

# The C-E Translation of Business Promotional Material Based on Skopostheorie

Xueying Yuan

Zhejiang Ocean University, Zhoushan, China

Yeli Shi

Zhejiang Ocean University, Zhoushan, China

**Abstract**—Based on Translation Skopostheorie, the author briefly expounds the purpose of C-E translation of businesses' promotional material. Simultaneously, the typical problems appeared in the translation process have been explored and analyzed. With practical examples, the author probes into some rules for solving these problems. The problems in such translation can be often found in the following four categories---straying away from the source text, being constrained to the source text, lacking in cultural elements, having grammatical errors and improper expressions. However, three rules of Skopostheorie---skopos rule, intratextual coherence rule, and inter-textual coherence rule may be used as guidance for solving these problems.

**Index Terms**—Skopostheorie, businesses promotional material, problems analysis, C-E translation rules

## I. INTRODUCTION

Under the background of the increasing process of economic globalization, the economic exchanges between China and other countries all over the world become more and more frequent. And there come not only the great opportunities, but also challenges to all the enterprises of China. Therefore, in order to comply with the trend of development of global economy, the enterprises have to struggle into the global market instead of being confined to the domestic, and with the constant development and optimization, finally mingle with the world economy. In the process of entering into the global market, enterprises need to provide quality products and services, publicize their own brands and products, so as to establish a good corporate image and enhance consumers' awareness of the brand. Therefore, the high quality of businesses' promotional material is particularly important, and the needs for its translation are increasingly high. The material translation may appear in a variety of media such as magazines, newspapers, and websites or in forms of brochures, flyers and the like.

However, at present, in some C-E translation of businesses' promotional material, people pay too much attention to such translating principles as "faithful" and "equivalent", which leads to some mistakes. The translation fails to be understood by the target readers. Consequently, such kind of translation is not conducive to businesses' overseas development. The main cause is the promotional material does not reflect the difference between "the internal and the external". The literal translation of material for promotion does not fit external publicity (Tao, 2005).

This article will first give a brief introduction of the Skopostheorie, and then make analysis of the main problems in translation process. Finally, it will probe into the rules which can be used as guidance for solving these problems.

## II. SKOPOSTHEORIE

The word Skopos comes from Greek, which means purpose in English. Hans J. Vermeer first put forward this theory in 1970. It was regarded as a landmark of the German functional translation and it is an important part of the functionalist theory as well. Before the functionalist theory, the functionalist equivalence theory proposed by Nida was in the dominant status in the translation domain. However, Vermeer was opposed to the viewpoint that translation is a simple process of language conversion. And he raised the Skopostheorie that has broken the limitation of equivalence theory. Skopostheorie holds that "translation is a complex action designed to achieve a particular purpose". (Nord, 2001, p.13) It means that any translation strategies or principles should serve for the purpose of the translation. He deems that translation is cross-cultural and the translator should be proficient in both languages. In his opinion, translation is a kind of action, that is, a kind of human behavior with purposes.

As Vermeer(1984) mentioned, translation is an "intentional, interpersonal, partly verbal intercultural interaction based on a source text". Thus, Skopostheorie will decide the translation strategy just according to the intended purpose in the perspective of target readers. Since people use the different languages in the different culture background could hardly understand each other, the Skopostheorie take advantage of the intended purpose to make them achieve the communication.

In Vermeer's view, the Skopos of the translation is set by the translator based on the initiator's instructions. As we all know that almost all the businesses are bound up in the benefit they can obtain. Therefore, according to the

Skopostheorie, the C-E translation of businesses' promotional material should all base on its commercial purpose as all the businesses are benefit-oriented.

### III. MAIN PROBLEMS IN THE BUSINESSES' PROMOTIONAL MATERIAL TRANSLATION

Although there is no denying that Chinese scholars, professors, translators and other relevant personage have gained a numerous volumes of achievements in this issue, there is still much room for improvement. Due to the differences in language, social habits, religious beliefs, aesthetic taste and thinking patterns, the translator will inevitably encounter many problems in C-E translation of businesses' promotional material. The following sections intend to delve into some typical problems that frequently appear in translation.

