

A Study on the Chinese-English Translation of University Mottoes from the Perspective of Skopos Theory

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Abstract: Being an embodiment of education philosophy and campus culture, university mottoes show the education objectives and school-running philosophy through their refined words and well-structured sentences. Present researches on E-C translation of mottoes help domestic university to go global. However, most of them are done from the perspective of linguistics, which, to some extent, weakens the importance of the functions of university mottoes. To view the translation of university mottoes from a different way and tackle problems that occur in the translation, this thesis, under the guidance of Skopos theory, makes an analysis on the features of Chinese university mottoes and overseas university mottoes and looks into translation techniques.

Keywords: C-E translation; university mottoes; Skopos theory.

INTRODUCTION

A university motto tells the spirit of a university and shows its value to the society. It is also the carrier of the culture of that university. Therefore, translating Chinese university mottoes into English is more than just translating a text but also a culture.

University mottoes have been given a priority both at home and abroad. According to the research papers in this field, there are mistakes in the translation of university motto, including aesthetic ablation, use of Chinglish and failing to convey the meaning of source text.

In order to tackle problems mentioned above, this thesis tries to discuss the translation of university mottoes from the perspective of Skopos theory and looks into the approaches, requirements and criteria of translation of university.

Theoretical Basis

"Skopos" is a term borrowed from ancient Greek and refers to "aim" or "purpose" [1]. Hans Vermeer introduced it to translation theory in the 1970s. And it has been used to refer to the purpose of translation action or the target text.

As the core theoretical basis, the three basic rules of Skopos theory must be elaborated.

The first one goes to Skopos rule, which refers to the fact that translation should be done in a way target acceptors expect in the circumstances and culture in a target language [2]. In another word, the end justifies the means. Vermeer thought that skopos determines translation approaches and strategies by which the target text can achieve functionally equivalent to the source text.

The second is coherence rule. It refers to that translation should be readable and can be accepted by the target reader so that the translation could achieve intratextual coherence. Namely, the target text must be fully coherent to the culture of target readers to it understood. The starting point for a translation is a text written in the source language. Having been translated into target language, it must make some sense for the reader under their own culture background.

Fidelity rule means that there must be the coherence between source text and target text so that the intertextual coherence can be achieved [3]. It can be understood in two aspects. One, the target text should be coherent to its source text in the perspective of linguistics, for instance, maintain the figures of speech, word-diction style or syntactic traits. Two, the target text should be coherent to its source text from the perspective of contents, which means that translation should contain some aspects which the target text mentions.

The relations among these three rules should also be clearly understood. Fidelity rule should submit

to coherence rule. And both fidelity rule and coherence rule comply with skopos rule. Suppose that the skopos of translation is to change the functions of source text, then the criteria of translation is no longer to achieve intratextual coherence. In the same vein, if the skopos of translation is to break the intertextual coherence, fidelity rule cannot work anymore.

An Analysis on University Mottoes

According to Skopos theory, the process how the translation is done should be quite clear. And university mottoes should be analyzed accordingly.

Features of Chinese university mottoes

From the perspective of word formation, the majority of Chinese university mottoes have several basic structures. Specifically, they are four phrases with each one having two words, two phrases with each phrase having four words and four phrases with each one having four words. Moreover, they share the same features that are symmetrical structures, terseness, and readability [4].

From the perspective of cultural accumulation, a large number of Chinese university mottoes are derived from Confucian classics. For instance, the motto of Fudan University is borrowed from Confucius's work *The Analects*. The motto of Southeast University is derived from *The Great Learning* which belongs to *The Four Books*. Both the origins and the connotation reflect traditional characteristics in Confucian culture.

From the perspective of value orientation, Chinese university mottoes emphasize people's moral obligations, inner cultivation and fulfillment of spiritual world. Confucianism places a premium on education and on the enhancement of people's responsibility, interpersonal relationships and personality cultivation.

Features of English university mottoes

From the view of word formation and structures, the most frequently used word in foreign university mottoes are freedom, truth, and knowledge. In terms of structures, foreign university mottoes are noun phrases, prepositional phrases, infinitive phrases. For instance, the motto of Yale University is "Light and Truth"; motto of MIT is "Mind and Hand". The example of prepositional phrases is that motto of University of San Francisco is "For City and University". And they are teeming with rhetoric devices [5]. For example, Yale University's motto uses the alliteration. Metonymy is used in the motto of MIT.

From the view of cultural accumulation, early education always has some relationship with religion [4].

In terms of value orientation, what the western university mottoes reflect is the pursuit of knowledge and freedom.

