On Translation Skills of Chinese Political Texts from the Perspective of Skopos Theory

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Abstract: *China's change in international status has attracted the attention of more and more people around the world. Political texts translation is an important channel for foreign countries to understand China. Political text is not only a part of politics, but also the final product of politics in many cases. Compared with texts in other fields, it is more constrained and restricted by history, culture, value orientation and ideology. This paper, based on the Skopos Theory, analyzes the stylistic characteristics of political texts, points out the prominent problems to be solved in the translation of political texts with Chinese characteristics, and puts forward the principles and strategies to solve these problems. The main purpose is to highlight the use of Skopos rules in the process of translation practice.*

Keywords: *Political Texts; Translation; Skopos Theory*

1. Introduction

As China's international status continues to rise, more and more countries begin to focus on China. The political text is an important channel for the world to understand China. Therefore, as one of the publicity activities, the political texts have a large number of words with Chinese characteristics. The translation purpose of Chinese political texts is to let foreign readers have a comprehensive and profound understanding of China and achieve their own communicative purposes. The Skopos theory emphasizes that the translation should be meaningful for the target language readers in the target language culture and context. The translation of political publicity texts aims to make foreign readers understand China.

According to the core concept of Skopos Theory, the most important factor in the translation process is the purpose of the overall translation behavior, which determines the translation strategy [1]. Under the guidance of Skopos Theory, the analysis and interpretation of the translation process of political texts will help translators accumulate skills in the translation of such kind of materials and realize the publicity function of political texts.

Under the guidance of Skopos Theory, this paper analyzes the stylistic characteristics of political texts. The translators can make full use of diverse translation strategies to deal with different words with Chinese characteristics in the translation of the political publicity texts.

2. Skopos Theory

Skopos Theory is a mainstream school of German functional translation theory, which has experienced four stages of development [2]. In the first stage, in 1971, Katharina Reiss created a translation criticism model based on the functional relationship between the source text and the target text [3]. The text function is included in the translation criticism. The function and purpose of the translation should be considered first when judging the translation [4]. Reiss's theory laid the foundation for the birth of the Skopos Theory [5]. In the second stage, Hans J·Vermeer developed and inherited Reiss's functional translation theory and put forward three rules of Skopos Theory, namely, skopos rule, coherence rule and fidelity rule [6]. In the third stage, Justa Holz-Manttari put forward the concept of "translation behavior", and believed that the purpose of translation was to achieve cross-cultural communication, and the purpose of the text determined the inherent value of the text. In the fourth stage, Christiane Nord put forward the concept of "function plus fidelity". Here, "fidelity" refers to the translator's ethics and morality, which means that the translator should respect the source text author

and make the translation faithful to the author [7].

There are three rules in the Skopos Theory, namely, skopos, coherence and fidelity. The Skopos rule is the primary principle of the theory. This rule holds that translation should be able to produce meaning in the culture and environment of the target language, and can act in the way expected by the target language recipient [8]. The purpose of translation determines the whole process of translation. Generally, "purpose" refers to the communicative purpose of the translation, that is, the communicative function of the translation to the target language readers in the target language cultural context. The rule of coherence refers to the readability and acceptability of the translation, which can be accepted and understood by the target language readers, and the translation can play a role in the target language culture. The rule of fidelity means that the source text and the target text are mutually equivalent in information, not only in terms of structure and sentence pattern, but also in the process of translation, which advocates translators to find out the core relationship between the source text and the target text from the perspective of translation purpose [9].

3. Comparison of Chinese and English characteristics

Behind different languages are differing social cultures and ways of thinking. Chinese is a paratactic language, and the subject is often omitted; English is a hypotactic language, which focuses on indicating the subject of the sentence [10]. Chinese uses more verbs, while English uses more nouns. The active voice is often used in Chinese, and the passive voice is often used in English. Chinese is good at induction, making a summary or stating the main event at the end of the sentence, while English is distinctive in its deductive thinking, and is used to explaining the conclusion or main event first, and then explaining the specific details or reasons. Chinese also has its own unique cultural words. The translator must be familiar with the differences between the two languages and the differences in the thinking of readers in the two languages, so that the translation can play its role in the context of the target language and be accepted and understood by the target language readers under their culture and context.

