communicative context should be taken into consideration. The inclusion of the TT addressee, the intended function of the TT as well as the whole communicative context to the previously limited scope of translation study which focuses on ST as a linguistic entity brings translation from a solely linguistic activity to a sociocommunicative field, thus offering possible solutions to the stagnancy of translation study. Based on the above-mentioned four theories, German translation scholar Hans. J. Vermeer managed to formulate a new translation theory—*Skopostheorie*, which overcame the limitations of its predecessors—equivalence-based linguistic approaches and introduced a more functional and sociocultural perspective into translation study. In a word, the overview on the evolution of *Skopostheorie* in this section justifies the conclusion that this theory did not appear overnight, or at least it might be safe to say that views similar to *Skopostheorie* had actually existed long before the theory itself came into being. By incorporating new perspectives from action theory, communication theory, reception aesthetics as well as text linguistics, a relatively mature translation theory—*Skopostheorie* finally took shape in the late 1970s, which is a natural result of the long-term development of translation theories and practice.

3. Basic Concepts of Skopostheorie

The following sections will be a close look at some basic concepts of *Skopostheorie*. The first two sections will deal with Vermeer’s translation commission and key rules of *Skopostheorie*, and the last one will compare the basis of Reiss’s functional category of translation criticism with that of Vermeer’s *Skopostheorie*.

3.1 Translation Commission

The translation commission, also known as the translation brief, is an important concept of

Skopostheorie. It is by no means a new concept; for it has always existed but has either been put into practice unconsciously, or been neglected or even been denied in the previous translation study and practice. It was not until Skopostheorie came into being that the concept was explicitly pointed out as an important factor to be considered in translation by Hans Vermeer who defines the term as “the instruction, given by oneself or by someone else”, to carry out a translation (Ma & Miao, 2009, p. 93). According to Skopostheorie, “translation is normally done by assignment” (Nord, 2001, p. 30). When a client needs the translation of a text for a certain purpose, he/she will assign the task of translation to a translator. Hence the need for a translation commission arises. As far as Vermeer is concerned, “a commission should comprise as much detailed information as possible on the following (1) the goal, i.e. a specification of the aim of the commission; (2) the conditions under which the intended goal should be attained (naturally including practical matters such as deadline and fee)” (Ma & Miao, 2009, p. 94). “In an ideal case, the client would give as many details as possible about the purpose, explaining the addressees, time, place, occasion and medium of the intended communication and the function the text is intended to have. This information would constitute an explicit translation brief” (Nord, 2001, p. 30). Yet in actual practice, the client, being no expert in intercultural communication, is unable to give the translator an explicit translation commission all by himself and thus has to negotiate it with the translator, who can give advice on whether the translation is necessary for the attainment of the intended purpose and then on what kind of TT best serves the intended purpose. If the client and the translator disagree in these respects, “the translator may either refuse the assignment or refuse any responsibility for the function of the target text and simply do what the client asks for” (Nord, 2001, pp. 30-31). Nevertheless, the commission, even made under such close collaboration, still “does not tell the translator how to go about their translating job, what translation strategy to use, or what translation type to choose. These decisions depend entirely on the translator’s responsibility and competence” (Nord, 2001, p. 30). With regard to the reliability of the translation commission, Vermeer points out that it depends on the circumstances of the target culture rather than on those of the source culture (Ma & Miao, 2009, p. 95). “A commission is only indirectly dependent on the source culture to the extent that a translation, by definition, must involve a source text” (Ma & Miao, 2009, p. 95). However, “if the discrepancy between the source culture and the target culture is too great, no translation is possible—at most a rewritten text or the like” (Ma & Miao, 2009, p. 95).