Functions of university mottoes

A university motto promotes the spirit of the university and cultivates the temperament of students. In addition, they are also the principles that teachers and students are supposed to obey. University mottoes embody the characteristics. Playing a significant role in university culture and spirit, university mottoes inspire students and teachers and guide them to cultivate their behaviors.

Reiss classified texts into three, which are inhaltsbetone (emphasize the contents or the information), formbetone (emphasize the format of language) and appellbetone (appeal to the reader) [6]. According to this classification and the functions mottoes play, university mottoes belong to inhaltsbetone and appellbetone. That is to say, the original intention cannot be changed after translated into target text, or it would fail to achieve its purpose.

In conclusion, translation of university mottoes is to achieve international communication. To be more specific, the function of university mottoes translation is to notify the English readers of Chinese culture and spread culture of Chinese universities. In the translation process, translators should make sure that purpose and functions are achieved.

The Application of Skopos Theory in the Translation of University Mottoes

As the main body of this thesis, this part argues for the application of Skopos theory with some typical ones serving as examples.

The application of skopos rule

Now the process of how the translation action is carried out is clear. In that process, a translator should not change the functions of source text and guarantee the achievement of the purpose of university mottoes translation [7]. If a university motto introduces the culture of that university, the translator should also produce that intention. Therefore, the first thing translators ought to do is that they should clearly know the meaning of source text without any misinterpreting.

For instance, University of Science and Technology of China set "红专并进 理实交融" as its motto. With the usage of literal translation, it was once translated as "Red and Expert, Truth and Fact". Although the format of translation is similar to the source text, the word "red" doesn't make sense and cannot convey original meaning. The translator failed to achieve its purpose.

As a matter of fact, the reason why Guo Moruo underscored “红专” and “理实” in his address in 1957 is that he hopes that the university not only sticks to the Party’s educational policy but also exerted unremitting endeavor on pursuing science and technology and truth [8].

Knowing the true meaning, people find that “integrity and specialty” can express the meaning fully. Thus, it was translated as “Studying Hard, to Excel in Both Integrity and Specialty”, which is regarded as a great translation. It not only conveys the meaning successfully but also accord with features of target language [8].

As for the motto of Huainan Normal College, “明德，至善，博学，笃行” is derived from *The Book of Rites*. The former two characters are the purpose and they mean that the purpose of this university is to encourage her students to know and manifest people’s inherent virtue. The latter two are means to achieve that goal. The motto aims at encouraging students to pursue knowledge and virtues and be the people of value. The following aspects should be taken into consideration to achieve its goal of publicity. The first thing is to remain the meaning, style and language characteristics. The second is to reflect the features of a normal university. The third is to take the differences between China and western countries into account.

Under the guidance of Skopos theory, it was translated as “Unto the Salt of the Earth via Knowledge and Integrity” with the usage of free translation and foreignizing translation. The words “unto” and “via” express the relation between the former two characters and latter characters. In order to show its religious color, the phrase “the salt of the earth” is chosen. That phrase is from *the Bible*. The original sentence is “Ye are the salt of the earth: but if the salt has lost his savor, wherewith shall it be salted?” The meaning of salt here is the most valuable members of society.

Tianjin University’s motto is “实事求是”, which is translated as “Seek Truth from Facts” with the usage of literal translation. “是” means truth and “事” means facts. From the perspective of semantic relationship, the meaning of source text is fully expressed. From the perspective of function, the translation realizes its function of cross-cultural communication. Thus, there is no doubt that it is a perfect translation.

Being the vital rule of Skopos theory, skopos rule not only tackles the dilemma between literal translation and free translation but also gives translators a lot of choices on what translation strategies will be chosen.

The application of coherence rule

Coherence rule reminds the translator that the translation ought to be readable and accepted by the intended readers.

Take the motto of Beijing Normal University for example, adopting the literal translation, someone translated the motto, “学为人师，行为世范”，literally as “Study well, Teach others, Be your best, Set an example”. As a consequence, the translation has been criticized because it not only hardly conveys the meaning of source text but also makes no sense for the intended readers.

Then it was translated as “Studying to teach and acting to examples”. However, the translator seldom complied with the expression habits in English; even someone think the translation is Chinglish. The readers would be confusing when they see it. Now it is translated as “Learn to be an Excellent Teacher, Act as an Exemplary Person”. That translation not only conveys the meaning faithfully but also can be accepted by the foreign readers.