4. An analysis of the stylistic characteristics of political texts

Political text refers to a text used in a political context, that is, a specific discourse used to achieve a particular political function. It mainly focuses on domestic or international political issues. Most of these texts are issued and published in the name of institutions, with prominent anonymity and normativity features. The personal intentions and tendencies of the actual producers of the text are not important, and the information conveyed by the text should be consistent with the overall ideology of the country. Andre Lefevere even believes that "ideology determines the translator's basic translation strategies, and also determines his approaches to translate those issues related to language and 'cultural diversity' in the original text (concepts, customs, and habits belonging to the original author)." [11]

The content of the political texts is objective. Chinese and English readers have different cultural backgrounds and their own ways of thinking. How to grasp the in-depth meaning of the source text, accurately use words to translate the text, and make the English version achieve its publicity function in the target culture and context are challenges for translators to deal with. Skopos Theory pays attention to the realization of the function and purpose of the translation [12]. Under the guidance of Skopos Theory, the accumulation of translation skills through the studies on the political texts is conducive to improving the ability of translators. The following parts will analyze the stylistic characteristics of political texts and combines them with the use of Skopos rules.

4.1. Analysis from the perspective of text function

Political texts, mostly involving major national policies and basic principles, concern a country's political influence and national image, and also directly reflect the political attitude, standpoint and thought of the author or speaker, which can be classified as "Authoritative Text" in Peter Newmark's "Expressive Text" [13]. However, the ultimate purpose of political texts is also to convey information to the audience and persuade them to believe what government agencies say and plan to do, so as to win the support of the audience and trigger action. Therefore, it can also be regarded as "Vocative Text". Therefore, in the context of source language, political texts not only serve as authoritative texts with author-centered expressive functions, but also emphasize audience-centered vocative functions. However, whether the translation should take into account both functions in the target context or what

specific functions it should achieve depends on the translation motivation of the speaker and the target audience. Most importantly, the translation should conform to the Skopos theory. The core is that the translation process is determined by the ultimate goal of translation behavior and the expected effect of translation, that is, the translation goal determines the translation means, and the expected translation effect determines the ways of post-processing of translation.

Most translations of political texts have relatively clear ideological norms, which serve the world view of the ruling regime. It is characterized by the direct intervention of government organizations, macro policies and dictatorship policies in translation work. Therefore, in general, the client defaults to be a government organ or related organization, and political nature is the first criterion for translation. For example, when it refers to the speeches of leaders on different occasions, the default translation client is the government of the country. According to the Skopos rule, the focus of translation is to accurately and effectively communicate the political ideas of the leader and the group, class, party or society he represents.

The audiences of political texts in the source language culture can be divided into two types. Firstly, texts, such as President Trump's inaugural address and Deng Xiaoping's talk with Mrs. Thatcher, are targeted at specific political groups. They are communication between political figures. Secondly, some other texts, like President Trump's inaugural address and Chinese government work reports over the years, are aimed at a wider audience, which are the communication between political and non-political figures. When the audience group of the translation in the target language culture is different, the translation should enable them to grasp the views, positions and decisions of the originator of the text on specific political behaviors. If the target audience is relatively independent both in terms of practical interests and social & cultural norms, the translation should consider making full use of Skopos rules to influence the target audience.

Therefore, whether it is a political institution or organization serving as a translation client or a target audience, it is required that the political text translation should realistically and accurately express the "individual political thoughts" of the text, reproduce the "expression" elements of the text, and thereby achieve its "expressive function" in the target language culture, with the "informative function" and "vocative function" of the translation ranking second. It is important for a translator to properly address distinctive collocations, original metaphors, neologisms, dialects, unconventional sentence patterns, etc. in the text when translating, and these texts cannot be routinely treated in accordance with the norms of the target language [14]. The linguistic form of the source language is also an important part of its expressive function. To be specifically, the rule of fidelity must be taken into consideration.

4.2. Analysis from the perspective of cross-cultural communication

Political texts have a strong ideological tendency and are rooted in local culture. Both in form and content, political texts contain a large number of local elements and involve extremely complex cultural factors, such as national conditions, public opinions, customs, idioms and allusions, which are extremely common in political texts.

However, there are great differences and even conflicts between Chinese and foreign cultures. Foreigners are different from Chinese people in language, culture, mode of thinking, national psychology, historical background, living habits and other aspects, so specific expressions based on Chinese culture may have different meanings for the target audience. In order to achieve its expected purposes, the translated political text should eliminate the differences in understanding caused by cultural factors as far as possible, and publicize the national culture and political ideas to the target language audience to the greatest extent.

