

Translation Strategies of Prose from the Perspective of Skopostheorie

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Abstract

The process of prose translation is a process of conveying aesthetics to the fullest. Compared with the previous translation theories, Skopostheorie takes a different approach, extending its research tentacles to the audience and target culture in the target language situation. Based on the translation principle of Skopostheorie, this paper analyzes the translation strategies of prose from the perspective of Skopostheorie for reference and perfection.

Keywords

Skopos Theory, Translation of Prose into English, Tactics

1. Introduction

Translation is an important way and medium to spread culture. How to faithfully spread our country's long history and culture to western readers is an important problem faced by every translator (Xu, 2019b). With regard to the principles of translation, each school has put forward its own theories and made efforts to improve the translation process from all aspects. The author thinks that the Skopostheorie of functionalism is very suitable for guiding translation practice.

With the deepening of cultural exchanges between China and foreign countries, the number of English translations of Chinese literary works abroad is increasing, which requires us to deepen and improve the study of English translation, so as to promote Chinese literature and culture to truly go abroad and be accepted and understood by the world. As a kind of literary translation, prose translation naturally needs to be studied and analyzed by many researchers. For example, Literature (Jiang et al., 2019) analyzes the English version of "Dawn Blossoms Plucked at Dusk" from the perspective of functional stylistics, and demonstrates and analyzes the guiding role of functional stylistics in translating

prose into English. Literature (Li & Fang, 2019) demonstrates the effectiveness and feasibility of stylistics in the study of prose translation, which also provides a new perspective for understanding prose translation. Literature (Dong, 2020) makes an analysis and research on “*Zhang Peiji’s Prose Translation*”, and concludes that the translation of modern Chinese prose should be based on the principle of “alienation”.

This paper makes a descriptive analysis through the concrete application of Skopostheorie in translating prose into English, which is helpful to explain again the guiding role and applicability of Skopostheorie in literary translation. At the same time, in the process of analyzing the specific application of Skopostheorie in the translation, this paper summarizes various translation methods and strategies adopted by translators, which also has certain reference significance for the translation and introduction of other Chinese prose works abroad.

2. Prose Characteristics

When talking about the characteristics of prose, writers at home and abroad will mention such evaluations as: “uncertainty”, “scattered but not scattered”, “marginal literature”, “fragmented” and “progress around a series of topics displayed along the way”, which can give a glimpse of the main characteristics of prose and can be summarized as follows: Prose emphasizes the beauty of language and the author’s personality, which are combined into special pen and ink; Pursuing diversification, flexible writing style and diverse writing style; Words are heavily decorated, vocabulary is wide, sentence patterns are flexible and changeable, length and structure are free, styles are diverse, artistic conception is far away, emotions are rich, themes are wide and artistic factors are strong. In addition to the characteristics of prose listed above, the author concludes that prose has the following three characteristics.

2.1. Ideological

Prose usually has one or more central ideas, which are expressed by lyricism, narration and discussion. In particular, philosophical prose often takes part in the truth of life with various images, thus revealing the eternal similarity between all things. Because of its profundity and spiritual integration, it gives us a way to go deep into the essence and reveal the inside information of things through phenomena. This characteristic of prose often causes readers to think and reflect on society, life and environment.

2.2. Poeticization

Poeticization of prose means that some prose blends emotions and fantasies at that time, giving readers beauty and imagination. In content, it retains poetic prose details. In form, it has the appearance of prose, unlike poetry, which branches and rhymes, but there is no lack of inherent beauty of rhyme and rhythm.

2.3. Aesthetic Quality

The aesthetics of prose can be expressed in many ways. For example, the inner beauty of prose mainly includes: the philosophical beauty of prose, the personality beauty of female prose, and the natural beauty of essays; the external beauty of prose mainly includes: life language adds the real beauty of prose, flowing style drives the formal beauty of prose, diverse themes express the style beauty of prose, and so on.

3. Skopos Theory and Translation Principles

3.1. Skopos Theory

Skopostheorie means that in English translation, the principle of purposiveness should be put in the key position, and the translation of results and purposiveness should be carried out on the basis of the original text, and the relevant translation principles must be observed to ensure that the sentences are fluent and can be fully understood by the audience. At the same time, connecting the source text with the target text for translation evaluation can meet the translation purpose requirements of the target text. Therefore, in the process of English translation, we should not only consider the original content, but also pay full attention to the translation purpose. Because of the different translation purposes, the translation methods are different.

3.2. Translation Principles

Skopostheorie includes three principles, which are the principle of purpose, the principle of coherence and the principle of faithfulness.

