



A Study on English-Chinese News Translation From the Perspective of Functionalism

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Abstract

This paper focuses on the analysis of journalistic translation from the perspective of Functionalism. Functionalism is supposed to be a theoretic system with various translating standards led by the targets. It consists of the typology theory of text, the Skopostheorie, the theory of translation action and a series of approaches by Nord on the improvement and supplements of those theories. Functionalism escapes the bounds of equivalence by challenging the traditional translation theories highlighting the texts. It analyses the translation action not only by the linguistics but also within the frame of Act Theory and Tran Cultural Theory. Thus, the Functionalism, by which the translators could pay more attention to the readers as well as the social effects and the communicative function, could appeal to the practice better. The Functionalism introduces a brand new thinking to the study of translation. This paper focuses on coping with the practical problems of news translation on the basis of Nord's approaches with a news report as a study case. After that, it will review the official translation edition to reach a conclusion.

Key words: Functionalism; News translation; Translation strategies

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INTRODUCTION

News English has its only style, different from any other form of written materials. Therefore, different translation methods should be adopted to cater for the requirement of a proper version of news translation. However, there are few theories to guide news English-Chinese translation practice for the moment. Therefore, there is a call for a theory to guide the news translation. Compared with other traditional translation theories, German Functionalism is more feasible for the translation of applied texts, which provides translators with a brand-new perspective of treating the source text, giving translators more freedom but at the same time demonstrating the guidelines and principles. This paper concentrates on the discussion of the News Translation between Chinese & English from the perspective of the German's Functionalism translation theories. In this paper, the author tries to introduce functionalism into news translation, and summarize some specific translation strategies and techniques by putting the theory into practice.

Owing to the specialty of the news writing style, the translation of news turns out to be more complicated and feasible compared to regular translation. To cater for the requirement of a proper version of news translation, different translation method should be adopted.

1. LITERATURE REVIEW

In this paper, the author will try to introduce German Functionalism into news translation, and summarize some specific translation strategies and techniques by putting the theory into practice.

Functionalism, which came into existence in German in 1970s, did not come into being overnight. There were many different kinds of translation theories at that time, for instance, the traditional equivalence conception, which means a relationship of equal value between words, phrases, sentences, and syntactic structures of the

source text and the target text. According to this theory, the importance of the source text is highlighted, which requires the characteristics of the source text such as the content and style, must be preserved in the translation. But translators have to admit that it is difficult to attain such equivalence sometimes with the existence of the pragmatic difference in two cultures.

To solve those problems, Katharina Reiss, founder of the Functionalism, put forward her translation theory called text typology. The core concept of the theory is that text type decides the translation strategies (Reiss, 2004). Then her student Hans J. Vermeer established Skopostheorie, a fundamental theory on functionalism, which states that a translational action is determined by its skopos, a Greek word which means the purpose of the target text. Skopostheorie refers to the Skopos Theory. According to Vermeer, the pioneer of Skopostheorie, the purpose of the translation action determines the translation process (Vermeer, 2000). Later, Justa Holz Manttari advanced her theory of translation action. She began to analyze the actionable aspects of the translation process, such as the roles of actual participants and the situational conditions.

These theories mainly explain that different text types require different translation strategy, and that the purpose of translational action decides the translation process (Vermeer, 2000), and that translators should consider the actionable aspects of translation process such as participants and situations. Using these theories as a foundation, Nord summarized that the intended communicative function of the target text determines the translation strategy.

For a long time, since Functionalism was introduced to China, some Chinese pioneers have been devoted to its study and promotion. Through their long-term research and discussion, Chinese scholars have made considerable achievements on the study of Functionalism to China, contributing to a better understanding of Functionalism for and providing a crucial source of reference for this thesis.

In 1997, Christiane Nord wrote the book *Translation as a Purposeful Activity: Functionalist Approaches Explained*. She summarized the previous theories and also put forward her viewpoint. Functionalism, according to Nord, is a methodological approach where the translator's decisions are governed by the intended function of the target text which determines the strategies of translation. It is supposed to be the core and foundation of the Functionalism (Nord, 2001), and also works as the crucial guidance in this paper.

