

Enhancing Translation Research on Chinese Silk Terminology: A Critical Review from the Perspective of Skopos Theory

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Abstract: As China's international status continues to improve and its foreign trade and exchanges become more and more frequent, the development of China's silk industry has received more and more attention. As a bridge for China's foreign trade in silk industry, its translation will take on important responsibilities in the future. The accurate translation of Chinese silk terminology is the most direct, authoritative and comprehensive source of information about Chinese silk culture for people around the world. In the new era, a better standardization of Chinese silk terminology translation is a new requirement for the international community to have a more comprehensive understanding of Chinese silk and culture in the future. Therefore, it is crucial to explore and study translation theories in translation practice in the context of Chinese silk terminology.

Keywords: Translation; Skopos Theory; Chinese Silk; Terminology

1. Introduction

As an important part of Chinese traditional culture, Chinese silk terminology has begun to receive attention by people in recent years. Accurate translation of Chinese silk terminology is of great significance for the promotion of Chinese culture, the protection of traditional skills and the exchange of Chinese and foreign cultures. This paper analyses the English translation of Chinese silk terminology from the perspective of translation purpose theory, hoping to provide some new directions for the study of Chinese silk terminology translation.

1.1 Purpose and Structure

The review of the current literature reveals a paucity of relevant studies. The present review

is a first attempt to fill this gap. It has two objectives: one is to explore the theoretical foundations of translating silk terminology from the skopos theory perspective, and the other is to outline relevant applications and directions for future research and practice. The framework of this review includes clarifying the scope and methodology of the research, exploring the current state of theoretical research, analyzing the applications in the light of problems and challenges, and giving conclusions and outlooks.

1.2 Research Questions

The purpose of this research is to study about the development of Chinese silk terminology translation under the perspective of skopos theory. Overall, this paper analyses and concludes the research on silk terminology translation guided by the following research questions:

Research Question 1: What are the current trends in theoretical research in terms of methodology and theory?

Research Question 2: What is the application of skopos theory to the translation of Chinese silk terminology?

2. Materials and Methods

2.1 Literature Search

This paper indexes relevant journal literature on China National Knowledge Infrastructure from 1980 to 2022. The search terms include the following: skopos theory, Chinese silk, silk terminology, and silk terminology translation. Among them, 119 documents (SCI core and CSSCI) were retrieved with "skopos theory" as the keyword, 1,085 documents (SCI and CSSCI) were retrieved with "Chinese silk" as the keyword. "Silk terminology" as the keyword, 9 results were found, of which there were six articles related to the silk terminology

of this paper, and the search for “silk terminology translation” yielded no results.

2.2 Analysis of the Literature

At the current stage, the English translation of Chinese silk terminology suffers from the problems of inconsistency in English translation, misuse of phonetic transcription and omission of culture. The process of silk terminology translation is not a simple language conversion, but a process of cross-language dissemination of the knowledge concepts covered by the terms. Translation should aim at conveying the cultural meaning and Chinese discourse significance implied in the silk terms. Through reading the relevant literature, it is found that, scholars focus on the dissemination of Chinese cultural connotations, which to a certain extent reflects the enhancement of cultural self-confidence.

2.3 Literature Methods

This literature review utilizes the creation of a comprehensive literature review table as a research method. By systematically organizing the essential details of each literature piece into a well-structured table, it not only facilitates easy access and classification but also enables efficient summarization and categorization of information. Moreover, this approach proves to be advantageous in analyzing the distinctive characteristics and variations among the literature pieces, thus unveiling significant trends and addressing prominent issues in the research field. Additionally, the literature review table serves as a solid foundation for fostering academic exchanges and collaborations, playing a pivotal role in promoting the advancement and progress of the research field.

3. Literature Review

3.1 Translation Skopos Theory

In 1970s, the German translator Hans J. Vermeer proposed the skopos theory. The skopos theory is a functional translation theory on terminology, and its basic meaning is that the most crucial factor in the translation process is the purpose of the whole translation activity. The word “Skopos” is of Greek origin and generally means “purpose”. In addition, Vermeer also proposed other related terms, such as “Aim”, “Purpose”, “Intention” and

“Function”. Through the foundational framework of the skopos theory, it is clear that he believes that one of the most crucial factors in determining the purpose of translation is the translator and the readers. Since the readers generally have their own cultural backgrounds as well as expectations and communicative needs for the translated content, the original text is only a source of some of the content for the readers rather than all the information, and the status of the original text in skopos theory is also much lower than its status in Equivalence Theory [1].

