

A Study on C-E Translation Strategies of Chinese Network Catchwords From the Perspective of Skopos Theory

Liu jialin ZHou wen

Southwest University of Science and Technology, Mianyang, Sichuan, 621010;

Abstract: As a product of the Internet era, network catchwords, also known as internet buzzwords, reflect the latest cultural direction and social dynamics of various countries and citizens. In addition to their semantic characteristics, they also reflect the social form, cultural life, and public psychology, and are characterized by fast updating speed and extensive content. However, due to the differences between Chinese and Western languages and cultures, translators have to take into account the cultural customs and social environment of the target readers when translating network catchwords. Therefore, the translation of internet buzzwords is not only about language communication but also about social culture. From the perspective of Skopos Theory, this thesis analyzes the characteristics and translation techniques of Chinese network catchwords and argues that appropriate translation methods should be adopted in specific contexts in order to accurately convey the semantics and cultural connotations of Chinese buzzwords to foreign readers.

Key Words: Skopos Theory, network catchwords, internet buzzwords, translation methods

DOI: 10.69979/3041-0843.25.01.004

1.Introduction

Network catchwords reflect national culture and image to a certain extent, so the quality of the translation of these buzzwords will directly affect the degree of information reception of the target readers and the dissemination effect of Chinese culture. Although many scholars have studied the translation of Chinese internet buzzwords in recent years, there is still a lack of corresponding theoretical basis and guidance for the translation of internet buzzwords in specific cultural context of China, which results in various translated versions. Therefore, translators must take up the important task of correctly translating Chinese network catchwords into English.

2.Theoretical Foundation

2.1.Skopos Theory

Skopos Theory, as the main theory of German functionalism, has become a more mature and important theory that can guide translation activities through continuous development based on cross-cultural communication theory. It focuses on “the target language and readers in translation process, emphasizing that translators should choose appropriate translation methods and skills in the translation activity.” (Wang, 2017).

2.1.1.Origin and Development of Skopos Theory

Skopos Theory first emerged in Germany in the 1970s and was proposed by Hans Vermeer. It is a new theoretical model of translation theory, which injects new vitality into the field of translation in a purely linguistic paradigm. As the core theory of the functionalist school, the Skopos Theory focuses on the various purposes chosen in the translation process.

Katharina Reiss first proposed the prototype of functionalism. She published the book *Translation Criticism: The Potential & Limitation*, in which she first proposed the functionalism (Reiss, 2004, 16). On the one hand, she insists on the equivalence theory is rather practical, and on the other hand, she believes that the functional relationship between the original text and the translated text should be used as the criterion for evaluating the translation, and thinks that the ideal translation should be equivalent to the original text in terms of conceptual content, linguistic form, and the level of communicative function.

On this basis, Vermeer, a student of Reiss, puts forward the Skopos Theory by taking the purpose of the text as the

first criterion for translation. He believes that translation is a purposeful activity in a specific situation and that the translator should put the purpose of translation in the first place. In addition, he proposed that "Translation is to produce a text in a target setting for a target purpose and target addressees in target circumstances." (Vermeer, 1987: 16). In other words, the purpose of translation determines the strategies and methods of translation. In addition, scholars of Skopos Theory have argued that "Translation is a communicative action, which is determined by its purpose that intended to achieve." (Newmark, 2001: 12).

Later, Justa Holz Manttari establishes translation behavior theory. Her theory is on the basis of Vermeer's, places translation in a socio-cultural context and focuses on the behavior of the translation process, the roles of the participants and the environment in which translation takes place.

Finally, Christian Nord, a representative of the second generation of Skopos Theory, discovers the limitations of the first generation of Skopos Theory and develops the second generation of it on this basis. He emphasizes the difference between fidelity theory and equivalence theory. Fidelity refers to the relationship between the original text and the translation. It is an interpersonal relationship.

2.1.2. Basic Rules of Skopos Theory

Skopos Theory includes three basic rules: the skopos rule, the coherence rule, and the fidelity rule.

The Skopos rule, a fundamental principle of translation, emphasizes that the translation process is guided by its purposes, which can be categorized into the translator's basic objectives, the communicative aims of the translated text, and the goals dictated by specific translation methods. "Skopos" typically refers to the communicative intentions directed towards target readers within a specific socio-cultural context. Consequently, translators must clarify the particular purpose in each context and select suitable translation methods accordingly. In translating network catchwords, the unique nature of the text allows translators to address diverse communicative needs through varying methods, thereby enhancing the conveyance of the source text's connotation and cultural significance.