However, it is also one of the demands of political text translation to promote the dissemination and use of political expressions and cultural words with national characteristics. As a result, whether to adopt "domestication" translation to ensure "being authentic" or to insist on "foreignization" translation to achieve "being characteristic" has become an open question, especially the translation of cultural words with local characteristics is the most controversial. In fact, culture itself is a kind of dynamic communication, and translation also falls into this category. In the process of interpreting words with Chinese characteristics, the translator should fully consider that the purpose of translation is to spread Chinese culture, and at the same time, the target language audience can clearly understand the meaning and ideas conveyed by the text. By this way, an ideal translation can be reached which is most in line with Chinese cultures and most acceptable to foreigners.

From the above analysis, it can be seen that political text translation needs to concentrate on two problems: first, how to realize the core expressive function of the texts; Second, how to deal with the expressions with cultural features, especially how to effectively realize the cross-language communication of abstract political concept words. However, when taking the Skopos Theory into account, translators are able to settle these problems.

5. Translation strategies of political texts from the Perspective of Skopos Theory

Although there are many reasons for the formation of political words with Chinese characteristics, the emergence of these words is ultimately aimed at promoting China's internationalization and boosting more frequent international cultural exchanges. This requires staff engaged in foreign publicity translation to master Chinese culture while paying attention to certain translation principles and strategies. The principles followed in translating Chinese political texts are different. The following part is a detailed description of the strategies often used by Chinese and foreign media in translating such kind of texts from the perspective of Skopos theory.

First of all, literal translation is a translation method that directly translates the meaning of words in the original text into the target text. Literal translation requires maintaining the form and content of the original text, especially the metaphor and image possessed by the original text. For example, the translation version of "paper tiger" by Chinese and foreign media can make foreigners understand the meaning of it at a glance. Nowadays, this word has already been an official word in English. Literal translation focuses more on faithfulness to the original text, which accords with the fidelity rule.

If the above method cannot accurately express certain political words with Chinese characteristics, it is necessary to adopt a liberal translation method. The liberal translation method refers to the semantic translation of political words, rather than the word for word interpretation. From the perspective of international language communication and cultural exchange, liberal translation pays more attention to the independence of Chinese cultural system, indicating that the characteristics of Chinese culture are not easily disturbed by foreign ones. For example, a "layman" is reasonably explained through liberal translation by achieving a simple and clear translation of the original word while making it easier for readers to accept. Unlike literal translation, liberal translation focuses more on the smoothness of the target text, which is more consistent with the coherence rule of Skopos Theory.

Sometimes, the translation of many Chinese political words cannot express the most appropriate lexical meaning through simple liberal or literal methods, in which case it is necessary to use interpretive methods to translate. Firstly, it is important to clarify the meaning of this strategy, that is, to interpret the meaning of the original words at a deeper level to make them clearer. The interpretive method is divided into literal translation plus interpretation and transliteration plus interpretation. For example, "shuangying (win-win)", "the movement of five stresses, four points of beauty and three aspects of love (stresses on decorum, manners, hygiene, discipline and morals; beauty of mind, language, behavior and the environment; love of the motherland, socialism and the Communist Party)".

There is another strategy that can be adopted in the translation, namely, corresponding translation. Countries, regions, and individuals have different perceptions and understandings of objective things, but there are many similarities to some extent. Chinese and foreign media often encounter this situation when translating political words: some words have similar meanings, structures, pronunciations or internal meanings. In this case, Chinese and foreign media generally use the corresponding translation method to translate political words with Chinese characteristics with equivalent translations, which can not only expresses the original connotation, but also makes foreigners better understand. For example, a famous statement announced by the Chinese Ministry of Foreign Affair is translated into "if you play with fire, you will get burned". Such kind of translation method strictly abides by the fidelity rule of Skopo Theory.

6. Conclusion

The political text is a text with strong purpose. Its translation requires the translator to consider the national interests, political influence and other important factors. Secondly, because the text itself needs to achieve the function of publicity and communication, it should be translated under the guidance of Skopos Theory by taking into account the culture, context and readers of the target language, so that the translation can achieve its function. Under the guidance of Skopos Theory, when analyzing the

translation process of political texts, the translator should clearly consider the text functions and cross-cultural differences. In addition, translators need to accurately control the meaning of words, comprehensively consider national interests, political positions and other factors, and select the most appropriate words for translation activities. Translation is not a simple language conversion, but a process of communication between different cultures. The success of communication directly affects the translation effect of the two languages. As an essential and important part of foreign publicity, the translation of political texts is the main way to achieve the dissemination and exchange of Chinese culture. By studying the strategies of translating Chinese political texts, translators will make more contribution in further promoting cultural exchanges at home and abroad, hence Chinese voice will be heard in the world.

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