Initially, Katharina Reiss proposed the framework of Functionalist Theory and pointed out that the most reasonable translation method should be an integral communicative performance method, which is that the conceptual expression and communicative competence should be equal to that of the original, while the functional characteristics of the translator should be prioritized in practice. The translation method of the translator should be determined according to the expected purpose or function of the translation, that is the “Skopos Rule” [2]. Vermeer, the student of Reiss, introduced the skopos theory, which freed the translation method from the shackles of Centrality of Original Text. He believed that the translation must be translated in accordance with the purpose of translation, and the translation method should follow “the intra-textual coherence rule” and “the inter-textual coherence rule” at the same time. Therefore, the translation must be revised appropriately by choosing different translation methods according to different translation purposes. With the further development of Functionalism, Nord Christiane proposed the principles of “Function plus Loyalty” to supplement the previous Functionalist Theory in order to comprehensively summarize and develop the Functionalism [3].

The general structure of the German Functionalist School has been established since then, and the skopos theory in Functionalism makes people re-conceptualize translation activities from the perspective of translators, which brings a new development space for translation theory. The Functionalists get rid of the fetters of reciprocity theory, take the purpose as the general rule, and put translation in the framework of behavioral theory and cross-cultural communication theory, which is

commendable for its courage, and also gives the world translation theoretical circle, including the Chinese translation circle, another way to explore [4]. The skopos theory offers new possibilities for studying the whole process of the act of translation [5]. Therefore, the skopos theory plays a guiding role in the translation of Chinese silk terminology.

3.2 The Domestic Research Status of Skopos Theory

In the late 1970s, Chinese experts and scholars began to establish contacts with the western academia. The “Functional Equivalence” theory of Eugene Nida, “Communicative Translation” and “Semantic Translation” of Peter Newmark, and Hermeneutics of George Steiner began to be introduced to China, and later the study of skopos theory began to be emphasized by scholars because of its distinctive academic ideas. In 1987, Gui Qianyuan, the Chinese translator, wrote the *Three Translators from The Federal Republic of Germany*, which was the first work in China to comprehensively expound on translation thought of German Functionalism. Some of Vermeer’s views into translation are covered in this essay, but its focus is not on translation theory but on translators, and thus it did not have a significant impact on the translation circle at that time. In the 1990s, Xue Siliang translated three of Vermeer’s academic papers which systematized the Functionalist skopos theory, including *New Perspectives in Translation Theory, Purpose, Appointment,*

and Source Text—Vermeer’s Modern Theory of Translation, and *Literary Translation—A Means of Cross-cultural Communication*. Since then, the related theoretical discourse and research have begun to become more comprehensive.

There are abundant academic research results on skopos theory of translation. They are mainly: *German Functionalism* by Zhong Weihe and Zhong Yu, *A Review of the Introduction, Application and Study of Functionalist Skopos Theory in China (1987—2005)* by Bian Jianhua and Cui Yonglu, *On Skopos Theory and Its Belittlement of the Source Text* by Pan Pingliang, *Discussion on Issues Related to the Skopos Theory—Four Online Exchanges with Prof. Christiane Nord (English)* by Bian Jianhua, *A Research into the Limits of Skopos Theory* by Peng Wenqing, *A Research Review of Skopos Theory* by Wang Jun and Chen Shiyue and so on, and the details of some research results on skopos theory of translation can be found in Table 1. These academic studies have clearly and accurately sorted out and summarized the development history as well as the basic concepts and principles of the skopos theory. At the same time, they have also comprehensively outlined its development in China, as well as the problems that need to be solved in the future and so on. So far, the author believes that the skopos theory still has the following three types of problems in the study of translation practice in China.

Table 1. Some Research Results on Skopos Theory of Translation

No.	Author	Publication	Publication	Date
1	Gui Qianyuan	Three Translators from The Federal Republic of Germany	Chinese Translators Journal	1987
2	Zhong Weihe, Zhong Yu	German Functionalism	Chinese Translators Journal	1999
3	Bian Jianhua, Cui Yonglu	A Review of the Introduction, Application and Study of Functionalist Skopos Theory in China (1987—2005)	Journal of PLA University of Foreign Languages	2006
4	Pan Pingliang	On Skopos Theory and Its Belittlement of the Source Text	Shanghai Journal of Translators	2006
5	Bian Jianhua	Discussion on Issues Related to the Skopos Theory—Four Online Exchanges with Prof. Christiane Nord (English)	Chinese Translators Journal	2006
6	Peng Wenqing	A Research into the Limits of Skopos Theory	Shanghai Journal of Translators	2012
7	Wang Jun, Chen Shiyue	A Research Review of Skopos Theory	Modern Communication	2017

