A Study on the Translation of Culture Loaded Words From the Perspective of Skopos Theory

ZAN Chen, LYU Liang-qiu
North China Electric Power University, Beijing, China

“A word is the best evidence of the reality of culture, in the sense of a historically transmitted system of conceptions and attitudes”. University website is an important window of foreign publicity while its English version is an important window for foreign students in particular. Culture loaded words, with their unique foreign flavor, are the miniature of colorful culture. Therefore, the translation of culture loaded words on university websites plays an important role in foreign publicity, as it will reflect the image of different university and indirectly affect the foreign publicity of China. This study selects from the websites of North China Electric Power University (NCEPU) two representative news and analyzes the translation of culture loaded words on university websites from the perspective of Skopos Theory. Finally, the author proposes three methods in translating these words—transliteration, literal translation, and free translation, which are suggestive for the translation of culture loaded words on the university websites.

Keywords: culture loaded words, university websites, Skopos Theory

Introduction

Due to more frequent exchanges with foreign countries, the need for foreign publicity of news greatly increases. University websites are critical channels for the campus news to be transmitted. The culture loaded words in the campus news, though sometimes more readable and interesting, bring trouble to news translators. Against the backdrop of “Chinese Culture Outgoing”, that how to better translate the culture loaded words becomes a challenge.

With two news articles at the website of North China Electric Power University (NCEPU) as an example, this paper will study the culture loaded words on university websites from the perspective of Skopos Theory.

Literature Review

Skopos Theory

Skopostheorie was first proposed by K. Reiss, a German translation theorist. It was established by the German linguists Hans Vermeer and Katharina Reiß and comprises the idea that the function of the target text should be primarily taken into account in the process of translation.
Skopos Theory focuses on translation as an activity with an aim or purpose, and on the intended addressee or audience of the translation. To translate means to produce a target text in a target setting for a target purpose and target addressees in target circumstances. In Skopos Theory, the status of the source text is lower than it is in equivalence-based theories of translation. The source is an “offer of information”, which the translator turns into an “offer of information” for the target audience. In Vermeer’s Skopostheorie, the most important factor is the receiver as they have their own cultural background, expectations for the source language and communicative needs. For each source language, translation is “text produced for some purpose and for the target audience in the target language situation”.

For Skopostheorie, there are three basic principles: skopos rule, coherence rule and fidelity rule, and loyalty rule. The primary rule is the skopos rule, that is, translation should be able to work in the context and culture of the target language according to the way expected by the target language receiver. The purpose of target language receiver determines the whole process of translation behavior, that is, the result determines the method. However, translation activities can have multiple purposes, which can be further divided into three categories: (1) the basic purpose of the translator (such as making a living); (2) the communicative purpose of the translation (such as enlightening the readers); (3) the purpose to be achieved by using a special translation means (such as literal translation according to the structure in order to explain the particularity of the language structure in a language). However, in general, “purpose” refers to the communicative purpose of the translation, that is, the communicative function of the translation to the target readers in the socio-cultural context of the target language. Therefore, the translator should make clear his specific purpose in the given translation context, and decide which translation method to adopt according to this purpose—literal translation, free translation, or else. Coherence rule refers to that the translation must conform to the standard of intra-textual coherence, that is, the translation has readability and acceptability, which enables the receiver to understand and make sense in the target culture and the communicative context in which the translation is used. Fidelity rule means that there should be intertextual coherence between the source text and the target text. This is equivalent to the so-called faithfulness to the original in other translation theories, but the degree and form of faithfulness to the original depend on the purpose of the translation and the translator’s understanding of the original. The principle of loyalty was put forward by Nord. She found that Skopos Theory has two defects: First, people from different cultural backgrounds have different views on a good translation because of the differences in cultural patterns; in addition, if the communicative purpose of the translation required by the target language is exactly opposite to the intention of the original author, then we will abide by the principle of purpose and violate the principle of faithfulness. Therefore, Nord proposed the principle of loyalty to solve the relationship between cultural differences and the participants in translation. According to Nord, the translator has a moral responsibility to the target audience and must explain to them what he has done and why. On the other hand, the principle requires the translator to be loyal to the original author. The translator should respect the original author and coordinate the target language and the author’s intention (Nord, 2001). Therefore, the principle of faithfulness focuses on the relationship between the translator and the original author, the client, the target audience, etc. Nord proposed that translators should follow the guiding principle of “function plus loyalty”, thus perfecting the theory.
Culture Loaded Words