#### A. *Straying Away from the Source Text*

During the translation, it is not advisable to translate words literally from source language. Translation is essentially a translator's recreation of the source text. But that does not mean that the translator can stray far away from the original text and indulges in free translation, which normally results in two major problems, mistranslation and undertranslation.

##### 1. Misinterpretation

Misinterpretation is mainly due to the translator's low English proficiency. Translation is based on what they take for granted without seeking any supporting evidence. For example, “我们公司生产腰包”, it was mistranslated as “Our company specializes in producing body bags”. Here, ‘body bags’ is not what we understand from the literal meaning of the ‘body-related package’, but refers to the ‘body bag’ which is used to wrap the corpse. And its preferred translation is “Our company specializes in producing wallets”. Mistranslation, existing commonly, fails to achieve the purpose of accurate translation of the source text, and even makes it rather ridiculous.

##### 2. Undertranslation

The second problem is undertranslation which is also called overloaded translation. This means that the translator ignores the understandability and readability of the text, or overestimates the knowledge of the target readers so that the readers cannot get a good understanding of the text. Take the word “拳头产品” for example. If literally translated it as “fist product”, it will be quite difficult for the target readers to understand its meaning in that they cannot grasp the concept of “拳头产品” as the Chinese readers. For this, Mr Lu Gusun(1998) proposed that it could be translated as “knockout product” which not only achieves the purpose of conveying the main information, but also seems more vivid and fits with the source text.

#### B. *Being Constrained to the Source Text*

Translation is not the translator's personal recreation. The first thing the translator should do is to be faithful to the original so as to convey the right information. As the principles “Faithfulness, Expressiveness and Elegance” advocated by Yan Fu in the “Theory of Evolution” say, “Faithfulness” is the most important one that the translator should observe in translation. However, with the pursuit of accuracy, they rigidly adhere to the source language and pay too much emphasis on “faithfulness”. As a result, some improper translations occur which leaves a great gap between the source language text and the target language text. As Mr. Huang Youyi (2004) pointed out that “the best foreign publicity translation is not done by verbatim translation or word by word translation but is done on the basis of appropriate processing of the Chinese text in line with the foreign readers' thinking habit”. Verbatim translation often leads to Chinglish and lengthiness.

##### 1. Chinglish

John Pinkham (2001) defined Chinglish as misshapen, hybrid language that is neither English nor Chinese but that might be described as English with Chinese characteristics.

If the translator simply strives for their translation to be identical in form to the source text, it probably causes some unnecessary misunderstanding. A common expression “欢迎您来到...” is invariably translated as “Welcome you to...”. Though “welcome” is a cliché, it is always misused. Such translation results from being over constrained to Chinese sentence patterns.

##### 2. Lengthiness

If translation is constrained too much to the source text, it will also result in lengthiness. In China, it is commonplace to have lengthy promotional material which has a mass of ornate rhetoric, while the westerners more appreciate the simplicity of language. For example, “我公司经营的产品中有举世闻名的贝雕工艺品;色彩艳丽,种类繁多的人造花卉;令人爱不释手的小工艺品.....稀有名贵的钻石珠宝;技艺精湛,巧夺天工的玉石雕刻.....”, it is an emblematic example of Chinese expression. But in order to cater to the taste of target readers and reach the goal of promotional publicity, the translator had better make it brief or concise, like “Our famous products include carvings, a variety of colorful artificial flowers, small arts..... rare jewelry, meticulous jade carvings.....”

#### C. *Lack of Cultural Elements*

Culture is an extremely abstract and broad concept. It is difficult to define it, but it is ubiquitous. Each nation has owned its unique culture. Even an inadvertent gesture may show the characteristics of culture. Culture includes people's beliefs, habits, values, behavior, and modes of communication and so on.

