

Original Paper

Study on Translation Strategies of International Publicity Texts from the Perspective of Skopos Theory

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Abstract

Against the backdrop of China's high-quality international cooperation in political coordination, economic and trade exchanges, and cultural mutual learning, international publicity text translation, a core cross-cultural communication medium, has gained prominent strategic value. However, practical translation problems persist, making it urgent to explore optimized translation strategies.

This study first clarifies the three major characteristics and classification of international publicity texts and elaborates on the three core principles of Skopos Theory. Centered on case analysis, it explores the specific application of domestication and foreignization strategies. Foreignization preserves the original cultural traits and discourse logic via zero translation, transliteration, literal translation and word-for-word translation. Domestication, by adopting free translation, imitation, variation and recreation, adapts to target readers' cognitive habits, thereby enhancing communication effects or mitigating semantic negative tendencies.

This study provides theoretical basis and practical reference for improving translation quality and international communication effectiveness, and offers practical guidance for constructing a Chinese characteristic foreign discourse system.

Keywords

Skopos Theory, international publicity texts, translation strategies

1. Introduction

Huang (2004) comprehensively defines publicity translation as an activity that involves translating extensive information about China into foreign languages for dissemination through various media, a necessity driven by China's socio-economic development and deepening global engagement. Zhang (2013) further specifies its purpose, carriers, channels, audience, and cross-linguistic, cross-cultural, and

cross-border nature. As a major developing country with a profound historical and cultural heritage, China utilizes international publicity texts to present its developmental achievements and cultural appeal to the world. However, many current international publicity reports are ineffective, failing to align with reality or the psychology of overseas audiences due to overly ideological slogans, simplistic viewpoints, and a harsh tone. The primary difficulties are twofold: linguistic, where structural differences between Chinese and English cause semantic loss; and cultural, where heightened ideological divergences exacerbate discourse decoding deviations (Huang, 2004).

As a pivotal theory in translation studies, Skopos Theory was founded upon core principles articulated by Hans J. Vermeer and others (Reiss & Vermeer, 1984; Vermeer, 1989). Nord (2001) further refined the theory with the "function plus loyalty" model, emphasizing the translator's responsibility to balance communicative purpose and interpersonal relationships in cross-cultural contexts. Newmark (2001) supplemented the theoretical framework with text typology, classifying texts into informative, expressive and vocative types, which provides a basis for defining the functional attributes of international publicity texts. Nida and Taber (2004) proposed the dynamic equivalence theory, shifting the focus of translation from literal correspondence to reader response, which laid a foundation for the development of Skopos Theory. With its unique perspective on translation behavior, Skopos Theory offers novel insights and methods for translation practice. Its application to international publicity translation strategy research directly addresses current practical needs and holds significant relevance.

2. International Publicity Texts

2.1 Distinctive Features of International Publicity Texts

Zhang Jian (2016) pointed out that the characteristics of international publicity translation lie in its nature as a cross-border, cross-cultural and cross-linguistic dissemination. It must fulfill multiple functions such as transmitting information, clarifying facts, and conducting propaganda battles. Its main characteristics are reflected in the following three aspects: the seriousness of sensitive language, the accuracy of transmission and the flexibility of language conversion

2.2 Classifications of International Publicity Texts

Duan Liancheng (1990) classified the international publicity materials into ordinary publicity materials and formal publicity materials. The former refers to the general reports of international publications and the local international publicity brochures, which mainly provide an overview of China's general situation, including politics, economy, society, culture, history, people's lives, scenic spots and historical sites, etc.; while the latter refers to documents: the formal speeches and works of senior leaders, as well as diplomatic talks, economic and trade contracts, legal documents and scientific and technological exchanges, etc.

3. Translation Strategies for Translation of International Publicity Texts from the Perspective of Skopos Theory

The macro-strategies of "domestication" and "foreignization," conceptualized by Venuti (1995), reveal the cultural politics and ethics inherent in translation. Within Skopos Theory, their selection and combination are governed directly by the communicative purpose of the translation. Xiong Bing (2014) systematically classifies translation methods under these two strategies, viewing them as overarching solutions to translation problems. He categorizes methods under foreignization as zero translation, transliteration, word-for-word translation, and literal translation; methods under domestication include free translation, imitation, variation, and recreation, forming a coherent analytical framework.