Wierzbicka (1997, p. 93) said, “A word is the best evidence of the reality of culture, in the sense of a historically transmitted system of conceptions and attitudes”. Wu Guohua (1989) claims that “a human uses language as a communicative tool and the members of society utilize the meaning of words to communicate with each other according to the social cultural model of the nation”.

Leech (1981) divides the meaning of words into seven parts: rational meaning, connotative meaning, social meaning, affective meaning, reflective meaning, collocating meaning, and thematic meaning. According to Leech (1981),

Conceptual meaning (sometimes called denotative or cognitive meaning) is widely assumed to be the central factor in linguistic communication…connotative meaning is the communicative value which an expression has by virtue of what it refers to, over and above its purely concept content. (p. 98)

Obviously, culturally-loaded words possess rich connotative meaning besides their conceptual meaning. They can be classified into different types according to different criteria. Based on different categories, culturally-loaded words can be divided into animal, figure, plant, body, machine, food, etc. In light of vocabulary equivalence, culturally-loaded words can be classified into the following types: complete equivalent, partially equivalent, completely contrary, and lexical gap (Hu, 1988). The test of the animal words’ connotation introduced in the following section is designed based on Hu’s classification.

Study on the Culture Loaded Words From the Perspective of Skopos Theory

Tang Ting (2012) proposed three solutions to the translation of culture loaded words in the news and stipulated that the words in different news should be appropriately used and the words must be new. Wang Fei (2012) analyzes three basic translation of culture loaded words—accuracy, completeness, and acceptability. Yang Tingyu (2019) explored the culture loaded words in business English news and discovered that the combination of domestication and foreignization translation strategies has become a trend. Previous study studies mostly on economic news or business news. This study, however, focuses on the campus news on the university websites according to the Skopos Theory so that the desired communicative effects can be achieved.

Study on the Culture Loaded Words on University Websites From the Perspective of Skopos Theory

With NCEPU as an example, this article selects from the website of NCEPU two articles published in 2019: One is about the Opening Ceremony; the other is about academic exchange. The two articles represent two typical types of news: conference and academic exchange, as they can often be seen on the websites of other domestic and foreign university websites. For these two representative types of news, it is discovered that many culture loaded words are covered. The culture loaded words, though help arouse the interest of readers, are difficult to translate for the translators.

Transliteration

Generally, transliteration is the conversion of a text from one script to another. Most systems of transliteration map the letters of the source script to letters pronounced similarly in the goal script, for some specific pair of source and goal language. For example, some history-related words such as “xiucai”, “yamen”,

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and “fenghuang”, some words related to athletic and recreational activities such as “pipa”, “erhu”, and “weiqi”, some words related to basic necessities of life such as “won ton”, “Wu Liang Ye”, and “litchi” (lichee), some related to natural landscape and local customs such as “feng shui”, “kang”, and “kowtow”, some related to the unit of measurement such as “yuan”, “jiao”, and “fen”. These words are also culture loaded words that can be translated by transliteration.

**Literal Translation**

Literal translation is the rendering of text from one language to another one conveying the sense of the original whole. It is the way to maintain the contents and the form of the source language in accordance with the culture. It emphasizes the form similarity, and requires the accordance between the original passages and the target one in the choice of word, syntax, and styles.

It can be used in the translation of traditional festivals and political words. For instance, “五四运动”, translated as “the May Fourth Movement”, was a great patriotic and revolutionary campaign pioneered by advanced young intellectuals and participated by the people from all walks of life to resolutely fight imperialism and feudalism on May 4th of 1919. It is a culture loaded word manifested by its historical significance.