Nida (2001) once said that without careful consideration of language and cultural background, any text cannot be fully understood. When translating the source language into the target language, the translator needs to keep thinking about the coherence point of the two different cultures in order to avoid misinterpretation. A familiar example is the word “龙”. In China, some associative expressions about “龙” can be frequently employed such as “龙的传人” and “龙头企业”. Dragon has a good image as well as a remarkable meaning in the Chinese long history. Ancient Chinese people always regarded the emperors as dragons. Nevertheless, dragon is considered as an awful and fearsome monster in the west. There is great disparity between China and the west. Hence, in this case, the translator could not translate these expressions literally so as to avoid cultural misunderstanding. Thus, “龙头企业” can be translated as “leading enterprises” or “corporate champion”.

#### D. Grammatical Error and Improper Expression

The grammatical error and improper expression are most common problems in all material translations. But they are most fundamental problems that cannot be ignored.

Grammatical errors include subject-predicate inconsistency, conjunction abuse or misuse, spelling and punctuation errors, etc. For instance, in the sentence “Our company is specialize in toys production”. the error lies in that the original form of the verb cannot be used after the copula. Take another example --- “With our advance technology, efficient product lines and professional management, we guarantee that all our products are in excellent quality and will satisfy every customer needs.” There are more grammatical errors in this sentence. “advance” is a noun not an adjective. It is not “all our products are in excellent quality but “all our products are excellent in quality”. And at last, it is not “customer needs” but “customer needs”.

Each language has its own habit and there are some distinctive ways of expression in a language. Since the translator is inclined to exactly keep the Chinese writing style, the improper expression can be frequently seen in the C-E translation of businesses promotional material. For example, the expression “保存 (preserve) 完好 (well)” in Chinese is “well preserved” in English rather than “preserved well” which is confined to the order of Chinese expression. In addition, improper expressions appear due to the wrong choice of words. The translator must be absolutely careful in choosing the proper words for the certain context. Otherwise, such mistakes will definitely cause confusion or even misunderstanding among foreign readers.

### IV. RULES FOR THE C-E TRANSLATION OF BUSINESSES PROMOTIONAL MATERIAL

The equivalence-based translation theory lay emphasis on the source text, and asks the translator to make a faithful replica of it. But because of the differences both in language and culture, the faithful replica seems not so easy to be achieved. Since the concept of ‘equivalence’ can not work out problems in some situations, the Skopostheorie was raised with three basic rules: the Skopos rule, the intratextual coherence rule and the inter-textual coherence rule.

As for so many typical problems that may arise in the C-E translation of businesses promotional material, based on the Skopostheorie, three main rules can be employed to cope with these problems. The translator can render a perfect translation if they can follow the three main rules.

#### A. Skopos Rule

Translation is a behavior with certain purpose and result. And there are a series of rules that should be observed in the process of translation. According to Skopostheorie, the prime principle determining any translation process is the purpose of the overall translation action (Nord, 2001). And in the viewpoint of Vermeer, there are three possible types of purpose in the translation which are divided as: the general purpose aimed at by the translation process, the communicative purpose aimed at by the target text and the purpose aimed at by a particular translation strategy or procedure. The Skopos breaks through the limitation of equivalence theory which is focusing on the source language.

Therefore, in line with Skopos rule, the translator must have a clear awareness of the company in their mind while translating the businesses’ promotional material. It is obvious that the C-E translation here is motive-driven. Because the ultimate purpose of the business is to appeal customers to purchase their products. The translation must be customer-oriented in order to achieve this goal. And the translation in the end should be both acceptable and attractive. Hence, the translator who neglects the Skopos rule will probably make the translation meaningless. This can be proved by the following example:

Source text:

这里三千座奇峰拔地而起,形态各异,有的似玉柱神鞭,立地顶天;有的像铜墙铁壁,巍然屹立;有的如晃板垒卵;摇摇欲坠...神奇而又真实,迷离而又实在,不是艺术创造胜似艺术创造,令人叹为观止。——《武陵源风景》

The translator should be quite explicit about the expectation of the readers when he or she is going to render the text into English. As it is a tourism brochure, the main information should be conveyed to the readers who want to know more about it. The following is a target text which justifies the motive of the products.