3.2 Key Rules of Skopostheorie

Vermeer put forward three rules of Skopostheorie, namely, skopos rule, coherence rule and fidelity rule. Within the framework of Skopostheorie, “the top-ranking rule for any translation is the skopos rule”, which says that the translation process is determined by the skopos of the overall translational action, or in other words, “the end justifies the means” (Nord, 2001, p. 29). To elaborate this rule, Vermeer gives a detailed explanation as follows: “translate/interpret/speak/write in a way that enables your text/translation to function in the situation in which it is used and with the people who want to use it and precisely in the way they want it to function” (Nord, 2001, p. 29). That is to say, a translation

should first and foremost seek to fulfill its intended purpose, rather than seek faithfulness to the ST. Naturally, this rule often runs contrary to the requirements of equivalence-based approaches to translation. However, skopos rule “does not mean that a good translation should conform or adapt to target-culture behavior or expectations” or suggest that adaption is the only legitimate translation strategy, for it does not exclude the possibility that a faithful reproduction of the ST can also be a legitimate purpose of the TT (Nord, 2001, p. 29). As “the skopos of a particular translation task may require either a free or a faithful translation, or anything between these two extremes, depending on the purpose for which the translation is needed”, this rule is just designed to move translation forward from “the eternal dilemmas of free vs. faithful translation, dynamic vs. formal equivalence, good interpreters vs. slavish translators, and so on” (Nord, 2001, p. 29). In addition to skopos rule, the translation process, in the framework of Skopostheorie, should also conform to coherence rule (or intratextual coherence) and fidelity rule (or intertextual coherence). Coherence rule stipulates that “a translation should be acceptable in a sense that it is coherent with the receivers’ situation” (Nord, 2001, p. 32). In other words, the TT should make sense in the target culture so that the TT receivers are able to understand it. “A communicative interaction can only be regarded as successful if the receivers interpret it as being sufficiently coherent with their situation” (Nord, 2001, p. 32). Under this rule, translators should take the TT receivers, their cultural background and social circumstances into serious consideration so as to produce a TT meaningful to TT receivers.

Fidelity rule specifies that the TT should “bear some kind of relationship with the corresponding ST” since translation by defined is a translational action involving a ST (Nord, 2001, p. 32). This rule might remind one of the concept of faithfulness in equivalence-based translation theories. However, they differ from each other in that the former is a dynamic rule whose form and degree depend on the translator’s interpretation of the ST while the latter is a static concept. In other words, the fidelity rule may require either maximally faithful imitation of the ST or minimal relevance to the ST or anything between these two extremes, whereas the concept of faithfulness requires maximal equivalence to the ST. Therefore, the latter might be a possible form of intertextual coherence. The above three rules are most explicitly summed up as follows by Reiss and Vermeer in their co-authored book *Groundwork for a General Theory of Translation*: 1) A translatum (or TT) is determined by its skopos. 2) A TT is an offer of information in a target culture and TL concerning an offer of information in a source culture and SL. 3) A TT does not initiate an offer of information in a clearly reversible way. 4) A TT must be internally coherent. 5) A TT must be coherent with the ST. 6) The five rules above stand in hierarchical order, with the skopos rule predominating (Munday, 2001, p. 78). These three rules do not run parallel with each other but stand in hierarchical order. “Intertextual coherence is considered subordinate to intratextual coherence and both are subordinate to the skopos rule” (Nord, 2001, p. 32). If the skopos requires a functional constancy between source and target texts, the standard will be intertextual coherence with the ST. If the skopos requires a change of function, the standard will be adequacy or appropriateness with regard to the skopos (Nord, 2001, p. 33).