On the basis of the three types of text, informative, expressive and operative, Reiss, Nord put forward four basic functions of text, namely, referential, expressive, appellative and phatic. The referential function of an expression includes reference to the objects of the world, perhaps the fictional one (Nord, 2001). The expressive

function in Nord's model refers to the sender's attitude toward the objects and phenomena of the world (Nord, 2006). Directed at the readers' feelings, the appellative function intends to induce them to respond in a particular way (Nord, 2001). The phatic function aims at beginning, keeping and ending a contact between translators and readers. It depends on the different changes of the linguistic and non-linguistic elements, and even the paralinguistic factors (Nord, 2006).

Nord categorized the translation process into two basic types: documentary translation and instrumental translation. The former aims at producing in the target language a kind of document of a communicative communication where the original-cultural senders communicate the original-cultural receivers in the original cultural condition. The latter means to provide an kind of instrument for the new communication between the original-culture senders and target-culture receivers (Nord, 2005). Nord thought that the most useful part of functionalism is brief translation, source-text analysis and avoiding translation problems. Source-text analysis can guide the translation process and help to answer the questions as follows: a. Whether the translation task is feasible; b. Which source text units are relevant to a functional translation; c. What translation strategy can make the target text meet the requirement of the translation brief.

Comparison of the translation brief with the result of source-text analysis can reveal the translation problems, which can be classified into pragmatic, cultural, linguistic and text-specific problems.

- i. Pragmatic translation problems: come from the difference between situations in source text and that in target text. They can be identified by checking on the factors such as sender, receiver, medium, time, place, motive and text function. They, presenting in every translation task, are regarded as the most important problems to deal with in the initial period of translator training.
- ii. Culture translation problems: arise from the difference between the conventions in source language culture and that in target language culture, which guide verbal and non-verbal behaviors. They exist in almost every translation task, especially in instrumental translations.
- iii. Linguistic translation problems: emerge when the two languages have structural differences in vocabulary, syntax and super segmental features. Text-specific translation problems: ones that happen only to a particular source text, such as illogical arrangement of information, disordered language, redundant expressions and so on.

The traditional approach of translation process starts from the source language element. Translators try to translate sentence by sentence or even word by word, polish it stylistically until it is acceptable for the intended

communicative situation. This bottom-up process starts from the linguistic structure to conventions and finally to pragmatics. The translation quality may largely depend on the translator's competence and translators may not see how the text functions as a whole in the communicative situation.

While in the functional translation, the process is top-down, starting from the pragmatic level. Translators first decide the intended function of the translation, documentary or instrumental. And they distinguish the functional elements to be reproduced as the source-text and the ones to be adjusted in the target text. Then they decide whether the Translated text should conform to source- culture or target-culture conventions as for the translation style. After that they begin to consider the difference in language system. Whether a translation is proper or not is not decided by itself, but by the communicative function it is expected to achieve. The principle of function plus loyalty offers translators freedom to adjust the text, while at the same time it limits the adjustment in a certain range.

2. CASE STUDIES ON THE FUNCTIONAL TRANSLATION APPROACHES OF NORD

Before the discussion of news translation, here first comes the exploration of the comparison between the genre convention of English and Chinese news closely related to the translation between them.

- Difference A: Although Chinese news headlines are also required to be clear and concise as English one, they are relatively more specific than the English ones, in providing subject or time or place, or other introductory and explanative information.
E.g. (a) lun-dun er-ling-yi-er nian ao-yun qian da-zao zui huan-bao cheng-shi
London eyes "greenest" city by 2012 (China Daily)
In E.g. (a), the underlined part is added to make the news better understood. It is not only a time adverbial modifier, but also tells the aim for which the "greenest" city is built.
- Difference B: Although various figures of speech and rhetorical devices are used both in English and Chinese news to make the news vivid and impressive, the expressional conventions of them differ a lot due to their different environment as well as different values and religions. Allowing for that, it is better to rewrite it rather than transform it stiffly.
E.g. (b) Drink like a fish (China Daily)
niu yin (which means drink like an ox)
Britain is an island country, so English has more words and expressions about fish and water. China lies in the Asian continent and people's life is closely associated with land and cultivating. When we describe someone drink a lot of water quickly we say "niu yin".

