

# *Research on English-Chinese Translation Techniques Based on the Skopos Theory*

Xianzhi Wang<sup>1</sup>, Lun Zhou<sup>2,\*</sup>

<sup>1</sup>*International Cooperation Department, North China University of Science and Technology,  
Tangshan, Hebei, 063210, China*

<sup>2</sup>*College of Foreign Languages, North China University of Science and Technology, Tangshan,  
Hebei, 063210, China*

*\*Corresponding author*

**Keywords:** Skopos Theory, functionalist, translation purpose, translation techniques

**Abstract:** The Skopos Theory proposed by Hans J Vermeer and its corresponding three rules: the skopos rule, the coherence rule, and the fidelity rule are widely applied in translation practice. The Skopos Theory of functionalist translation holds that the skopos rule is the preferred principle of translation, which determines translation techniques on the basis of the translation purpose. The Skopos Theory emphasizes the function and effectiveness of translation, that is, what is the purpose of translation and what kind of effect translation needs to achieve in order to better meet the actual needs of translation. Therefore, based on the Skopos Theory, this paper explores the specific application of the three rules of the Skopos Theory in English-Chinese translation, introduces corresponding translation techniques, such as conversion, addition, omission, restructuring and shift of voices, studies the impact of translation purpose and intention on translation techniques, and provides guidance for future translation practice, thus improving translation quality and effectiveness.

## **1. Introduction to the Skopos Theory**

Vermeer noted that the Skopos Theory is a translation theory based on the functionalist view of translation which emerged in the 1970s[1]. This theory emphasizes the purpose of the overall translation behavior, viewing translation as an action performed for specific purposes and specific target audiences in the target language[2]. Zhang Meifang proposed that the term “skopos” commonly refers to the purpose of the translation, which comes from the Greek word “skopos”. In addition to “skopos”, Vermeer also used related words such as “aim”, “purpose”, “intention”, and “function”[3]. The Skopos Theory makes translation research not centered on the original text, but on the target language, especially the purpose of communication between the target language readers and the audience. Therefore, the Skopos Theory regards the purpose of translation as the core, which holds that the final goal of translation is to make the audience of the source language and the target language obtain similar information and communicative effects. In the process of translation, the translator should be purpose-oriented and choose symbols that meet the needs of the target audience in order to optimize the effect of information transmission and communication. The

Skopos Theory advocates the criteria of adequacy evaluation, that is, the translation should meet the requirements of the translation purpose, which is different from the principles of “equivalence in different forms” and “homomorphism in different forms”. At the same time, the Skopos Theory also requires translators to take into account the accuracy, fluency, persuasiveness, adaptability and readability of the target text in translation, so as to provide specific guidance and standards for translation practice.

Christiane Nord is a retired professor at the University of Applied Science in Magdeburg, Germany, and a representative figure of the second generation of the German functionalist translation school[4]. Under the influence of his teacher Reiss’s Text Typology, Nord was very loyal to Vermeer’s Skopos Theory, and highly appreciated House-Mantre’s Translation Behavior Theory. Zhang Meifang wrote that, in order to avoid conceptual confusion, Nord proposed a basic distinction between “intention” and “function”: “intention” is defined from the sender’s perspective, while “function” refers to the function of the text, which is jointly determined by the receiver’s expectations, needs, existing knowledge, and environmental conditions[3]. Nord further expanded functionalist Skopos Theory and proposed the “Function Plus Loyalty” Theory, emphasizing that the receiver is a key element in determining the translation purpose, and the translation is only meaningful if it is accepted and understood by the target readers[5]. The Skopos Theory breaks the structuralist linguistic school’s static research model, interprets translation from the perspective of the target language, and regards translation as a purposeful communicative activity. Each translation is directed towards a certain audience, therefore, Nord remarked that translation is “the production of discourse for a specific purpose and audience in the target context”[6].

## 2. Three Rules of Skopos Theory

Venuti commented that translation behavior should be completed by following certain rules and principles: the rule of skopos, coherence, fidelity, and loyalty[7]. Shuttleworth described that, according to the skopos rule, translation is a kind of cross-cultural communication behavior with a specific purpose[8]. Throughout the development of Skopos Theory in the Western world and its introduction, recognition, dissemination, acceptance, and criticism in the Chinese academic circles, the focus is mostly on its three main principles. The skopos rule, coherence rule and fidelity rule are of a different order, that is, the coherence rule is superior to fidelity rule and both are subject to the skopos rule. From the perspective of value level, the skopos rule is not only the primary rule that determines the translation techniques, but also the extremely prominent law that should be observed in translation.

