

Original Paper

Research on Translation Strategies of South China Sea External Propaganda Materials from the Perspective of Eco-translatology

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Abstract

With China's increasing international status, the translation of South China Sea external propaganda materials plays a crucial role in shaping China's image and discourse power on the global stage. Eco-translatology offers valuable perspectives for the translation of such materials. This paper, based on the three-dimensional transformation theory of Eco-translatology, namely the linguistic dimension, cultural dimension, and communicative dimension, explores how diverse translation strategies can promote international understanding and communication through the analysis of specific cases. The research provides new perspectives and practical strategies for the translation of South China Sea external propaganda materials, contributing to enhancing the country's image and strengthening its international influence.

Keywords

Eco-translatology, three-dimensional transformation, The South China Sea

1. Introduction

The South China Sea, as a crucial component of China's national strategy, involves territorial sovereignty and maritime rights. The translation of South China Sea external propaganda materials is of significant importance, not only for the nation's image and reputation but also closely tied to its core interests and strategic security. In today's globalized world, the South China Sea attracts considerable international attention. Accurate and effective translation of these materials plays a vital role in conveying China's stance, historical basis, and legal rights in the region. Therefore, this study adopts Eco-translatology as a theoretical framework, focusing on the translation strategies for South China Sea external propaganda materials. It aims to explore how to achieve three-dimensional transformation in linguistic, cultural, and communicative dimensions under the guidance of Eco-translatology, thereby

improving the translation quality and enhancing its international communication effectiveness, better serving national strategic needs and safeguarding territorial sovereignty and maritime rights.

2. Overview of South China Sea External Propaganda Materials

South China Sea external propaganda materials are a series of promotional materials released by the Chinese government and related institutions to convey China's voice, present China's position, and shape China's image to the international community. These materials come in a wide variety of formats, including promotional videos, brochures, posters, pictures, books, and policy documents (such as government white papers), among others. They are disseminated through various communication channels, covering both traditional media like television, newspapers, and magazines, as well as modern online platforms. The entities responsible for producing and releasing these materials are diverse, involving government departments, media organizations, and civil society groups.

The translation of South China Sea external propaganda materials is an important task for the Chinese government in spreading its stance and policies in international affairs. The content of these materials covers a wide range of areas, including economics, culture, foreign cultural exchange, policy promotion, and international public diplomacy. In the translation process, it is essential to accurately convey China's stance on territorial sovereignty, resource development, and international maritime law, while also considering the different reactions that the South China Sea issue might provoke in various national public opinion environments. Therefore, such translations must maintain objectivity and neutrality, avoiding personal biases.

Overall, the translation of South China Sea external propaganda materials is not merely a linguistic transformation but an integral part of the broader external communication strategy. The goal is to enhance international understanding and support for China's position, thereby improving the country's image.

3. An Overview of Eco-translatology

Eco-translatology, a groundbreaking translation theory proposed by the renowned professor Hu Gengshen from Tsinghua University, is an interdisciplinary field that integrates ecology and translation studies. This theory deeply acknowledges that translation is not merely a superficial phenomenon of language transformation but rather a complex system encompassing numerous intertwined factors such as language, culture, communication, and more. Within this framework, translation research is given a broader perspective that extends beyond the limitations of traditional linguistic studies. By introducing ecological viewpoints and methods, Eco-translatology innovatively aims to provide a comprehensive and in-depth exploration of the translation process.

At the core of Eco-translatology lies the principle of "survival of the fittest," a concept that is crucial in the natural world. This principle is creatively applied to the field of translation, where it suggests that translation activities are influenced by dynamic interactions among various elements, much like an

ecosystem. Key words in Prof Hu's eco-translatology are adaptation and selection in the translational eco- environment. (Crawford J D, 2011) Translation is viewed as an adaptive mechanism in which the translator must adjust to the changing ecological environment shaped by social, cultural, and communicative factors. In this process, translators are required to be highly sensitive to the multifaceted differences between the source and target languages. These differences are not only evident in linguistic structures or vocabulary but also in the underlying social, cultural, and communicative contexts. The translator must therefore account for these layers of difference, ensuring that the translation is faithful to both the linguistic and cultural realities of the source and target languages.