Many historic movements like “the May Fourth Movement” and “the July 7th Incident” cannot be clearly explained by a few words. By taking the target readers into consideration, literal translation is the best choice. First and foremost, the exact day is very critical and of historic significance for these culture loaded words like “五四运动” and “七七事变”. Literal translation puts this point on the first place and the exact day is clearly illustrated. But after the free translation, explanation by some phrases needs to be further illustrated. But here consider that the English version of news on the university website is targeted mostly at the foreign students who already learn much about Chinese culture. They may read the news for the understanding of what has happened in the university. The translation is readable for them. Therefore, further explanation about “the May Fourth Movement” is not mentioned.

**Free Translation**

Free translation is a supplementary means to mainly convey the meaning and spirit of original text without trying to reproduce its sentence patterns or figures of speech. It does not emphasize the original form, including words, syntax, structure, metaphor, and other rhetoric. It requires the correct expression of original content but does not require sticking to the original form.

Free translation is the most common way to translate the culture loaded words. As culture loaded words are mostly characterized by the culture behind the word, literal translation under such circumstances will lead to misunderstanding. As such, the target readers cannot effectively understand what they read, thus causing failure in cultural communication.
The translation of typical Chinese titles. For typical Chinese titles, there are strict differences between different titles. In Chinese culture, titles sometimes also reflect the status and social influence of different person so misuse of titles is not allowed. In addition, there are many generic sentences in Chinese. These generic sentences cannot be dealt with ambigiously when translating according to the Skopos Theory. The translator must make sure the target readers may possibly understand the meaning. In that case, these generic sentences are dealt with specially to make sure clear understanding.

ST: 校党委常委、校长助理及有关职能处室、各院系负责人、教师代表和全体2019级新生参加了典礼。

TT: The Standing Committee of the Party Committee, the assistant principal, the Heads of the related Departments and Schools, the teachers’ representatives, and all the freshmen and new graduates of Grade 2019 attend the ceremony.

ST: 出席此次活动的有美中绿色能源促进会代表团的专家，我校经管学院教授及学校有关部门负责人。

TT: Experts from the UCGEC delegation, professors from School of Economics and Management, and the Heads of the related Departments and Schools attended the meeting.

For example, expressions such as “有关职能处室、各院系负责人” are also culture loaded words with their unique Chinese favor. Here, “有关职能处室、各院系负责人” can be often found in Chinese news. It is a general concept. But if it is translated by use of literal translation, the target readers would not understand what the news mean. Therefore, free translation needs to use to make the meaning of the expression more specific to the target readers. Under this circumstance, “有关职能处室、各院系负责人” cannot be translated as “the related functional department”. But more specifically, it can be translated as “the Heads of the related Departments and Schools”.

The translation of classical Chinese and idioms. For classical Chinese and idioms, the best way is free translation. For example, “锐意进取” can be translated as “forge ahead with determination” and “天真烂漫” be translated as “naive” according to different context.

ST: 校长在题为《为学以严成大器》的讲话中向6,163名本科生、4,090名研究生和447名留学生正式加入华电大家庭，表示热烈欢迎。

TT: President of NCEPU extends a warm welcome for 6,163 freshmen, 4,090 graduate students, and 447 international students in his speech entitled “Strictness and preciseness make great learning and great men”.

For instance, “为学以严成大器” is a speech title. It is brief but contains much meaning. In terms of form, it is in line with classical Chinese. In that case, the first step is to truly understand the meaning. According to the Skopos Theory, the translator must be responsible that the target readers may understand what the translation means. Considering the context, it is said at the Opening Ceremony. The title also summarizes what the speaker hopes for the freshmen. Here, the translator tries to convey the meaning and spirit of original text without trying to reproduce the sentence patterns or figures of speech. “Strictness and preciseness make great learning and great men” reaches the goal as strictness and preciseness are often emphasized in the process of learning.
Conclusion

The English version news on university websites is critical in cultural communication. According to the Skopos Theory, the needs of the target readers should be carefully considered while translating in order to avoid misunderstanding. Besides, the translator must consider which method is the most appropriate under different circumstance—transliteration, literal translation, or free translation.

References