The coherence rule mandates that translations must maintain intra-textual coherence, ensuring they are comprehensible to target language readers and meaningful within their cultural context. Translators should prioritize information deemed relevant and significant during the transfer process, utilizing appropriate methods to present the logical information from the source text. When translating Chinese internet buzzwords, while different strategies may be employed, the fidelity to meaning and maintenance of coherence are essential.

Lastly, the fidelity rule asserts that translations must remain faithful to the original text, with the degree of faithfulness influenced by the translator's understanding of the source material and the translation's intended purpose.

The first rule of the Skopos Theory is the most crucial of the three, and the second and third rules are only secondary and ought to be followed the first. The relationship of the three rules is that "fidelity rule follows coherence rule and the two rules obey skopos rule." (Reiss and Vermeer, 1984).

2.2. Chinese Network Catchwords

2.2.1. Definition

Network Catchwords are words, phrases or sentences that are popular on the Internet during a specific period of time. They circulate among Internet users, especially young Internet users, and become their agreed expressions. Wang Ying (2009) defines it as a special form of spoken language, a lively and fresh word used by people in online communication. So, we can say that internet buzzwords represent the expressions of mutual recognition and self-identification of the majority of Internet users, reflecting the user's way of thinking and values.

2.2.2. Linguistic Features of Chinese Network Buzzwords

Network catchwords, primarily disseminated online, must be concise and clear to meet the demands of rapid internet communication. Users often engage in simultaneous chats or real-time interactions, necessitating brief expressions for efficient text input. Additionally, these buzzwords possess validity, reflecting the social atmosphere, linguistic trends, and public sentiments of their time. They emerge alongside specific events or hotspots and tend to be replaced by new terms as these contexts evolve, resulting in a relatively short lifespan for each catchword. Moreover, humor is a prominent

characteristic of network catchwords. Internet users frequently employ creative language, symbols, and playful expressions to cope with the stress of a fast-paced lifestyle.

2.2.3.Cultural Features of Chinese Network Catchwords

First, network catchwords are the embodiment of postmodernist culture. Postmodernist culture is a culture for everyone, a culture dominated by capital and commodities. At the same time, it tends to reflect the current social trends and is closely connected with the mass media, so it is characterized by stylization and batch. "Internet buzzwords originate from a postmodern cultural context." (Li Lin, 2015).

3.Translation Methods of Chinese Network Catchwords From the Perspective of Skopos Theory

In this part, the author tries to summarize five effective methods of C-E translation methods for Chinese network catchwords.

3.1.Literal Translation

Literal translation refers to a method that preserves both the content and form of the original text. It aims to maintain the syntactic structure and wording as closely as possible while conveying the meaning of the source text. In the translation of network catchwords, literal translation is often favored due to its simplicity and effectiveness in retaining the original's essence. Many translators employ this strategy to ensure that both the form and content of the original text are reflected in the translation. In the following discussion, examples of literal translations of Chinese internet buzzwords will be provided to illustrate this method.

Example1: 团购 (groupon)

When we say the Chinese character “团”, we think of a group of people getting together. The Chinese word for “团购” means that consumers join together to strengthen their bargaining power with merchants in order to get the best price on their purchases. In fact, this shopping method exists not only in China, but also in the U.K. In 2008, a global shopping site called “Groupon” was launched, which “serves more than 500 cities around the world, with nearly 48.1 million active users and more than 425,000 active deals globally.” (Wang, 2017). So, this form of shopping is not unfamiliar in foreign countries, and the translator can take the method of direct translation.

In addition, the word “groupon” is very concise, which is also in line with the characteristics of network buzzwords. From the coherence rule of Skopos Theory, the best way to translate “团购” is literal translation. Through literal translation, the target readers can accurately receive the meaning and cultural connotation of the source language, and the semantic coherence, so that the target readers’ reaction to the translated text is like that of the original readers.

Example2:胶囊公寓 (capsule apartment)

The term “胶囊公寓” refers to a small apartment shaped like a capsule. With only four words, this term accurately and vividly describes the characteristics of an apartment, and is characterized by simplicity and intuition, which is the embodiment of postmodernist culture. In translating this buzzword, the translator adopts a purposive approach and translates “胶囊” into the English word “capsule”, which originally means a small container or pill. So, when people see the word “capsule”, they will first think of a small room. Moreover, “apartment” originally means a set of rooms for living alone, so when “capsule” and “apartment” are put together to form a new word, the meaning of the original can be accurately conveyed. This also proves the fidelity rule of Skopos Theory.

3.2.Transliteration

Transliteration is a translation method that focuses on converting the pronunciation of source language words into a target language with similar sounds. Due to cultural differences, certain Chinese terms and their associated imagery lack direct equivalents in English. In such cases, translators use transliteration, directly rendering the source text's pronunciation into a similar-sounding expression in English. Many Chinese network catchwords embody rich cultural nuances that do not have equivalent expressions in English, prompting translators to frequently employ phonetic translation for these buzzwords.