3.3 Adequacy and Equivalence

Before the emergence of Skopostheorie, the translation circle was dominated by equivalence-based linguistic approaches to translation, which focus on the ST; whose features have to be preserved in the TT. These approaches, mainly oriented towards literary translation, were put forward on the premise that the ST and TT shared the same function or purpose. As a key term of these approaches, equivalence is defined as “a static, result-oriented concept describing a relationship of equal communicative value between two texts or, on lower ranks, between words, phrases, sentences, syntactic structures and so on” (Nord, 2001, pp. 35-36). Early German functionalists such as Katharina Reiss still base their theories largely on equivalence. “Reiss develops a model of translation criticism based on the functional relationship between source and target texts” (Nord, 2001, p. 9). Well aware that functional constancy is no longer regarded as the only possible case of translation, she puts forward two sets of standard for evaluating translation. When the TT and the ST share the same function, maximal equivalence to the ST or in other words, successful representation of the features derived from the ST will serve as the yardstick against which translations will be measured. By contrast, when the TT requires a change of function, adequacy to the intended function will take the place of equivalence as the only valid standard for evaluating the TT. “Adequacy describes a quality with regard to a particular standard. Within the framework of Skopostheorie; adequacy refers to the qualities of a target text with regard to the translation brief: the translation should be adequate to the requirements of the brief” (Nord, 2001, p. 35). Compared with equivalence, adequacy is “a dynamic concept related to the process of translational action and referring to the goal-oriented selection of signs that are considered appropriate for the communicative purpose defined in the translation assignment” (Nord, 2001, p. 35). Faced with these two sets of standard, Reiss regards adequacy as “the generic concept” and subordinates equivalence to the super-ordinate concept of adequacy (Nord, 2001, p. 36). When Reiss’ translation model is fitted into Vermeer’s general translation theory as a specific theory, equivalence, in the framework of Skopostheorie, means “adequacy to a skopos which requires that the target text serve the same communicative function or functions as the source text, thus preserving invariance of function between source and target text” (Nord, 2001, p. 36). In this sense, the concept of equivalence is reduced to functional equivalence on the text level. The form of equivalence required for an adequate translation is determined by the skopos of the translation. In conclusion, Skopostheorie has challenged the validity of equivalence-based linguistic approaches to translation without completely abandoning its key concept of equivalence which serves as a tie binding the ST and TT together. The concept, redefined by Reiss and Vermeer in terms of its function and communicative effect, is ingeniously subordinated to adequacy to account for the special case of functional constancy. The new measure of translation has now changed into adequacy, thus enriches the singularity of translation standard.

4. Conclusion

German functionalism, a trend of translation formulated in Germany which focuses on the function or functions of translation, includes Katharina Reiss' functional category of translation criticism, Hans J. Vermeer's Skopostheorie, Justa Holz-Manttari's theory of translational action, and Christiane Nord's functionalist methodology in translating or training. Although Skopostheorie has played a major role in the development of this trend, it is just one of the four approaches of the German School of functionalist translation theory. Therefore, it can not be used as a substitute for the super ordinate concept of German functionalism. The confusion of the two terms and the incorrect substitution of one for the other prevailing in many Chinese academic articles probably result from the interweaving of both function and skopos in the Chinese translations of these two terms. In conclusion, this chapter gives a detailed interpretation of the important concepts and theoretical rules of Skopostheorie, on the basis of which, misunderstandings about this theory such as skopos and Skopostheorie are pointed out and corrected. Through a contrast and comparison between the basic concepts of Skopostheorie and relevant views of other approaches in German functionalism, the similarities and differences are generated, which not only help to sort out the thread of development of this trend but also differentiate Skopostheorie from these similar approaches.

Through the clarification of its basic concepts and the distinction between easily confused ones, misunderstandings are expected to be rooted out in the marketplace of translation studies in China, resulting in a more profound understanding of the theory. The appraisal of its merits based on a comparison between Skopostheorie and traditional translation theories and criticism of its demerits on the basis of a thorough analysis on its qualification in explaining and guiding the whole translation process rather than on researcher's own view of translation will not only be more objective and convincing, but also hopefully raise scholars' awareness of the possible limitations and invalidities of Western translation theories as they are imported into the country. Subsequently, blind acceptance of Western translation theories in China can be reduced to a great extent. Moreover, the discussion of applicability of Skopostheorie is expected to contribute to rectifying indiscriminate application of Western translation theories in China, thus is of special significance to China's translation practice.

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