In Eco-translatology, the translator is encouraged to actively adapt to the broader translation environment, which is influenced by social, cultural, and communicative factors. Social elements include the economic, historical, and political contexts in which both the source and target languages exist. These factors can directly or indirectly affect the content and style of translation, and the translator must be attuned to these influences when making translation choices. Cultural considerations are equally important, as they relate to the distinct traditions, values, and customs represented by the source and target languages. The translator's role is to navigate these cultural differences carefully, ensuring that the translation resonates with the target audience in their cultural context. Furthermore, communicative factors—such as the cognitive level and reading habits of the target audience—are also crucial. The translator must consider how to effectively convey meaning so that the translation achieves its intended communicative purpose.

In conclusion, Eco-translatology offers a comprehensive and dynamic approach to translation by viewing it as a complex system shaped by a variety of interacting factors. (Figure 1) By applying ecological principles, this theory encourages translators to adapt to the ever-changing translation environment, ensuring that translations are not only linguistically accurate but also culturally and socially appropriate, ultimately achieving effective communication between the source and target languages.

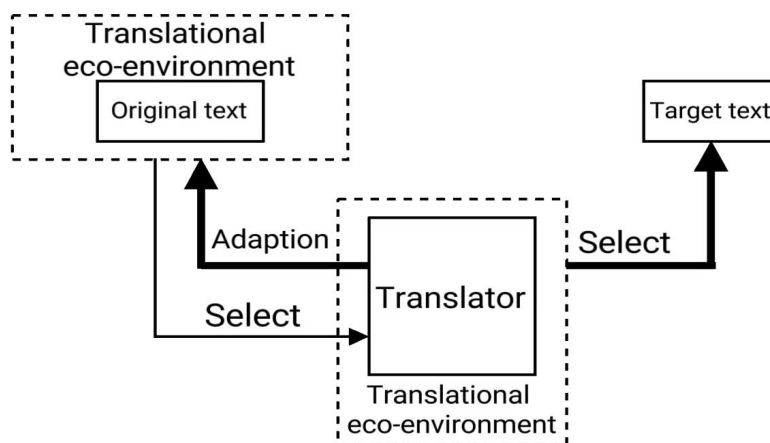


Figure 1. The Overview of Eco-translatology

Eco-translatology views the original and target texts as two environments that form an organic and unified ecological system. It emphasizes that the translated text must adapt to the ecological environment of the target language. The adaptations and choices made by the translator within this environment occur alternately and continue throughout the translation process (Li & Hu, 2017, p. 20). In human social communication, language carries a large amount of human culture; culture is both the purpose and content of human communication; and communication, in turn, relies on language as a medium. (Shang, 2017, p. 44). Therefore, it is evident that language, culture, and communication are inseparably connected. Thus, when the translator "transplants" the text, under the principle of "multidimensional adaptation and adaptive selection," the focus is relatively concentrated on adaptive selection transformations in the linguistic, cultural, and communicative dimensions. (Hu, 2011) These three dimensions are interrelated and mutually influential, and together they constitute the core "three-dimensional transformation" translation strategy in Eco-translatology.

4. Analysis of the English Translation of South China Sea External Propaganda Materials from the Perspective of Eco-translatology

This article focuses on the white paper "China Adheres to the Position of Settling Through Negotiation the Relevant Disputes Between China and the Philippines in the South China Sea" as a case study to explore the English translation strategies of South China Sea-related external propaganda materials from the perspective of Eco-translatology.

The "linguistic dimension" transformation refers to the process where the translator makes choices regarding the language form during the translation process to achieve deep communication. The "cultural dimension" transformation refers to the need for the translator to consider the cultural connotations and interpretations of both the source and target languages during the translation. In addition to considering transformations in the linguistic and cultural dimensions, the translator must also focus on the "communicative dimension," considering whether the translation achieves the communicative purpose and continuously revising the translation to meet the communicative intentions of the original text (Xue, 2022, p. 97).