The motto of Harbin Institute of Technology is “规格严格，功夫到家” which was translated as “Being strict in qualifications, making every endeavor in education and research”. The translation seems cockamamie; it parts the principles for teachers and students rigidly. Now it is translated as “Strict Standards and Sufficient Effort” which is terse and idiomatic and rhetoric devices are used in this translation. Thus, the aesthetics is remained and the coherence rule is perfectly applied here.

Another example is the motto of Xiamen University, “自强不息，止于至善”. It was translated as “Pursue Excellency, Strive for Perfection”. Although there is no grammar mistake and the translation realizes its function, it doesn’t comply with idiomatic expressions. According to the coherence rule, it would be better if translated as “Pursuit of Excellency, to Strive for Perfection”. This translation not only comply with the coherence rule but also is similar to the logic order of the source text [9].

In translation of university mottoes, translators should use the words that correspond to reading habits of English readers. The translation aims at both making the readers understand it and striking a responsive chord in the hearts of its readers, otherwise the translation of university mottoes is nothing but a face-saving project and its functions in publicity cannot be reflected.

The application of fidelity rule

Fidelity rule reminds translators that intertextual coherence should be remained in the process of translation.

Take the motto of Nanjing University of Aeronautics and Astronautics for example, “智周万物，道济天下” was once translated as “Intelligence Covers Everything and Norms Serve Mankind”. This translation is confusing and not idiomatic. Thus, it fails to achieve its goal. The reason why that motto is chosen is to encourage students to grasp the scientific knowledge and to serve the mankind. Now it is translated as “Acquirement of Knowledge to Serve the Mankind”. The translator is not of literalism when translating the motto.

The motto of University of Hong Kong is another example. Its motto “格物明德” is translated as “Knowledge and Virtue”. Those four Chinese characters are taken from the Confucian classic *The Great Learning*. The first phrase, 明德, occurs in the opening sentence: “大学之道，在明明德，在亲民，在止于至善”. It means that *The Great Learning* teaches the display of illustrious virtue, the renewal of the people, and repose in the highest good. The second phrase occurs in a description of how wise rulers set about cultivating wisdom and virtue: “欲正其心者，先诚其意。欲诚其意者，先致其知。”. Zhu Xi glossed this phrase as “志在格物”, which means “exhausting by examination the principles of things and affairs”.

The translator wasn't confined to the format and chose two nouns. On the basis of deep understanding of real meaning of these two phrases, the translation “Knowledge and Virtue” was carried out with the use of free translation. Therefore, we should say that in translation of university motto, translators should first have a deep and profound understanding of text source text.

In conclusion, the Skopos rule is beneficial to the improvement of university mottoes translation and solve some problems. With the application of this theory, it is hoped that greater translation will be made.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Translators now have a brand-new perspective on translation of university mottoes. Skopos theory endows translators a thought that it doesn't matter which translation approaches will be chosen as long as the skopos of the translation is realized.

From the examples that precede, it is safe to make a conclusion that translation techniques like literal translation, free translation, adoption and omission can be used to translate university mottoes. As for what kind of specific translation approaches will be used, it is totally case by case.

Specifically, with the use of those common sentence patterns of English university mottoes, the

motto can be translated into some nouns literally if the it has several two-character phrases or one four-character phrase which only has one meaning like the motto of Peking University, National University of Defense Technology and Tianjin University. And free translation is a great choice if the motto has several four-character phrases and one phrase only conveys one meaning. The examples are the motto of Beijing Foreign Studies University, Tsinghua University and Harbin Institute of Technology. Adoption and omission should be adopted if there are some phrases that make no sense for the English readers, and the example of this one is the motto of University of Science and Technology of China.

As for the criteria of translation of university mottoes, the translation should convey the meaning of source text, be accepted by the target readers. In another way, it should be readable, terse, aesthetic and idiomatic.

CONCLUSION

According to Skopos theory, there are some rules that the translators should adhere to.

Firstly, translators should know exactly what the source text conveys. Secondly, translators should keep the differences in cultures in mind and the differences should be taken into consideration in translating the university mottoes. Thirdly, as for those information that would make the intended readers confusing should be eliminated in order to obey the coherence rule.

There no hard and fast rule about the criteria of translation of university mottoes and it doesn't matter what kind of translation approaches are adopted as long as the functions of university mottoes are achieved. But overall, literal translation and free translation are the most frequently used methods besides some other methods between these two, which are used occasionally. And there are also some basic criteria of university mottoes translation: the translation should be readable, idiomatic, aesthetic and terse.

In conclusion, by providing a new way of thinking, Skopos theory can solve the problem mentioned in the first the essay.

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