Example3: “给力”(gelivable)

The word “给力” is originally a local Chinese dialect that usually means helpful and effective. This word, which means “cool” and “capable” was later included to the Modern Chinese Dictionary (6th Edition), following the 2010 FIFA World Cup. The translator, guided by Skopos Theory, translates “给力” as “gelivable”, effectively conveying the linguistic and cultural connotations. The word “geli” comes from the transliteration of the Chinese word “给力”. The second part is just adding a “-able” to indicate the part of speech. Such a translation reflects the translation logic of combining East and West, which not only conforms to the English word formation, but also retains the linguistic characteristics of internet buzzwords. It causes more resonance with the target readers.

Example4: “牛逼” (niubility)

The meaning of the word “牛逼” is not what it seems. In fact, it describes someone who is very capable. In order to accurately convey the Chinese culture behind this buzzword, Skopos Theory played an important role. The first part of the translation, “niu”, is the Chinese pinyin, which is pronounced the same way in Chinese. The second part is an abbreviation of the English suffix “-ability”, which means ability. Together, it means “a cool ability and lifestyle”. This translation not only retains the characteristics of the network catchwords, but also conforms to the rules of English word formation. Using only one word, it conveys the current Chinese society and culture to the target readers in a phonetic way. It truly combines Chinese and Western cultures and conforms to the fidelity rule of Skopos Theory.

3.3.Annotation

Annotation is to add notes on top of other translation methods so that the translation can better convey the cultural connotations. This method is usually used together with literal translation or transliteration. When translating these buzzwords, target readers may not be able to understand their real meaning if only literal or transliteration is used. In this regard, relevant explanations need to be added later to facilitate their understanding. In this part, the author mainly analyzes the use of annotation method in the C-E translation of Chinese network buzzwords.

Example5: “裸婚”(naked wedding, getting married without a house, a car, a wedding ceremony)

The term “裸婚” refers to a simple way of getting married, that is, not buying a house, not buying a car, not organizing a wedding, and not even buying a wedding ring. It is one of the most fashionable ways to get married among young people in Chinese society, reflecting the change of values and the pressure of life of contemporary young people. Many websites and magazines directly translate it as “naked wedding”, causing misunderstanding to foreign readers, who mistakenly think it is a wedding without clothes. Therefore, under the guidance of the Skopos Theory, the translator adds notes so that the target readers can not only understand the literal meaning of the word, but also realize the cultural connotation. In addition, the translation also maintains the principle of simplicity and clarity of the Internet terminology, and does not directly translate it as “no house, no car, no wedding”, which is easy for the target readers to use.

Example6: “吃土” (eat/live on dirt)

The term “吃土” became popular after Alibaba launched the “Double Eleven” shopping event. It means that after spending a lot of money on shopping, people have little or nothing left, so they can only save money and downgrade their consumption. Domestic readers can easily understand the meaning of the words in combination with the background of online shopping, but for foreign readers, they will not know the meaning. In order to fully convey the connotation and culture of “live on dirt”, the translator added the following explanation: “a common term in China for being so poor that you can only afford dirt for meals” (Pan, 2019). The translation seems to fulfill the skopos rule in the Skopos Theory. Through the translation with comments, the target readers will have similar associations with the readers of the source text, and it is easy to accept and understand the actual meaning of this internet buzzword, which proves the fidelity rule in the Skopos Theory.

3.4.Free Translation

Free translation, also known as liberal translation, refers to the accurate expression of the source language based on the understanding of the source language from the reader’s point of view. Literal translation focuses more on maintaining the content of the original language than on formal equivalence. If the translator does not really understand the meaning of the original language, he cannot get an accurate translation. Due to the differences between Chinese and foreign

cultures, network catchwords are limited by the socio-cultural environment of the target language and may produce semantic gaps in the target language. The following are examples of Chinese internet buzzwords.

Example7: “高富帅” (prince charming)

The term “高富帅”, as a network catchword, refers to a man with a tall body, considerable wealth and handsome appearance. This can be considered the ideal for most women. Due to the simplicity of Chinese characters, only three characters are used to express rich cultural connotations, and each character expresses a different meaning. If the translator, in order to maintain full equivalence with the original text, adopts the method of literal translation and simply translates “tall, wealth, handsome”, then although the form of the original text is maintained, the target readers cannot be able to understand the deeper meaning of the word. Therefore, in order to preserve the cultural characteristics and connotations of the word, translators should put the Skopos Theory in the first place and choose the expression corresponding to the Chinese in English, that is, “prince charming”, which means “白马王子”. In Western culture, Prince Charming is the ideal partner of many women, and its meaning is very similar to that of the Chinese term “高富帅”. To produce the same response for the target readers, the translators can adopt the translation strategy of free translation, which follows the skopos rule and coherence rule in the Skopos Theory, so as to effectively fills the semantic gap in the target language.