1) Purpose principle

Skopostheorie emphasizes that translation should be able to play its role in the culture and situation of the target language in a way that the target language readers are accustomed to. The purpose of translation determines the whole process of translation, that is, the method we usually say depends on what kind of results we want to get, that is, “the communicative function of the target language readers in the socio-cultural context of the target language”. Therefore, the translator should be clear about the purpose of translation, and decide which translation strategy should be adopted in the process of translation-literal translation or free translation or between literal translation and free translation.

2) Coherence principle

The principle of coherence means that the translated text must meet the standard of inter-lingual coherence, that is, the translated text is readable and can be accepted and understood by readers in the target language environment (Zhang & Wen, 2019), and the final translated text can be meaningful in the context of using the translated text and the target language culture (Xu, 2019a).

3) Principle of faithfulness

Translators have a certain moral responsibility to the target readers, and they must explain to them what they are doing and why they are doing it (Wang,

2020). In addition, the translator should first respect the original author, that is, “be faithful” to the original, be loyal to the original author, and coordinate the author’s intention with the target language (Zhu, 2019).

4. Translation Strategies of Prose from the Perspective of Skopos Theory

4.1. Cultural Factors in Prose Translation

The choice of translation is a kind of power, a kind of strategy, but it is not arbitrary. It has not only the translator’s personal aesthetic factors, but also the restriction of power relations composed of various cultural factors including ideology (Wang, 2019). Translation pays attention to the transmission of art, content and original information, which is a process of transforming one language into another. Since ancient times, many people in the field of translation have regarded vivid, equivalence and antithesis as the standards in the process of translation.

In this regard, the author will illustrate the important role of cultural factors in prose translation from the perspective of analyzing and studying Zhang Peiji’s English translation essays, so as to strengthen people’s attention to cultural factors in prose translation, improve people’s pragmatic ability and deepen translators’ sensitivity to cultural barriers, so that translators can deal with cultural differences more flexibly in prose translation.

At first, let’s look at some simple examples in “*Selected English Translation of Modern Chinese Prose (III)*”.

- a) “什么事不可能” (Zou Taofen, *What’s impossible*)
- b) “Nothing is Impossible to a Willing” (English translation)
- a) “习之难改也甚矣” (Xia Yan, *Untitled*)
- b) “Old habits die hard” (English translation)

“什么事不可能” is the title of an essay written by the author Zou Taofen. “Nothing is Impossible to a Willing Mind” (meaning the same as “where there’s a will, there’s a way”) is an English proverb, which is similar to the original text, so we might as well borrow it. “习之难改也甚矣” can be literally translated as “Old habits are not easily changed” or “It is difficult to get rid of old habits”, etc. Now we might as well borrow the English synonym proverb “Old habits die hard”.

From the above two examples, we can find that they take good care of western cultural factors and deal with the translated text accordingly, which can make the target readers accept the translated text well. However, sometimes we can’t simply think about taking care of the cultural color of the target language reader’s environment, and sometimes the translation must take care of the national color of the Chinese country, so that our culture can be transmitted abroad.

4.2. The Change of Voice Reflects the Combination of Form and Meaning in Translation

Passive forms are used more often in English than in Chinese. Passive is seldom

used in Chinese, but active is often used. In English, a large number of transitive verbs can be used in the passive form, and many phrases equivalent to transitive verbs can also be used in the passive form. Active voice is often used in Chinese, but passive voice is sometimes used in English translation. In English, passive structures are often used to highlight the position and importance of the action taker as the subject of sentences. Therefore, when translating from Chinese to English, Chinese active sentences are transformed into English passive sentences, and the object of the original text becomes the subject of the translation. Similarly, when translating Chinese into English, Chinese active sentences are often changed into English passive sentences. For example:

a) 以前听人说：“火车厉害得很，走在铁路上的人，一不小心，身体就被碾做两段。”又听人说：“火车快得邪气，坐在车中，望见窗外的电线木如同栅栏一样。” (Excerpts from Feng Zikai's prose)

b) I was told before, "The train is so formidable that someone walking on the railway, if carelessly, will be ground into two parts." I was also told, "The train run unbelievably fast. Sitting on the train, you may see the wooden wire poles looked like fences." (English translation)

If the expression of Chinese is a passive sentence, it is generally not necessary to change it into an active sentence when translating it into English, but it is still translated into a passive sentence. Because this way of expression conforms to the expression habit of English. Such as:

a) ……我们这主人定将在世界到处的城市被设立生祠，死后还要在世界到处的城市中被设立铜像呢。(Excerpts from Feng Zikai's prose)

b) ……temples would be built for the host in his life and bronze statues would be set up after his death throughout the cities all over the world. (English translation)