- Difference C: A few of differences lie in the syntactic order and way of expression for the journalistic writing between the two languages.
E.g. (c) You guan-yuan biao-shi yi-ming tong-guo dao-yong xue-sheng shen-fen
bang-zhu zi-ji qin-qi shang da-xue de lao-shi bei jiang-ji

A teacher who allegedly helped a relative be admitted into university by stealing the identity of one of his students has been and demoted, an official said. (*China Daily*)

In the English news, usually the news source "who said it" is put at the end of the lead while in Chinese, it is often put at the beginning, which can be seen from the translation of the underline part in E.g. (c).

The translation approaches of functionalism consist of Translation Brief, Source-text Analysis and Translation Problems. The paper introduces parts of a Chinese report as the case to study on the application of the Translation Approaches into news translation, followed the evaluation on the official translation edition based on the Functionalism translation theory.

In the following part the author is going to analyze a journalistic report from Xinhua News Agency, partly introduced as the case to explain how to apply the translation approaches into news translation, followed the evaluation on the official English translation edition released on Xinhua Online from the perspective of Functionalism theory. Functionalism Translation Approaches consists of three phases: Translation Brief, Source-text Analysis and Translation Problems. The paper will apply the approaches to the above news report in phases.

The translation approach starts from the establishment of the Translation Brief for a translation text. Here it refers to the news report above. The paper concludes its translation brief.

- ◆ Step 1: The (intended) text function(s)

Referential (information about the celebration of the 90th anniversary of "May Fourth Movement") and expressive (expression of China's view on the spirit of the "May Fourth Movement")

- ◆ Step 2: The target-text address(es)

Readers from Xinhua. Online, most of them are westerners from English-speaking countries, ranging from officials, businessmen to travelers in China. They have no adequate background knowledge of China but they are interested in China. Some of the readers are overseas Chinese who are learning English and Chinese.

- ◆ Step 3: The (prospective) time and place of text reception

Immediately after the news is released, in western countries as well as in China

- ◆ Step 4: The medium over which the text will be transmitted

- ◆ Step 5: The motive for the production or reception of the text

Report the event and deliver China's opinion to foreign readers

This translation brief contributes to understand the basic requirement of this translation task. The task is concluded as follows:

(i) In order to achieve the intended functions, the translated news should conform to journalistic genre and style conventions of English.

(ii) The translator should take account of the prospective readers' cultural background, their reading expectation and their knowledge on the target language.

(iii) The text must fit into the limited space provided by website.

(iv) The translation can be adapted in some way.

According to Nord, the intended communicative function of the target text decides the translation strategies, but he also attached great importance to the analysis of the source text, for comparison between the source text in the situation and the translation brief can help the translator to decide the best way to transform the information.

To begin with, comparison between the intended function of the source text and that of target text can lead to the conclusion of what type of translation should be taken. Also, comparison between the intended readers of the source text and those of the target text can make the translator know the readers' difference in cultural background and their different expectations so that he can adjust the explicit and implicit information given in his translation.

For this news, the text function of the first paragraph is referential, providing the information about the celebration of "May Fourth Movement" and the attendees. The function of the speech delivered by Li Changchun is both expressive and appellative, expressing his view on the spirit of "May Fourth Movement" and calling on the Chinese people to unite and fight for a better country. And the function of the underlined paragraph is expressive, expressing the journalist's emotion. So the functions of the source text can be summarized as referential, expressive and persuasive.