The first one is that the research is comprehensive but not refined. With the progress of the times, people can search for a lot of research on skopos theory in China, which basically involves various fields, and the proportion of the combination with the actual translation is more and the research results are also more. However, there is a lack of in-depth, sustained and outlined research in a certain field. Despite the fact that domestic research related to skopos theory is relatively extensive in terms of application, the scope of research on the theory of the school itself is still relatively narrow, with a small number of articles on theoretical depth and empirical basis [6]. The field of Chinese silk can be used here as an example. It can be found that some of the relevant papers can be searched, but they are not closely related to the study of Chinese silk, and the vast majority of them are translations that are related to silk and the results obtained in practice are put forward. These studies are fragmented and can be interpreted as being horizontal in scope rather than vertical in depth, thus failing to break through research bottlenecks. This leads to the lack of innovation in most studies and the failure to solve more practical problems.

The second one is the blind application of translation theory. The disconnect and deviation between translation research and practice is due to the fact that most translators who are actually engaged in translation work do not have a lot of time for translation theory, while scholars who study translation theory do not have a lot of time for translation work. This problem is particularly prominent in the study of skopos theory. The research and practice of skopos theory in translation is not only to study articles with few words and little knowledge, but also to propose solutions. On the contrary, it needs to study on the basis of translation with a certain number of words and involving a certain amount of knowledge, pointing out common problems and proposing persuasive solutions. Peng [7] believed that when applying the skopos theory, we should know its limitations, and should not widely apply it to translations that are not for a specific period of time or for a specific audience, otherwise it will easily fall into “relativism” and “anarchism”. The real practice should apply the theory in practice and refine the theory by testing it in practice.

The last one is blind worship and over-exaggeration of the role of translation theory. With the rapid development of modern society and the progress of the times, China emerged on the international stage, and the practicality of translation began to favor the importance of translation purpose, which promoted the spread and development of skopos theory. The warm reception by Chinese scholars is probably due to the fact that skopos theory is a fresh and applied theory with both prescriptive and descriptive features [8]. However, skopos theory does not only emphasize the freedom of the translator, thus ignoring the importance of the source text. In the author’s opinion, the source text should not be completely ignored in the translation practice because the theory points out that “the source text is supreme”, nor should it be blindly criticized or over-heeded because it is suitable for the use of the theory in a certain kind of field, or the tradition of “the source text is supreme” has been challenged. In translation practice, it is in fact difficult to rely on only one translation theory to accomplish translation work. Cao [9] said that the translator must study what is involved in the translated text and have the awareness to study what is translated. This requires that the translator should have the ability to discern and not use any one theory blindly. Therefore, translation theories should be used, evaluated and innovated with a rigorous and tolerant attitude, and should be researched and practiced with the critical thinking.

3.3 Skopos Theory Applied to the Chinese Silk Terminology Translation

Since the 21st century, the skopos theory has been paid attention to and studied by scholars at home and abroad. skopos theory is widely used in various translation practices to help people solve problems encountered in translation practice. Compared with the research of skopos theory in other fields, the research of skopos theory in the field of Chinese Silk Terminology Translation is still scarce.

Firstly, the current research on the translation of Chinese silk terminology started relatively late, and at the same time, the research attention is not high and the number of researchers is small. Among them, the most famous is *An Analysis of English Translation of Silk Terms and Silk Culture* published by

Zeng Fanjian and Pan Xing in the journal *Silk*, which points out that modern silk terminology has problems such as inconsistent and incomplete English translations. In this research, Zeng and Pan [10] combine the English translations of Hawkes' and Yang Xianyi's *Dream of Red Mansions* and other English-language works on Chinese silk terminology, refine and modify the system of English translation of modern Chinese silk terminology, and provide a classification of the English translations and specific strategies, thus further highlighting the importance of the English translations of Chinese silk terminology.

Secondly, there are still some contradictions between the core viewpoints of skopos theory and the basic features of China's silk terminology translation. The main content of skopos theory refers to the importance of translation purpose. Translation needs to adjust and modify the source text according to different translation purposes, and pay attention to readers' understanding and absorption effect of information. However, Chinese silk terminology has a strong background of traditional Chinese culture. Therefore, in most cases, silk terms can be found in the corresponding traces of Chinese history and culture. Chinese silk information has a certain degree of specificity and seriousness and its strong cultural background makes the terminology more difficult to understand, which makes it very likely that if

the English translation of the silk terminology is not accurate enough, it will lead to the lack of cultural information.