4.1 Linguistic Dimension

From the perspective of Eco-translatology studies, the adaptive transformation of the linguistic dimension refers to the translator's selection of appropriate language forms during the translation process. Language form primarily involves two aspects: whether the word choices are accurate and whether the sentence structure is appropriate (Shang, 2017, p. 44). When translating external propaganda materials, the inherent characteristics of political texts, such as precision and rigor, cannot be overlooked. Moreover, there are significant differences between Chinese and English in terms of political text style and sentence construction. Faced with these differences, translators must carefully choose appropriate translation strategies based on the unique features of both Chinese and English. In this process, translators should not only strive to faithfully reproduce the meaning of the original text

but also ensure that the style and sentence structure of the translation naturally integrate into the linguistic context of the target language

4.1.1 Linguistic Precision

Example 1:

Original text: 溯本清源，以正视听。

Translation: In order to get to the root of the issue and set the record straight.

In Chinese, "溯本清源" is a well-known idiomatic expression with deep cultural connotations. Its literal meaning is to trace back to the root (to seek the root and trace to the source), emphasizing the idea of clarifying and untangling things from their origins and identifying the fundamental cause of an issue. In the translation, "get to the root of the issue" conveys a similar meaning, while the word "issue" explicitly refers to a problem or dispute. This transformation retains the core meaning of the original language but adapts it to the context of the target language.

The phrase "以正视听" in Chinese suggests the idea of ensuring that facts are correctly understood (in order to ensure a correct understanding of the facts), aiming to correct misunderstandings and provide the public with accurate information. The English expression "set the record straight" is an idiom that literally means "to straighten the record" but figuratively means to clarify facts and correct misunderstandings. This aligns closely with the meaning of "以正视听."

By using an established English idiom to translate a culturally specific Chinese expression, this is an effective form of linguistic dimension transformation. This translation retains the functional meaning of the original text, while choosing an expression familiar to the target language audience, thus avoiding potential misunderstandings caused by cultural differences. The translator also considers the context of the original text: the single adverb "straight" adds a rich layer of meaning, whether interpreted as "unequivocally" (straightforwardly) or "publicly" (openly), fully reflecting China's firm stance. This approach demonstrates linguistic precision by maintaining the clarity and intent of the original expression, ensuring that it is both culturally appropriate and contextually accurate for the target language audience. (Li & Hu, 2017, p. 20)

4.1.2 Sentence Structure Transformation

Example 2:

Original text: 通过谈判解决南海有关争议是中菲共识和承诺

Translation: It is the consensus and commitment of China and the Philippines to settle through negotiation their relevant disputes in the South China Sea.

The original Chinese sentence follows a Subject-Verb-Object structure, where the subject is “通过谈判解决南海有关争议” ("settling relevant disputes in the South China Sea through negotiation"), the verb is “是” ("is"), and the object is “中菲共识和承诺” ("the consensus and commitment of China and the Philippines"). In this structure, the action or method of resolving the disputes (i.e., "settling through negotiation") is emphasized by being placed as the subject of the sentence, naturally drawing the reader's attention to the process.

However, in English, when the subject is too long or complex, a dummy subject (such as "it") is often used to maintain sentence balance and fluidity. The real subject, typically a clause, infinitive phrase, or gerund phrase, is then placed later in the sentence. This structure adheres to the "end-weight principle" in English, which suggests that sentences should avoid being too top-heavy, allowing for a smoother and more natural flow.

In the English translation, the dummy subject "It" is used, and the true subject of the sentence, "to settle through negotiation their relevant disputes in the South China Sea," is positioned later. This structure places the action or method of dispute resolution—"settling through negotiation"—at the heart of the sentence, highlighting its importance through the emphatic form "It is...".

This translation effectively addresses the differences between Chinese and English in terms of syntactic habits. In Chinese, emphasis is often placed on the subject (the method or action), while in English, the sentence is restructured to enhance readability and flow. The use of "It is..." draws attention to the significance of the consensus and commitment, while the real subject, the infinitive phrase, describes the specific action (settling disputes).

This transformation reflects how translation is not just a mechanical process of converting words but involves adapting the structure to the target language's syntactic preferences. It also takes into account the cognitive and cultural context of the target readers, ensuring that they have a similar reading experience to the original audience. By employing such adaptive strategies, the translator does not merely transfer language but facilitates a dynamic communicative process that mirrors the source language's ecosystem in the target language, enhancing the text's flow and readability. (Liu & Li, 2024, p. 92)

4.2 Cultural Dimension

Cultural adaptability is crucial in the translation process. Translators must understand the cultural habits and stylistic preferences of the target language, adjusting their language to improve the acceptance and effectiveness of the conveyed information. Translators also need to be attentive to the cultural connotations underlying the language. Translation is not merely the transformation of one language's words into another; more importantly, it facilitates the exchange and transmission of cultures between two linguistic communities. During translation, translators should focus on adaptive strategies for conveying cultural dimensions, paying attention to both the transfer and interpretation of the bilingual cultural meanings.