### 2.1. The Skopos Rule

The term “skopos” originates from the Greek, which means “purpose” or “goal”, and is specifically used by the functionalist translation school to refer to the purpose of translation or the purpose of translation behavior. In addition, the four concepts “aim” (the final result of the translation act), “purpose” (the result of various stages and stages in the translation process), “intention” (the translator produces the target text with the goal of the client or the initiator of the translation process understands the source text with the goal) and “function” (the meaning of the text is transmitted between the source language culture and the target language culture) are also subordinate to skopos, namely, the purpose. As the most basic and important principle of the Skopos Theory, the skopos rule means that translation should enable the target text to play a certain function in the target context, and produce due effects on the users of the target text. However, Venuti proposed that, in most cases, “purpose” refers to the communicative purpose of the translated text, that is, “the communicative function of the translated text for the target language reader in the cultural context”[9]. The purpose of translation is to make the translated text play a role in the target

culture and be presented in the form expected by the target readers to meet their reading needs. In conclusion, the skopos rule includes the aim of the translator, the communicative goal of the translation and the objective to be achieved by adopting some certain techniques.

## **2.2. The Coherence Rule**

The coherence rule is also called “intra-textual coherence”. According to this principle, the translation ought to be harmonious with the version, which means that the translation is suitable, decipherable, comprehensible by the recipient, and meaningful in the target language culture and the communicative context. The entities involved in the translation process include the information sender, the information receiver, the sponsor, and the translator. The meaning of the text lies in the reader’s reception and understanding, as well as the realization of the text’s function. What the translator should do is to generate a text that is meaningful to the target language readers. In addition, the translator’s intention should keep a balance among the original author, translator and target language reader.

## **2.3. The Fidelity Rule**

Known as the intertextual coherence, the fidelity rule is also of predominant value. Specifically, the translator needs to be faithful to the original author and balance the original author’s intention and purpose. In addition, the translator has the responsibility and obligation to explain his choices during the translation process to the original author, translator, readers, and other parties involved. In Skopos Theory, the fidelity rule is in lower situation compared with the coherence rule, because the target text must first be understood and then contrasted with the source language to see if the target text is compatible with the source text.

In the process of translation, the skopos rule and the fidelity rule should be taken as the guidance, and the appropriateness should be regarded as the criterion to evaluate the translation. In conclusion, the translation purpose of the Skopos Theory mainly focus on the accuracy, fluency, persuasiveness, adaptability and readability of the target text, aiming to achieve the best information transmission and communicative effects, and providing specific guidance and standards for translation practice.

## **3. The Application of the Three Rules in Translation**

The application of the three rules in translation mainly involves the following aspects: Firstly, the purpose and intention of translation. Study the purpose and intention of translation, that is, what kind of goal and effect the translation intends to achieve, so as to determine the best translation strategy and technique. Secondly, the selection and application of translation techniques. Based on the purpose and intention of the translation, selecting and applying different translation techniques, such as conversion, addition, restructuring, and shift of voices in order to achieve the best translation effect. Tang Chaoju marked that the Skopos Theory provides a new perspective for translators to approach translation, freeing them from being completely bound to the source text[10]. The research on English-Chinese translation techniques based on the Skopos Theory covers the purpose and intention of translation, the selection and application of translation techniques, and the conversion of language and culture, aiming to make the translation closer to the original text and meet the needs of the target readers.

### **3.1. The Application of Skopos Rule in Translation**

The skopos rule is one of the most important principles of the Skopos Theory, and the goal in the translation process determines the methods and techniques of translation behavior, that is, the translation result determines the concrete way of realizing the translation process. Therefore, in the

light of the features of the source text, the translator must adopt appropriate translation techniques and methods, such as conversion and addition, in order to adapt to readers' reading habits and achieve specific communicative purposes.

Example 1: To generate broad interest and increased activities, the Parties shall, by mutual agreement.

Example 2: Having accepted and embraced their persona, the best speakers take an exaggerated version of themselves onstage.

Conversion is a technique of converting one word class in the original text into another. It is often used in the translation process for adjusting grammar, changing the expression style, and adapting to language habits, among other aspects. In English-Chinese translation, common word-class conversions include converting nouns into verbs, adjectives into adverbs, and verbs into nouns. For example, in Example 1, the meaning of "To generate broad interest and increased activities" is "wèi zēng jiā lì yì, kuò zhǎn huó dòng" in Chinese. The translator converted adjectives into verb forms, which gives the translation a stronger sense of rhythm. Omission, on the other hand, can make the translation more concise by omitting articles, prepositions, verbs, pronouns, and words with repetitive meanings, but it must not affect the main content of the original text. In Example 2, the two words "accepted" and "embraced" have the same meaning, that is "jiē shòu" in Chinese. Therefore, the translator refines the original text by omitting one repetitive word, making the translation concise and readable.

### 3.2. The Application of Coherence Rule in Translation

As for the coherence rule, the translation is bound to meet the criteria of intralingual coherence in order to help readers fully understand the original text. The communicative purpose and function of English-Chinese translation, as well as the differences between the two languages, determine that translators must flexibly apply different translation techniques such as adjusting the order, so as to make the translation coherent, natural, and coherent.

