

Translation of Economic Literature and Political Terms With Chinese Characteristics: A Brief Literature Review

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Abstract

Economic texts are usually the required translation materials for MTI students in finance and economics universities. The topic includes taxation, accounting, economy, finance, commerce, international trade and etc., which are highly professional, full of abundant terms, and characterized with China's socialist market economy. The theoretical perspectives of these translation studies range from functional equivalence theory, text typology to skopos theory. After collecting academic journals and graduation theses of scholars from domestic colleges and universities, the author of this paper concludes relevant research literature into the translation of economic literature and translation of political terms, and summarizes the research status of domestic scholars, especially MTI students, on the mastery and application of translation theories, so as to provide some references for further studies in this field.

Key words: Translation of economic literature; Translation of political terms; Functional equivalence theory; Text typology; Skopos theory

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INTRODUCTION

On August 17, 2021, the 10th meeting of the Central

Committee for Financial and Economic Affairs proposed such reform keywords as “common prosperity”, “primary distribution, redistribution, and tertiary distribution”. Fiscal policy and fiscal reform, as the institutional mechanism design in the field of redistribution, will play an irreplaceable role on the road to common prosperity. Under the circumstances, China will focus on the problems such as uncoordinated development between urban and rural areas, as well as inequality in the distribution of income. Simultaneously, our taxation system should also balance fairness and efficiency so as to provide an institutional guarantee for the solid promotion of common prosperity. It is through common prosperity that China has shown the world that a new type of society in the 21st century can be more equal, fairer and more inclusive. Therefore, in the process of multilingual translation and cross-border communication, economic texts, especially political and economic literature with Chinese characteristics, are of profound guidance and reference for bridging language gaps and exchanging economic philosophies.

1. PREVIOUS STUDIES ON THE TRANSLATION OF ECONOMIC LITERATURE

Based on the books and articles available, the previous studies on the translation of economic texts can be further analyzed from the following three perspectives:

1.1 Perspective of Functional Equivalence Theory

Adopting appropriate translation guiding theories is a common approach for conducting studies on the translation of economic texts, among which functional equivalence theory put forward by American linguist Eugene Nida is used for the most times. Functional equivalence theory highlights equivalence in language

and culture and reorganizes the form and structure of information in a proper way.

Lin Qiuxian (2014) and Zhao Xi (2014) apply Nida's translation theory to their translation tasks, concluding that translating economic texts, especially with tax features, can be a real challenge for translators in comprehending and explaining the source text. Thus, in the meaning aspect, Lin emphasizes that translators should take the readers' feelings into consideration and carefully read relevant cultural background knowledge to avoid mistranslation. In addition, based on the English translation of *Improving the Tax System amid the Rule-of-Law China* (excerpts), Ni Ziqian (2020) adds that translators should try to convey the proper names in tax law phrases, the expressions with Chinese characteristics, as well as the significant historical events in order to help readers have a better understanding about the text. In a similar manner, Zhu Qing (2010) and Tang Qi (2015) have a discussion about the proper translation of research reports on taxation. They both argue that a minimal translation error or deviation may result in wide divergence. Moreover, Pan Lingling (2013) chooses the English translation of *Chinese Economy at the Crossroads* (excerpt) to illustrate the unique features of economic literature, specifically the expertise and normalization, and Li Changshuan (2016) probes deeper into this field and analyzes the translation of tax deduction & tax credit, tax refund & tax return, etc. Likewise, Kang Jingxin and Han Xue (2020) focus on the problems of translating proper nouns, abbreviations and terminology of economic texts, which coincides with the one brought by Qiang Yanyan and Duan Wujin (2021) who analyze and compare the different Chinese translations of technical terminology in securities. They both stress that translators should grasp the true meaning of the terms and translate them as precise as possible. In the style aspect, Zhao gives abundant examples cited from financial translation to manifest that Nida's functional equivalence theory can also be applied to economic translation by achieving equivalence in meaning and style so as to realize the ultimate goal of economic translation -- serving for cooperation and communication. Considering that there are many zero-subject sentences and long sentences in Chinese, Ma Zhichao (2015) deems that translators must deal with these sentences flexibly according to the specific situations rather than stick to the source text. Zhang Daina (2019) suggests that for the sake of communication, translators should use proper strategies to make sure the fluency of translation, which can make the target readers have the similar response as the original readers.

Under the guidance of Nida's translation theory, Sun Zizhong (2015) and Li Honghong (2020) analyze the characteristics of economic texts in vocabulary, syntax and discourse in detail, and take domestication into study to explore translation strategies in economic texts. Sun also

summarizes the feelings and experiences in the process of translation from three aspects -- hardware, software and translation habits of a translator. The hardware refers to the selection and usage of various available tools for translators, including both paper dictionaries and online auxiliary equipment; and the software means the translator's literature cultivation which consists of bilingual capability, cultural sensitivity and attitudes. Similarly, Lei Xiaohong (2018) analyzes and concludes the methods applied in the translation of *Quebec Tax System*, such as word additions, word order adjustments, division, anaphora and cohesion from lexical, syntactic and discourse level, aiming at exploring the applicability of functional equivalence theory to the translation of economic texts.