Target text:

3000 crags rise in various shapes-pillars, columns, walls, shaky egg stacks and potted landscapes...--- conjuring up fantastic and unforgettable images. (Jia, 2000)

As we can see in the target text above, the source language is really magnificent but intricate. Literal translation may lead to unintelligibility. The translator adopted an omission approach in the translation which highlighted the key information that could be conducive to the readers' better understanding of the material. Thus, the purpose of attracting customers is reached.

### B. *Intratextual Coherence Rule*

Intratextual coherence rule means that the target text should be coherent with the situation of the readers so as to make the readers understand the text easily. It places emphasis on the readability and acceptability of the target text. To achieve this goal, the target text must be fit in the culture and communicative customs which the readers have. Vermeer once defined culture as "the entire setting of norms and conventions an individual as a member of his society must know in order to be 'like everybody'" (Nord, 2001, p. 33).

Apparently, culture element is one of the most significant aspects that deserves people much attention. Therefore, while translating businesses promotional material, the culture of target language must be taken into consideration so that the target text can be more acceptable for the foreign readers. Here is an example.

Source text:

禹陵左侧是禹祠，祠前一泓碧水，名曰放生池。(Xu & Hu, 2008)

In this source text, some unacquainted culture phenomenon arise, such as "禹陵", "禹祠" and "放生池". If the translator just transliterates them as "yulin", "yuci" or "fangsheng pond", it would be arcane for the foreign readers and cannot reach the goal of the translation. As a result, some pertinent explanation should be provided in the translation.

Target text is as follows:

To the left of the Mausoleum is the shrine to King Yu, where his descendants and admirers offered sacrifices to him. And in front of the memorial temple lies a limpid pool called 'Fang-sheng Pond' at which believers in Buddhism freed small animals they had bought from their captors as a philanthropic act.

Cultural elements are fully reflected in the target text which has removed the cultural barriers. Moreover, it can be approved by readers without a hitch and then achieve the purpose of publicity.

### C. *Inter-textual Coherence Rule*

Intertextual coherence rule which is also named fidelity rule indicates the coherent relationship between source and target text. Different from the intratextual coherence which focuses on the relationship between the target text and receivers, the intertextual coherence rule sticks out the importance of the source text. It is rather similar to the Faithfulness proposed by Chinese scholar Yanfu which claims the target text should be faithful to the source text. The faithfulness can be seen from the linguistic level which includes words, sentences, grammars, and figure of speech. The form taken to maintain intertextual coherence depends on the translator's interpretation of the source text and on the Skopos of translation. Some useful background information offered by the translator can make it easier as well as clearer for foreign readers to understand. Duan Liancheng(2004) once pointed out that "Do not underestimate the audience's intelligence. But never over-estimate an ordinary foreigner's knowledge of China". Intertextual coherence signifies that the receiver should be able to understand the target text both in its cultural context and communicative situation.

Here is an example for this:

Source text:

... 诞生于上世纪末的虎豹集团，信守孜孜以求，永不言退的发展理念，在市场经济的大潮中，任凭浊浪排空，惊涛拍岸，独有胜似闲庭信步的自信，处变不惊，运筹帷幄。尽握无限商机于掌间，渐显王者之气于天地... (choose from Hubao Group in Jiangsu, China)

Target text:

Founded in the late 1980s, the Hubao Group is determined to succeed... The Hubao Group has a high standard of quality and is well-equipped with the world's most advanced technology. They are taking the lead in designing new fashion and maintaining high quality products... (Zhou, 2003)

Since the source text has some information which makes no sense to the readers, the translator singled out the main information expressed by the source text and pruned the useless ones, such as "孜孜以求", "浊浪排空", "惊涛拍岸", etc. These expressions have such strong cultural background that the foreign readers probably cannot get the resonance and even feel repugnant for it. Therefore, in this translation, the translator needs to select the substantial information so as to get the acknowledgment of the foreign readers and eventually achieves the Skopos of the translation.