Example 3:

Original text:例如，宋代，中国在两广地区设有经略安抚使，总绥南疆。

Translation:For instance, in the Song Dynasty, China established a post of Jing Lue An Fu Shi (Imperial Envoy for Management and Pacification) in the regions now known as Guangdong and Guangxi to govern the southern territory.

In the original text, 经略安抚使 (Jing Lue An Fu Shi) is a specific historical title, and a direct translation might leave foreign readers unable to understand its historical context and function. In the

translation, the term Jing Lue An Fu Shi is retained in its pinyin form, followed by an English explanation, Imperial Envoy for Management and Pacification. This approach uses explicitation, combining the title with its function (management and pacification), making it more accessible to the target audience. This method preserves the original Chinese title while offering a clear English explanation, which helps the reader understand its significance.

This translation strategy reflects respect for cultural differences and adaptive transformation, ensuring that the information is not only conveyed but also resonates within the different cultural context. By providing both the term's original form and its explanation, the translation makes the historical role easier to comprehend for an English-speaking audience, facilitating cross-cultural understanding while maintaining the integrity of the original Chinese concept.

4.3 Communicative Dimension

The transformation in the communicative dimension is an important concept in the Eco-translatology theory. It refers to the adaptation and selection made by translators during the translation process in order to achieve the communicative intention, aiming to balance the communicative ecological environments of the two languages. The transformation in the communicative dimension mainly focuses on whether the communicative intention of the source text has been accurately and appropriately conveyed in the target text. This transformation process requires translators to not only pay attention to the transformation of language information and the transmission of cultural connotations but also place the emphasis of translation choices on the communicative level to ensure that the communicative intention in the source text can be accurately reflected in the target text.

Example 4:

Original Text: 在领土和海洋划界问题上，中国不接受任何强加于中国的争端解决方案，不接受任何诉诸第三方的争端解决方式。

Target Text: On issues concerning territory and maritime delimitation, China does not accept any means of dispute settlement imposed on it, nor does it accept any recourse to third-party settlement.

The original text clearly states China's stance of rejecting dispute settlement solutions that are imposed or involve third parties. This is accurately conveyed in the target text through two parallel negative sentences: "does not accept any means of dispute settlement imposed on it" and "nor does it accept any recourse to third-party settlement." By translating "强加于" as "imposed on it" and "诉诸第三方" as "recourse to third-party," the translator retains the original negative tone while strengthening China's rejection. This transformation ensures accuracy and adapts to the target language's expression habits, making the text clear and easily understood by the international community, while effectively conveying China's position and safeguarding its interests.

5. Conclusions

In the context of globalization, the adaptability and flexibility of translation have become particularly important. The three-dimensional transformation theory of Eco-translatology provides effective

theoretical guidance for the translation of overseas external materials. In the translation process, the transformation of the linguistic dimension requires translators to process vocabulary, syntax, and other aspects with precision, ensuring that the translated text adheres to the linguistic norms and conventions of the target language. The cultural dimension of transformation requires translators to skillfully bridge cultural differences, ensuring the effective transmission and transformation of cultural meanings. The communicative dimension focuses on the effect of the translation within the communicative context, ensuring that the translation meets the communicative needs of the target audience and achieves the intended communicative goals. By making adaptive choices across these three dimensions, the translation can achieve a harmonious integration of the source and target language environments, thus improving the quality and communicative effectiveness of the translation.

Through the analysis of specific cases, we have gained a deeper understanding of the multiple challenges faced in the translation of overseas external materials and the adaptability required in different contexts. The three-dimensional transformation strategy not only enhances the quality of translation but also provides a broader perspective and methodology for the dissemination of overseas external materials. Therefore, future translation practices should continue to develop in this direction to achieve more harmonious cross-cultural communication and promote the development of overseas external materials.

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