1.2 Perspective of Text Typology

Since economic literature belongs to informative texts, Katharina Reiss's text type theory is also a popular approach for conducting studies on the translation of economic texts. Among the translation reports of MTI students, many argue that translators should pay attention to the accuracy, simplicity, objectivity and logicity of information transmission. Zhang Weiyao (2019), by taking the article *The Joy of Tax* as a case study, makes a detailed analysis and summary of the translation strategies used at lexical level concerning terminologies and culture-loaded words; at syntactic level related to passive and compound sentences; and at discourse level about textual cohesion and coherence. Ma Juan (2020), choosing the academic work *Studies on the Improvement of China's Social Security System* as a research object, adds that literal translation and annotation are used in the translation of culture-loaded words while free translation is used in the translation of vague words so that the target text can more accurately convey the meaning of the source text. Besides, Zhang Xiao (2019) applies Reiss's theory to the translation practice and proves its effectiveness in the result-oriented C-E translation work. Tang Qi (2016) takes *Journal of Finance and Accounting* as a case study, and finds that nominalization and passive voice are used to make the translation more objective; that abbreviations and omissions make the translation more concise; and that complex sentences make the logic of sentences more clear. In conclusion, Zhu Rongxiang (2014) holds that translators should strive for accuracy, logic and coherence in the process of translation so as to make the translated text readable, comprehensible and acceptable to the target text receivers.

On the other hand, Yang Chen (2020) points out that economic terms and expressions with Chinese characteristics need to be unified by searching for some authoritative corpora and other official documents to ensure their accuracy and objectivity. Yang also holds the opinion that parallel texts such as *China Statistical*

Yearbook should be fully utilized because there are a large number of data and specific figures in economic texts. This standpoint can also be found in the theses of Wang Huili (2015), Cai Lihua and Gao Jun (2017). Meanwhile, Wang brings theories of semantics, stylistics and pragmatics into the discussion, examines the informative and expressive functions of business texts and optimizes the translation strategies.

1.3 Perspective of Skopos Theory

Hans Vermeer's skopos theory is another way to conduct studies on the translation of economic texts. Under the guidance of this theory, Wang Lili (2011) and Zhang Xinyu (2015) analyze the difficulties and solve the problems in the process of translation and discuss the translation strategies for economic texts mainly on the levels of lexicon, syntax and style. To achieve the goal of translation, Zhang reckons that literal translation should always be used. However, there still exist some difficulties which cannot be solved by this method. Zhang Qian (2018) analyzes the English translation of *Report on National Conditions Written in Peking University* (excerpt) to show that at lexical level, the translation of special words and phrases as well as conversion of parts-of-speech are the main difficulties; that at syntactic level, non-subject sentences and long sentences are mainly to be dealt with; and that at textual level, the coherence in the target text and between the source text and the target text are focused. Apart from that, Yan Huimin (2017) indicates that coherence rule can be better employed on syntactic level but it is not applicable on textual level when Yan analyzes the language features and applicability of skopos theory in financial academic paper translation.

What's more, there are not only a lot of economic terminologies, but also many metaphoric expressions in economic texts. The widespread use of metaphor in economic news makes the report more vivid and accessible, but its application also poses more challenge for economic news translation because metaphor translation largely affects the quality of the whole text. Li Jingcao (2014) is devoted to the research of metaphor translation in economic news under the guidance of skopos theory and proposes three ways in translating metaphor: Preserve the image of metaphor, choose another figure of speech, or go straight to its real meaning. This is also agreed by Wu Shan (2017) and Zhou Mei (2020). The former, based on the reports from *Sydney Morning Herald* and *Melbourne Times*, makes a detailed analysis about news translation on the topic of financial budget, while the latter concentrates on the study of conceptual metaphor in economic cognitive domain and provides corresponding translation strategies as well as further suggestions.

2. PREVIOUS STUDIES ON THE TRANSLATION OF POLITICAL TERMS WITH CHINESE CHARACTERISTICS

Given that the text to be translated is full of political terms, efforts should be made to review the previous studies on the translation of political terms with Chinese characteristics.

From the perspectives of equivalent effect translation and culture translation, Li Se, Guo Haiyun and Liu Wei (2004) prioritize the spirit of the source text and the transplanted of cultural messages due to historical, political, economic and cultural differences between China and English-speaking countries. Yang Yuan (2006) holds that whether the translation of political terms is right or false will directly impact the foreigner's understanding about social, political and economic life in China.

Zhang Jie, Liu Jing and Zhu Lifang (2017), however, see a different view. They suggest that Vermeer's skopos theory can also be applied in the translation of political terms, and concentrate on the translation strategies in publicity work, teaching Chinese as a foreign language and English teaching at college, while He Weiwei and Geng Xiaochao (2020) pay more attention to the advantage of foreignization in translating and promoting Chinese political culture. Li Zeyuan (2021) extracts Chinese political terms from *Report on the Work of the Government*, analyzes the common language forms and parts of speech during translation, and then sums up several rules. It is concluded that the accuracy, political nature and readability are the most important ones.

3. DEFICIENCIES OF PREVIOUS STUDIES

Although a lot of previous studies on the translation of economic literature have been made, there is still much to do from the following two aspects:

First, it is not hard to see that relevant studies are generally limited to the analysis of translation strategies under the guidance of certain translation theories from lexical, syntactic and textual levels. Since comparative studies could provide us with a different viewpoint in the translation of economic texts, more parallel texts and corpus-based analysis should be introduced in the future studies.

Second, great efforts should be cast in the specific study of economic translation, not just from the translation of macro-economic literature this way only. More attention should also be paid to the translation of taxation, securities, bonds, banking and accounting and there is still much room to be explored in this field.

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