3.1 Application of Foreignization

Foreignization is essentially "source-author oriented," meaning the translator aligns with the original author, seeking, in Schleiermacher's (2006) terms, to "bring the reader to the author." Skopos Theory posits that translation purpose determines strategy. Foreignization can maximally preserve the linguistic, literary, and cultural features of the source text, allowing target readers to appreciate its foreignness. Zhang (2005) argues that foreignization should adhere to the "function plus loyalty" principle, retaining cultural uniqueness while ensuring comprehension. Jia (2004) adds that text type is a key factor, and pragmatic texts like international publicity are suited to foreignization methods (e.g., literal translation) for conveying distinctive concepts. Reiss (2004) also emphasizes that informative texts (e.g., policy briefings) should prioritize content fidelity, supporting foreignization for objective information transfer. When it comes to applying the strategy of foreignization, several concrete methods can be employed, as detailed and demonstrated below:

3.1.1 Zero Translation

Zero translation means that no translation operation is carried out, and certain components of the source language are directly introduced into the target language.

ST: The NBA has a large number of fans in China.

TT1: NBA 在中国拥有大量球迷。

TT2: 美国职业篮球联赛（NBA）在中国拥有大量球迷。

As a report by the mainstream American media, The New York Times, the source text aims to convey the message "the wide influence of the NBA in China". Based on the three principles of Skopos Theory, TT1's adoption of the zero-translation strategy to directly retain "NBA" in the target text is more reasonable: from the perspective of the Skopos Rule, as a globally recognized abbreviation for a sports organization, "NBA" has achieved a high level of cognitive consensus in Chinese media, social contexts, and daily communication. Direct usage enables the rapid conveyance of the core concept of the "National Basketball Association", avoiding the redundancy of TT2's full translation "美国职业篮球联赛(NBA)" and aligning with the purpose of "efficient information dissemination" in target texts such as news reports and sports commentaries. In terms of the Coherence Rule, "NBA" has been deeply integrated into the Chinese discourse system, posing no obstacles for Chinese fans to understand the nature and cultural

connotations of the league it represents. The expression “NBA 在中国拥有大量球迷” conforms to Chinese readers’ usage habits regarding sports terminology, with a smooth and natural linguistic rhythm. In contrast, TT2’s full-form presentation tends to appear cumbersome in short sentences, undermining the text’s coherence. At the level of the Fidelity Rule, zero translation preserves the original term “NBA” forming a direct correspondence with the English abbreviation. This approach is closer to the concise expressive style of the source text compared to TT2’s full translation and does not add extra explanatory content during the translation process. While ensuring accurate information transmission, it maximally maintains the information density and communication efficiency of the original text.

3.1.2 Transliteration

Transliteration means to convert words from one language to another language with a close approximation in phonetic sound.

ST: The “taikonauts” aboard the spacecraft are conducting a series of scientific experiments.

TT1: 飞船上的“太空人”正在进行一系列科学实验。

TT2: 宇宙飞船上的“宇航员”正在进行一系列科学实验。

The word “taikonauts” is a combination of the Chinese word “太空” and a Greek root “naut”, which means “human beings”, specifically referring to Chinese astronauts. TT1 adopts a transliteration method, translating “taikonauts” as “太空人”, which not only retains the core pronunciation of “taikong” but also conforms to the Chinese word formation habits with the character “人”. Based on Skopos Theory, TT1’s strategy of transliterating “taikonauts” as “太空人” (taikongren) is more reasonable. By preserving the “taiko” (太空) element in its pronunciation through transliteration, TT1 not only aligns with the communicative purpose of conveying the uniqueness of Chinese space culture to international readers, but also ensures linguistic coherence through the acceptability of “太空人” in Chinese contexts. Compared with TT2’s generic free translation “宇航员” (astronaut), TT1 remains more faithful to the source text’s cultural specificity and deep-seated communicative intent.

3.1.3 Word-for-Word Translation

Word-for-word translation is the rendering of text from one language to another one word at a time, without necessarily conveying the sense of the original text. It is also known as literal translation.

ST: Democracy dies in darkness.

TT1: 民主死在黑暗里

TT2: 民主在黑暗中消亡

The source text, from The Washington Post, conveys disappointment and helplessness towards then-President Trump. Based on Skopos Theory and the word-for-word translation approach, TT1’s translation “民主死在黑暗里” (Democracy dies in darkness) is more reasonable. In terms of the skopos rule, as the iconic slogan of The Washington Post, the source text aims to arouse public vigilance against democratic crises through strong linguistic impact. TT1 adopts word-for-word translation to literally render “dies” as “死” (die), using colloquial expression to emphasize the urgency of “democratic collapse”, which better aligns with the slogan’s communicative purpose of “stimulating public attention” than TT2’s

literary free translation “消亡” (perish). From the perspective of word-for-word translation, TT1 strictly follows the lexical structure of the source text. Although it sacrifices some literary elegance in Chinese expression, it retains the concise impact of the source text’s “subject-verb structure + locative adverbial”. In contrast, TT2’s free translation of “dies” weakens the semantic intensity of the original. In terms of the fidelity rule, the literal conversion of words in word-for-word translation creates a direct formal correspondence between the target text and the source text. Within the framework of Skopos Theory, this “formal fidelity” effectively serves the deep-seated communicative intent of “conveying crisis warnings”, ensuring that the core function of the slogan is realized.