Free translation can be translated without being bound by the form. The translator can express the meaning of the original text in clear words from the point of view of the target readers, in accordance with English conventions. However, it must be noted that when translators use this method of translation, they must understand the meaning of the original text and the emotions expressed.

3.5. Innovative Translation

Due to cultural differences and changes in national conditions, some network catchwords in recent years cannot be translated by the four translation strategies proposed above. If the translator chooses one of these four, it may cause the translated text to lose the flavor or characteristics of the original text, and may even cause the target readers to misunderstand. In order to deal with this situation, the translator needs to adopt the translation method of innovative translation under the guidance of the Skopos Theory, break the limitation of formal equivalence, and create new vocabulary.

Example8: “秒杀” (seckill)

The word “秒杀” comes from the Internet language, meaning that a player is instantly killed by another opponent in a video game. (Pan, 2019). The term was later widely used in online shopping, specifically to refer to a type of online auction. Merchants stimulate customers’ desire to buy by listing some low-priced items and restricting them to purchase for a limited period of time. These items are snapped up very quickly after they are listed, and some are even sold out in a matter of seconds. In response to this situation, some translators translate it as “instant purchasing”, which means “即时购买” in Chinese. But in fact, this translation is inappropriate. It fails to show the competitive atmosphere of the rush to buy and the speed with which the goods are sold out. Therefore, in order to let the target readers understand the cultural connotation of the internet buzzword more clearly, the translator adopts the innovative translation strategy of translating “秒杀” to “seckill”. First, he translated “秒” and “杀” separately, and then combined the two words into a new word. In the author’s opinion, such a translation method is in line with the skopos rule and coherence rule of Skopos Theory, and has a unique charm, which is innovative while keeping the simplicity and clarity of the internet buzzwords, thus enabling the target readers to better understand the Chinese society and culture.

4. Conclusion

Chinese internet buzzwords have rich cultural connotations and linguistic features, vividly reflecting the current social hotspots and the spirit of all people in China. This thesis explores the C-E translation strategies and methods of Chinese network catchwords from the perspective of Skopos Theory. Through a large number of examples and analyses, the author summarizes five appropriate translation methods: 1) literal translation 2) transliteration 3) Annotation 4) free translation 5) innovative translation. These five methods can effectively translate different types of Chinese network catchwords into

authentic and fluent English. Internet buzzwords reflect the progress of the times and social changes, and with the passage of time. Against this background, the studies on C-E translation strategies of Chinese network catchwords must be constantly updated. However, it is worth mentioning that translators must have a pious attitude, aiming at promoting cultural exchange and flexibly utilizing various means of translation, so as to accurately deliver the original message to the target readers.

REFERENCE

- [1]Newmark, Peter. A. Textbook of Translation[M]. Shanghai: Shanghai Foreign Language Education Press, 2001
- [2]Nord, Christiane. Translating as a Purposeful Activity: Functionalist Approaches Explained[M]. Shanghai: Shanghai Foreign Language Education Press, 2001
- [3]Reiss, Katharina. Translation Criticism: The Potential & Limitation[M]. Shanghai: Shanghai Foreign Language Education Press, 2004
- [4]Reiss, Katharina & Vermeer, Hans. J. Groundwork for a General Theory of Translation[M]. Germany: Tübingen: Niemeyer, 1984
- [5]Vermeer,Hans. J.What Does It mean to Translate?[J].Indian Journal of Applied Linguistic, 1987, (2): 25-33
- [6]Li Lin. The Postmodern Cultural Characteristics of Internet Slang [J]. Lanzhou Academic Journal, 2015, (3): 63-64
- [7]Wang Yi, A Study on the English Translation of Chinese Internet Slang from the Perspective of Translation Skopos Theory [D]. Chengdu: Xihua University, 2017

Net.1.Baidu Encyclopedia. Chinese Cyber Language Dictionary.

<http://baike.baidu.com/view/5614932.htm>

About the author: Liu Jialin, female (2001- -), Han Nationality, Suining, Sichuan, postgraduate, research direction: Translational, regional country Studies; Zhou Wen, male (1975-), Han Nationality, Guang'an, Sichuan, postgraduate, Southwest University of Science and Technology, associate professor, research direction: British and American literature and regional country research