The intended readers of the source text are Chinese people while those of the target text are westerners. Chinese readers are familiar with the Chinese history, but few of the English readers know it. And the latter will not have interest in the songs sung for the celebration, for they have hardly heard of them. Most of the westerners are just interested in the information of the event and China's political views. And they are not the objects for the persuasive function, so the persuasive function should give way to other function in the translation.

In view of the readers' difference in cultural background, the explicit and implicit information of the text need to be adjusted. And their difference in reading interest may require a selection of information in translation, which cater to the target readers' expectations.

The mediums are different for the source text and target text. Allowing for the target readers' limitation of the source-language knowledge, the translation needs explanation and expansion. For the limited space provided by newspaper, the translator probably need to delete some parts to keep the text to a certain length.

The above analysis of the source-text in combination with translation brief shows clearly what kind of the source-text information can be kept invariant and what has to be adjusted according to the translation purpose.

After working out the translation brief and analyzing the source text, here comes to the stage of solving translation problems. In the functional translation process, there is hierarchy of translation problems, starting from pragmatic problems, and then cultural problems, linguistic problems, to text-specific problems. The problems should be solved in a top-down order, by using addition, omission, adaptation and edition.

a) Problem 1: Pragmatic Problems

The pragmatic problems can be identified by analyzing the extra-linguistic elements such as sender, receiver, medium, time, place, motive and text functions. Then the decision on what kind of information is important and what kind of information could be omitted is made.

The structure of the Chinese news headline is in the form of "head plus subhead". But most English news reports tend to use a single headline. This should be adapted in the translation. As the intended readers are foreigners, it is better to tell them it is news about China, especially when it is among international news. The English news headline cannot be too long to include all the information in the Chinese one. So here the key words should be retained and the others be omitted. "wu si yun dong 90 zhou nian" is most important information, but "90th anniversary of May Fourth Movement" may confuse the foreign readers, so it is advisable to add it theme "ai guo zhu yi" - patriotism.

b) Problem 2: Cultural Problems

Sometimes it is necessary to add some explanation or background information to the translation so as to help the intended readers to understand the information which is self-evident for the source-text readers.

In the news, the first paragraph of the source text mentioned "wu si yun dong" - "May Fourth Movement", which is all unfamiliar concept for foreign readers. So an explanation is necessary in the translation.

c) Problem 3: Linguistic Problems

As chapter I has mentioned, there are a lot differences in the English and Chinese news convention. In translation, these linguistic problems should be solved, making the target text conform to the convention of the target language.

(i) for headline:

It can be learnt from part I that English headlines usually have the characteristics of omitting articles, using present tense and preferring short words.

(ii) for lead in:

Chinese lead and English one are usually different in syntactic order and way of expression. This Chinese lead adopts the pattern of time, person, place and action while the English lead usually stresses the important information. Besides, we should also pay attention to the tense and voice used in English version. Also considering the pragmatic problems, explanation of the “May Fourth Movement” and adjustment of the sentence order are necessary.

d) Problem 4: Text-specific Problems

Text-specific problems occur only in a particular source text. For news translation, there is no need to consider the problems such as illogical or disordered sentences.

According to Functionalism, the translator’s decisions are governed by the intended function of the target text or any of its parts which determines the translation strategy. That is to say, to judge or evaluate a translation is not by itself, but by the text function which it is supposed to achieve, which works as the clear theoretic guidance to evaluate the official translation in this thesis.

Through the translation brief analyzed above, the intended function of the target-text is referential and informative, and the target-text addressees are readers of Xinhua Online, most of whom are westerners from English-speaking countries. They have no adequate background knowledge of China but they are interested in China. Therefore, the translated news should conform to journalistic genre and style conventions of English in order to achieve the functions.

Concern 1: For headline

It is explained in Chapter1 that compared to Chinese headlines, most English ones turn out more concise.

