

Nominalization and Hedges in Translation: A Skopos Theory–Based Approach

Meng Li

University of Manchester, Manchester, UK

Keywords: Skopos Theory; Nominalization; Hedge; Translation

Abstract: This article talks about translation under the guidance of Skopos Theory to deal with nominalization and hedges in order to make the conversion of Chinese and English more fluent. Based on the Skopos Theory, the translators can give a smoother translation to the target text and maintain the original meaning as much as possible. Pay attention to the nominalization and the hedge is what the Chinese audience needs.

1. Introduction

According to the Skopos Theory, the most important rule is the skopos rule. Translation should be purpose-oriented, and the main purpose of translation is to make readers understand and conform to local idioms. In the translation process, I noticed that nominalization and hedges appeared in many sentences, which should be carefully tackled to meet the Chinese traditions and keep original meanings. Therefore, my critical analysis will focus on de-nominalization and hedges.

Chinese prefers to use verbs while English prefers to use nouns. This different preference will lead to some changes in the translation process. Verbs are more fit to the language usage in Chinese. In addition, the translator needs to pay attention to the hedges to keep them in Chinese. It is a method to avoid direct responsibility in case to avoid any further misunderstanding.

2. Literature Review

“The highest rule of a theory of translational action is the skopos rule: any action is determined by its purpose, i.e. it is a function of its purpose or skopos”^[4]. Translation is a purposeful action. Translators need to make strategic language choices based on the target language, audience’s expectations and cultural norms. In order to enable the target audience to better understand the translated text, the nominalization strategy should be processed according to different purposes, which can enhance the connectivity and readability of the translated article. Therefore, the translation process is to let the public understand but maintain professional characteristics.

Reiss and Vermeer mentioned that in Skopos Theory, there is an intratextual coherence. “An interaction is successful if it is interpreted by the recipients are sufficiently coherent with their situation and if there is no protest, in any form whatsoever”^[4]. In the process of translation, the translators will try their best to translate in accordance with Chinese vocabulary habits and the Chinese background. To ensure the smoothness of sentences in Chinese, word-for-word translation is sometimes not feasible, and some simple changes and integrations are made according to intratextual

coherence.

By focusing on cross-cultural translation, this study will delve into how translators convey and reconstruct culture and text between English and Chinese language. This comprehensive perspective broadens the theoretical dialogue between meta-discourse research and Skopos Theory, providing new insights into the strategic nature of translation behavior. We can not only focus on the nominalization but we can make changes when translating, such as de-nominalization and hedges. It helps to highlight the translator's active role in constructing academic discourse and achieving communicative purposes

3. Analysis

3.1 Grammatical Metaphor

“Nominalization, whereby any element or group of elements is made to function as a nominal group in the clause”^[1]. This is quite important term in the translation field, and it is a part of the ideational metaphor. Halliday divided grammatical metaphors into ideational metaphors, interpersonal metaphors, and textual metaphors^[1]. “Much attention has been paid to culture-specific psychopathologies.”, here attention is used as a noun. The direct translation meaning is “A lot of attention is spent on culture-specific psychopathology” in Chinese. The subject is attention, and it's in the passive voice. This is very strange in Chinese because Chinese is people oriented. The actual subject here should be the person, it is the person who takes a lot of attention to psychopathology instead of attention. My translation meaning in Chinese is “People pay much attention to culture-specific psychopathologies”. I use “pay attention to” to replace “attention” in Chinese word, which changes the noun into a verb. “It is important to note that the nominalization English prefers is a matter of choice, not necessity”^[2]. The nominalization of attention here is not necessary because of the human oriented tradition in Chinese. Based on the Skopos Theory, the skopos rule is the most important rule that I must follow to make sure the Chinese audience can understand and read fluently.

“As we have seen, the ideational metafunction is a resource for construing our experience of the world that lies around us and inside us”^[1]. There is one example, “unmitigated reference to the value of the individual self” translated as “endlessly pursue of self-value” in Chinese. I use “pursue” to replace “reference” when doing the translation to Chinese, which will be more fluent to read in Chinese. Based on my knowledge of using Chinese words, “endlessly pursue” is the frequently used phrase in Chinese to describe another's pursuit and fulfillment of self-worth. Besides, this is also a de-nominalization, which changes the noun into a verb. “Unmitigated reference” in Chinese means “complete reference” which will let others misinterpret it as an indicator, rather than expressive individualism. “Grammatical metaphor of the ideational kind is primarily a strategy enabling us to transform our experience of the world”^[1]. In addition, in the background of Chinese, individualism refers to the pursuit of personal value, so this translation is also in line with the Chinese culture.

“The translator often faces the choice of transplanting or changing the language structure of the source language in the process of manipulation on the above-mentioned language systems”^[5]. To make the sentence easier to understand, and in the process of de-nominalization, some adjustments will be made to the sentence structure, which is based on the Skopos Theory to achieve more readable for the Chinese audience.