In the functionalism perspective, the source text is merely an offer of the information, where the translator picks the essential information that can serve the ultimate goal. In this way, the function of the businesses' promotional material can be realized within the expectation.

## V. CONCLUSION

Good C-E translation of businesses' promotional material should be faithful but not rigid, flexible but not divorced from the content. Also, it should be both concise and elegant in the structure. Besides, some grammatical mistakes and improper expressions should be avoided as well. As the businesses' promotional material is quite different from other

types of ordinary text, the translator needs to pay attention to the correct handling of the new vocabulary and jargon translation related to a certain industry, so as to successfully achieve the purpose of the translation. It can help the target readers take a deep understanding of the enterprise and its products, so as to achieve the effect of publicity, improve brand awareness, expand the scope of the enterprise's cognitive groups and sales market, and eventually bring great economic and social benefits. In addition, the translator should also have a good understanding and mastery of two kinds of languages, two cultures, with one or more areas of professional knowledge, at the same time with an objective and cautious attitude and a high sense of responsibility.

As the Skopos of businesses' promotional material is to "convey the information, display the peculiarity, set up the image, stimulate the demand and expand the sales", (Yang & Bao, 2006, p.32) it should be given full consideration and be the benchmark for the translation. This article utilized the Skopostheorie to probe into some typical problems of C-E translation of businesses promotional material and analyzed the rules for dealing with these problems. Since no single translation theory can summarize all the probable situations, the analysis cannot be very satisfactory. More efforts should be made in the further research on this subject. With rapid economic globalization, enterprises face more opportunities, but challenges as well. The Skopostheorie can be adopted as guidance for the C-E translation of businesses' promotional material, which may act as a catalyst for their business expansion in the global market.

#### REFERENCES

- [1] Duan, L. (2004). How to Help Foreigners Know China. Beijing: Wuzhou Spreading Press.
- [2] Huang, Y. (2004). Adhere to the Principle of "Three Close Proximity": Handle the Difficult Problems in the Foreign Language Translation. *Chinese Translation Journal*. (6). 27-28.
- [3] John, P. (2001). The Translator's Guide To Chinglish. Beijing: Foreign Language Teaching and Research Press.
- [4] Jia, W. (2000). The National Aesthetic Difference from the Chinese and English Scene Depicts ---From the Thought of a Tourist Scene. Yang, Z. English and Chinese Comparison and Translation. Shanghai: Shanghai Foreign Language Education Press. 230-240.
- [5] Lu, G. (1998). The Translation and I. *Chinese Translation Journal*. (1). 46-47.
- [6] Nord, C. (2001). Translating as a Purposeful Activity: Functionalist Approaches Explained. Shanghai: Shanghai Foreign Language Educational Press.
- [7] Nida, E. A. (2001). Language and Culture, Contexts in Translating. Shanghai: Shanghai Foreign Language Education Press.
- [8] Tao, Q. (2005). Exploring Principles of Translating Economic Literature of Enterprises from Chinese to English Based on Skopostheorie. *Journal of Hefei University of Technology*. (4). 125-128.
- [9] Vermeer, H. J & Reiss, K. (1984). Skopos and Commission in Translational Action. London: Routledge.
- [10] Xu, M & Hu, Y. (2008). The Translation of Enterprise Publicity from the Perspective of Functional Translation Theory. *Journal of Huazhong University of Science and Technology*. (3). 107-110.
- [11] Yang, Q & Bao, T. (2006). Skopostheorie of Translation for Money. *Shanghai Journal of Translators*. (3). 32-35.
- [12] Zhou, L. (2003). Discussing the English Translation Principles of the Translation of Zhuangci in the Corporate Propaganda. *Shanghai Journal of Translators for Science and Technology*. (3). 59-61.

**Xueying Yuan** was born in Zhejiang, China in 1996. She is currently a college student in Zhejiang Ocean University, junioring in business English major.

**Yeli Shi** is currently an associate professor in Foreign Language College, Zhejiang Ocean University, Zhoushan, China. She is also a master of Arts in Literature and Language, Zhejiang University. Her research interests include English language and business English teaching.