Example 3: Mr. Piech's skeptical view of mergers matched the company's outlook for the auto sector this year even though VW is off to a strong start, with first-quarter deliveries expected to rise by 7%.

Example 4: VW Has Lost Appetite for Mergers, Chairman Says

According to the expression habits of Chinese, the adverbial clause of condition and time as well as the attributive clause which are placed after the main clause in English should be moved forward in translation, and the sentence order should be adjusted so that it is more easily accepted by Chinese readers. Therefore, the translator adjusts the word order and places "even though VW is off to a strong start", and "Chairman Says" at the beginning of the sentence when translating example 3 and 4, following the principle of "reason first, result last" and "speaker first, content last", making the translation more concise, fluent and readable.

### 3.3. The Application of Fidelity Rule in Translation

Bian Jianhua noted that the core of traditional translation theory is that the translation must be "faithful" and "equivalent" to the original text[11]. The fidelity rule means that the translation should be centered on the original text and reflect its faithfulness. In English-Chinese translation, the fidelity of the text refers to the accurate transmission of the source text, that is, a correct understanding of the source text and the appropriate application of translation techniques, such as shift of voices. At the same time, it is also necessary to ensure that the content of the original text is not distorted or mistranslated to the extent.

Example5: Haiti's trees and roots used to keep the mountainous island's soil in place. Once they were cut, the soil began to wash off the fields. Unable to feed itself, Haiti now has one of the world's highest hunger rates.

Example6: You've been asked to make a speech, run an important meeting, present your research to a group, or pitch for investment.

In English-Chinese translation, some scientific and technological texts usually focus on elaborating the essential features of objective things and taking object as subject, therefore, objective passive voice often appears in the source text. However, there are more active voice or no subject sentence in Chinese. Consequently, shift of voices is usually adopted to change passive voice sentences in English into active voice sentences in Chinese, such as translating “were cut” and “been asked” as “zāo dào kǎn fá” and “shòu dào yāo qǐng” in example 5 and example 6, in order to make the translation graceful, smooth and understandable.

#### 4. Conclusion

The research on English-Chinese translation techniques based on the Skopos Theory can help translators better understand the purpose and intention of translation, improve the quality and effect of the target text, and build a bridge for cross-cultural communication. The specific significance is as follows: First, better understand the intention and needs of the source text and target readers, and appropriately select and apply translation techniques and strategies; Second, according to the purpose and intention of translation, various translation techniques and strategies are flexibly adopted to achieve the best translation effect. Therefore, guided by the three rules of Skopos Theory, the translator combines the purpose of translation and the specific situation of the target language readers, selects certain translation techniques, thus improving translation quality and making it really play its intended function in the target context.

#### Acknowledgements

This study was supported by “Hebei Province 2017 Professional Degree Teaching Case Base Construction Project ‘Translation Theory and Practice Course Teaching Case Base Construction’ (Project No. KCJSZ2017058)” and “The First Batch of New Liberal Arts Research and Reform Practice Projects in Hebei Province ‘Research on Industry-Academic Collaborative Training Mechanism of Human-Computer Interaction Emergency Translation Talents’ (Project No. 2021GJXWK018)”.

#### References

- [1] Vermeer H. J. *What Does It Mean to Translate?* *Indian Journal of Applied Linguistics*, 1987, (13):25-33.
- [2] Vermeer H. J. *Skopos and Commission in Transnational Action*. Shanghai: Shanghai Foreign Language Education Press, 1989: 90.
- [3] Zhang Meifang. *Function Plus Loyalty: On Nord's Functionalist Approach to Translation*. *Journal of Foreign Languages*, 2005(01):60-65.
- [4] Tian Lu, Zhao Junfeng. *Functional Translation Theory in the New Century: An Interview with Professor Christian Nord*. *Chinese Translators Journal*, 2018, 39(04):86-90.
- [5] Nord C. *Text Analysis in Translation: Theory, Methodology, and Didactic Application of a Model for Translation-Oriented Text Analysis*. Amsterdam-Atlanta: Rodopi, 1991.
- [6] Nord C. *Translating as a Purposeful Activity: Functionalist Approaches Explained*. Shanghai: Shanghai Foreign Language Education Press, 2001.
- [7] Venuti L. *The Translation Studies Reader*. London & New York: Routledge, 2000.
- [8] Shuttleworth M., & Cowie M. *Dictionary of Translation Studies*. Beijing: Foreign Language Teaching and Research Press, 2005:212.
- [9] Venuti L. *Strategies of Translation*. London and New York: Routledge, 2001.
- [10] Tang Chaoju, Lv You, Li Qin. *Culture-loaded Words' Translation Based on Skopos Theory: Comparative Analysis on English Versions of Chinese Tang Legend “Qiuanke Zhuan”*. *Journal of Southwest University of Science and Technology*, 2022, 39(01):37-44+82.
- [11] Bian Jianhua. *Interpretation of Nord's “Loyalty Principle”*, *Chinese Science & Technology Translators Journal*, 2006, (03):33-36+13.