3.1.4 Literal Translation

Literal translation refers to a method to render text from one language to another by following closely the form of the source language. Definitely different from word-for-word translation, literal translation shall provide a fluent and accurate translation that is easily comprehended by the readers of the target language.

ST: China’s 5G technology is leading the world in terms of coverage and speed.

TT1: 中国的 5G 技术在覆盖范围和速度方面领先世界

TT2: 中国的 5G 技术凭借其广泛的覆盖范围和超快的速度在全球范围内独占鳌头。

For this example, the literal translation of TT1 better aligns with the characteristics of international publicity texts. This international publicity text aims to accurately convey China’s achievements in the field of technology. TT1 directly translates “leading the world” as “领先世界”, presenting the core content concisely and clearly without adding modifiers such as “广泛的”, “超快的”, “独占鳌头”. in TT2, thus avoiding excessive interpretation of the original information and making the translation more objective and accurate. This literal translation method enables international audiences to accurately understand the global status of China’s 5G technology, highlights China’s actual achievements in the 5G field, helps enhance China’s influence in the international technology sector, and is in line with the goal of international publicity texts to precisely convey China’s technological development information to the international community.

3.2 Application of Domestication

In contrast to foreignization, domestication is "target-reader oriented." The translator approaches the reader, striving, as Schleiermacher (2006) put it, to "lead the original author to the reader." Since a key purpose of publicity is fostering foreign understanding of one's country, domestication strategies can enhance reader comprehension. Chen (2007) proposes that domestication in this context should focus on building audience "identity," adapting to their cognitive habits and values. Yuan (2005) adds that the rationale lies in balancing cultural specificity with audience acceptance, where methods like free translation and variation can mitigate misunderstandings arising from cultural differences.

When it comes to applying the strategy of domestication, several concrete methods can be employed, as detailed and demonstrated below:

3.2.1 Liberal Translation

It is a method to deliver the intended meaning of the source text without paying attention to details such as syntax, style, and so on of the original text.

ST: Europe should aim to speak as one.

TT1: 欧洲应该团结一致，一个鼻孔出气

TT2: 欧洲应该以团结一致为目标

The source text is from *The Economist*. This article intends to convey the trend that Europe is no longer as united and divided as before, because China is at play behind the scenes to get a fragmented Europe to be divided and ruled, maliciously smearing China to advocate the so called “China threat Theory”. The translator of TT1 fully considered the target readers (domestic audience) and perceived the ideological intentions hidden in the original *The Economist*. By adding the Chinese idiom “一个鼻孔出气”, it not only conveys the superficial meaning of “unity”, but also exposes the potential biases and false statements in the original text in a satirical tone, making the translation critical and in line with the purpose of publicity texts to guide domestic readers to correctly understand the inappropriate remarks of foreign media. However, TT2, merely transforms the core meaning of the original text straightforwardly without considering the stance behind the original text or the needs of the target audience. It mechanically conveys the literal meaning and fails to achieve the purpose of exposing and guiding public opinion as an international publicity text. In terms of achieving the translation goal, it is not as effective as TT1.

3.2.2 Imitation

Imitation refers to the situation where the translator is not confined to the semantic details of the original text, nor is he/she confined to its vocabulary and syntactic structure. Instead, the translator “takes the original text as a reference model” (Dryden, 2006).

ST: If China were to send in the army, once an unthinkable idea, the risks would be not only to the demonstrators.

TT1: 如果中国动用军队，那么将不仅仅是给示威者带来风险。

TT2: 如果中国出兵，这曾经是一个不可想象的想法，那么风险将不仅仅是对示威者。

The source text from *The Economist* links the Hong Kong issue with “China’s military intervention”, essentially using false narratives to play up the “China threat theory” and attempt to distort the legitimacy of the Chinese government in safeguarding national sovereignty. In TT1, the method of imitation is adopted: the ideologically inflammatory insert “once an unthinkable idea” is omitted. This expression is essentially a false premise by Western media to strengthen the “China threat theory”, and its omission avoids falling into the narrative trap, aligning with the purpose of foreign propaganda texts to clarify facts. TT2 retains the insert “这曾经是一个不可想象的想法”. Although faithful to the original, it invisibly reinforces the false premise of “China’s possible military intervention”, contradicting the purpose of foreign propaganda texts to “correct misperceptions”.