4.3. Link up

There are differences in discourse organization between English and Chinese. For example, in the way of sentence cohesion, English often uses hypotaxis, that is, connecting words to connect sentences; while Chinese emphasizes meaning legally. In view of the syntactic features of parataxis in Chinese and parataxis in English, personal subjects are often used in Chinese discourse cohesion. More active voice sentences; use ownerless sentences and subject ellipsis sentences; use topic subjects more often; Less attention is paid to formal norms, and discourse cohesion is implicit. However, in English discourse cohesion, impersonal main words are often used. Pay equal attention to the formal specification of passive sentences and active sentences; the subject cannot be omitted generally; emphasis on formal norms, function and formal structural norms can generally meet, and discourse cohesion is dominant. Meaningful strategies are obviously effective in cohesive transformation between English and Chinese texts. For example:

a) 巴黎的地车比纽约、伦敦、马德里的都好，却相当闷热，令人穿不住毛

衣。所以。地上地下。穿穿脱脱，也颇麻烦。(Yu Guangzhong, *Summer in Western Europe*)

b) Consequently, you'll be annoyed by having to don or doff your clothes now and then, depending on whether you're above ground or underground. (English translation)

The former gain "now and then" supplements that "让人觉得麻烦" is "频繁穿/脱衣服", which enhances the accuracy of the translation. "depending on whether" is the gain due to the need of sentence pattern, which realizes the cohesion within the target sentence. Another example is:

a) 老王卖瓜，只要卖的是好瓜，为什么不能自卖自夸？(An peian, *Appreciate yourself*)

b) As we know, there is an old Chinese saying disparaging a melon peddler, named Lao Wang, who keeps praising his own goods. Well, why can the praise his melons if they are really sweet and juicy? (English translation)

Two meanings are added. The former one adds information to explain the source language culture in order to help the target readers better understand the original text; The latter part meets the needs of sentence-making in the translated text, connecting the preceding with the following, and connecting the various parts in the sentence.

4.4. Translation Compensation Policy

1) Logical semantic compensation

English and Chinese belong to different language families, so their linguistic features are different. Chinese attaches great importance to parataxis, and its logical semantics are mainly expressed by the meaning contained in words, that is, "invisible means"; In English, hypotaxis is expressed by logical connectives in most cases, that is, "explicit means". For example:

a) 十年前，白马湖已成了一个小村落，当我移居的时候，还是一片荒野。(Excerpts from *Winter in White Horse Lake*)

b) Since then, however, it has grown into quite a village, but it was an expanse of wilderness at the time when I moved in. (English translation)

2) Transformation method

The transformation methods used in this paper include generalization transformation, sentence structure transformation, cultural image transformation, positive and negative transformation. For example:

a) 晚上差不多不用燃灯。(Excerpts from *Winter in White Horse Lake*)

b) I could almost do without lamplight at night. (English translation)

The original text can be regarded as a negative sentence, but the translation has changed the sentence pattern, in which "do without" is an idiom meaning "没有……也行", which is an authentic English expression.

3) Amplification

According to Skopostheorie, we should follow the principle of "author first" and faithfully express the original author's ideological content and language style when translating the style with expressive function as the main one. Generally

speaking, prose should follow this principle. However, due to the complex stylistic features of prose itself, the translation principle of “author first” is too general, and the translation of charm and artistic conception in prose is the real difficulty. For example:

a) 春晖中学的新建筑巍然矗立于湖的那一面，湖的这一面的山脚下是小小的几间新平屋…… (Excerpts from *Winter in White Horse Lake*)

b) The new building of hun Hui Middle School then stood tall on the other side of the lake while on this side were several newly-built small one storey houses tucked away at the foot of a mountain. (English translation)

“tucked away” in the translation is a semantic component. “tucked” has the meaning of stuffing, collecting and covering, but the original text does not have the expression of this word. Zhang Peiji added this component, which not only did not destroy the expression of the original text, but added some flavor of the original text to the translation. Because the increase of this phrase emphasizes the secluded and deserted environment around it, and further expresses the lyrical tone of the original text.

5. Summary

In traditional translation theory, faithfulness to the original text and equivalence with the original text have always been regarded as the highest standard for evaluating the quality of translation. To this, teleology has put forward different viewpoints. Skopostheorie chooses the best translation strategies and methods to deal with the information provided by the source text according to the specific translation purposes and relevant contextual factors, so compared with the traditional translation concept of “equivalence”, Skopostheorie is more scientific and operable. It is found that in the process of translating the source language into English, different translators mainly adopt the method of supplementing and interpreting the cultural factors in prose. The cultural background knowledge of the target readers and their living environment are fully considered. In translating dialect words and titles into English, free translation, substitution, translation and reduction are adopted respectively, which preserves the distinctive cultural images in the original text, fully embodies the specific application of Skopostheorie in translation practice, and finally achieves the translation purpose of the target text.

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Conflicts of Interest

The author declares no conflicts of interest regarding the publication of this paper.

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