Therefore, firstly, for the subhead of the above Chinese news report should be omitted in the translation. Secondly, The English news headline cannot be too long to include all the information in the Chinese one. So here the key words should be retained and the others be omitted. Thirdly, It can be inferred from the news that “wu si yun dong 50 zhou nian” is most important information, but “90th anniversary of May Fourth Movement” may confuse the foreign readers, so it is advisable to add its theme swx “ai guo zhu yi” - patriotism.

In terms of the official edition, the headline “China marks 90th anniversary of “May Fourth Movement” reviving patriotism”, according to the Functionalism theory, works very well. Firstly, it points out the essence of the news by some brief words with the subhead omitted, which conform to the English news writing. Secondly, it adds the word “patriotism” to the headline so that the theme of the news turns out more specific to the foreign readers.

Concern 2: For lead

Firstly, Chinese lead and English one are usually different in syntactic order and way of expression. The Chinese news adopts the pattern of time, person, place and action in its lead while the English lead usually stresses

the important information. In the lead of the Chinese news, it mentioned many Chinese leaders (Hu Jintao, Wu Bangguo, Wen Jiabao, Jia Qinglin, Li Changchun, and Xi Jinping).

These names are put in the place of sentence subject as important information in the Chinese news. In the English translation, they are considered not so important, and can be put outside the lead.

It can be founded the lead of the official edition focuses on the event itself with other factors ignored, appealing to the writing style of English lead.

Concern 3: For body

In the first paragraph of the body, the journalist wrote with his personal emotion, which seems not objective to the target addressees who do not have much knowledge of China or do not hold the same position as Chinese people. Therefore, they may feel confused for this paragraph, and they hardly have heard of these songs. Thus, the whole paragraph failing to be the key information for the addressees does not need translating word by word. As for the official translation, it pays attention to the translation of this paragraph, just keeping the main idea of the paragraph avoiding translation word by word.

For the key information: the “May Fourth Movement”, for the target-text addressees (mainly foreign readers) may not know much about the background of this event, which will cause the translation fails to achieve the text functions (referential and informative). Therefore it is necessary to add some background information. It can be seen that the official edition adds the background information in the last paragraph “The May Fourth Movement started with mass student protests on May 4, 1919...”

Concern 4: Summary

According to the Functionalism, a translation which can achieve the text function could be seen as a good one. It can be founded that this translation of the Chinese news report clearly conveys the information about the celebration of the 90th anniversary of “May Fourth Movement” to foreign readers and states China’s view on the spirit of the “May Fourth Movement”. That is to say, it succeeds in achieving the text function - referential and expressive function. Therefore, under the Functionalism, it is an excellent translation.

CONCLUSION

This paper discusses the translation approaches of functionalism from many regards including its origin, content, and application mainly in news translation between Chinese and English on the basis of a case study China Marks 90th Anniversary of “May Fourth Movement” Reviving Patriotism. The process of its application consists of three phases: the translation brief, source-text analysis and translation problems.

For the phase of translation brief, the translator is supposed to figures out the intended text function

(referential, expressive, appellative or phatic). For news, it usually has the referential function. This can be the fundamental principle of translation for a translator. Also he should know the intended readers and their expectation, the time and place for the news to release, the medium over which the news will be transmitted, and the motive for the production or reception of the news.

Then comes to the phase of source-text analysis, which decides the translation type to be adopted (documentary translation or instrumental translation). By comparison between the translation brief and source-text analysis, the translator can discover the translation problems involved, such as pragmatic, cultural, linguistic, and text-specific problems. Problem solving should comply with a top-down order, during which the translator can make some adjustments (addition, omission, and adaptation), as long as the translation text carries out the intended function and meets the expectation of the readers. It caters for the requirement of news translation and can be put into news translation practice.

The Translation Theory of Functionalism, rooting in the function of the text and function of translation and breaking the traditional thinking model, dedicates to the very balance between the literal translation and free translation. It settles the specific and practical standards for translations of various texts, providing a good theoretical guidance for news translation.

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