The application of skopos theory in the Chinese Silk Terminology Translation is difficult to study, but it has some maneuverability. There are still very few scholars who have studied the translation of Chinese silk terminology from different perspectives, as well as very few scholars who have chosen to conduct some research on the application of skopos theory in Chinese silk translation practice from different perspectives. Studies on the translation of Chinese silk terminology include *An Analysis of English Translation of Silk Terms and Silk Culture* by Zeng Fanjian and Pan Xing, *A Study on the Translation of Silk Terms from the Perspective of Knowledge Communication* by Zhao Chuanyin. Studies on the English translation of Chinese silk from the perspective of skopos theory include *English Translation of Exhibition Titles from the Perspective of Skopos Theory—Taking China Silk Museum as the Example* by Zhou Yajuan, *Syntactic Characteristics of English Contracts in Silk Industry from the Perspective of Skopos Theory and the Chinese Translation Strategies* by Shen Mengmeng and Chen Xia, and the details of Studies on the translation of Chinese silk terminology and Chinese silk from the perspective of skopos theory can be found in Table 2.

Table 2. Search Results on the Translation of Chinese Silk Terminology and Chinese Silk from the Perspective of Skopos Theory

No.	Author	Publication	Publication	Date
1	Zeng Fanjian, Pan Xing	An Analysis of English Translation of Silk Terms and Silk Culture	Journal of Silk	2019
2	Zhao Chuanyin	A Study on the Translation of Silk Terms from the Perspective of Knowledge Communication	Journal of Heihe University	2020
3	Zhou Yajuan	English Translation of Exhibition Titles from the Perspective of Skopos Theory—Taking China Silk Museum as the Example	Chinese Museum	2022
4	Shen Mengmeng, Chen Xia	Syntactic Characteristics of English Contracts in Silk Industry from the Perspective of Skopos Theory and Its Chinese Translation Strategies	Overseas English	2020

Their content frameworks have a certain degree of similarity, basically introducing theories, presenting relevant research on silk topics, the characteristics or strategies of the case study, and conclusions. These papers are

all related to the Chinese-English translation of Chinese silk, which have made bold attempts and feasible research in the foreign communication of Chinese silk, introduced the practical application of a variety of translation

strategies, cited a variety of specific cases as well as corresponding coping skills, and provided certain inspiration and references for the translation of Chinese silk terminology. However, as far as the study of Chinese silk terminology translation from the perspective of the skopos theory is concerned, there is currently no corresponding literature. As for the overall research on the broad scope of silk translation, there are problems of uneven academic level, more repetitive content, more conceptual shallow research, more articles of the same framework, and the problem of broad but not specialized and not detailed. The difficulties of Chinese silk terminology translation mainly include the specificity of terminology translation, which determines that it cannot be changed at will. If the content is not changed, it is difficult for the readers to understand and distinguish the differences between the terms, and if it is not changed properly, it may result in a certain degree of lack of cultural background, which to a certain extent restricts the development of the study of the skopos theory in the field of Chinese silk terminology translation.

However, Chinese silk terminology translation needs to have a strong sense of purpose. Translation research on Chinese silk terminology is intended to promote the accurate and comprehensive dissemination of Chinese silk civilization to the world, so that the world can recognize and understand the historical significance of Chinese silk as well as the modern international trade environment. This purpose is the highest guiding idea of Chinese silk terminology translation, which is highly compatible with the principle of “acceptance by readers”, that is the “purpose above all” in the skopos theory. Therefore, the skopos theory is of great significance to the translation of Chinese silk terminology.

4. Overall Summary and Conclusions

Since Chinese silk culture has a long history, the study of Chinese silk terminology translation can promote the inheritance and development of Chinese silk civilization, as well as the prosperity of the Chinese silk industry and the status of China in the world. On the basis of the further studying the essence of skopos theory, the practice and application

of Chinese silk terminology translation should be explored, and the difficulties faced in terms of cultural connotation, meaning of Chinese discourse and understanding of reader should be solved, and the efforts should be made to fully and accurately disseminate Chinese silk culture to the world. Therefore, it is of great significance to study Chinese silk terminology translation from the perspective of skopos theory.

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