3.2.3 Variation Translation

While imitation keeps the main idea like the source, variation produces a translation whose content or

emphasis differs. It is used to serve a specific purpose distinct from the author's or to meet target readers' specific needs.

ST: Chinese Parents Defrauded by “Perfect” Education.

TT1: 中国残酷教育环境折磨家长学生

TT2: 中国父母被“完美”教育欺骗

The original text is the title of a report in The Guardian of the United Kingdom. The word “perfect” education is clearly a scathing satire on the domestic education system, and the word “defrauded” has a more derogatory connotation. The translator of TT1 varied the semantic focus of the original text to defuse the relatively strong satirical and derogatory connotations towards the Chinese education system in the original text. The highly ironic “perfect” education is translated as “残酷教育环境” because Chinese people all know that the educational environment in China is very cruel, so for Chinese readers, this translation does not contain much derogatory or ironic meaning. The more derogatory “Chinese parents defrauded” is translated as the less derogatory “折磨家长学生”. After such retranslation, the relatively strong satirical and derogatory intentions in the original text have been greatly reduced in the translation, thereby achieving the translator's specific translation purpose, that is, to meet the psychological expectations and needs of the majority of Chinese readers when reading such foreign media articles.

TT2 translated it literally, retaining the satirical meaning of "perfect" and the strong derogatory meaning of "defrauded" in the original text, without considering the psychological expectations of Chinese readers when reading such articles. Failing to achieve the translator's goal of reducing the satirical and derogatory meaning of the original text is not conducive to the dissemination of such international publicity texts among the target language readers. Liu (2001) summarized common errors in foreign publicity translation, including pragmatic misunderstandings caused by ignoring cultural differences and linguistic rigidities from word-for-word translation, which reminds translators to avoid mechanical literal translation and prioritize communicative effects in variation translation.

3.2.4 Recreation

Recreation refers to a translation method in which the translator, to achieve a specific translation purpose, disregards the meaning and form of the original text and creatively reprocesses it.

ST: China's dominance in electric vehicles is built on state subsidies and market barriers, raising concerns about unfair competition in global markets.

TT1: 中国新能源汽车产业的快速发展得益于政策引导与市场创新，为全球绿色转型提供了高质量、可负担的解决方案。

TT2: 中国在电动汽车领域的领先地位建立在政府补贴和市场壁垒之上，引发对全球市场竞争不公平的担忧。

The Wall Street Journal constructed a negative narrative framework through expressions such as “state subsidies” and “unfair competition”. If translated literally, it would reinforce the Western criticism of China's industrial policies; while the recreation through strategic restructuring transformed “government

subsidies" into "政策引导", replaced "market barriers" with "政策引导", and added "全球绿色转型" as a common goal. This successfully achieved a functional transformation: in terms of purpose compatibility, it shifted from problem-oriented to solution-oriented, aligning with the positive dissemination needs of international propaganda; in terms of audience acceptance, it not only responded to the expectations of developing countries for affordable technologies but also met the attention of the international community to environmental protection issues. This handling neither violated the facts nor achieved political equivalence through contextual supplementation. It perfectly interprets the core principle of the theory of translation that "the translation behavior is determined by its purpose", and is an effective strategy for international propaganda texts to counter Western media biases.

4. Conclusion

This study, grounded in Skopos Theory, has systematically explored the application paths of translation strategies for publicity texts. Study shows that the core of publicity translation lies in being oriented towards the communication purpose and following the principle that "the purpose determines the means". The three principles of Skopos Theory constitute a scientific translation decision-making framework. Among them, the skopos rule, as the highest criterion, requires translators to balance the faithfulness of the original text and the contextual requirements of the target language under multiple goals such as the construction of the national image and the transmission of policy information.

At the level of strategy application, the foreignization and domestication strategies present complementary values: The foreignization strategy retains the characteristics of Chinese culture through methods such as zero translation, transliteration, and literal translation, and is suitable for conveying characteristic concepts; The domestication strategy uses means such as free translation and variation translation and so on to bridge cultural barriers and conform to the cognitive habits of target language readers. This strategic choice not only avoids the semantic loss caused by literal translation, but also avoids the cultural distortion caused by excessive domestication, providing a feasible solution for "translation of Chinese discourse" in cross-cultural communication.

This study provides translators with a strategic framework that considers both political accuracy and communication effectiveness, which is conducive to enhancing the acceptance of international publicity texts in the context of the target language. Subsequent studies can combine the characteristics of new media communication to further explore the adaptability of translation strategies in a dynamic context, providing more specific references for optimizing the practice of international publicity translation.

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