3.2 Metadiscourse

“Metadiscourse is an approach to conceptualizing interactions between text producers and their texts and between text producers and users”^[6]. According to Hyland, metadiscourse can be divided into interactive resources and interactional resources^[6]. Interactional resources include hedges,

boosters, attitude markers, engagement markers, and self-mentions. Metadiscourse has various ways to help the audience understand context. My analysis will mainly focus on the hedges.

“Hedges emphasize the subjectivity of a position by allowing information to be presented as an opinion rather than a fact and therefore open that position to negotiation”^[6]. In the original text, “argue” and “suggest” frequently appear, allowing the audience to think. Besides, “may be”, “perhaps”, “largely”, and “generally” are also hedges in this text.

“It is suggested that the concepts developed within the field tend to reflect a bias towards ‘Western’ ways of thinking”. The author used the phrase “be suggested that” to indicate this concept might be true and avoid responsibility for the absolute conclusion. This leaves room for imagination and reflection for readers and scholars to verify and explore. The direct translation of “it is suggested that” is “the suggestion is”, which becomes the author suggests the audience instead of indirectness. Based on the Skopos Theory and maintaining the original meaning, “someone argues” is a more appropriate version. In Chinese, when people are faced with something unclear, they usually use “someone argues” or “it is said” to express that they have learned it from other places. If it is wrong, it is none of their business because they are also heard from others. “Hedges therefore imply that a statement is based on the writer’s plausible reasoning rather than certain knowledge, indicating the degree of confidence it is prudent to attribute to it”^[6]. This is a more euphemistic way to convey information, which is also very common in the Chinese context, so the use of hedges is very appropriate. “Zhong (middle course) and zhongyong (golden mean) are core concepts in Confucianism”^[3]. This hedge fits in the Chinese traditional concept of “zhongyong (golden mean)”.

“Perhaps the most famous example is Schadenfreude, a German term describing pleasure at the misfortunes of others”. Here, the author who had wrote this sentence enumerated a word to support his point. However, he used an adverbial “perhaps” to indicate the uncertainty. Because the author did not guarantee that “Schadenfreude” is the most famous example, it was his guess and experience. In the process of translation, removing the word “perhaps” did not actually affect the full meaning. However, in order to conform to Chinese idioms and the principle of the Skopos Theory, I choose to keep this word. By using the word “may be” as the translation of “perhaps” in Chinese, the reader immediately understands that the author did know about this example, but without the relevant statistics, he couldn’t say absolutely. “Hedges cast a proposition as contingent by highlighting its subjectivity”^[6]. This is also the purpose of giving the reader a better understanding.

Hyland pointed out that hedges are widely used in academic writing as a way of conveying indirectness and giving a rhetorical space for the audience to think about^[6]. Hedges are commonly used in both English and Chinese. In English, it is to avoid direct responsibility. However, in Chinese, it is the habit for Chinese to keep modesty. The use of hedges benefits the two languages on each side.

4. Conclusion

This analysis emphasizes grammatical metaphor and interactional metadiscourse. Under the Skopos Theory, ideational metaphor and hedges are the strategies to meet the skopos rule to let the Chinese audience understand. The mission of the translators is to try to use what they have learned to achieve a more perfect translation.

Ideational metaphor is a very powerful way to manage the text and to express information. In metadiscourse, hedges are frequently used in academic writings because it is a method for carefully talking about facts and opinions.

The translator regards translation as a purposeful act, consciously using nominalization structures in accordance with the habits in the Chinese context to ensure the fluency of the text in the target language. At the same time, by using hedges, the appropriate interpersonal communication distance of Chinese culture is retained, respecting cultural diversity. The combination of nominalization and

hedges reflects how the translator skillfully balances clarity, accuracy and prudent rhetorical strategies in the translation process.

These strategies can help translators to translate more easily because they give a direction for them to follow. These give translators a reference of how to deal with the conversion between Chinese and English, rather than relying on experience, so that the translation becomes more logical.

It is worth noting that the application of de-nominalization and hedge retention is not a rigid formula, but needs flexible adjustment according to specific text types and communication scenarios. For example, in formal academic papers, the degree of de-nominalization should be controlled to avoid excessive colloquialization that weakens the professionalism of the text; in popular science translations, more active verb structures can be used to enhance readability. Future research could further expand the scope of corpus, comparing the application differences of these strategies in different disciplines (such as natural sciences and humanities) to provide more targeted translation guidance. Ultimately, the core value of this study lies in verifying that Skopos Theory can effectively solve the grammatical and discourse-level contradictions in Chinese-English translation, providing a practical path for translators to balance “faithfulness to the original text” and “adaptation to the target audience”.

References

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